

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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A STUDY OF FAITH AND PRACTICE



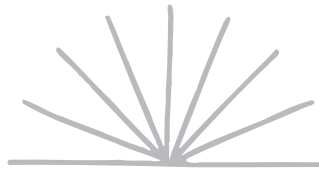
EPHESIANS

JACKIE HILL PERRY

JASMINE HOLMES

MELISSA KRUGER

A STUDY OF FAITH AND PRACTICE



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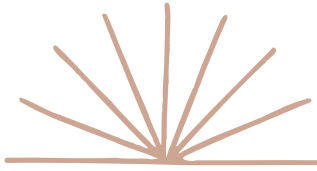
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ABOUT

THE AUTHORS

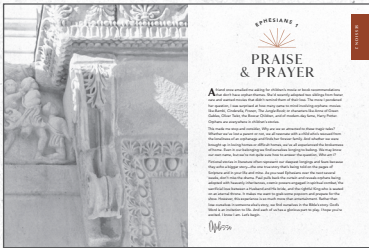
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GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study with other women at your church or in a group setting. Or, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it with you. This will give you study friends to pray with and connect with over coffee or through text or email so you can chat about what you're learning.



PERSONAL STUDY

Each week features five days of personal study that walk you verse-by-verse through Ephesians. You'll find questions to help you understand and apply the text, plus insightful commentary to clarify your study.



WATCH & DISCUSS

At the end of each week you'll find pages that provide space for you to take notes during the videos and follow along with your small group discussion.



DIGGING DEEPER

Included throughout the study are a few pages of extra reading to help broaden your understanding of Paul's original audience and the cultural context for Ephesians.

Extra Resources



LEADER GUIDE

A free leader guide PDF is available for download at lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy. The leader guide offers several tips and helps along with discussion guides for each session.



BACKGROUND ON THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

AUTHOR: Paul the apostle (1:1)

DATE: About AD 61

BIG PICTURE

In God's eternal plan, God's great masterpiece, the church, has now been manifested. Christ is united with all the redeemed, whether Jew or Gentile, transforming relationships in this life and leading to a glorious future.

SUMMARY

Ephesians is written by the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Ephesus. Paul spent three years among the Ephesians, but this letter is written about 7–8 years after his time there. His letter divides into two parts: Chapters 1–3 are doctrinal and chapters 4–6 are practical. There are no imperatives in chapters 1–3, everything is descriptive, but chapters 4–6 are filled with directives telling believers how to conduct themselves in keeping with their calling.

Paul began his letter with thankfulness as he shared with his readers about God's redemptive work in salvation (1:3-14). He wanted them to know the power available to them through Christ (1:15-19) and he reminded them that this power comes to persons who were dead in sin but saved by grace (2:1-10). In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God and to each other and are joined together in the church (2:11–3:21).

In the second half of the letter, Paul explained how our beliefs transform how we live. He focused specifically on how our faith impacts our church life, personal life, and family life. To conclude his letter Paul called his readers to put on God's armor to avoid Satan's temptations and to triumph over his attacks (4:1–6:24).¹

PLACES IN EPHESIANS ►

This map highlights some of the key places from Paul's third missionary journey in and around Ephesus.



GALATIA

SYRIA

SAMARIA

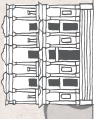


Philippi

Thyatira

ASIA

Ephesus



Rhodes

Crete

AEGEAN SEA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

EGYPT

GREECE

Athens

Corinth

Cyprus

Tyre

Caesarea

Jerusalem

Alexandria

EPHESUS ON THE MAP



SESSION ONE



INTRODUCTION

The book of Ephesians is often known for the individual themes it addresses. Within the six brief chapters of this letter, we encounter some of the most famous New Testament passages on topics such as God's work in salvation; unity and diversity in the body of Christ; Jesus as the cornerstone; spiritual gifts; submission; familial relationships; and the need to prepare for spiritual battle by putting on the full armor of God.

Like all of Scripture, though, this book of the Bible was never meant to be parsed out into excerpts, disconnected from the full context. When Paul wrote Ephesians, he wrote a single letter to a specific church full of real saints. Everything from his opening greeting to his run on sentences and intercessory prayers was crafted within a theological framework that he ordered with intentionality and care. And it's with this same carefulness that we should read it as recipients today.

As we study Ephesians, it's tempting to get lost in the trees and miss the forest. There are so many beautiful individual truths to explore, but we also want to see the larger picture of God's purposefulness and goodness

as we consider the entire epistle. The first half of Paul's letter reveals God's loving pursuit of His adopted children, as well as the abundant riches of our spiritual blessings. In these chapters we read one of the clearest presentations of the gospel in all of Scripture, along with Paul's heartfelt prayers for the spiritual health of the church. Then with chapter 4, Paul makes a clear transition to faith in practice. As saints who have been transformed from death to life through Jesus Christ, how now do we live? What virtues and characteristics should be evident in our daily lives? How do we relate to one another with love? How do we live out of the abundant grace and mercy God has showered on us? And how do we fight the battle of faith while we wait for Jesus to return?

