



The Journey

Ephesians 1:3 NIV

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.

Where Are You Going?

At first, when you read Ephesians 1: 3, you are tempted to quickly move past it to the meatier material found next but that would be a mistake. Verse 3 is critical to understanding who you are and what to make of the Father and the Son. The first part of the verse reads a bit differently in the Greek than it comes across in the English translations. It literally is, "Praiseworthy, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". This is almost a shout grammatically, a fist pump, clap of the hands. It might sound a bit like this today. "Yes!! The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Your eyes looking up, a giant smile on your face and happiness pulsing through your body. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!!! That's who I'm talking about!!!" But why such zeal?

There are plenty who don't feel that good about God. In fact, many lack any sort of enthusiasm when it comes to the Father. Even great people in the Bible had a hard time being excited about Him when things got rough. The prophet Jeremiah complained, **Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save?** (Jeremiah 14:9 NIV) Isaiah the prophet wasn't very happy with how responsive God was to the needs of His people. **Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.** (Isaiah 45:15 NIV) Job felt like God was more of an absent or uncaring Father than one who should be praised. **"Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.** (Job 19:7 NIV) Lest we forget the cry of Jesus as He hung on the cross. **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46 NIV) Perhaps you have felt that way too. God, why have you quit on me? How come you don't care about my life? Where are my blessings?

Literally our verse tells us that the Father is "the blessing one". In other words, God's personality is wrapped up in blessing. We know that the Bible states that God is love as well as light and Jesus reminded us that God is Spirit, but here we are told that God is blessing one. To say that God is blessing means that He reaches out beyond Himself and pours into others goodness. He is not God off to Himself but God into you. Yet, the blessing coming to you is in the heavenly realms and is spiritual blessing in Christ. The tendency is to look at anything described as spiritual as not quite real. Because we have no experience with anything to do with the heavenly realms, it is hard for us to give it much weight. I have never been to Switzerland or Mexico but still think highly of both and would love to get there. Our lack of personal acquaintance with certain people or places doesn't mean they are unreal. There are plenty of people you haven't met yet and places you haven't seen but you will because they will be a part of your journey. You haven't arrived yet.

Thomas is sometimes unfairly criticized. Doubting Thomas is a bit too harsh a nickname. Like you, he was on a journey. He had not seen Jesus raised from the dead. He saw Him beaten and scourged and even

crucified. Thomas had not yet seen Jesus resurrected when he became known for his doubting a resurrected Jesus. It was on the way. He would eventually reach that destination, but he wasn't there yet. Thomas had seen the Jewish leaders curse Jesus and watched as the crowds called for Him to be crucified but never saw Him with His eternal body. Many are at this same place. They have seen the killings, the shootings, the racial taunts, the earthquakes, the child trafficking, the disease, the divorces, the addictions, and the cursing but never the spiritual blessings in heavenly realms. The spiritual blessings in Christ don't seem as real as death or cruelty and pain. Like Thomas, considering such love of God and complete devotion to your joy and happiness may seem too far away to be true. Remember though, you are on a journey and haven't yet arrived.

On Easter Sunday, two followers of Jesus were travelling from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. Just a seven mile walk, it felt like an eternity to them though because of the horrible events they had just witnessed. Imagine their uncertainty, the doubts and questions about God and heaven and everything they had once believed about Jesus with His death. Now it seemed like such a fairy tale to think Jesus could save the world. As they tramped along the trail, the two talked about all they had heard so far. Two of the women from the group of followers of Jesus had gone to the tomb that day and found it without Jesus' body. They told everyone that a vision of angels appeared to them who declared that Jesus was actually alive. This was of course preposterous and couldn't be true but then two others, Peter and John went down to the tomb and found it empty just as the women had said. Everything seemed quite bizarre and maybe even suspicious to these two disciples on their journey before they met Jesus alive and raised from the dead. So many are at this same spot on the journey; questions, lots of questions. Why did my mom die? How come our marriage ended in divorce? Why did I have to lose my job? How come I can't shake this illness? What am I supposed to do about the depression overwhelming my daughter?

The Psalmist had this same struggle as he went along on the journey. In fact, he asks the very question you might be asking. **I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from?** (Psalm 121:1 NIV) Author Philip Yancey describes in his book, The Question that Never Goes Away, the account of Catholic writer and psychologist Henri Nouwen. While serving in Peru, he was asked to lead a funeral service for a seventeen year old boy who had been killed. At the funeral were the mother, two other sons, an aunt and uncle and a grandparent. Nouwen was a bit nervous because he really didn't know what to say to this hurting family. Nouwen was highly educated, well trained in the field of psychology, but he stumbled around, trying to find the right words. As Nouwen fumbled with, "I just want to say how much I really feel with you...", he stopped because he felt overwhelmed with the immensity of their loss. "Gracias. Padre, gracias. Muchas gracias," the family kept repeating as Nouwen struggled to speak. He started again but his words were halting and once more the family interrupted him. "Gracias Padre. Muchisimas gracias." This went on again and again. Nouwen would try to speak, stumble and the family thanked him. Finally, the mother came up to Henri Nouwen and gently comforted him, "Father, don't be so depressed! Don't you know that the Lord loves us? Here are my sons, and here is my aunt and uncle. Come have food with us, come to our house. We can stand the pain of Tony's loss because God is with us."

Psalm 121 answers its own question, "Where does my help come from?" in verse 2. **My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.** (Psalm 121:2 NIV) We may not understand for now why all the evil remains in this world, but there is this to consider. Jesus, from out of the heavenlies came and suffered just as badly, if not worse than anyone you have ever known. He experienced the pain of evil. When He consoles you, when He walks with you on the journey, He knows what it takes to be comforted. He has the love you need when you need it as you walk along the road of heartache and sorrow. He comes to you just as He did when those two heartbroken and confused disciples trudged along the road to Emmaus.

We live in a broken world where sorrow is not far from us. Yet the God we have promises that your journey will bring you the joy of Christ filling you forever. The promise of our verse is that every spiritual blessing in Christ is stored and ready for you when your journey has taken you home. This part of the trip may be hard

and at times painful, but within you Christ is comforting you, encouraging you and at times carrying you along when you are feeling weak. It is not fake, this life you have with Christ. It is supernatural and beyond our capacity to fathom mostly, but it is true. You will soon enough have joy beyond comprehension and in the meantime, you have Jesus to see you through this. So, enjoy the meal and the grace of having real friends who love you and keep in mind that it is Christ crucified who is with you!