

Greeting (1:1-2)

To our beloved New Bridge family, we, your pastors, Mark, James, & Jon write this letter to you after nearly a year together in the book of Ephesians. It is our privilege and honor to be your pastors and our love and care for you runs deep. Grace & Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Rich Blessings (1:3-14)

We serve an amazing God! We could go on and on about all that He has done on our behalf and who we are in Christ. Our God and Father is to be blessed and we have every spiritual blessing in Jesus. He is the one who has done everything necessary to redeem and restore us. We are forgiven by His blood. His greatest pleasure was saving us, does that not blow your mind? It was His pleasure to save us!

We live in a time when it can be hard to know where our value and identity come from. It's easy to look for identity in your job, your possessions, your kids, your sexuality, your politics, but this isn't where your ultimate value and identity are found. In Christ, you are chosen, adopted, forgiven, loved, secure, restored, significant...you are wanted! He has generously lavished us with His grace! You aren't an afterthought; you were on God's mind from the beginning of time. Jesus paid a high price for you. Redemption came only through Jesus' blood and through His blood we are made new from the inside out. Not only that, but He has given us an inheritance and sealed us with His Holy Spirit! There's so much that we can give God glory for! Let's never forget this and never stop praising Him!

Prayer for spiritual insight (1:15-23)

We have heard the stories about your faith in the Lord and how God is making His love known through you. You've opened your homes to the orphans and cared for them as your own. You've sat with, grieved with, and cared for those who have lost loved ones. You've stepped in to be family for those without family. You gave with incredible generosity to help those in our neighborhood who have fallen on difficult financial times in this Covid era. \$39,000 you gave so that people could keep their utilities on, make rent and mortgage payments, get their cars fixed so they could get to work, and pay other bills they wouldn't have been able to otherwise. Every time we hear these stories it reminds us of how thankful we are for you. We are praying for you all the time!

We pray that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation! We pray that His wisdom would show you how to handle the unclear, complicated situations that you are facing! We pray that God would open the

eyes of your heart to see things from His perspective. We pray that you wouldn't just know about God, but that you would truly *know* HIM, that you would experience and walk with Him!

We pray that you would know the immeasurable greatness of His power, that same power that raised Jesus from the dead! Isn't that incredible to think about? There is no way to calculate His power! That same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you in Christ! As you face overwhelming challenges, may you know that Jesus has authority over all things and that He sits as ruler over every power! There is nothing on your heart or mind that Jesus doesn't have under His control! We pray this brings you peace and comfort.

From Death to Life (2:1-10)

New Bridge, we are not a community of people with neat and clean pasts. We are not a community of people who have it all figured out. We are a community of people who were all spiritually dead in our sins - addicts, arrogantly going about life our own way, following unbridled sexuality, thinking we could earn God's favor with our false religiosity. As much as we may be disgusted by the brokenness in our world, we were right there part of this depravity.

But God, wouldn't leave us there. No, God reached into our filth and brought us out. Yes, God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love, He made us alive! His mercy and grace are a free gift to us all and through this gift of faith we are no longer defined by our sin, but rather defined by our Savior! Forgiven! Made alive! Free! This is who you are in Christ! Look around. Listen to the stories of those around you. Be encouraged and praise God for His glorious, generous grace! He is bringing life to marriages that were dead. He is breaking the chains of addiction. He is healing the abused. He is humbling the arrogant. Our sin is great, but His mercy is far greater!

Not only did Jesus pull us up out of the grave, but He also raised us up and seats us with Him in the heavens, in Christ! This is love underserved. This is our God!

So now He points to you New Bridge, as an example of His grace, of His kindness through Jesus. You are His piece of artwork - like creation that brings us to awe, your life is an awe-inspiring expression of God's grace on display. He has work for you to do in this world - good work that He has prepared for you specifically. Yes, our broken lives, restored by Christ, can join in His work of reconciling and restoring all things. Let's join Him in that work! Let's show people His love and tell of His incredible mercy!

