

"Because of HIS Great Love"

A Bible study focused on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

*Because of HIS great love for us, GOD, who is rich in mercy,
made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -
it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2: 4 - 5*

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STUDY SUGGESTIONS FOR THIS SERIES:

PREPARE QUIETLY - As you begin each lesson, take some time to prepare yourself. You will find that it is enormously helpful to calm your spirit and get in touch with The One who invites you to come into His presence. He takes delight in having His children humbly bow before Him and express their honest desire to get to know Him better. There are suggestions at the beginning of each lesson to help you focus on Jesus and His unending love for you.

LISTEN INTENTLY - Take your time as you read the suggested passage of Scripture. This is not an academic assignment or a textbook. This is God's Holy Word - His love letter to you. If possible read it in 2 or 3 different translations. You may want to jot down some of your thoughts and observations or even underline some of the words or phrases that catch your attention.

PONDER CAREFULLY - The heart of the lesson is found in this section. There will be several questions for you to consider. These questions have no right or wrong answers. They are meant to help you to understand the passages and to discover the truths that the Holy Spirit wants to teach to you. Feel free to focus on the questions which are most interesting or relevant to you. What verses, phrases, ideas in this chapter could have been written just for you at this time in walk with the Savior?

RESPOND PERSONALLY - Finally, you will want to listen quietly for the still, small voice of the Lord. What is it that the Spirit of God has brought to your mind and how will you follow through with this prompting in the days ahead? Will you willingly and humbly accept with gratefulness Jesus' great love for you? Will you let Him enable you to become the person that God Himself created you to be?

Ephesians - Paul's "Masterpiece"

"For we are God's masterpiece." – Ephesians 2: 10

An Introduction to Ephesians

Larson, Eric, Frameworks, How to Navigate the New Testament, Frameworks Resources, 2013, pp. 185 – 187

"There is no question that many Biblical scholars would agree that Paul's letter written to the Ephesians is a masterpiece of Christian thought, executed in a manner well calculated to astonish all who read it. In no other biblical letter can we both sound the depths of God's infinite mysteries (chapters 1 – 3) and benefit from Paul's practical, down to earth advice (chapters 4 – 6) at the same time.

"Among the Epistles bearing the name of St. Paul," says Scottish Bible teacher S.D.F. Salmond, "there is none greater than this, nor any with a character more entirely its own . . ." In the judgment of many who are entitled to deliver an opinion it is the grandest of all Pauline letters.

At the end of the book of Acts, Paul is living in Rome in a rented apartment. He is being held there under house arrest, waiting for a hearing before Caesar for a crime he didn't commit. He will stay there for two years.

What might seem to some as negative circumstances turn out to be quite positive for him, for now he has plenty of time to rest, to think, to have conversations with Jesus – and to write four letters, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians.

The first pair of these so called *prison epistles* is written to resolve issues that have arisen among Christians in one location, Colossae, an ancient city located in today's Turkey. As Paul completes these two writings, a faithful courier named Tychicus stands by, ready to hand-carry them to their intended recipients 1,000 miles away (it will be a long walk).

Before Tychicus can finish lacing up his sandals (and pack his lunch), Paul grabs his arm. "Wait a second," he says. "Since you'll be traveling through Asia Minor anyway, there's another letter that I need you to deliver."

With that, Paul walks over to his desk, sits down and begins to write Ephesians. This one will be a *circular letter* destined first for believers in Ephesus and from there circulated to Christian groups in other places.

In it, Paul warmly welcomes the Ephesians into God's glorious family by showing them spectacular things God has done for them. Since there are no issues for Paul to deal with, his writing is free to soar. And soar it does:

'He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms . . . God can point to us in all future ages as examples . . . of His grace and kindness toward us . . . we are His masterpiece.'"

A Brief Outline of the Letter

Paul writes Ephesians in two parts. Each has three chapters. In the first part, he displays the heavenly, spiritual truths that Christians should understand and experience. In the second, he lays out practical advice to help our daily living. In the first, Paul focuses on beliefs and, in the second, on behaviors. The two parts perfectly harmonize with each other.

Beliefs – heavenly visions, compelling sights
Behaviors – earthly practices, sound advice

Chapters 1 – 3
Chapters 4 – 6

Ephesians – “Because of HIS Great Love”

The following information is quoted directly from Frameworks by Eric Larson with permission from the author*

Navigating the Letter –

1. Notice how Paul describes his divine revelations

At some time in Paul’s Christian life, God revealed to him the mystery of his will, the plan of his eternal purpose. Paul describes these divine insights, which had been hidden from mankind for generations, in vivid detail in chapters 1 - 3. Read slowly. Don’t miss them.

2. Watch for Paul’s word pictures of the church

In this letter, Paul creates metaphors to illustrate four aspects of the church.

