

Prepared



Discovering what God has prepared for you

An in-depth study of Ephesians 2:10

The story behind the study

Some mornings I find myself more teachable than others.

In the quiet of one such morning, I arbitrarily opened my Bible to the second chapter of Ephesians. My eyes landed on an already highlighted verse—Ephesians 2:10: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV).

I read the familiar verse slowly; feeling encouraged by the confidence packed in those words of purpose. Suddenly, I was struck by one word in that verse: *prepared*.

The life of the man who penned that verse quickly animated my thoughts. I was intrigued by all the ways God had prepared Paul and how his life epitomized the profound statement he made.

I camped there for days.

With each thing Paul experienced, God prepared him for the next. And that next thing prepared him further for what God had for him next. And on it went.

God prepared him...to do the work He had prepared *for* him.

Prepared...in that moment I liked how that word fit. And I nodded my head, as if in agreement, that the season from which I was emerging was definitely a period of preparation and that in all our seasons, God prepares us for what He has *for* us.

If only I could tell you how many times in the past ten years I’ve written about waiting.

Waiting on the Lord.

Waiting in the Lord.

Waiting before the Lord.

But do you know what I have finally learned, *at last?*

That in my waiting God was preparing me.

Now, I didn't realize at the time that's what He was doing, mind you.
(*You know what they say about hind-sight!*)

I would like to sound all clever here and tell you that I knew all along God was preparing me; and exactly what He was preparing me for. Though He has brought me to this new and unfamiliar season in my life, and though I know not what lies ahead, I do know He has been preparing me for whatever that may be. (I also know that He will faithfully provide what's lacking.)

When my children entered high school, my mother's prayer became common to most. Don't we all, at some point in time, utter; "What's next, Lord? After the kids are grown and gone...what do You have next for me?"

There *is* an answer to that prayer.

In contemplating Ephesians 2:10 that one morning, I looked back. And when I did, it was as if God parted a foggy veil that shrouded that waiting season. I was finally able to see one important thing: God had been preparing me for the what-next. Because He does, in fact, have something prepared *for* me.

As He does for you!

Whatever your circumstances may be, know that God is preparing you for that next thing, too. Right from where you are, in fact.

Am I prepared? Past tense?

NO!

But, I am **MORE** prepared...and being prepared still. That is my most earnest prayer—that He will indeed continue the work He started. And do you know what is even more glorious? It pleases Him to do so! For all of us.

Together, shall we willingly place ourselves before our Maker for the preparing?

We **can** trust that in His perfect wisdom and perfect timing He will provide for our understanding what He has prepared *us* for. And what He has prepared *for* us.

Because He is—ever and always—a God who prepares.

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The Essence of Prepared

DAY 1

Introducing Preparedness

A new day dawns and—no matter what waits to greet you—there is nothing quite like feeling **prepared**.

What was waiting for you at the start of this new day? Was it the familiar and expected? Or was it something more challenging?

And how did you rise to greet it? Were you reluctant? Apprehensive? Indifferent? Or did you feel prepared?

How prepared *can* we be?

And just what is “it” that prepares us?

Together, we’ll be exploring more fully what the “it” is that prepares us. And then, we’ll follow that trail to see where it leads us in discovering what it is we’re prepared **for**.

But first, let’s see what our Lord has to say on the matter...

Prepared—adj.:
“Properly expectant, organized, equipped; ready.”

Prepare—verb:
“To put in proper condition or readiness; to make ready in advance for a particular purpose or use.”

(*Dictionary.com, n.d.*)

Feasting Preparations

Don’t you love preparing for special feasts? Whether it’s a significant occasion, holiday or church potluck? But isn’t it really more about being with those gathered around the table than the meal itself?

One of the parables Jesus directed to the religious leaders of His day, during the final week of His earthly ministry, is about a feast God is preparing for His people. And it gives us a glimpse into that for which we should ultimately be preparing.

Read Matthew 22:1-15.

According to verse 2, what is the Kingdom of Heaven compared to?

The feast is prepared for _____ .

Which is Whom? _____

The feast is given by _____ .

Which is Whom? _____

“Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

(Luke 14:15, see also Rev 19:9)

Who is entrusted with the inviting (vs 3)?

From verse 4, circle what it is that’s “ready”:

Nothing

Only some things

Everything

Two groups ignored the invitation (vs 5), what did “the rest” do (vs 6)?

Was the feast prepared anyway (vs8)?

The first invitations sent out by the son’s servants were flat-out rejected. The next round-of-invitations were either ignored or incited persecution (followed by consequential judgment). Finally the banquet hall was filled with guests.