Unity in Christ (2:11-22)

But in doing this work, NEVER forget where you came from. Never forget that at one time we were the “have-nots” of God’s promises. No matter how religious you are, no matter how many good things you do, God isn’t impressed. It isn’t your religious efforts, your good works, your Bible reading, serving, or giving that impresses God. No, remember that God is at work in the intimate and even unseen, most sensitive parts of who you are. The area in which you did the greatest sinning is now the area of His greatest promise of redemption. You are forever marked by His promises to you!

We live in a fallen and broken world. We live in a world that has and continues to divide over all kinds of human-made categories like the color of a person’s skin, languages, socio-economic levels. People divide over political parties, masks, vaccinations. We have seen so many reasons to divide. We went through a shattering and there are many broken pieces all around.

But NEVER forget that, in a time when the world divides and puts up walls, Jesus has broken down these walls! Jesus is picking up the broken pieces and building something new. In Jesus, there is even a new humanity! A humanity where male and female, rich and poor, and people of all skin colors have dignity and value. In Jesus, there is a new family! A citizenship not based on your ethnicity or your passport, but a citizenship in the Kingdom of God; a kingdom, not to be found on any earthly map, but one defined by His love, grace, and mercy. We pledge allegiance to His kingdom above all!

New Bridge, Jesus is our peace! Isn’t that what we long for? Isn’t that what our neighborhoods, schools, and friends long for? Isn’t peace what our world longs for? JESUS is our peace!

We, New Bridge, are a part of this global, diverse, creative, expansive family of God that has existed for generations! We have become a mosaic of this picture of God. Here and now, in our time, we get to be a part of building on the foundation of those before us, displaying for a divided world how the love of Jesus brings people together who would otherwise have nothing to do with each other. In many ways, it’s never been this hard. Yet in many ways, it’s never been this good! In Him, New Bridge, we are being built together to make God visible here in Olympia, by the power of God’s Holy Spirit!

Our ministry to New Bridge (3:1-7)

We, your pastors and servants of Jesus on your behalf, feel honored that God has allowed us to speak week after week about the great mysteries of God, those truths on the heart of God for all to hear and know! We take this very seriously knowing that, apart from the grace of God and empowering of His Spirit, we bring nothing of significance to the table.

Each time we share with you, it's our hope and prayer that our eyes are lifted to fixate on the incalculable riches of Christ; that, like exploring a diamond from different angles, we would better grasp the multi-faceted wisdom of God! As broken and messed up as we are, church family, the Church is still God's primary means of making His love known to the world, and with each life changed, declaring to the rulers and authorities in the spiritual realm that Christ has won!

So don't be discouraged about the challenges we face as a church. God has shaken us. We knew this was coming. God is building us up, purifying us, and making us stronger as we pursue His glory in all things!

Prayer for spiritual power (3:14-21)

Understanding all that deep theology is wonderful. But theology alone doesn't mean anything if it doesn't change our lives. Our hearts are moved to stop and pray for you as we think about these things. And this is our continual prayer for you; that you would find strength, out of His glorious, unlimited resources. May His Spirit empower you, and may you, like a tree with deep roots, be secure in the love of God - a love not like any we've ever experienced before. A love not based on fickle emotions. A love that doesn't discard and abandon when something different catches the eye. No, we pray that you would know the length, width, height, and depth of God's perfect, sacrificial, unconditional, relentless love - a love that we won't be able to fully grasp until we stand before Him face to face one day.

This God of incomparable love is able to do more than we could ever ask or imagine! New Bridge, let's lift our eyes above our circumstances and ask God to help us see from His perspective! Let's ask Him to give us dreams and desires that are in line with His! Let's trust Him to do more than we could ever do on our own! Have you heard about what God is doing through our partnership in Kenya? What started with a cohort of 15 people has caught the attention of others in the area and 120 are asking to be a part of it. People who were forced into oppressive situations have received training, resources, and discipleship in Christ to find dignity and worth in Him! We're told they've never seen something like this in that part of Kenya before! Could you have ever imagined that would happen when we collected our money together and

sent it there with prayers that God would change lives and bring hope? New Bridge, the Lord listens to our prayers! Let's ask Him to soften hardened hearts, to heal broken relationships, to bring freedom from addiction, to make His love known in our neighborhood, Olympia, and throughout the world!

