

# Ephesians

Bible Studies for Small Groups

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# Outline

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1	<b>To the praise of his glory</b>	<i>Ephesians 1:1-14</i>	Dec 16 2018
2	<b>Open the eyes of our hearts</b>	<i>Ephesians 1:15-23</i>	Dec 23 2018
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7	<b>Walk worthily of your calling</b>	<i>Ephesians 4:1-4:16</i>	Jan 13 2019
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## Introduction

Paul wrote Ephesians to strengthen and encourage believers in Christ. The believers to whom Paul writes likely felt small and weak. The temptation to participate in the idolatry and immorality of the culture around them was strong. Perhaps they lived with lingering fear that supernatural powers would interfere with their lives because of their difference, especially in their refusal to worship idols. They also were struggling to be united with other believers who may be from different backgrounds, especially across Jew-Gentile lines.

Ephesians falls quite neatly into two halves. In the first half (Eph 1-3) Paul writes to them to remind them of all that God has done for them in Christ. This half of the letter is couched in the language of praise (Eph 1:3-14 & 3:20-21) and prayer (Eph 1:15-18 & 3:14-19), and celebrates the wonderful blessings and privileges believers have: God has fulfilled his promises. Christ has triumphed over all powers. They are saved by grace, and made alive from death. God has joined his people together, Jew and Gentile, and together they are God's new temple, and Christ's body.

The tone shifts in the second half (Eph 4-6) to that of exhortation. Paul urges his readers to 'walk worthily' of their high calling, having their whole lives reshaped by their relationship with Christ. They are to serve and minister to one another for each other's growth and strengthening. They are to 'learn Christ' and 'imitate God', and not live like the world around them. Family life too, is to be shaped by their relationship to Christ, characterised by love. And they are to stand firm against the powers, being 'strong in the Lord and in his mighty power'.

Ephesians is a letter that will encourage and strengthen us, too. It will encourage us with powerful reminders of who we really are, as his people. It will strengthen us to live together as followers of Christ, in a world where to do so is to be different and to experience pressure. Most of all, it will focus us on Christ, raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand, as the centre of all God's plans and purposes.

# To the praise of his glory

## Ephesians 1:1-14

1. Think about the history and future of our world– the whole world throughout all time. Where do you think it is all heading? Overall, do you tend to feel that: a) things are getting better and we're heading for a bright future? b) things are getting worse and we're heading for trouble? c) things go round and round, history repeats? d) life and history are random? e) something else? What leads you to say that?

### Read Ephesians 1:1-14

2. How is God addressed in Eph 1:3?
3. This prayer of praise seems to be based on a common style of praise-prayer in the Old Testament which starts with the words 'Praise be to the LORD God of Israel ...' (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:15, Ps 41:13, Ps 106:48, Luke 1:68). This style of prayer is often used to celebrate what God has done for his people in fulfilment of his promises. What is the significance of praising God in this way, as 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'?

Within this prayer of praise, there are three interlocking stories of what God has done and is doing through Christ: the story of **all creation**, the story of **Israel**, and the story of **Christian believers**;

4. What is God's goal for 'all things in heaven and on earth' according to Eph 1:10? How will this be achieved?
5. The language and sequence of this prayer (especially 'blessing', 'he chose us for adoption', 'redemption', 'the fulfilment of the times', 'inheritance') recalls the story of God's promises to Israel, echoing some its key moments (Abraham, exodus, promised land, hope of future restoration). How have these promised blessings been fulfilled and finally come to God's people?
6. Re-read Eph 1:3-14 and note all the places that Paul talks about us being '*in Christ*', (including '*in him*', where '*him*' is Christ, or '*in some other reference to Christ*').
7. In Eph 1:11-14, Paul seems to distinguish between Jewish Christians in vv. 11-12 ('we who were first to hope in Christ') and Gentile Christians in vv. 13-14 ('you also ...', c.f. Rom 1:16-17).
  - 7.a. According to Eph 1:13, how have non-Jews come to be 'in Christ' and share in God's promised blessings?
  - 7.b. What is the role of the Spirit in uniting us to Christ.
8. What difference would it make to remember that God chooses and predestines when:
  - 8.a. you are weighed down with guilt or fear?
  - 8.b. you are proud?
9. God saves because it is God's pleasure and will to love and be gracious (Eph 1:5-6, 9). Yet we also see here that God acts for his own glory and praise (Eph 1:12, 14). Are these ideas in conflict? How can we reconcile these motivations of God.
10. Paul seems overcome at the thought that God has blessed us with 'every spiritual blessing in Christ' (Eph 1:3). Exuberant praise is his spontaneous and heartfelt response. Do we respond in the same way? If not, why not?