As we study verse-by-verse through this letter together, we hope you'll walk away with a deeper understanding of your merciful and forgiving Father, as well as your calling as His beloved and adopted saint. As you increasingly understand the riches of His kindness, we pray that you'll walk in a manner worthy of your calling—to the praise of His glorious grace.

WATCH & DISCUSS



Watch the Session One video. Discuss the following questions with your Bible study group. A more extensive leader guide is available for free download at lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy.

- 1 Going into your Ephesians study, what is one thing you know about this book of the Bible? It could be anything from a key teaching or famous verse, to who wrote it or why.
- 2 After watching the introduction video, what excites you about studying Ephesians? What do you hope to learn about who God is and who you are in Him?
- 3 Jackie describes Bible interpretation as a community project. What are some ways we can encourage, challenge, and hold one another accountable as we go through this study?
- 4 What is one thing you will ask God to do as He works in you through this study?



EPHESIANS 7



PRAISE & PRAYER

SESSION TWO

A friend once emailed me asking for children's movie or book recommendations that don't have orphan themes. She'd recently adopted two siblings from foster care and wanted movies that didn't remind them of their loss. The more I pondered her question, I was surprised at how many came to mind involving orphans: movies like *Bambi*, *Cinderella*, *Frozen*, *The Jungle Book*; or characters like Anne of Green Gables, Oliver Twist, the Boxcar Children, and of modern-day fame, Harry Potter. Orphans are everywhere in children's stories.

This made me stop and consider, *Why are we so attracted to these tragic tales?* Whether we've lost a parent or not, we all resonate with a child who's rescued from the loneliness of an orphanage and finds her forever family. And whether we were brought up in loving homes or difficult homes, we've all experienced the brokenness of home. Even in our belonging we find ourselves longing to belong. We may know our own name, but we're not quite sure how to answer the question, *Who am I?*

Fictional stories in literature often represent our deepest longings and fears because they echo a bigger story—the one true story that's being told on the pages of Scripture and in your life and mine. As you read Ephesians over the next several weeks, don't miss the drama. Paul pulls back the curtain and reveals orphans being adopted with heavenly inheritances, cosmic powers engaged in spiritual combat, the sacrificial love between a Husband and His bride, and the rightful King who is seated on an eternal throne. It makes me want to grab some popcorn and prepare for the show. However, this experience is so much more than entertainment. Rather than lose ourselves in someone else's story, we find ourselves in the Bible's story. God's Word is an invitation to life. And each of us has a glorious part to play. I hope you're excited. I know I am. Let's begin.

Melissa

EPHESIANS 7



GREETING

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

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

GOD'S RICH BLESSINGS

³Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. ⁵He predestined

us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the right time — to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

¹¹In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, ¹²so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

¹³In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. ¹⁴The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

¹⁵This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be

enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

GOD'S POWER IN CHRIST

²⁰He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — ²¹far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

²²And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Begin by reading or listening to the entire letter to the Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

It's six chapters and should take you about twenty minutes. If you don't have time to read the entire letter right now, listen to it later today while you go on a walk, ride in your car, or are doing chores around the house.

At this point in my life, I receive a lot of uninteresting mail. From the packaging alone, I can easily sort my stack of envelopes between bills to pay and junk mail to toss. That's why I'm always excited to see a hand-addressed letter with a familiar name in the corner. In a world of impersonal greetings and various requests, it's wonderful to receive mail from a friend.

The letter to the Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Ephesus. As we begin our study, it's helpful to remember that these are real historical figures, living in a particular cultural context. These are words between believers, meant to encourage both their faith in Jesus and their practice (living out) of that faith.

Now return to Ephesians 1 and read verses 1-2 (p.12).

1. How does Paul identify himself at the beginning of this letter?
2. Read Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1 also. What do you learn from these passages about Paul's current situation as he writes this letter?

Our study begins where the letter begins—by identifying its author. Paul describes himself as an apostle—by God’s will. It’s important to note that Paul didn’t choose this position of authority for himself. Rather, God appointed him for this role when He appeared to Paul in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-16).

In addition to describing himself as an apostle, Paul referred to himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1) and “the prisoner in the Lord” (4:1). Paul wasn’t speaking figuratively here; he was imprisoned for his service to the Lord and wrote many of his New Testament letters while under Roman guard (Acts 28).

