

INTRODUCTION

Paul was a persecutor of the church until Jesus knocked him to the ground and confronted him with the reality of Who He is (Acts 9). Within a few years, he was traveling and preaching the gospel from Antioch to Philippi to Thessalonica to Athens to Colossi to Ephesus to Macedonia, establishing churches in many cities. His mission to preach the gospel landed him in prison, from which he continued to reach out via letter to the churches he established.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share with your group your favorite mystery book or movie.
2. Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Why does Paul say he was in prison? Do you think he's trying to make the Ephesians feel guilty?

3. Read the following passages and note Paul's attitude about being in prison:

Philippians 1:12-14 _____

Colossians 4:2-4 _____

Philemon 1:1 _____

2 Timothy 1:8-9 _____

4. Paul is convinced that his imprisonment was intended by God to advance the gospel, and also to show the power of God's grace over all circumstances. When your circumstances are not what you would choose, do you look at them as a way to show others the power of Jesus? If not, how can you begin to do this?
5. The Greek word for mystery (*mystērion*) is a bit different from the English word. While our word can mean something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain, the Greek word can mean something not yet known, but about to be revealed. What is the mystery to which Paul refers? Why do you think it was a mystery?
6. What are the three things Paul notes about the mystery in verse 6? What do you think he is communicating by calling the Gentiles this?
7. In light of this mystery, how do you think God feels when believers are at odds with one another? Are there any relationships with fellow-believers in your life that are in need of reconciliation?

Study Questions for Community Groups

8. According to verses 8-9, what was Paul's mission? Why does he call himself "the least of all the Lord's people"? Do you think this is true?

9. According to verses 10-11, what does God intend for the church? How do we accomplish this?

10. What does it mean to approach God with freedom and confidence (verse 12)? Do you have this confidence when you pray? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE

¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—²surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. ⁷I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of His power. ⁸Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹according to His eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Ephesians 3:1-13

APPLICATION

Paul experienced stoning, beating, and incarceration as a result of his proclamation of the gospel. Ultimately, he was killed because of his persistence in sharing Jesus' love and sacrifice with others. Take time this week to think about what you are sacrificing for the sake of the gospel.