What do you suppose the “guests” represent (vs 10)?

Every last detail was prepared in advance and the guests (representing the church) are gathered to the feast of the son the king loves. The king makes a glorious entrance to greet the guests when he notices someone is not properly prepared for the grand occasion (v.11).

Was this man invited?

Was he properly attired?

According to the customs of-the-day, the king would provide wedding garments for the guests. To not appropriate what the king provided was an extreme offense against the king, for it was to refuse rebelliously the gift of his grace.

The king made dual preparations: the feast for the guest...and the guest for the feast. There was no excuse for the guest to attend unprepared.

**Who already responded as expected in verse 15
(reference Group Three from verse 6)?**

God has prepared a wedding feast for His Beloved Son. It has been foretold in both the Old and New Testament alike.

Read Isaiah 25:6-9.

For whom is this feast prepared?

Now read Revelation 19:6-9.

What did the apostle John see that "had come"?

How was the Bride made ready?

What does the “fine linen” stand for?

The invitation is extended. Preparations made.

Are **you** coming?

You may be prepared for *this* day, but will you be prepared for *The Day*—clothed in the garments of the Son’s righteousness? Come, ready to feast... *to celebrate!*

Day 2

What Is It That Prepares?

There have been certain seasons in my life that prepared me for some approaching life events.

For example, college prepared me for the marketplace. Similarly, Lamaze classes prepared me for childbirth. (Nothing, however, prepared me for motherhood!) Trials prepared me to encourage others. And through seasons of waiting I sought God, studied His Word, and then cultivated ways to share what I learned.

If I were to chart other examples, it might look something like this:

Seasons of	Prepared for
Study	Teaching
Suffering	Ministry
Developing a skill	Serving and mentoring

Ok, now it's your turn. To help prime your brain, think of the training that prepares the athlete for a competition or practice and rehearsals that prepare the performer.

What experiences have prepared you for something next?

Seasons of	Prepared for

I want desperately for you to know, dear sister, that in every season—whatever that is—God is preparing you. One season prepares for the next; and on it goes. There is no season in our lives that is wasted or that cannot suit some future purpose. (But I'm getting weeks ahead of myself.)

Ground Zero ~ How Is One Prepared?

Now let's shift our focus in order to understand the basics about preparation with regard to spiritual matters.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

(Ephesians 1:3)

From Ephesians 1:3 in the sidebar, complete this sentence:

God _____ blessed me with _____ spiritual blessing in _____.

For clarity: Who is the Source of our every blessing?

Let's reiterate: We are blessed in _____.

Read Ephesians 1:7-14.

Check the blessings we have in Christ that are mentioned in this passage:

- Comfort**
- Redemption**
- Forgiveness**
- Riches**
- Unity**
- Holy Spirit**

What two terms does Paul use with reference to the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Message of _____

Gospel of your _____

Two things—of worth beyond measure—had to be freely given for the redemption of humanity: the blood of Christ Jesus and God-gifted grace. Further blessings that stem from that redemption are the forgiveness of sins and the unification of all things to Christ. Made new and sealed by the Holy Spirit, we are lavished with grace to receive subsequent blessings from the Father, prepared to bring praise to God’s glory.

Being prepared for all subsequent spiritual blessings begins with redemption.

Now What?

Now that we’ve answered the spiritual questions, “Who prepares us” (God) and “How are we prepared” (redemption through Jesus Christ), what’s next?

Understanding what we are now.

Read Ephesians 2:1-22.

Complete the chart below. Use a 1-2 word answer in each blank, for the verse referenced in that blank, of what we were as opposed to what we are now, in Christ:

Were	Are Now
Vs 1)	Vs 5)
Vs 3)	Vs 6)
Vs 12)	Vs 13)
Vs 14)	Vs 16)
Vs 19)	Vs 19)
	Vs 22)

Look over that amazing list one more time, my friend...as if to count your many blessings!

We were “dead in our transgressions and sins”; **but now** (two profound words of God’s great mercy and grace), we are **SAVED...RAISED...ALIVE!**

What a way to end this day of our study together!

Doesn’t it just make you feel ready for anything?!

Preparing Temples

In the weeks ahead, we will discover more fully what God prepares *in us*, for what He has prepared *for us*. But, since in this first week we will cover the basics of preparedness, I'm going to touch lightly on this.

Fill-in the blanks with the word *prepared*:

A _____ work

to do a

work _____

We are a prepared work (prepared by God) to do a work prepared (also prepared by God).