- 3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. How did Paul describe himself in these verses? What did he mean that he persecuted the church of God? (See Acts 9:1-19 for more of Paul’s background. In these verses he’s referred to by his Hebrew name, *Saul*. *Paul* is his Greek name.)**

Don’t miss the irony here—one of the greatest persecutors of the early church wrote Ephesians as a prisoner for the gospel. Meeting Jesus transformed Paul’s life, and he became one of Christianity’s greatest missionaries. In his own words, “I intensely persecuted God’s church and tried to destroy it . . . But when God, who from my mother’s womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles . . .” (Gal. 1:13-16). This transforming power of the gospel is one of the themes we’ll see in the early pages of Ephesians.

- 4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:37 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What did Paul understand about his authority as an apostle?**

Paul’s words weren’t just his opinions. Like Moses and the prophets before him, he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His words were written at a particular time to a particular church, but they are intended for all Christians for all time.

As we read the book of Ephesians, I hope you'll be encouraged (and maybe a little surprised) by how relevant Paul's words are to you in your life today. Just as in creation, God speaks and life bursts forth. As we read and study God's Word, it's life-giving. These words are powerful, not because they're the words of Paul, but because they're breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16).

- 5. Before we get too far along, it's also helpful to know a little bit about the letter's recipients. How does Paul address the Ephesians at the beginning of this letter? Is that identification surprising to you? Why or why not?**

Paul visited Ephesus on his third missionary journey, and Luke records the highlights of his time there in Acts 19.

- 6. Read Acts 19. Note what you learn about the following:**

- ◆ Jewish response to Paul's message (see 19:8-9)
- ◆ Time spent in Ephesus (see also Acts 20:31)
- ◆ Religious background of the Ephesians

- 7. Now read Acts 20:17-38. What else do you learn about Paul's ministry among the Ephesians from this passage?**

These passages from Acts help put into context Paul’s ministry among the Ephesians. Even though his initial greetings may seem impersonal, Paul spent three years with them. During those years his teaching was met with a wide variety of responses, as we see in Acts 19. Most likely he wrote this letter to them during the time of his imprisonment in Rome, which sets this letter about 7–8 years after his time in Ephesus.

Ephesus was a port city on the west coast of Asia (part of modern-day Turkey), where one could find a variety of religious practices. The presence of a synagogue meant that it was home to a number of Jewish families. The culture was inundated with idolatry, reliant upon magical arts, and curious about demons. At the center of religious life was the worship of Artemis, whose temple was located in Ephesus and was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Additionally, the worship of the emperor and his family was a prominent feature of life. Imagery of emperors as warrior gods appeared on coins and altars throughout the city.¹

- 8. Paul’s first words to these Ephesian saints were “grace” and “peace,” which is a standard part of Paul’s greeting in all of his New Testament letters. Look up the following words in a standard English dictionary, and write the definitions below.**

GRACE	
PEACE	

Why do you think these two terms were Paul’s chosen way to begin his letters?

As Paul wrote this letter, he understood the cultural practices and religious tensions of the Ephesians. The gospel—the good news of grace and peace freely given through Christ—was an unwelcome religious message for many who profited off magic arts and idolatry. It was most likely difficult to be a Christian in this hostile culture, so Paul’s initial address to the “faithful saints” offering “grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” would have been an encouraging and welcome greeting.

You may not feel like much of a saint some days (nor do I!), but it's the biblical identification of the people of God. It's not a name for the super spiritual or theologically trained. It's the name of everyone who by faith believes in Jesus. In our next lesson, we'll explore more of what that means, but for today, take a little time to let that identity sink into your soul. The question *Who am I?* has its first hint of an answer: *I'm a saint!*

Knowing who we are matters. When we try to earn our relationship with God by working harder, it leaves us exhausted and weary. And no matter how hard we try, we can never be good enough to earn the identity of a saint. It's a name that's given to us—just like Paul was given the title of apostle. Yes, we still struggle with sin, but by faith in Christ, we can rest assured that God greets us with grace and peace and considers us His saints.

Reflect

Today, as you go about your day, remember that you are a beloved saint. And God invites you to cast all your burdens on him because he cares about you (1 Pet. 5:7). Spend some time in prayer thanking Him for the grace and peace that are freely yours in Christ. Ask Him to help you live joyfully as a saint, set apart by Him and for Him.



ONE REALLY LONG SENTENCE

Read Ephesians 1.

Have you ever written something and, upon re-reading it, realized, *Wow, that was a really long and complex sentence?* Or perhaps you've experienced sending a "quick" voice messaging a friend, and suddenly you're at the ten-minute mark? I know I'm guilty of both!