# Open the eyes of our hearts

## Ephesians 1:15-23

1. Take a few moments to reflect on your prayers over the past few weeks or so. What have you thanked God for? What have you asked God for?

### Read Ephesians 1:15-19a

2. Why would it be appropriate to thank God when we hear of people's faith in Jesus, or their growing love for Christian people?
3. Paul asks God to work in the lives of his Ephesian friends with 2 requests that are means which will in turn lead to four ends. See if you can untangle the means and the ends in those verses. (Hint: look for phrases like 'so that' or 'in order that').

in v17 Paul asks God to \_\_\_\_\_ 'so that' \_\_\_\_\_

in v18-19a Paul asks God to \_\_\_\_\_ 'in order that' i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

iii) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Why do we need God's Spirit to work in this way for us to know God?
5. If someone asked you 'How can I get to know God better?' what would you say? How would Paul answer this question based on this passage?
6. What is our 'hope' and 'inheritance' that Paul wants Christian people to know? What difference does grasping these things make?

### Read Ephesians 1:19b-23

7. What has God's power done for Jesus?
8. Paul says that this same power is at work in Christians. That is an incredible thought! Have a discussion about how we experience this power? (Hint: have a think about what the words 'for the church' might mean)
9. Based on his prayer, what is Paul's great desire for his Christian friends? To what extent do our prayer lives reflect similar desires and priorities?
10. What are some specific things from this prayer which we can incorporate into our own prayers?

# By grace

## Ephesians 2:1-10

1. How does the story of your life go, the way you tell it (whether to yourself, or what you reveal to others)? Is it one of success and achievements? Or is it a story of disappointment, even failure?

### Read Ephesians 2:1-3

2. How do these verses describe our situation apart from Christ?
3. Paul explains the three-fold underlying problem of our condition. Discuss what is meant by:

3.a. following the \_\_\_\_\_ of this \_\_\_\_\_

3.b. following the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_

3.c. \_\_\_\_\_ the cravings of \_\_\_\_\_ and following its \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

What will this dire situation result in? Do you accept this assessment of your own life?

### Read Ephesians 2:4-7

4. What was motivating God to do something about our disastrous mess?
5. What has happened to us in Christ? How does this relate to what happened to Christ in Eph 1:20-21?

### Read Ephesians 2:8-10

6. What does 'it is by grace you have been saved' mean? And what does this have to do with faith and works? (see Eph 2:8-9).
7. Why does being saved by grace, through faith mean that 'no one can boast'?
8. How are believers described in Eph 2:10? In what way is this description both humbling *and* dignifying?
9. Eph 2:9 makes it clear that our salvation is 'not by works'. What, then, is the place of good works in the Christian life according to Eph 2:10?
10. There is an invitation here to own a new story, different from those we commonly tell about ourselves: That of Christ, and his work in our lives. Reconsider your answer to Q1 in light of this. How might a gospel-centred version of your story sound?

#### *A thought on Ephesians 2:10:*

The 'for' at the beginning of Eph 2:10 indicates that this verse supplies a further reason why believers cannot and must not boast (v9). The Christian who boasts has forgotten that they are saved by grace, and that this is from God, not themselves. We are God's handiwork, not our own. However, it's possible there's an additional reason to not boast in verse 10. Boasting involves more than just inward feelings of self-confidence before God (i.e. 'vertical'-boasting). Typically boasting has a 'horizontal', or social expression as well. I boast *over another person*, to whom I may feel myself superior. Interestingly, there is a shift from talking about 'you' in verses 8 and 9, to 'we' in verse 10. Verse 10 then goes beyond verses 8-9 in that it is not just salvation that is God's work, but *believers themselves* are described as God's carefully crafted creations, a striking and dignified status. I suggest this is to remind me of the wider people of God, the 'we', to whom I belong— i.e. those over whom I may be tempted to boast and feel superior. Boasting is now doubly inappropriate, a denial not only of God's work in my life, but also of his work *in others*'. Not only am I not a self-made person, nothing more than what God has given me. But also, the one I imagine myself superior to and boast over is nothing less than a precious work of God.