Ephesians 2: 21 – 22 - the church is believers built together into a temple for God’s residence

Ephesians 4: 4 – the church is Christ’s body, expressing Him, and through whom He can move and work

Ephesians 4: 24 – the church is likened to God’s *new man*, a brand new spiritual entity

Ephesians 4: 25 – 32 – the church is the bride of Christ, whom He loves, for whom He gave His life and to whom He is devoted forever

3. Pay attention to “Oneness”

Unity is an overarching theme of Ephesians. Paul says that God has created one band of believers out of two groups, Jews and non-Jews, people who once hated each other. This amazing, now-unified assembly testifies of God’s transforming work in members’ lives. The new group guards a sevenfold oneness – one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God – with the Spirit’s help. Lots of *ones*. (Ephesians 4: 3 – 6)

Unique Things about Ephesians

The church in Ephesians is universal, not local

In Paul’s other New Testament letters, the word church means a group of Christian believers meeting together in a specific location. However, in Ephesians it has a different meaning. Here, the church is universal in scope. It includes all believers from all places throughout all time. We exist together, whether in heaven or on earth, and in spirit constitute God’s one family.

Christians are God’s Masterpiece

The Greek word *poiema*, (*masterpiece or workmanship* in most English Bibles), is used twice in the New Testament. The first time is in Romans 1: 20 where Paul likens the universe—God’s outstanding *physical* creation – to the handiwork of an expert craftsman. The second time is here in Ephesians 2: 10 in reference to the church – God’s incredible *spiritual* creation.

Ephesians and Colossians are twins

If we laid Ephesians and Colossians side by side, we would discover that 78 of the 155 verses in Ephesians are identical (or nearly so) to verses in Colossians. This should not surprise us since at the time Paul wrote this letter, he had just finished writing Colossians – its lofty ideas still occupied his thoughts.

We have God’s armor

In Ephesians 6: 10 – 18, Paul asks his readers to stand strong in their faith. Then he vividly describes the spiritual armor they should slap on as they go out into the world to do battle with the devil. This protective gear includes five defensive pieces – breastplate, belt, shoes, shield and helmet – and one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit.

*Larson, Eric, Frameworks, How to Navigate the New Testament, Frameworks Resources, 2013, pp. 188 - 191

Discovering "HIS Great Love"

"Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes."
Ephesians 1: 4

"But God is so rich in mercy and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead."
Ephesians 2: 4

"I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong."
Ephesians 3: 16 - 17

"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."
Ephesians 3: 18 – 19

"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church."
Ephesians 4: 15

"Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God."
Ephesians 5: 2

"For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up His life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's Word."
Ephesians 5: 25 – 26

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Lesson 1 - We Are Enormously Blessed!

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

Ephesians 1: 3

PREPARE QUIETLY

This is your special time to come into the presence of the Lord and to learn from Him through studying His Word, so take a few minutes to quiet your mind and heart and think about the love that He has for you. Love that motivated Him to send His one and only son, Jesus, so that you could be forgiven and have the gift of life eternal - John 3: 16. What does this kind of love mean to you today? What are the desires of your heart?

LISTEN INTENTLY - Read Ephesians 1

If possible, read this chapter in 2 or 3 different translations or paraphrase versions of the Bible.

What ideas, words, thoughts are particularly interesting to you? Take note of them.

PONDER CAREFULLY

1. What does Paul want the people to think about as he begins his letter to them? Give your own title to each section.

1 - 2

3 - 14

15 - 23

2. How many “blessings” can you find in verses 3 - 14? What do these concepts mean to you?

3. “In Christ” or “In Him” is a central theme in this letter. Highlight the variations of this phrase as you study each week.

What does it mean to you? How would you explain this concept to someone else?

Romans 8: 1

Galatians 3: 26 - 28 and 5: 6

II Corinthians 5: 17 - 18

Philippians 3: 8 - 10

4. Notice the phrase, “For this reason”, the transition words between his opening words and his prayer. What do you think is in Paul’s mind at this point in the letter?

5. How does Paul describe who Christ is, what He is doing and His relationship to the church? (verses 20 - 23)

6. As Paul prays for these people, he makes very specific requests to God on their behalf? What are they? Try to put them in your own words and personalize them for yourself.

RESPOND PERSONALLY

1. There is a key phrase in verse 13 which explains clearly the difference between those people who are “in Christ” and those who are still on their way to finding the source of every spiritual blessing. It is “having believed” or “when you believed”! Where are you on this journey? Take some time to talk with Jesus about what He has done and wants to do for you.

2. Using Paul’s prayer as your model, what do you want to ask God to do in your life? Substitute the word “I” for “you”. How could this prayer help you to intercede in new ways for your family and friends?