The passage we're studying today and tomorrow has a similar feel to it. Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with the longest sentence in any of his epistles. In our English translations, verses 3-14 are broken up into multiple sentences. But in the original Greek this entire passage is one long sentence. As commentator John Stott notes, "His speech pours out of his mouth in a continuous cascade. He neither pauses for breath, nor punctuates his words with full stops."²

Today we'll spend some time observing what's in the text, and then tomorrow we'll consider how to interpret what it means and apply it to our lives. We'll follow this same pattern (observe one day, then interpret and apply the next) throughout our study of the first two chapters of Ephesians.

Now read Ephesians 1:3-14.

9. **When someone talks without pausing to take a breath, usually they're pretty excited about something. Who (and what) is Paul so excited to talk to the Ephesians about?**

DAY TWO
2

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us
with every spiritual
blessing in the
heavens in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

10. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with a benediction or praise of all that God has done on our behalf. List out every verb in this passage describing what God has done for His people.

Example: God blessed us with every spiritual blessing (v. 3)

11. Look up the following words in a standard English dictionary. What do you learn?

PREDESTINED (V. 5)	
REDEMPTION (V. 7)	
SEAL/SEALED (V. 13)	

Paul is clear from the beginning of his letter that God is at work in our lives and in the world. These three terms point to God's past, present, and future work. Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for redemption. He was thinking about you and me long before we were even born. If that's difficult for you to wrap your mind around, it is for me too! And it's a good reminder that God's ways are beyond our comprehension. While we may not always understand the ways God is at work, we can rest assured that He has a plan. He is active in our lives now and forever.

12. Go back through this passage (pp. 12-13) and underline every time you see the words "according to." List out each of these phrases by writing out "according to X." (Hint: you should find it four times.)

13. Now **circle** each occurrence of the words *predestined* and *purposed*.

14. As you read this passage, consider the following questions about our salvation:

- ◆ Who blessed us with salvation?

- ◆ When did He choose us?

- ◆ For what purpose did He choose us?

- ◆ Why did He adopt us?

- ◆ How did He save us? (see 1:7-9)

It's clear as we read this passage that Paul is overwhelmed by the glorious good news of the gospel. From before the foundation of the world, God our heavenly Father chose us to be holy and blameless in love before Him. He redeemed us through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, and He seals us forever through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's words in this passage may leave you with some questions, but what's clear is that our adoption into God's family is *according to His good pleasure*, not according to our being good enough.

15. What does it mean to be adopted? Why is this a fitting term?

Adoption in the Roman Empire came with full privileges of name, estate, and inheritance. And according to Jewish law, the firstborn son in Israel received a double inheritance (Deut. 21:15-17). So, when Paul writes that we're "adopted as sons," he's in no way excluding adopted daughters. It means that both men and women receive the firstborn son privileges of name (saint), estate (in Christ), and inheritance (eternal life with Christ).

16. As you consider words like "predestined," "chosen," and "according to his plan or will," what is confusing or uncomfortable? What is hopeful or encouraging?

17. Read Hebrews 9:22. How does this passage help you understand what Paul means by the following phrases: "redemption through his blood" and "the forgiveness of our trespasses"? How do those two concepts go together?

18. How do we gain forgiveness? What did Jesus do so that we might be redeemed?

Sin is serious. When the first humans sinned, their action broke the perfect relationship they had with God and with each other (Gen. 3). Because God is gracious and desires relationship with His children, He created a way for their relationship with Him to be restored. However, this restoration came with a cost. God's goodness and justice prevents Him from ignoring sin, so He made a way for forgiveness that maintained His justice and righteousness. Leviticus 17:11 tells us, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the lifeblood that makes atonement." The author of Hebrews helps us see how the Old Testament animal sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate and necessary (Heb. 10:4) sacrifice for sin—the death of Jesus, the very Son of God.

19. What is the down payment of our inheritance? What do you think that means about our full inheritance?

20. Throughout our study of Ephesians, we want to pay attention to Paul's frequent mentions of all three Persons of the Trinity. Reflect on what Ephesians 1:3-14 reveals about:

God the Father	God the Son	God the Spirit

Reflect

In one sentence, Paul has given us a full overview of the lavish riches that are ours in Christ. We'll dig deeper into the implications for our lives tomorrow, but for today, take a few minutes to write out your own benediction of praise to God.

Thank Him for the way He has saved you and how He continually works in your life today. Spend time throughout the day savoring these truths and reminding yourself:

**I am a saint.
I am adopted, redeemed, and forgiven.
I have an inheritance coming.**

DAY THREE
3

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us
with every spiritual
blessing in the
heavens in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

HEAPED UP HAPPINESS

Begin today by reading through Ephesians 1 again.

If you have another Bible translation available, I encourage you to read it in a different version. I've found that sometimes the slight differences make me notice the details of the passage in a new way. Biblegateway.com is a helpful website for this.