And there are no greater illustrations of this than those found in the passages regarding the tabernacle, the temple and the church.

Divine Building Projects

Read Exodus 35:30-36:1.

According to verse 31, how were the craftsmen made able?

The purpose was twofold. Verse 33 tells us it was “for work in every skilled craft” in building that tabernacle. Verse 34 states the other key purpose God gave these abilities:

God prepared the people...to prepare others...in preparing the tabernacle, where God would dwell among His people.

Read 1 Kings 5:1-6.

What had to first happen before the temple could be built, according to verse 3?

The Hebrew word for tabernacle is *mishkan*, which means “dwelling place.”
(*Bible Hub*)

Fill in the blanks from verse 5:

The temple was built for the _____ of the Lord
_____ God.

Were sounds of iron tools heard at the temple site (6:7)?

Look at 1 Kings 6:13 and choose the correct answer:

God promised to dwell among them, based on what condition in verse 12?

- A) They keep the temple clean
- B) As long as Solomon was king
- C) They obey God's commands
- D) Sing only David's psalms in worship

From verse 6:19, what was prepared for the Ark of the Covenant

- A) Outer courtyard
- B) Inner sanctuary
- C) Neighboring dwellings
- D) A cover

What kind of gold was used (vs 6:21)?

- A) 18 carat
- B) 24 carat
- C) Pure
- D) White

How many years did it take to build the temple (vs 6:38)?

What can we glean from these particular details about building temples?

Once there was peace in the kingdom and enmity no longer abounded among the people of God, the king prepared the site and the people to build a dwelling place for the Name of the Lord.

Three temple projects on Mt. Moriah were:

- Solomon's Temple
• (960 BC-586 BC)
- Zerubbabel's Temple
• (515 BC-20 BC)
- Herod's Temple
• (20 BC-70 AD)

Redesigning Sacred Dwellings

The absence of chiseling sounds on the hardened bedrock of that ancient work is akin to the silent work of the Holy Spirit upon hardened hearts in our sanctification—sculpting temples where He dwells within His people.

Each age of the temple underwent a redesign, ultimately finishing with God's dwelling within each of us. Each redesign served the same purpose: to fill God's longing to tabernacle (originally used as both a noun and a verb in the Greek) among His creation.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

“And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”

(Ephesians 2:22, NIV)

Match to complete the sentence.

Built on the foundation of	Chief Cornerstone
With Christ Jesus as the	Holy temple in the Lord
And rises to become a	Apostles and Prophets

As God lavishly prepared the temples of old, He does so today.

The construction process continues. But, as we rise up together to become the holy temple of God, the church, we cannot overlook the fact that we are each a temple—the dwelling place for the glory of God.

What work can you do on *your* temple today?

I often borrow the words of hymns for prayer. Today, in closing, join me in praying these lyrics.

“O Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary;
pure and holy, tried and true;
with thanksgiving I'll be a living sanctuary
for You.”

Prepared Pre-Conversion

The main profile of our study makes his grand entrance today, although I doubt he is a stranger to anyone.

Back-in-the-day, everyone knew who Saul of Tarsus was—no introduction required. He had an impressive resume, an imposing personality, and impossible pride.

The man who would be called Paul enters the biblical scene in Acts 7:58... and the Bible is never the same!

Saul ~ The Early Years

How do you like knitting? Well, sharpen your needles; we just might need them today in knitting together the tapestry of Saul's pre-conversion life.

Match the passage with what can be learned of Saul from it.

Rm 11:1 **Was advancing in Judaism and extremely zealous of Jewish tradition**

Gal 1:13-14 **Was a Pharisee that was faultless in obeying the Law**

Php 3:5-6 **Was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin**

Saul, the proficient law student, could be considered a lawyer, of sorts; for he expounded, defended and prosecuted law breakers— aspiring to ascend the ruling courts of the Sanhedrin Council.

Saul was not only a Jew; he was considered a "Hebrew-of-Hebrews." He didn't fall into the classification of a Hellenistic Jew, but was an orthodox, Hebraic Jew. He would have spoken Aramaic, the language of Judea, in the home and synagogue. Scripture tells us that he had a rising reputation by zealously defending the religion of his people.

Now match what can be learned of Saul from these passages.

Tarsus was settled in the southeast corner of Asia Minor (now modern Turkey), in the province of Cilicia. Roughly situated about 12 miles from the Mediterranean shore, it was guarded by the Taurus mountain range. The Cilician Gate passed through the range...all the way to Rome.