Unity & Diversity in the body of Christ (4:1-16)

With all this in mind, as your pastors, we beg you to fight for unity. There's too much at stake, for you, for our church, and for the work God desires to do in and through us! This requires humility and gentleness. Be patient with each other. Give each other the benefit of the doubt. Yes, even put up with each other, making every effort to maintain unity. Our society tries to convince us that you must choose between the color of one's uniform and the color of one's skin; or between those who wear masks and those who don't, between those who are vaccinated, and those who aren't. Even within the Church, some are choosing to side with a political party over unity in Christ. Let's not lose focus of what is most important and what unites us in all our diversity.

We are a family, a faith family. We are united by one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all! We are united in Christ!

God wants to grow us into greater and greater unity and maturity. That's why He has given leadership to His Church. It isn't the leadership's responsibility to do all the work of ministry, but rather to equip each person, with all your varied gifts, talents, and experiences so that, as everyone does his and her part, we grow not simply as individuals but also into the church God had in mind when He created us!

God gives each of us gifts that can be used to serve others. We see the way He is using you!

(MC)

Lee, we see how God is using you despite your eight surgeries and over fifty days in the hospital this year to share an anchored hope that is greater than your suffering, and how you continue to look for opportunities to share Jesus with your nurses, doctors, and whoever God brings to you.

Rhonda & Brian, Dinali, Amber, Madison, Marissa, Barb & Josh, and all the Kids' Bridge volunteers, we see your faithful love and care for our kids. You are there every week and you don't babysit, you create a fun, safe, and loving environment to help disciple our kids and teach them about Jesus.

Neal and Jane, we see how you continue to welcome the orphans into your home; how you hold them as they tremor and detox from the drugs they took in while in their mother's womb. We see the tears you shed after watching another one you have woven your heart with leave your home, and how, while knowing that pain will come again, you still open your arms to the next baby in need of a loving home.

Josh, we see how you give hours to make sure that the sound equipment and tech board are set just right so that those online can have a good experience until they can be with us in person. We see how you show up early every Thursday to make sure cords are set and all is ready to go for the band.

Jim and Phil, we see how you are using your retirement years and skills to fix what's broken and further develop our building.

Candice & Schylar, we see your faithfulness in serving the middle schoolers. We see the efforts you make to build relationships and speak into their lives in these difficult and critical years of development.

Rick & Nicole, we see your love for our life group leaders and the hours you invest so that our leaders are engaged, encouraged, equipped, and empowered to lead.

Those of you serving in the food pantry, we see how many people you give food and supplies to and the great compassion you show in the process. Greeters, we see your warm smiles that invite people in to worship after long and often difficult weeks.

Worship and tech team, directors, we see the hours you put in preparing so that we can all worship God in one voice through song. During this Covid era, you have had to adapt in many different ways and learn new skills to provide an online worship experience for those unable to join us in person.

Life Group leaders, we see how you are pouring out yourself to create communities where people can grow to love God, love one another, and make His love known in the unique places and relationships God has given to each. You are on the front lines of the mission of New Bridge and we couldn't be who we are or do what God has called us to do without you.

We could go on and on. We are far more than a building. We are far more than our gatherings alone. We gather to scatter. This is how the body works together and grows into maturity. It's the way, when it all comes together like a puzzle, we see God!

Living the New Life (4:17-5:5)

Therefore, as people who have been made new in Christ and who are growing into maturity in Him, don't live according to the values and ways of our society! Apart from Christ, people look to substances, money, relationships, sex, status, material possessions, and approval from others to find significance, security, and safety. You know that these are false saviors and terrible lords. They are false saviors because they can't deliver on what they promise and they are terrible lords because they will destroy you if you put your hope in them alone. Following Jesus means we will live differently from the ways and values of this world. This is how you've been taught here at New Bridge from the beginning and we will continue pointing you to Jesus and His design for you.