Now that we've spent some time observing the text, today we'll consider how to interpret what it means and apply it to our lives. It's one thing to list out everything God has done for us; it's another thing to understand the riches of those blessings; and it's another thing still to live in light of those truths. We want our observations to lead to understanding and our understanding to lead to transformation.

21. Now reread Ephesians 1:3-14. What does it mean that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavens? What's the difference between spiritual blessings and earthly blessings?

We tend to think of blessings as things that make our lives easier—health, money, relationships, and so on. While all of these can be blessings in our lives, they pale in comparison to the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Ultimately, every earthly blessing we possess is temporary. In contrast, our spiritual blessings are fully secure and can never spoil or fade.

Consider how one theologian reflects on this passage:

In this majestic section, Paul wrote of the blessings that belong to the church through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . These blessings include our union with Christ; being seated with him in the heavenlies; and our adoption, redemption, and election. All spiritual gifts and service abilities also flow out of these spiritual blessings that God gives to every believer at the time of salvation.³

22. Think about what you most often thank God for in your life. In what ways do we often focus on our earthly blessings instead of our spiritual blessings? Why do you think we do this?
23. In light of Paul's circumstances (Eph. 3:1; 4:1), what is surprising about how he begins this letter? What can you learn from Paul's example when faced with unwanted circumstances in your own life?

Because Paul's eternal future was secure, he knew his hardships were temporary. He might have been in prison then, but one day, he would be in glory! Future hope gives us present joy, even when our circumstances are difficult and painful.

24. Read through this passage one more time. Look for the following, and highlight each in a different way in the text:
- ◆ What happened in the past for our salvation?
 - ◆ What is true in the present about our salvation?
 - ◆ What hope is a future aspect of our salvation?

Theologians will often discuss our salvation in past, present, and future terms. We are saved (justification), we are being saved (sanctification), and one day we will finally be saved (glorification).

Justification: God redeemed us by Christ's blood and adopted us as children. His justification means we are fully free from sin's penalty.

Sanctification: The Holy Spirit lives inside us presently, continually at work to make us holy. Present grace frees us from sin's power—we are no longer enslaved to sin. However, we still struggle with sin and live in a world broken by sin.

Glorification: One day, we'll experience freedom from sin's presence when future grace leads us into glory.

Although Paul didn't pen the hymn, he understood the phrase, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!"⁴

25. As you think about your adoption into the family of God (Eph. 1:5), read Romans 8:12-17.

- ◆ According to this passage, how does our adoption change us?

- ◆ What does it mean to live according to the flesh?

- ◆ What does it mean to live by the Spirit?

- ◆ What is the relationship between our adoption and suffering?

Our adoption doesn't just secure a future inheritance; it's a present reality. The Holy Spirit lives in us, changing us day by day to increasingly look more like Jesus. While we may still struggle with sin, we're no longer enslaved to it. We're now children of God and part of our adoption is a new nature, one that has a new power to obey God. Those who live by the flesh follow their own inclinations and desires, but those who walk by the Spirit follow God's Word and ways.

Our family resemblance to Jesus also means that we experience suffering. Just as Paul found himself in prison because of his faith, we will experience hardships because of our identity in Christ. As we live by the Spirit, our lives may come in conflict with those who are living by the flesh. Daily, we'll face temptation to give into fear and live according to sinful desires. While it may seem easier to go along with the ways of the world, our transformed nature cries out to God, "Lead [me] not into temptation, but deliver [me] from evil!" (Matt. 6:13, ESV).

- 26.** As you consider your own life, in what ways are you tempted to live according to the flesh? Is there any area you need to cry out, “Abba Father,” and seek God’s forgiveness?
- 27.** Some of us may struggle to believe that we truly have forgiveness. Are there situations from your past (or present) that fill you with shame? In what areas do you struggle to believe God’s grace is enough for you?

If you ever wonder if you’re too far gone for grace, let me encourage you with these verses from Ephesians.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

EPHESIANS 1:7-8, ESV

I love that word, *lavished*; it brings to mind the idea of abundance. I picture arms overflowing with presents or a table overflowing with good things to eat. God has storehouses of grace—He’s not going to run out. This is such good news.

- 28.** Part of God’s abundant grace to us is that He doesn’t leave us in our sin. As you reflect upon your walk with God, how do you see the Spirit at work in your life, transforming you to be increasingly holy and blameless?
- 29.** Look back at verses 6, 12, and 14. What repeated word do you notice in these verses? What is Paul’s ultimate hope for our lives as believers?

