Tread: **A Study in Ephesians – wk 6 – Baby Steps**

**It was a church in a big city – started by a man who saw and talked to Jesus (Paul) he loved this place – (lived there 3yrs). But now in a Roman prison – thinking back to those people and days he writes…**

**He encourages them to stand – walk – run! This is his letter.**

**Ch 1-2 How to stand - Ch 3-4 How to walk - Ch 5-6 How to run!**

**A baby does not come out running around the hospital – that would be crazy! One does not come before the other!**

**Where we stand – In Christ you are here! You are chosen, adopted, forgiven, enlightened, empowered, redeemed, included, secure – together we are ONE. This is the position we start from = Chap 1-2**

**Now, our first step – Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles… (Paul’s ADD moment…)**

**(He interrupts himself) 2 Surely you have heard about the administration (stewardship)of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, (something not previously known) as I have already written briefly. (from God, not me - as an apostle = Christ messenger)**

**4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, (as you read this you will be able to understand what the Lord is saying) 5 which 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. (it’s a God thing) 6 This mystery is that through the gospel (the good news of Jesus) the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (the mystery is – thru Jesus we stand together as equals together serving Jesus)**

**7 I became a servant of this gospel (the good news) by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, (I was a pharisee, hater of Christians, seeking to attack and persecute – But God chose me – he uses the foolish to confound the wise) this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration (the responsibility) of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.**

**Paul lays out a few first steps… We know who we are (Ch 1-2) now it’s time to take a baby step… here is the first one…**

**1. Walk in submission to scriptures (Eph 3:2-10)**

**Paul’s is reminding us our first step is not based on our own feelings & opinions, but rather the leadership of the apostles.**

**Eph 3:4 In reading this, (what he writes) you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 …it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.**

**Apostles of Christ = Jesus designated messengers - To teach and give God’s word! Used by God to give us the heart of God.**

**We step, walk, and live not in our feelings, opinions, society, culture, news, political affliction… by what the Word of God says as given to the apostles. God’s messengers.**

**This is baby step #1 - Some struggle to get past the first step! Well – I don’t like what the bible says about that… baby step it.**

**The second step is a tough one for many also – Eph 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, (Ekklesia - gathering / assembly of the redeemed) the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, (Who are these? Angelic beings – our life is played out before the audience of angels – as we glorify God – they in turn offer greater praise to God. We live out God’s plan in front of them) 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**Apostle’s scriptural authority – The word of God. The final say.**

**Shepherd’s spiritual authority - given to help in your Journey.**

**“through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is made known”**

**2. Walk in submission to caring church leadership (Eph 3:7-11)**

**Acts 20:28, 1 Cor 16:16, 1 Thess 5:12, Heb 13:7, 1 Tim 5:17**

**This is a difficult step for many - in America people distrust authority, especially church leaders. Step 1, got it - step 2, nope!**

**But Jesus ordained the church (Ekklesia) – to be his pillar of truth.**

**1 Tim 3:15 - …the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.**

**All healthy missions & ministry should flow from Ekklesia – that is God’s eternal purpose from the beginning! The church has always been plan A. Plan B… the church. Plan C… church**

**God gives shepherds and spiritual leaders in the church to help guide your steps and help in areas of your life. It is to your benefit. (Eph 4)**

**Talking about caring church leadership - Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders submit to their authority, (if you don’t have confidence – find one you can trust) because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. (I will, and every church leader will answer to God for our leadership – I take that seriously) Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.**

**When you do it benefits you, when you don’t it won’t.**

**We provide more than just Sunday to help you. We challenge you to trust the LORD in diff areas of your life – FOR YOUR BENEFIT! Not mine. But when you resist – it is not a joy for us… as we care for you!**

**Next baby step – Ephesians 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (so, don’t worry about me – in prison – God knows what He is doing)**

**3. Walk in confidence (3:12-16a)**

**As you walk in Christ – walk confidently that God is approachable thru prayer every step of the way in our times of need- never alone!**

**Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

**Paul says - I was a nobody, that God made a somebody (1 Cor. 15:9-10)**

**I was a selfish, then God made me selfless**

**I was one lost, chained to my sin, then God found me and set free**

**Afraid and fearful of God & death- now, in Christ, I boldly approach**

**We are not alone – thru faith in Jesus we have freedom and confidence – no matter what comes our way!**

**\*\* First steps holding on to dad’s fingers… Dad’s got you!**

**Paul takes a breather, recalibrates (compare v31 & 14) – “For this reason…”**

**Okay back on track! - Eph 3:14 For this reason (when I think about your walk with God…) I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. (A prayer for spiritual maturity) 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**

**Strengthened by God in our inner being. When you struggle to take another step or live another day - boldly approach the throne of God – cry out for strength in your inner being – breath, get up, walk - live, love, and glorify God in your life!**

**17b …And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, (In God’s love all things are created, you are alive, and that Jesus came – at the core of it all = LOVE) 18 *(I pray you may)* may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp (understand, take hold, to comprehend) how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge (How can we know it, if it surpasses knowledge? To be in awe!) - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (filled to the top)**

**Paul prays that they/we might be able to comprehend the immense, amazing, remarkable, magnificent, majestic, grand, glorious, extraordinary, awe-inspiring, wonderful, irresistible, overwhelming – Love of God! Grasp it and Hold it tight!**

**4. Walk in His love (3:17-19)**

**Walk in the knowledge & awe of his great love for you, be filled with it!**

**Walk knowing by God- I am loved- I’m important- I’m valuable. I cannot fathom His love… that cross… (expound on the cross)**