# He is our peace

## Ephesians 2:11-22

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

1. It is likely that in 1st Century Asia Minor, “uncircumcised” and “circumcised” (Eph 2:11) were derogatory names or labels which Jews and Gentiles hurled at each other. What are some of the ways that people create divisions and erect ‘barriers’ in our world?
2. Eph 2:1-10 painted a dire ‘before’ picture; ‘dead in your transgressions and sins’. How is the ‘before Christ’ state of Gentile Christians described in Eph 2:12? Why is this a problem?
3. What was keeping Gentiles out of Israel? What is the ‘barrier’, and ‘dividing wall of hostility’?
4. There was a prominent symbol of this division in the very architecture of Jerusalem, can you think of what it was?
5. What has Christ done and how has he done it?
6. Carefully re-read Eph 2:14-18. Find where Paul speaks in different ways about Christ achieving peace both *vertically* i.e. between believers and God, and *horizontally* i.e. between believers themselves. How are these two aspects of ‘our peace’ related to each other?
7. We often think about God’s work in Christ mainly in terms of reconciling us to God. How does this expand our picture of what Christ has done?
8. How might this change the way you need to think about or act towards fellow Christians?
9. One way of thinking about the Old Testament is as the story of God’s presence dwelling with his people. This story develops through stages, reaching a high-point as God dwells in the temple in Jerusalem, followed by a low-point when the temple is destroyed and Israel go into exile. During this time, God promises to renew his people, including a renewed temple, and to dwell with his people forever (e.g. Ezek 37, 40-44). How have such promises been fulfilled according to Eph 2:19-22?
10. Why is it important for Christians to express our one-ness in Christ? What are some ways that we can do this?

# God's wisdom made known

## Ephesians 3:1-13

1. Who do you think church is for? And what does church do for them?

### Read Ephesians 3:1-13

2. What has God given Paul in Eph 3:2, and what is he to do with it?
3. How did God give Paul this role (Eph 3:3)?
4. 'The mystery of Christ' is an important concept in these verses. Look at Eph 3:5-6 & 9, what does Paul mean by the word 'mystery'?
5. The Old Testament foreshadows and anticipates the gospel in numerous ways, but here Paul says that some things weren't revealed to previous generations. What about Christ's work is completely surprising and unexpected?
6. Read Eph 3:10 carefully. Who is church for according to this verse?
7. Look up Eph 1:20-21, 2:2, 6:12. Who are these 'rulers and authorities'? How does church reveal God's wisdom to them?
8. How might remembering this change the way we 'do' church?
9. Ephesians 3:12 is a wonderful, short statement of the gospel. Read it slowly, consider committing it to memory. What is meant by 'in him and through faith in him ...', that is, what is Christ's role and the role of our faith in approaching God? What restrictions or limitations are there on our approach to God?
10. Thank God for these blessings as part of your group prayer time.

# Filled to all the fullness of God

## Ephesians 3:14-21

1. What is the most important thing to pray for others?

### Read Ephesians 3:14-19

2. How is God addressed in Eph 3:14? What does it mean to you to know God as 'Father' and to belong to God's family?
3. Find all the mentions of 'love' in this prayer. At the heart of Paul's prayer is *grasping Christ's love*. Why is this such a basic and important thing for a Christian? What happens when we forget Christ's love for us?
4. In Eph 3:17, 'being rooted and established in love' seems to refer to the love that exists between believers in the church. How does the love that is expressed between Christians relate to Christ's love for us?
5. 'Together with all the Lord's holy people' (Eph 3:18) reflects an emphasis in Ephesians, that Christians would remember that they belong to a family that is bigger than just themselves, and even just their local church. What are some ways we can increase our appreciation that we belong to this 'communion of Saints'?
6. It sounds like a strange thing to say, but what do you think Paul means when he prays that we will 'know this love that surpasses knowledge' (Eph 3:19)?
7. How can you show love to someone at church in a way that demonstrates the nature of Christ's love?
8. What do you think it might mean to 'be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' (Eph 3:19). Look up Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kgs. 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 7:1-2; Ezek. 44:4 and see if these verses shed light.