Following Jesus isn't about behavior modification, but about a new heart and life with Christ. Instead of being selfish, He's changing you to be generous. Instead of being a liar, He's changing you to pursue open and honest relationships. Instead of unguarded anger, Jesus is changing you to be a peacemaker, and to pursue reconciliation according to His character. Instead of foul language and useless talk, Jesus is changing you to be one who uses your words to encourage and build people up, and point them to Jesus. Instead of seeing people as objects for your sexual fantasies, to see them as people created in the image of God, worthy of dignity and respect. Instead of following what society says about sexuality, to follow God's design. It leads to a pleasure, wholeness, and connectedness that our hearts long for but is corrupted when left to our unbridled lusts and autonomous definitions.

Relational conflict happens, but let's be a people who are quick to forgive just as God forgave us in Christ. Extend to others the kindness and compassion that Jesus has extended to you. Think of it like this, imitate what you see in Jesus. Walk in love.

Light Versus Darkness (5:6-20)

New Bridge family, don't be easily deceived. Pay attention to what you're listening to and letting influence you. Are your news outlets, social media threads, podcasters, bloggers, or Netflix shows leading you away from the heart and character of Christ in you? Or is comfort, convenience, or even an overly busy schedule distracting you from engaging in worship or gospel community?

Don't be deceived that following Jesus can be reduced to Sunday mornings or jumping through a few religious hoops. Examine yourself. Look at your schedule, your checkbook, your internet threads. Examine your heart, your language, and your relationships. What do they reveal about what, or rather who is ruling your heart and your life?

Everything done in darkness and in secret will be exposed. In the light of Christ, there is freedom to pursue vulnerable and authentic relationships. Leave behind a life in the shadows and pursue integrity. Be intentional about how you use your time and your days. Remember, we live in a fallen world and God has put you in this place, in this time for His purposes. So, make the most of the days for His glory.

Lift your eyes to all that we have to be thankful for even in these difficult days. Share these things with one another. Share what you are thankful for. Tell each other. Like listening to songs of praise, your sharing builds you and others up in Jesus and gives glory for who He is!

Wives and Husbands (5:21-33)

Following Jesus means reorienting all of life around Him. There is no part of your life that He doesn't desire to redeem. It all matters to Him. Not only that, Jesus is using your most intense relational environments to continue shaping you into the person He has created you to be and to make His love known through you, even affecting generations to come. Your family life is fertile ground for Gospel transformation and Gospel reflection.

Husbands and wives, live in humility with one another, each submitting to and looking to the interest of the other. Together, you are a picture of Jesus and His Church. Just as God brought order in creation, God brings order to our families and society. Women, whether you spend your days at home, out in the workplace, or some combination, we celebrate your giftedness and influence on those around you. We urge you to understand and support your husbands in ways that show your love for Christ. Husbands, as you learn more about the person of Jesus, always be thinking about how you can love your wife with the same kind of love you see in Jesus; sacrificial, serving, initiating reconciliation, and prioritizing her spiritual growth. There are few relationships as exposing and vulnerable as marriage. The challenges you'll face in marriage may make you think it isn't worth it. Don't give up. Know that we are praying for you. God is using this relationship to transform your heart and to reflect the Gospel to those around you.

Children and Parents (6:1-4)

Parenting is hard work, so children, listen to your parents. God is using this relationship to shape your faith. Parents so much of the way we approach parenting is informed by our own experience with our parents. Honor and respect your parents. For some, this is easier than others. Not all parents are or have done honorable things. Remember, whatever your mom or dad were not for you, God is. We pray that God would bring healing and show you what it looks like to honor your parents.

In your parenting, remember that you are creating a family culture. You are planting seeds now that will grow in the future. Take every opportunity, not just when you're in public, to create moments, memories, and milestones that will point your kids to Jesus. Talk about Jesus in the everyday parts of your life. Parenting may be some of the most difficult work you do, but it is also one of the most meaningful ways you engage in how Jesus intends to shape you and your family.

Employees and Bosses (6:5-9)

As you spend over fifty percent of your life at work, don't believe the lie that your work doesn't matter. Be aware of the tendency to compartmentalize life. In Jesus, there is no sacred/secular divide. All of life matters to Him and all of life is to be lived unto His glory. God has given you skills, talents, networks, and experiences and He is using them to reflect His image in creating, managing, and developing.

