



# Radicle: Ephesians for Misfits

## Fall Teaching Series & Small Group Study

### Introduction

**Rad·i·cle** *Noun* (Botany) - A part of a plant that develops into the **primary root**.

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 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. And I pray that you, being **rooted and established in love**, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*  
— **Ephesians 3.14-19** <sup>NIV</sup>

As we continue in the **Refocus** phase of Refresh, and as we transition to a new gathering location, we want to remind ourselves *who we are, why we gather as a community and worship, and where we're going together*. We are a **New People**, with **New Passion**, and **New Purpose**. We are a “community of misfits on a mission, finding identity in Jesus.”

*What does it mean to be a “community of misfits”?*

*What does it mean to be “on a mission”?*

*What does it mean to “find identity in Jesus”?*

These are the kinds of questions we want to explore in this series. We want to do that both in the teaching ministry during our Sunday worship gatherings and also in small groups during the week. This guide will help to facilitate that exploration.

### Schedule

WEEK 1 - SEPT 9<sup>TH</sup> - “A PLACE OF POWER” (ACTS 19) - T. C.  
 WEEK 2 - SEPT 16<sup>TH</sup> - “THE DISTURBING WAY OF JESUS” (ACTS 19) - T. C.  
 WEEK 3 - SEPT 23<sup>RD</sup> - “IDENTITY IN CHRIST” (EPHESIANS 1, P1) - T. C.  
 WEEK 4 - SEPT 30<sup>TH</sup> - “KNOWING THE POWER OF THE KING” (EPHESIANS 1, P2) - T. C.  
 WEEK 5 - OCT 7<sup>TH</sup> - “SALVATION BY ALLEGIANCE ALONE” (EPHESIANS 2, P1) - T. C.  
 WEEK 6 - OCT 14<sup>TH</sup> - “ONE, MULTIETHNIC FAMILY” (EPHESIANS 2, P2) - T. C.  
 WEEK 7 - OCT 21<sup>ST</sup> - “ROOTED IN LOVE” (EPHESIANS 3) - T. C.  
 WEEK 8 - OCT 28<sup>TH</sup> - “UNITY IN PEACE” (EPHESIANS 4, P1) - EMILY  
 WEEK 9 - NOV 4<sup>TH</sup> - “PRIESTHOOD OF ALL DISCIPLES” (EPHESIANS 4, P2) - OSHETA  
 WEEK 10 - NOV 11<sup>TH</sup> - “IMITATING GOD” (EPHESIANS 4-5) - DER  
 WEEK 11 - NOV 18<sup>TH</sup> - “MUTUAL SUBMISSION” (EPHESIANS 5-6) - OSHETA  
 WEEK 12 - NOV 25<sup>TH</sup> - “SPIRITUAL WARFARE” (EPHESIANS 6) - T. C.

## Historical & Cultural Background on Ephesus

In the first century, when the apostle Saul/ Paul<sup>1</sup> traveled to **Ephesus** (now in modern-day Turkey), a city with a long and illustrious history. Dating back to the Greek migrations of 1200 BC, Ephesus underwent several rebirths. In Greek times, it was the birth place of a great pre-Socratic philosopher named Heraclitus. It was considered an important center of learning and culture. The streets at night were illuminated by oil lamps, which was a rare luxury in ancient cities. In Roman times, the city was a major center of cultural exchange. The ancient historian Aristio described Ephesus as being the most important trading center in the Roman province of “Asia.”



The city was also world famous for its massive temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Artemis (or Diana to the Romans), who was goddess of chastity but also fertility and childbirth. The **Temple of Artemis** in Ephesus was one of the “Seven Wonders” of the ancient world and there was a legend that the statue of the goddess was a gift from the gods that fell out of the sky. This was likely based on a meteor that fell at some point in city’s past. It was almost double the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Pliny the Elder, a Roman official and historian, called the temple of Artemis, “the most wonderful monument of Grecian magnificence.” The priests of the temple of Artemis were all women who “ruled the show and kept the men in their place.” This

becomes a crucial piece of context for a highly controversial passage in **First Timothy**, which is also set in Ephesus (i.e. I Tim. 2.11-12).

“Now, if you were writing a letter to someone in a small, new religious movement with a base in Ephesus, and you wanted to say that because of the gospel of Jesus the old ways of organizing male and female roles had to be rethought from top to bottom, with one feature being that women were to be encouraged to study and learn and take a leadership role, you might well want to avoid giving the wrong impression. Was the apostle saying, people might wonder, that women should be trained so that Christianity would gradually become a cult like that of Artemis, where women led and kept the men in line? That, it seems to me, is what verse 12 is denying. The word I’ve translated as ‘try to dictate to them’ is unusual but has overtones of ‘being bossy’ or ‘seizing control.’ Paul is saying, like Jesus in Luke 10, that women must have the space and leisure to study and learn in their own way, not in order that they may muscle in and take over the leadership as in the Artemis cult, but so that men and women alike can develop whatever gifts of learning, teaching, and leadership God has given them.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saul of Tarsus sometimes went by “Paul” when he was ministering in predominantly Gentile settings, but never ceased to be “Saul.” Like many people today, he had two names. He was Saul in his native language and culture, and he had a second name for when he interacted with majority culture peoples. His name was not changed by God, nor was it changed after he submitted himself to the Lordship of Jesus as Messiah.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (HarperOne, 2015), p.80-81.