#### *A prayer for the filling of God's temple:*

The language of this prayer also picks up on the theme that God's people are his temple. Comparing Eph 3:1 & 14 suggests that Eph 3:2-13 is an aside and the prayer seems to pick up where Eph 2:19-22 left off, i.e. where this temple was discussed in detail. The language of 'dwelling' (v17) and being 'established' (v17) are commonly used in connection with the temple. Interestingly, the words used for the four dimensions 'wide and long and high and deep' are found throughout the Old Testament whenever the measurements for the construction of the temple are being described. Most significantly, the phrase at the climax of the prayer 'that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' echoes a common phrase in the Old Testament when God's presence would fill the temple (e.g. Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Chron 7:1-2; Ezek 44:4).

### Read Ephesians 3:20-21

9. Find all the references to 'power' in Eph 3:14-21 then look again at Eph 1:19-21. Ephesians has often emphasised God's power, which is at work in believers. In light of all we've seen in chapters 1-3, what is God doing for us and in us with his incomparably great power?
10. In your prayer time, make sure you pray the things Paul prays for, for each other (though feel free to express them in your own words).

# Walk worthily of your calling

## Ephesians 4:1-16

### Read Ephesians 4:1-6

1. Ephesians 4:1 is the great 'hinge' verse which marks the transition from the first half of the letter to the second. Think over some of the main themes of chapters 1-3. What is 'the calling' that Christians have received?
2. List all the things in Eph 4:4-6 of which there are 'one'. Reflect on the fact that all believers share these things in common. How might these shed light on what is meant by the 'bond of peace' that exists between Christian believers in verse 3?

### Read Ephesians 4:7-16

3. Given all the emphasis on the one-ness of God's people why are the words 'to each one' in verse 7 surprising?
4. The words translated 'works of service' in Eph 4:12 literally read 'works of ministry'. We often associate 'ministry' in God's church with 'ministers' i.e. church leaders and teachers (clergy etc...) Who is given the job of 'ministry' in Eph 4:12?
5. What is the role of leaders and teachers according to Eph 4:11? What kind of ministry do you hope to receive from ministers and pastors at church? How does this passage shape our expectations of church leaders?
6. What is the goal of 'ministry' in Christ's body (Eph 4:13-16)?

#### *When did Christ 'descend':*

Ephesians 4:8-10 has proved quite puzzling, especially the reference to Christ descending. There are two main possibilities. The first (the *down-then-up* view) is that Christ descended in his incarnation and the whole trajectory it began, culminating in his death. After this he rose and ascended triumphant. This view is suggested if Eph 4:10 is describing the sequence of these events, and it fits well with the famous passage in Phil 2. A second view (*up-then-down*) understands Christ's 'descent' as the sending of the Spirit *after* his ascension (c.f. Acts 2). This would mean Eph 4:10 is emphasising the Spirit's role as mediating the very presence of Christ. This view may make better sense in the context as it relates to the distribution of gifts to the body, a theme elsewhere connected to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (e.g. 1 Cor 12). Either way, it is clear that Christ distributes gifts to his people from his position as the ascended and triumphant Lord.

7. What is the means of 'ministry' in Eph 4:15?
8. What's the problem if we have 'love' but neglect 'truth'? What happens if we speak 'truth' but neglect 'love'? On which side are you most likely to err?
9. What are some opportunities you have to 'speak the truth in love' to brothers or sisters at church?
10. In Eph 4:16, the mention of 'the whole body' draws our attention to the wider people of God beyond the bounds of our local church– i.e. all believers throughout the world. How regularly are you conscious of belonging to this big multi-cultural people? What are some opportunities you have to 'speak the truth in love' to brothers or sisters beyond our church?

