

Step One: Select a Text

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us

in Christ
with every spiritual blessing
in the heavenly places,

⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless
before him in love.

⁵ He destined us
for adoption
as his children through Jesus Christ,
according to the good pleasure of his will,

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace
that he freely bestowed on us
in the Beloved.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace
⁸ that he lavished on us.
With all wisdom and insight

⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his good pleasure
that he set forth in Christ,

¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time,
to gather up all things in him,
things in heaven
and things on earth.

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,
having been destined
according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things
according to his counsel and will,

¹² so that we,
who were the first
to set our hope on Christ,
might live for the praise of his glory.

¹³ In him you also,
when you had heard the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation,
and had believed

in him,

were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;
¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance
toward redemption as God's own people,
to the praise of his glory.

Step Two: Probe Your Text. Probe the text for any explicit and implicit oral performance features.

- Several elements in verse 3 establish an atmosphere of reverence for God and Christ. First, the adjective rendered “blessed” means “praised.” With the words “Blessed [Praised] be God,” Paul employed a common Jewish exclamation of blessing and praise that was practiced at meals, in the synagogue, and at festal occasions (cf. Tob 13:1 and Sg Three 29–68). The blessing formula comes from the Hebrew term that literally means to fall on one’s knees. Thus, in both word and posture, Paul sets a reverent tone for the rest of the praise and adoration.
- Second, the Greek text reads “blessed the God” without any main verb. The NRSV supplies the word “be.” Lacking the verb, the statement can be understood as an affirmation (God *is* praise-worthy), a wish (*May* God be praised), or as an imperative (*Worship* God!).¹ Perhaps the absence of a verb “encourages the simultaneous acts of confession, acceptance of invitation, and decision to obey.”
- Also, in verse 3, the use of the term Lord evokes a sense of respect. It is an honorary title and it refers to one who is a master or owner. It is a term used of men and of gods and usually it concerns the relationship between a lord and his subordinates. The acknowledgment of Jesus as “Lord” honors and reveres Jesus, conveying that Paul knows his position in the social hierarchy—Jesus is above him.
- The blessing is followed by a listing of the major landmarks in the majestic panorama of God’s grace. Here Paul makes effective use of repeating the same words “in Christ” or “according to” to begin successive phrases. In this text, the repetition has two functions. First, one of the reasons for the piling up of subordinate clauses that are introduced by the same words is that it gives the praise and adoration a sense of rhythm. The repeated pattern encourages the congregation to get caught up in and anticipate future occurrences of the phrases and participate in the worship along with Paul. The pattern of “in Christ” tends to evoke a sense of combined anticipation among the Ephesian congregation, who, have already been exposed to the pattern beginning in verse 3. Second, the repetition has the effect of making the list of spiritual blessings appear even more numerous. The technique of utilizing the repeated formula “in Christ” or “in him” to introduce the blessings of redemption (1:7), forgiveness (1:7), knowledge of the mystery of God’s will (1:9), inheritance (1:11), and Spirit sealing (1:13), gives the impression that only a few examples of divine blessings from a great pool of possibilities have been selected for use

¹ Carey C. Newman, “Ephesians 1:3—A Primer to Paul’s Grammar of God,” *RevExp* 95 (1998): 93.

and many more examples could have been cited. This function elevates the status of God and encourages more praise.

- A formal mode of audience engagement is present in the three refrains, “to the praise of his glorious grace” (1:6) or “to the praise of his glory” (1:12,14). A lector reading Paul’s letter and an audience occupying that same space at the same time, afforded an opportunity for the assembly’s participation in the praise. The praise is sustained throughout the rest of the sentence by means of the recurring refrain “to the praise of his glory.” The refrains allow the recipients of these blessings a chance to join with Paul through the lector in expressing their gratitude and praise for God’s mighty acts accomplished through Christ.

Step Three: Prepare the Script.