We hear the way your co-workers, neighbors, bosses, and employees speak about you. We smile each time we hear someone in our community talk about the regard they have for you because of your influence in their lives. We thank God for the skills and experiences He has given you that you might use those for the good of human flourishing and for the glory of God, making His love known in places of such importance to our society. You may feel frustrated with your work environment. You may disagree with the direction of our culture. Retreating may be easier, but how is our broken world to see who Jesus is if Christians leave the places of influence that God has given them? Stay engaged.

Whether you are an employee or a boss, remember that you are working ultimately for Jesus. Do all of your work with integrity, excellence, treating others with respect and dignity. Don't only work when people are watching or for the earthly rewards. God is always watching and will reward your work in His ways and in His time.

May God make you strong as you live to make His love known where you live, work, learn, and play!

Christian warfare (6:10-20)

After all of this, remember that you are in the battle of your life. It's not a battle against people or even our culture. It's not a battle of "us versus them." No, this is a battle in the spiritual realm. You won't stand a chance if you try to face it in your own strength. Satan has been in this battle for many years and his schemes work. Distraction, deception, and accusation. He fights dirty and his goal is to destroy you. But God hasn't left you alone to fight these battles. You may be against the ropes, but in His strength, you can get off the ropes. Like a firefighter covered and protected to enter the fire on behalf of its victims, in Jesus, you are covered and equipped to storm the kingdom of darkness.

But you must stay alert and ready. You'll be tempted to rely on your own strength, and you'll be tempted to believe there isn't a battle. Your strength isn't enough and the battle is real! Be alert. Be ready.

Saturate yourself in God's truth. Don't just read it. Reflect on it, meditate on it, memorize it. Let it seep into your soul. It's your foundation for everything else. Let God's word be the filter through which you interpret all of life. Guard your heart with the righteousness of Christ. Remember each day that there is nothing you can do to earn God's love and there is nothing you can do to lose it. Receive and stand firm in who you are in Christ. Pay attention to what is captivating your heart and desires. All of life flows from your heart, so guard it with Christ's righteousness. With His righteousness covering you, look around you. What is happening around you that breaks the heart of God? What injustice is He equipping you to step into on His behalf?

Be ready with the Gospel of peace. Bathe yourself in the story of God's redemption that it would never grow old to you and that you'd be ready to share the message of God's peace to those around you.

Be careful about trying to do this life alone. Isolation is dangerous and unhealthy. Join your shield of faith with others in Gospel-community that you would be stronger together than you can be alone.

Guard your mind. Pay attention to the kind of thoughts you're allowing to stay in your mind. Your thoughts are often where Satan directs his distractions, deceptions, and accusations. Take these thoughts captive and replace them with the truth of Christ.

In all this, learn God's word. Like a sword, it is the weapon God has given you to use in battle. It is only God's word that will be effective in defeating darkness. Use the truths of God's word to lead you into prayer. Prayer is the battle. It's often neglected, but it is where the battle takes place. Pray with the power and truths of the Bible on your behalf and on behalf of those in your life. You don't have to be eloquent in your prayers. We're always growing in prayer. So don't be discouraged if it is an area of growth for you.

Stay in the battle New Bridge. If you are wounded in battle, let people know. We are here for you. May we always be a church of two kinds of people, those who are wounded, and those who are going into battle on behalf of the wounded.

Closing remarks (6:21-24)

It is our honor and privilege to be your pastors. We care deeply for you and what is happening in your life. We desire to see you grow in the grace of Jesus and the life He has for you. We pray for you often and are working together that we might be the church God has created us to be. Knowing that we cannot be as near and involved with each of you as we would like, we are grateful for the many faithful life group leaders God has raised up in our church. We send them as ministers of the Lord to lead and care for you. May they encourage your hearts and may you grow together to be a picture of a Gospel-shaped community committed to loving God, loving one another, and making His love known.

May the peace of God be yours. May His love increase in you, and His grace be always with you.

Sincerely,
Your Pastors, Mark, James, and Jon