# Put on the new self

## Ephesians 4:17-5:2

1. When it comes to personal growth or improvement, which comes first, do you think: changed thinking, or changed behaviour?

### Read Ephesians 4:17-24

2. How are unbelievers described in these verses? Why do you think Ephesians repeatedly reminds readers of their past (see also Eph 2:1-3; 2:11-12)?
3. What are the connections between a person's mind, heart, and actions? How are these connection described as working both in unbelievers and believers?
4. Eph 4:20 literally says 'but this is not how you learned Christ'. It is striking expression, to speak of *learning a person* (rather than say information or a skill). How might this be a rich and helpful description of what it means to become and be a Christian?

### Read Ephesians 4:25-32

5. These realities governing the Christian life begin here to be applied in specific ways. There seems to be a parallel structure where three aspects of life are briefly touched on in Eph 4:25-28. They are then repeated in Eph 4:29-32. What do these verses say about speech, anger, and stealing/giving? For each, what is to be 'put off'? What is to be 'put on' instead? And what is the new mind set that enables that change to happen?

	Eph 4:25-28	Eph 4:29-32
<b>speech</b>	put off: v25 put on: mindset:	put off: v29-30 put on: mindset:
<b>anger</b>	put off: v26-27 put on: mindset:	put off: v31 put on: mindset:
<b>stealing/ giving*</b>	put off: v28 put on: mindset:	put off: v32 put on: mindset:

\* I suggest the word translated 'forgiving' in Eph 4:32 might be better understood as 'giving', or 'being gracious'. This includes forgiving one another, but also includes all kinds of generous acts.

6. Which aspects of this exhortations do you personally find most challenging? Is there anything here you need to 'put off', or 'put on'?

### Read Ephesians 5:1-2

7. Eph 5:1-2 bring this section to a climax. In many places in the Bible, *love* is the ultimate, or all-encompassing, way to think about the Christian life. E.g. look up Matt 22:37-40; Rom 13:10; 1 Cor 13; Gal 5:14; Col 3:14. According to Eph 5:1-2, how can love increasingly characterise our lives and experience?

# Walk as children of the light

## Ephesians 5:3-5:21

1. How are Christians different from unbelievers?

### Read Ephesians 5:3-21

2. What are some ways in which the (unbelieving) world is described throughout these verses? How are believers contrasted with the world?
3. What kinds of worldly behaviour does Paul particularly urge Christians to avoid? Why are they 'inappropriate for God's Holy people' (Eph 5:3)? Which of these are most relevant in our cultural context?
4. What do you think Eph 5:7 means? How separate, or isolated, should Christians be from the world?
5. In which areas do you feel most feel the incompatibility between a godly life and the ungodly norms of our culture?
6. On what basis are believers said to 'be' light (Eph 5:8, see also Eph 5:12-13)?
7. Navigating life in our world requires great wisdom (Eph 5:15). How can we grow in this wisdom that we need?
8. What do you think it means to be 'filled with the Spirit'? (Hint: does the contrast with drunkenness help? What about the other references to 'filling' in Ephesians– remember the study on Eph 3:14-21?)
9. Eph 5:18-19 imply that this work of the Spirit is bound up with the communal gathering of God's people. What do God's people do when they gather according to these verses?
10. How can our church and small group gatherings better serve to help us live lives of difference in the world?

# Relationships in Christ

## Ephesians 5:22-6:9

1. What are some prevailing dominant views in our culture about how husbands and wives, and parents and children, should relate?