In this example of Ephesians 1:1-14 we use the text directly from Scripture, modifying “Blessed be God...” to “Praise God...”. The speaker performs the material as Paul speaking directly to the assembly. Note the posture of the actor throughout – gestures to draw in the audience, as well as arms reaching up in praise and worship.

Performed by a single actor

THE SETTING IS A BARE STAGE

ACTOR PORTRAYS PAUL

Scripture is written in italics.

(STAGE DIRECTIONS ARE BOLD IN ALL CAPS AND IN PARENTHESIS)

*****PLEASE NOTE – TO EMPHASIZE THE PHRASE “IN HIM/IN CHRIST” THE PERFORMER SHOULD USE THIS MOTION: FINGERTIPS TOUCH TOGETHER ON THE WORD “IN” AND HANDS BOTH RAISE PALMS UPWARD ON THE WORD “HIM” OR “CHRIST”. THIS MOVEMENT IS INDICATED AS “GESTURE A” IN THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.***

PAUL

¹*Paul, (GESTURING TO SELF)*

an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

(GESTURING TO GOD ABOVE)

To (WHILE SPEAKING, SLOWLY SWEEPING ARMS OPEN TO AUDIENCE, PALMS UP) the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

(WHILE CONTINUING NEXT PHRASE, PALMS TOWARD AUDIENCE – A BLESSING)

² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

(WITH JOY, PALMS UP, FACE TO HEAVENS)

³ *Praise God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (for he is praise-worthy),*

(SLOWLY BRINGING ARMS DOWN TO GESTURE TOWARD AUDIENCE)

who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

⁴ just as he chose us **(GESTURE TO SELF WITH BOTH HANDS)** in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

(PAUSE. LOOK OVER AUDIENCE. TWO STEPS RIGHT. SMILING BROADLY.)

⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

(PAUSE. TWO STEPS LEFT. SMILING BROADLY.)

(GESTURE A)⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood,

(NODDING – AFFIRMATION)

the forgiveness of our trespasses,

according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

(BACK TO CENTER)

With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will,

according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time,

to gather up all things in him,

things in heaven **(GESTURING TO GOD ABOVE)**

and things on earth. **(SWEPING GESTURING ACROSS AUDIENCE)**

(TWO STEPS TOWARD AUDIENCE – SOFTLY - A SECRET TO SHARE)

(GESTURE A)¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,

having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things

according to his counsel and will,

¹² so that we, **(GESTURING TO SELF)**

who were the first to set our hope on Christ,

might live for the praise of his glory.

(GESTURE A)¹³ In him you also, **(POINTING TO AUDIENCE)**

when you had heard the word of truth,

the gospel of your salvation,

and had believed in him,

you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;

(ARMS WIDE, WITH GREAT JOY)

¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people,

(FACE TO HEAVENS)

to the praise of his glory.

EVERYONE

to the praise of his glory.

(END)

Step Four: Other Important Issues for a Successful Performance

- Unlike in our modern world, oral cultures believed that the recitation of a letter created a sense of the author's tangible presence. Letters, despite their written nature, brought a material presence of the absent writer through the impress of the hand on the paper and

through physical contact by the recipient with the letter that was handled by the author. Likewise, Paul's epistles served as substitutes for his personal presence (1 Cor 5:4–5).

- Scholars have long recognized the liturgical and homiletical nature of the book of Ephesians. This performance makes use of a liturgical style response. An introduction should make the audience aware of the need for their response at the appropriate time. Appointing an individual to lead the response will give the audience confidence and comfort in speaking the assigned text. Having the audience response text available on a large screen or display will allow a seamless flow and encourage engagement for everyone. Here is a suggested introduction: “This morning’s text is from Ephesians 1.1-14. At the end of the reading there will be an opportunity for everyone to respond with these words: “To the praise of His Glory”. When it is time to respond, the words will appear on the screen. I will lead the response and you may read the words aloud with me. And now, the reading. Ephesians 1.1-14.”