## Week 1 - "A Place of Power" (Acts 19.1-20)

**Power** is one of the main themes of the New Testament book called "Ephesians," written by the apostle Paul for circulation among the churches of "Asia." For example, in chapter one Paul prays for Jesus's disciples to have power like the power God exerted in raising Jesus from the dead (v.19-20) and praises Jesus for being exalted far above all "rulers" "authorities" and "powers," both terrestrial and celestial. He then prays for the disciples to have power to know Christ's love in chapter 3, verse 18. The work then closes with a discourse on spiritual warfare against "principalities and powers." So, why all this talk of power? If we read the accounts from Acts of Paul's time in Ephesus, it will help shed light on why this theme emerges so often.

"Power is one of the great themes of Ephesians. Perhaps this is because Ephesus itself, and the surrounding area, was seen as a place of power. Certainly in social and civic terms the city was powerful, and was set to become more so. It was a major centre of imperial influence in Paul's day. The Roman emperors were keen to establish and maintain places where their rule could be celebrated and enhanced.

But it was also a centre of religious power. All sorts of cults and beliefs flourished, and frequently they focused on power: the power of what we might call magic, power to make things happen in the world, to influence people and events, to gain wealth or health or influence for yourself and to bring about the downfall of your enemies. Their world, in other words, was dominated by the 'principalities and powers,' the various levels of rulers and authorities from local magistrates up to internationally recognized gods and goddesses, and all stages in between."<sup>3</sup>

### Group Discussion Questions

#### Read Acts 19, verses 1 through 7

- Luke's account of Paul's time in Ephesus begins with an odd encounter with some "disciples of John". **Who was John the Forerunner (or Baptizer)?** (cf. Luke 1.5-25, 57-66; 3.1-20; John 1.6-8) **And why do you think it was important to Luke to begin his account of Paul's time in Ephesus with a story about disciples receiving Holy Spirit baptism?**
- Some Christian traditions emphasize the gift of speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and associate it with Holy Spirit baptism. **What has been your experience or non-experience with tongues and/or Holy Spirit baptism?**
- **What role do you think the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy should play in the life of the church today? Why? What about the role of Holy Spirit baptism?**

#### Read verses 8 through 12

- Paul's time in Ephesus is considered his "most sustained piece of missionary and pastoral work."<sup>4</sup> **What was Paul's evangelism and church planting "strategy"? How long was he there? Where did he host gatherings? What was the effect?**
- **What do you think we could learn from Paul's approach?**

<sup>3</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Westminster John Knox, 2002), p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 2* (Westminster John Knox, 2008), p.123.

“Paul and these new disciples will give witness to the claiming power of God over the creation. This is what the miracles will signify. Luke has always been clear about miracles, as a sign of divine retaking and holy restoration of a wayward creation (Luke 4:38-41; 5:13; 6:19; Acts 5:15-16). This is a work manifest by bodily touch, presence, and relationship. Not all three must be present for miracles, but all three are certainly implied. This extraordinary element of this story has always been the skin. The skin of Paul by the Spirit is given salvific resonance such that objects that touch his skin also touch divine presence. The life of the objects become one with the life of God. This suggests not a transformation of the objects but a connectivity that presses deep into the materiality of the divine embrace. Here deliverance is at the surface of objects, on the plane where skin and cloth carry a saving sensuality. We, Christians of a desensitized era, would do well to remember this reality of sensuality. Touch matters to God because we are God’s creatures, created to be touched repeatedly by God. Touching is often intercepted by economic utility and isolating pleasure, yet here we see a glimpse of an eros in which touching marks a divine yearning for a pleasure that heals and sets free and will reach into eternity.”<sup>5</sup>

- The account of ordinary items like handkerchiefs having healing properties makes many Modern people very uncomfortable. **Why do you think that is? How does this account challenge our thinking/worldview? What should we do when we encounter accounts like this in Scripture?**

### Read verses 13 through 16

“It matters little who the evil spirit knew or did not know. What is far more important is that these would-be exorcists imagine their delivering work outside the bonds of relationship with Jesus or his servants. This is a perennial danger for those who wish to do series intervention against the demonic forces of this world that oppress humanity and the creation. [...] These sons of Sceva did in fact challenge the demonic, and they did in fact seek to free someone from its deadly grip. Yet they had not placed themselves in the space of the Spirit and the life of Jesus where touch, presence, and relationship situate our actions in God’s own life and turn us always toward that life. So they are wounded in their attempt to do good... It signals what is always possible for those who wish to do the work of Jesus without constantly pressing into the life of Jesus. We too may be overcome by evil.”<sup>6</sup>

- **What are some ways you attempt to work for God apart from God’s life and presence?**
- **What are some ways we can press into God’s presence while pursuing the mission of Jesus?**

### Read verses 17 through 20

“We are on the ground of renunciation here, where the intimate spaces of hope infested with practices and gesture that lean toward futility and false gods are opened and cleared out by the Spirit... This limitation is one unearthed by believers, not imposed on them. It is *their* recognition that a particular practice or belief will not yield what they imagined and is not encircled by the ecology of divine touch, presence, and relationship. *They* see the limitation and have chosen a better way. [...] Renunciation therefore must always come from within a community and never be imposed on a community. The imposition of renunciation in the history of Christianity has led to the inculcating of deep cultural self-hatred in many peoples and forms of Christian life that are obsessively policing. Such forms of faith deny and destroy much more than they affirm and build up, and thus they undermine the holy work of renunciation.”<sup>7</sup>

- **What is your experience or non-experience with renunciation?**
- **What might God be calling you to renounce in your life?**

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<sup>5</sup> Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Westminster John Knox, 2017), p.185-186.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186-187.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187-188.