

Beginning today we are going to spend several weeks reading through most of the letter to the Ephesians. Reading through a book of the Bible in the summer may be difficult because many of us are in and out in July. I am aware of this and will do my best to fill in any gaps from previous readings.

Ephesians is a letter. The letter begins by informing us that Paul is the writer and he is writing this letter to the saints who are in the town of Ephesus. Many scholars debate if Paul wrote this letter or if it was written by a close associate of Paul's based on the language used. For simplicity I am going to refer to the writer being Paul.

At the core of this letter is a call for Jews and Gentiles to come together and form one church. One church with a diversity of people of various backgrounds and ethnicities. This letter is a calling upon this group of people to affirm what they share in common as the basis for their relationship to one another as Christians.

Let us begin by reading the first 14 verses of this letter. In this section, Paul is identified as the author and he focuses in on God's grace and our adoption into God's family.

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

I have heard said to me and I have told my kids to follow your passion and your vocational career will work out. But I recently read an article that turns that advice upside down. The author of a recent study argues that telling someone to follow their passion is bad advice.

Carol Dweck is a Psychology professor at Stanford University. She shares about how she recently asked her students how many of them were waiting to discover their passion. Almost all of them raised their hands. They shared about their dreams of a tidal wave cascading over them when they would realize their passion.

She then asked them if they would have unlimited motivation toward their passion. They said they would. She then told them this. “I hate to burst your bubble, but it doesn’t usually happen that way.”

Dweck and her science partners carried out a study comparing folks who believed in fixed theory verses growth theory. In other words, their study compared people who believed that passions were fixed verses those that believed passions were developed.

If you believe that passion is fixed, then you go from one thing to another looking for that one thing that brings you great fulfillment. You will go from one job to another looking for that job that brings you great joy. You will go from one school to another looking for that school that fits you perfectly.

If you believe that passion is fixed, you will go from one house or community to another looking for that perfect neighborhood, house, or town. You will go from one relationship to another looking for that perfect soul mate. You will go from one church to another looking for that perfect church.

If you believe that you are born with passion toward something that is established and fixed, then you will keep looking and looking and looking for that one object or person or place.

Dweck and her colleagues, however, developed a theory that passion is developed. Professor Ann Renninger says to look at kids. Before the age of 8, kids will try anything and be passionate about it. Between 8 and 12 they start to compare themselves to others and become insecure if they are not as good.

As a result, their passions become limited. And looking at adults, if your mother develops cancer then suddenly you become passionate about learning about cancer.

So how does this study help us understand this passage of Scripture from Ephesians? According to Paul, we have been chosen by God to be adopted as children into Christ. Through this adoption we are granted an inheritance. An inheritance of hope. This hope is confirmed and sealed through the Holy Spirit.

If we follow this passage and believe this passage, then we will be folks that look for hope and believe in hope even in the darkest of situations. Hope, like passion, is not a fixed object. Hope is something that we must believe we have to grow and nurture and support.

So, think about the most hopeless situation that you think exists. You may feel hopeless about something in your family. You may feel hopeless about something concerning your work. You may feel hopeless about something in this nation or you may feel hopeless about something in the world.

As we heard about the situation of 12 children and their 25-year-old coach in the caves of Thailand we certainly felt a sense of hopelessness. As we hear about the separations of families along the border or conflicts in families that you may be a part of we may feel a sense of hopelessness.

But Paul shares words to the community in Ephesus that belief in Christ leads to hope and trust and redemption. This hope is not a static and fixed hope. Hope must be something that we work to develop and grow. Hope must be something that we nurture in ourselves and in the community around us.

So, think about the most hopeless situation you can think of. Now begin to imagine how you can help to create and cultivate a presence of hope. If you feel hopeless due to a conflict in your family, how can Christ work through you to help provide hope?

If you feel hopeless to the situation of separated families along the border, what politicians can you badger to get the situation corrected? If you feel hopeless about something at work, how can Christ work through you to help provide a sense of hope in what you are facing?

Being a follower of Jesus Christ and accepting our adoption as children of God means being a hopeful person. If we succumb to hopelessness, then we are succumbing to the agents of darkness. If we seek to develop and nurture hope, then we are faithful to our adoption.

Whether we want to affirm it or not, we have been given the power and responsibility to be people of hope.

The challenge before us is to enter into the most hopeless of situations and share words and actions of hope. AMEN.

-Kahzan, Olga, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/07/find-your-passion-is-terrible-advice/564932/>

-Given: July 15, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)