Read Ephesians 5:22-6:9

It is the challenges of family— marriage and parenting— and the challenges of work which lead many Christians in our 21st Century world to turn to the Bible seeking God's help and guidance. However, when we turn to a passage like Eph 5:22-6:9, which directly addresses such issues, we are confronted by the fact that the Bible speaks from a world that is very different to our own. We encounter slaves and masters; not only so foreign to us, but the very notion is abhorrent. Many have a similar reaction to the idea of a wife being called upon to 'submit' to her husband. Surely this is archaic at best, and dangerous at worst, especially in light of the recent testimony of a number of brave women who have exposed the possibility that an abusive husband may twist these verses to perpetuate domestic violence ([www.abc.net.au/news/8652028](http://www.abc.net.au/news/8652028)). It is important to realise that Paul's strategy here is not to call for the reform of unjust societal structures— he was hardly in a position to do such a thing— rather he called on Christians to live within the established structures as transformed people. In fact, these verses were just as counter cultural in the day they were written as they are today, not so much for what they say to those *under authority* (wives, children, slaves), but for what they say to those *in authority* (husbands, fathers, masters). Indeed, we will not be able to hear what Paul has in mind when he talks about submitting, until we first hear what he says about authority. Believers follow the example of the one who is 'far above all rule and authority' (1:21), and yet he 'loved us and gave himself for us' (5:2)! The gospel, particularly the cross of Christ, brings a complete inversion— a turning upside down— of worldly values when it comes to the exercise of power and leadership among God's people. Authority is to be used and spent in loving and sacrificial service for the sake of others.

2. Read through these verses again and note all the references to Christ (including when he is referred to as 'Lord' or similar). Which of the six relationships (wife, husband, child, father, slave, and master) has been in some way effected by the person's relationship with Christ?
3. It is husbands who receive the most extended instruction here. How are husbands to relate to their wives? In what ways are husbands to reflect Christ's love for his Church?
4. With this in mind, how does this passage speak into situations of domestic violence or abuse?
5. In what ways might a father exasperate his children (6:4)? What should they do instead?
6. What does a Christian master need to remember so as to treat well those under his or her authority?
7. In each of these positions of authority, how have worldly norms and values been turned upside down by the gospel?
8. Think about the areas of your own life where you are in some position of authority or responsibility for others. What difference ought the gospel make to the way you exercise that authority, and treat those under your care? Think of a specific change you can implement in the way you relate to one of these people which more reflects the example of Jesus.
9. With this in mind, how should we understand the wife's reciprocating response to her husband? One respected dictionary gives the following definition for the Greek word translated here 'submit', 'voluntary yielding in love'. Is there anything you'd want to add or change about that definition? How should we apply this teaching to marriages in the 21st Century?
10. Think about the areas of your own life where you are under authority, or someone is responsible for you in some way. What difference ought the gospel make to the way you relate in that context?

# Put on the armour of God

## Ephesians 6:10-24

1. Do you view your daily life as a spiritual battle? What is your reaction to this perspective?

### Read Ephesians 6:10-24

2. In Eph 6:10, Paul reminds us again about the Lord's 'mighty power'. What has he said in the previous chapters about God's power? (See Eph 1:19-21; 3:16-18).
3. What does Eph 6:11-12 tell us about the battle we're in? Who is our adversary?
4. Three times, Paul says the goal of our 'spiritual warfare' is to 'stand' (Eph 6:11, 13, 14). What does this imply about the nature of the evil one's attacks? What is to be the Christian's objective in this fight?
5. How does the metaphor of armour and warfare enrich our understanding and response to these instructions?
6. Paul tells us what the elements of the armour metaphor stands for: Our armour consists in T\_\_\_\_\_, R\_\_\_\_\_, the G\_\_\_\_\_ of P\_\_\_\_\_, F\_\_\_\_\_, S\_\_\_\_\_ and the W\_\_\_\_\_ of G\_\_\_\_\_.
7. Several of these images come from Isaiah. Look up Isa 11:5; 49:2; 52:7; 59:17. Who are these pieces of armour associated with in Isaiah's prophesy? What does this say about the source and purpose of our armour?
8. What practical things can we do to grow in these things and in the strength they impart?
9. Read Eph 6:18 again. What is the place of prayer in the spiritual battle?
10. Recall your answer to the first question. What do you need to change in light of the nature of this spiritual battle in which believers are engaged?

### Closing Question:

Think back over what you've heard through Ephesians. What has stood out to you the most? Choose a verse to remember which sums up Ephesians.