You were created for one purpose and one purpose only—to glorify God forever. Everything about you, from your personality to your gifts and interests (to whether you have curly or straight hair), was designed intentionally by God to reflect His glory to the world. In another of his New Testament letters, Paul wrote, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31, ESV). And the Westminster Shorter Catechism sums it up this way: “Q: What is the chief end of man? A: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”⁵ You are sealed in Christ through the Spirit to praise the name of your heavenly Father forever. If you ever wonder, *Who am I and why am I here?* Ephesians 1 tells you clearly: You’re a saint created by God to live to the praise of God’s glory!

Paul closes his one long sentence with a reminder of the Holy Spirit’s seal on your life. Typically, a seal is offered as a guarantee or confirmation. To apply for a driver’s license, I’m not allowed to just use a copy of a birth certificate, I have to have one that has an embossed seal to authenticate the truthfulness of the certificate. In medieval times, a king would press his ring into wax to create an official seal for his decree before it was sent out.⁶ Seals serve as a confirmation or proof that something is true.

30. What does it mean that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit?

31. According to Ephesians 1:13, what two things happened before we were sealed with the Holy Spirit?

In this opening benediction, Paul is gazing on salvation as if he’s beholding a masterpiece. He’s looking at it from every angle—stepping back and seeing the entire view, and at the same time zooming in and noticing every important brush stroke. He’s helping us begin to comprehend the incomprehensible work of Christ on our behalf, the good news of the gospel that we first “heard” and then “believed.”

Paul reminds us of the past, present, and future aspects of our salvation. He shows us the blessings of the triune God on our behalf: how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work in perfect unity to secure our adoption. He reminds us that our redemption has been fully purchased by Christ's blood and that forgiveness is freely granted according to the riches of His grace.

These truths are foundational for everything Paul's going to talk about in the rest of Ephesians. Paul's letter is a study of faith (what we believe) and practice (how we live out what we believe). Both faith and practice matter, but the order matters too. First, he wants us to understand what God has done on our behalf. Then, he's going to explain how we live in light of that understanding.

Reflect

Finish your study today in prayer, asking God to allow these truths to be on your heart and mind as you go about your day. Use these words to guide you:

"Oh, the heaped up happiness of those whose God is the Lord; a happiness so great and so glorious, it cannot be conceived, and cannot be uttered! All the blessings to this world cannot make us happy, except we have you."⁷

DAY FOUR
4

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us
with every spiritual
blessing in the
heavens in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

FROM PRAISE TO PRAYER

Read or listen to Ephesians 1 again.

What are you thankful for today? What we're thankful for tells us a lot about what we value. In the same way, what we pray for tells us a lot about what we desire. In today's study, we're moving from Paul's praise for God to his prayer for the Ephesians. Just like Ephesians 1:3-14, this section of prayer is all one sentence in the original Greek. This makes Ephesians 1 just two sentences long!

As you work through the chapter again, pay careful attention to what's on Paul's heart as he prays for the Ephesians. We'll spend today observing what the text says in Ephesians 1:15-23 before transitioning to interpretation and application tomorrow.

Now reread Ephesians 1:15-23.

32. Why does Paul give thanks for the Ephesians?

**33. Underline the phrase *what is* in verses 18-19 (p. 13).
What three specific things does Paul pray that they would know?**

◆ What is _____

◆ What is _____

◆ What is _____

34. As you read this passage, what do you learn about:

God the Father	God the Son	God the Spirit

As Paul did in his opening praise, he again appeals to all three Persons of the Trinity in his prayer for the Ephesian saints. He prayed that they would understand not only who God is in His three Persons, but also the role each Person plays in the life of a Christ follower. Why was this concept so important to Paul? Understanding who God is and what He’s done for us empowers us to live a life of godliness. Knowing God is the foundation for glorifying God.

Paul’s prayer for believers includes several specific petitions that he takes to God on their behalf, which are found in verses 17-19. Let’s briefly consider each one.

35. Why do you think Paul prays that God would give them the Spirit (or “a spirit”) of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him (v. 17)? If they already believe in Jesus, what is Paul praying for now?

36. From the context, what do you think it means to have the “eyes of your heart” enlightened (v. 18)?

When we become Christians, we know God, but we don’t know everything about Him. We’ll spend our entire lives “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10, ESV). When Paul prays for “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” he

is praying that the Spirit will be at work so that the Ephesians may know God more fully.

This desire for spiritual growth is the very reason you're doing this study right now. As you walk with God and study His Word, you can do so with anticipation. The Spirit is at work, guiding you and teaching you—opening the eyes of your heart so you might know God better!

- 37. Have you ever had a time when you began to understand a spiritual truth in a new way? Or a moment when you felt like you went from being spiritually blind to being able to see spiritual truths more clearly? How does growing in the knowledge of God encourage you in your faith?**

Paul prays that they might know “what is the hope of his calling” (v. 18). Read the following verses:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct.