**His patience, his persistence, his provision for me**

**At the core of all we know about God – we must establish this step. God is good & loving. We must know this or everything else falls apart.**

**As you grow in life and with God things are hard to understand – our faith is tested – our steps may stumble – we may wander – we may doubt – we may struggle - but know this and hold tight to this – God is good, and God loves you!**

**When you stumble and wonder if God still loves you – look to the cross. His blood says yes!**

**This is also important because we will be called to walk in that kind of Love to others, but we cannot give what we don’t have. We must know it to walk in it – we must have it to give it!**

**Baby step 5 - Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, (exceedingly abundantly, above all that we ask or think) according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

**5. Walk in faith (3:20-21)**

**Hudson Taylor: there are 3 stages in every great work of God: impossible, difficult, and done.**

**Let’s break it down:**

**God is able!! - “Now to him who is able” -**

**I don’t know if it’s possible (God is able) – I don’t know if I can (GIA) It seems to difficult (GIA) that person is too far gone (GIA)**

**Is able - not always does!**

**God is sovereign, all powerful, all mighty – God is able!**

**God is bigger!! - “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” -**

**God's capacity to meet our needs far exceeds anything we can request in prayer or conceive of.**

**But this is not about buying lottery tickets and praying for it. This is not about God doing more than we ask (though at times he does) but a response to God’s ability to work in anyone.**

**“Who would have thought – me. That I Paul – would be an apostle.**

**God is able to turn rebels like you an me into sons and daughters of God. Who would have guessed - you? Who would have ever imagined God would use me to change the world!**

**Don’t give up on your son, daughter, dad, or friend – God is able!**

**How does he do it?**

**God is at work!! “according to his power that is at work within us”**

**God working in us and through us – and in them. God is able!!!**

**A few standout big thoughts - Walking in SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

1. **Spiritual growth happens INSIDE OUT**

**Philippians 2:13, 4:8, 1 Thess 5:23, Rom 12:2, Hebrews 10:24-25, John 17:17**

**It is not a matter of will power – but the Spirits power.**

**Eph 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being… 20 …according to His (God’s) power that is at work within us…**

**You may not see it at first – but it is growing**

**It’s an inside job - Philippians 2:13 …for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (God starts a work in you the moment of salvation – the “want to” changes and gives the power to act on it)**

**Navel oranges big and flavorful. Discovered by a missionary in Brazil (1800’s) Looks like it has a navel - actually come from a mutation – try to grow a second fruit (a twin) but are seedless – so they cannot reproduce themselves.**

**So how do they grow the trees? A branch of the tree is grafted (explain) onto a citrus tree branch – and then develop a grove. The only way - is to graft it onto a living branch – they cannot reproduce themselves.**

**This is a great picture of our spiritual walk. We are born incapable of have true spiritual fruit. In order for us to have fruit & reproduce ourselves - we must we grafted onto the branch who is Jesus.**

**Hanging navel oranges to a tree – does not make that tree a navel orange tree. It must be grafted and grown from the inside out.**

**That’s why trying to force fruit on people trees does not work. May look better, but it’s not a fruit tree, nothing changed inside**

1. **Spiritual growth is a PROCESS, not an EVENT**

**Romans 7:15-25, Philippians 3:12-15, 4:8, Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15,**

**1 Corin 15:33, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 10:24-25, John 17:17**

**Paul’s prayer for spiritual maturity is a process in Christian theology known as sanctification – “set apart to a new life”**

**There is a cooperation in our spiritual life. God works in (to convict, draw, and change our will) we then work it out (act on it)**

**Philip 2:12 …continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.**

**Two big things that affect our growth more than anything:**

1. **Who we hang with - and - 2) What we put in our mind**

**All healthy fruit trees need weed & insect killers and plant food! The fruit is affected by insects and fertilizer. Just like us.**

**Who we hang with and what we put in our mind. Good and bad**

**As we start to walk and take a look at some tough areas of our life in the next few weeks in Eph - understand it is a process! Step by step.**

**Change does come, but it happens over time, not overnight**

1. **The goal of Spiritual growth is PROGRESS, not PERFECTION**

**Some of you are struggling – you’re not growing as fast as you want – or someone you love is stumbling a lot. Listen – keep on going.**

**Facts are not maturity (know it all 2nd grader) Maturity takes time**

**Almost every bible hero was someone who struggled with their walk with God (Abe, David, Noah, Moses, Peter, the list goes on…)**

**God is more concerned about your direction than your perfection**

**Proverbs 24:16 For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.**

**Righteousness / maturity – is not defined by our ability to be perfect – but by our ability to get back up when we fall – and fall again and get up – and fall again and get up – and fall…**

**\*\*Don’t try to rush it with others – walk with them – take the time.**

**There is no magical formula – it is a process.**

**Even the apostle Paul says this - Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things.**

**BABY STEPS – followed by BIG STEPS – but still steps.**

**I want to end with an illustration I have given before… A child first steps – Dad’s don’t mock the falls – we celebrate the steps - God is loving – grace filled – and a good dad!**

**“I haven’t heard a voice telling me to go.” Jim Elliott, “You don’t need a voice, you have a verse.” Verses are better than voices.**

**Illustration Taser – the Holy Ghost taser – a person struggling with alcoholism or a lust addiction… so He prays for God to help. And He wants God to zap him with the Holy Ghost taser gun… but God’s response is – the church – community - get involved in some Christ-centered ministry at the church… where guys can support me and speak into my life. We want the taser as plan A.**