Acts 22:3	Conformed to the strictest sect of his religion
Acts 26:5	Born in Tarsus and studied under Gamaliel
Acts 22:4-5	Persecuted Christians and acquainted with the High Priest and the Jewish Council

Born in the gentile city of Tarsus as the son of a Pharisee, Saul would have had the socio-economic standing and thorough education in Greek culture, literature, and language. This would serve him well in later years. He was also trained in tentmaking, preparing him to earn future income. And his Roman citizenship would have allowed for extensive travel throughout the Empire, both with privileges and legal protection.

Saul's training at the feet of Gamaliel for six years prepared him to be a master theologian. This extensive knowledge of their history, religious system, and Scriptures of the law and prophets would lay the foundation for him to reason and apply it to the New Covenant of Christ. Living the highly ritualistic life of a Pharisee prepared him to lead a disciplined and obedient life under treacherous conditions to come.

Read Acts 7:57-8:3.

Complete the sentence regarding Saul's part in the stoning of Stephen.

"Saul _____ of their killing him."

What was happening to the church?

Who led the charge? _____

The time and place of his birth all played a part in preparing Saul, as did

his upbringing. But all of that was about to change, as God took hold of his life for a greater purpose long prepared for him.

Read Acts 9:1-9.

Write the term used in verse 1 that describes what Saul was doing.

Who is it that stopped Saul dead-in-his-tracks?

How long did Saul sit in darkness?

Jewish Christian converts fled north from Jerusalem, some 100 miles to Damascus, for refuge from persecution.

This blindness served several purposes. Ultimately, it prepared Saul to trust God, so that in all the difficulties that lay ahead, when he would not be able to see, he could press on in faith.

**Go back to Acts 9:4. What was Saul doing?
Yet what did he hear?**

Take that to heart, dear sister. That Voice that called out to Saul in the depths of his rebellious sin, calls out to you. There is no action so terrible that Jesus does not call you to Him from the midst of it.

Jesus Christ can change the course of our lives in a flash and set us on the path He has prepared for us. And all that lies behind—forgiven—prepared us all the way.

Prepared Post-Conversion

Can we ever truly be prepared for the things of God until we are in Christ?

As previously discussed, redemption is necessary to pave the way for all other spiritual blessings. We must first be right with God and reconciled to Him—and that only comes through Jesus—to be prepared to move forward in living out His will.

We learned yesterday that Paul was prepared in his early years, but only to a point. And that was used *in opposition* to God.

Paul, prior to his conversion, was headed down a clear path of destruction when Jesus called him out to follow a better Way...***Him***.

A Change in Direction

God had something prepared for Paul. But first He had to prepare *him* for what He had prepared *for* him.

Let's continue on this journey of Paul's preparation, post-conversion.

Each verse represents a stepping stone in Paul's timeline from his baptism to his first missionary journey. The stepping stones below are laid out on the path God would take Paul. Write the places traveled (from the Word Bank) in the blank of their corresponding stone.



Acts 9:19b-22



Gal 1:17-18



Acts 9:26-30



Gal 1:21



Acts 11:25-26

Word Bank:

- Caesarea to Tarsus
- Antioch
- Syria and Cilicia
- Damascus
- Arabia to Damascus to Jerusalem



What would your timeline look like? Can you also map out a path of times God has prepared you for where you are in your journey today?



This timeline spans a period of more than 11 years in the apostle’s life. This process was critical in preparing him to understand God’s will, teach the gospel, and learn to follow the Holy Spirit closely.

Read how the apostle summarizes his change in direction, from his own words recorded in Galatians 1:14-17.

Now match to complete each statement.

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| WAS | he preached Christ |
| BUT | advancing in Judaism |
| THEN | he was called |

According to 1 Corinthians 15:10 in the sidebar, to what did Paul attribute this change?

A lesson to be learned from Paul is this: Whether pre-conversion or post-conversion—before and after—we are always prepared by the grace of God.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”
(1 Corinthians 15:10)

Prepared To Say

Allow me to introduce an exercise called “Prepared to Say,” which we will be doing each week at the end of Day 5. Hopefully, you will find it thematic to our study from the week.

It can be used as a memory verse in the week ahead, but it is also designed to be used as an assessment tool of your faith.

The verse selected will focus on a time in which Paul had to be prepared by God in his faith to be able to make such a confident claim. Hopefully it is something we, too, are prepared to say along with Paul.

So, at the end of each week, when you reach the “Prepared to Say” section, honestly ask yourself if you are at a point in your faith where you are able to make the same statement.

Are you now prepared to say with Paul....



Prepared to Say

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life” (1 Tm 1:15-16).