1 PETER 1:13–15

- 38. From these verses, what (or whom) is the basis of our hope? What are we to set our hope on?**

39. How does our future hope impact our present living?

Hope is powerful. However, it's not enough to just be a hopeful person. The Object of our hope is the Source of our power. And Peter reminds us: set your hope completely on Jesus!

Paul also prays that they might know "what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (v. 18).

40. Read 1 Peter 1:3-5. What do you learn about your inheritance from this passage? Why is your inheritance secure?

As you read about the inheritance in Ephesians 1:18, you may wonder: *Is this passage talking about God's inheritance in His people or His people's inheritance, which they receive from Him?* Pastor John Stott offers this insight:

The Greek expression, like the English, could mean either God's inheritance or ours, that is, either the inheritance he receives or the inheritance he gives. Some commentators take it in the former sense and understand it to refer to the inheritance which God possesses among his people. Certainly the Old Testament authors taught consistently that God's people were his inheritance or 'possession' . . . But the parallel passage in Colossians 1:12 strongly suggests the other interpretation here, namely that 'God's inheritance' refers to what he will give us, for we are to give thanks to the Father, 'who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light'. In this case, if God's 'call' points back to the beginning of our Christian life, God's 'inheritance' points on to its end, to that final inheritance of which the Holy Spirit is the guarantee (14) and which Peter describes as "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you."⁸

In some sense, both concepts are true. God considers His people His inheritance; we are a treasured possession to God! And He also gives us an inheritance. It's fully secure, not dependent on our performance, but dependent upon His grace. We are beloved by God and we are blessed by God.

41. Lastly, Paul prays that they might know "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power" (v. 19). Go back to the Ephesians text on pages 12-13 and **circle** each occurrence of the word *power* in 1:15-23.
42. Now also read 2 Peter 1:3-4. What do you learn about God's power from these passages? How is His power at work in the life of a believer?
43. Read back over Ephesians 1:20-21. List everything Paul affirms about Jesus in these two verses.
44. What do you learn about the relationship between Christ and the church from Ephesians 1:22-23? What does it mean that the church is His body?

Paul closed his prayer with the culminating power of Jesus's resurrection and ascension to God's "right hand." From this place of authority Jesus governs His church, which is so closely united with Him that Paul refers to it as His "body." Don't forget this picture, it's one we'll see again and again throughout Ephesians.

Today, we've looked in depth at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. He wasn't afraid to boldly ask for the Lord to grow their faith so that they would abound in hope. So often we feel powerless, because we forget our access to the Father's power. God's resources are available to us through prayer—any time and any place. However, sometimes I think we are hesitant to go before the Lord because we fear we aren't good enough to ask for His help.

My husband, Mike, is a seminary professor and president, and some students are intimidated to knock on his door and ask him a question. One student told me that she was so nervous that she walked back and forth and practiced what she was going to say with a friend until she had the courage to finally go in. Thankfully, she survived!

That same week I had taken my kids to Mike's office. They bounded in the room without knocking. They sat in his chair and spun around and put on his robe. They weren't intimidated in the least. Why? Because they knew that they were his beloved children. What they knew about their dad made them feel safe and secure in his presence. In the same way, what we know about God informs how we relate to Him. When you're adopted as His child, you can boldly come into His presence. He delights in you. He loves you. He welcomes you. You have the same access Paul had to God.

Reflect

I encourage you, take the time right now to spend some time in prayer. Use Paul's words in Ephesians 1:17-19 to guide you. You're a beloved daughter, and your Father delights to talk with you.

DAY FIVE
5

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us
with every spiritual
blessing in the
heavens in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

IT MATTERS WHO YOU KNOW

Read through Ephesians 1 for the final time this week.

By now Paul's words should be very familiar!

As we conclude our study this week, it's helpful to consider how Ephesians 1 fits into the overall structure of Paul's letter. Paul is extremely purposeful as he writes. He spends the first three chapters focusing on indicative statements (what is true about what God has done, is doing, or will do) and then moves to the imperative instructions (how we live in light of these truths). An example of how indicative and imperative statements work is something like this:

Indicative: "There's a fire in the building."

Imperative: "Get out of the building!"

Understanding the indicatives helps us understand the reasons for the imperatives. The order matters. Think of the difference between these two statements:

You are saved, therefore live a life of holiness to please the Lord.

Live a life of holiness to please the Lord so that you can be saved.

The first statement sets us free, the second one enslaves us to fear. Knowing what is true is vital for living in the truth of what we know. Therefore, Paul spends three chapters filling our minds with the good news of God's work on our behalf to secure our salvation.

Paul also knows that the only way we can understand the truth of the gospel is by the Spirit's power. For that reason, he's on his knees in prayer for the church of Ephesus. We'll close out our time in Ephesians 1 today by looking more in depth at Paul's prayer and taking the time to consider how his words can guide our prayers.

45. Now reread Ephesians 1:15-23. In what ways is Paul's prayer similar to your prayers? In what ways is it different?
46. Considering Paul's current circumstances, is there anything you're surprised Paul *didn't* pray here?
47. One thing Paul particularly prays for is that the Ephesians would know the "hope of his [God's] calling" (v. 18), which refers to God's saving grace in their lives. Take a moment to read the following verses and consider: What are some false hopes that we might be tempted to trust in instead of the hope we have in Christ?
- ◆ 1 Timothy 6:17
 - ◆ Psalm 33:16-17
 - ◆ Proverbs 28:26
48. In what ways are you tempted to put your hope in money, power, or your own efforts?
49. How does trusting in "false hopes" hinder our prayer lives? What keeps you from a more active prayer life?

It's so tempting to trust in what we can see to provide for what we need. We feel more at ease when we have plenty of money in our checking accounts. We feel safe because we have alarm systems. We tend to trust in our own experience or insights. It's a good thing to save our money, lock our doors, and be thoughtful in our ways! However, we need a more secure place to put our trust. Only God is able to give us the provision, security, and wisdom we need. Trusting in God gives us a secure hope for whatever circumstances we may encounter, and no matter what is going on around us, the best action we can always take is to turn to God in prayer.

50. Now read Colossians 1:9-14. How does this passage compare to Ephesians 1? Take a moment to mark similar words and phrases.

51. What do you learn about some of Paul's greatest hopes from his prayers?

52. Paul tells the Ephesians, "I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." What can we learn about Paul's prayer life from this one simple statement?

53. What are a couple of specific ways you would like to grow your own prayer life, both in the frequency and the content of your prayers?

Prayer is one of the distinct features of Paul's letters. In the midst of his travels and imprisonments, he consistently prayed for the church. Prayer was a vital aspect of Paul's relationship with God and his relationship with others. He loved God, so he prayed to Him. He loved others, so he prayed for them. Paul understood that he couldn't always be with the various churches that he loved, but he could always be remembering them in his prayers.

In verse 20, Paul shifts his prayer to include a description of Christ's power. The church in Ephesus likely needed this reminder because, as one Bible commentator points out, "The message that the emperors were warrior gods, defeating their foes and bringing order to the world, appeared on coins and the reliefs of imperial altars (one of them found in Ephesus). Sometimes this imagery depicted the warrior emperor trampling his enemies underfoot."⁹

54. In what ways do you think Paul's description of Christ's power in Ephesians 1:20-23 may have particularly encouraged the church in Ephesus? Which words or phrases stand out to you?

It's easy to be pessimistic about the state of the world. Every day on the news we see images of violence, ungodliness, pain, and suffering. It can look like everything is spiraling out of control. The Ephesians would have experienced this sense of cultural dismay as well. However, Paul reminded them (and us): Jesus is on His throne! He reigns with power and dominion in this age and in the one to come. Everything is subject to Him. This knowledge gives us needed hope as we live our daily lives.

Paul closes his prayer by alluding to a theme that will show up throughout the book of Ephesians—unity within the church. Paul gives a first hint of this concept when he describes the church as a "body" and Christ as our "head" (vv. 22-23).

55. Read Romans 12:3-6. What does it mean that we are part of a body? How should we think about our role in the life of the church?

I've found Paul's explanation of the body to be such helpful imagery. Each of us is unique in our gifting. I may serve in one area and you may serve in another. Both of us are needed! When I see another believer using her gifts in a wonderful way, that doesn't mean I should do what she's doing. We've all been entrusted with spiritual gifts that we use to serve one another, to the glory of God. Our individual gifts are intended to promote unity within the church as God works in diverse ways through His people.

Both Paul's praise and Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 highlight an overarching theme: It matters who you know. And it matters what you know about who you know. Paul's benediction serves as a reminder to the Ephesians of the spiritual blessings that belong to them in Christ. It's a terrible tragedy to be rich beyond measure and live like the poorest of paupers. Paul is desperate for them to know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance, and the resurrection power that is at work in them through the Holy Spirit.

Reflect

Close your week of study by writing out from memory the spiritual blessings that are yours in Christ. (If you're having trouble recalling them, make it a point to memorize them before you reach the end of the next week of study. They're worth knowing by heart.)

As you write out each one, say a prayer for someone you love. Ask God to open the spiritual eyes of their heart so they may know the riches of their inheritance and set their hope fully on God's grace, not their circumstances or efforts.

Just as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, we want to live a life of praise to God and prayer for one another.