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Lesson 2 - We have new life in Christ!

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.

Ephesians 2: 4 - 5

PREPARE QUIETLY

This is your special time to come into the presence of the Lord and to learn from Him through studying His Word. As you slow down and quiet your mind and heart, think about God’s love for you. When Jesus came, He made it possible for you and for me to begin to grasp the Father’s kindness and love - Titus 3: 3 - 7. What is the reassurance that He wants you to hear today through these verses? What are your doubts, fears or concerns? He is waiting for you to be honest so that He can meet you right where you are today.

LISTEN INTENTLY - Read Ephesians 2

If possible, read this chapter in 2 or 3 different translations or paraphrase versions of the Bible. Read it out loud. What ideas, words, thoughts are particularly interesting to you? Take note of them.

PONDER CAREFULLY

1. What is the theme in these next 2 paragraphs of this letter? Is there a natural progression from chapter 1?
1 - 10 -

11 - 22
2. How does Paul describe our human condition without Christ? Is this how you think about people? Why or why not?
3. All other religions have rules and emphasize human effort as the way to appease and/or please their deities. Based on these verses, what makes it possible for man to come into a relationship with God?
4. There are some amazing phrases in verses 4 - 10, describing what God does for all who by “saved, through faith”. What do they mean to you?
vs. 5 - “made us alive” or “gave us life”

vs. 6 - “seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms”

vs. 10 - “we are God’s workmanship” or “masterpiece”
5. Until the death and resurrection of Christ, the separation of Jew from Gentile was enormous. How does Paul remind the new believers of this? Why do you think this was so important for him to do? Is peace really possible?
6. How does the idea of a building help you visualize “the church” or God’s people both in the present and throughout history - verses 19 - 22? How does this illustrate the idea of unity?

RESPOND PERSONALLY

1. What do you think the Holy Spirit might be eager to impress on your heart and mind today?
Take time to read verses 4 - 10 again - slowly. Then listen for His tender and compassionate words to you. What would it mean for you to take seriously His desire for you to grow in “Christ-likeness”?
2. How interested are you in peace, reconciliation, and unity within the “fellowship of believers” - even those who are different in some way than you are? How are you involved in making this happen? Let God direct your thoughts.

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Lesson 3 - We Are God's Children!

And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3: 6 (NLT)

PREPARE QUIETLY

This is your special time to come into the presence of the Lord and to learn from Him through studying His Word, so take a few minutes to quiet your mind and heart and think about the love that He has for you. His love is so great that He sent His Son so that all who believe in Him could become His beloved children - I John 3: 1 - 3. What does this kind of love mean to you today? Listen for the voice of your Heavenly Father and then tell Him your heart's desires?

LISTEN INTENTLY - Read Ephesians 3

Why not read it every day? Read it out loud in different translations.

What ideas, words, thoughts are particularly interesting to you? Take note of them.

PONDER CAREFULLY

1. Summarize briefly the content in each of the 2 sections of chapter 3?

1 - 13 -

14 - 21

2. There is a transition statement in both verse 1 and verse 14. What is Paul referring to as he continues his letter?

3. What is the mission or purpose of the church? Who or what is the church in this context? See also 1: 22.

4. What do you think is in Paul's mind when he writes about God's "glorious, unlimited resources" or "the riches of His glory" (NKJ)? (Verse 16) What are some other phrases that could describe the greatness of our God?

5. Because of the intense persecution and difficulties that surrounded these new believers, Paul could have asked God to protect them or remove their problems, but instead he chose to ask God for some other amazing things. What are they? How does Romans 8: 37 - 39 complement this prayer?

6. What does this letter teach us about prayer and about the God who is able to answer the prayers of His children?

RESPOND PERSONALLY

1. Take some time to remind yourself of the truths in verses 12 and 20 and then prayerfully, write out the prayer in verses 14 - 19, changing the word "you" to "I" or "my". Then read it again and again until it becomes your own. Whose power is it that will enable you to believe that God will always accomplish what He has promised.

2. Even as Paul prayed this for his friends, who are the people that you could pray for in this way? Let God bring them to your mind as He chooses to do and then commit yourself to PRAY.

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Lesson 4 - We Have God’s Holy Spirit

**Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.
Put on your new nature, created to be like God -- truly righteous and holy.**
Ephesians 4: 23 - 24 (NLT)

PREPARE QUIETLY

Take a few minutes to quiet your mind and heart and think about the love that God has for you. As you read Romans 5: 1 and 5 - 8 think about how much He loves you. What does this kind of love mean to you? Is there something that you need to confess to Jesus? What are the desires of your heart? By faith, will you dare to believe that God loves you this much?

LISTEN INTENTLY - Ephesians 4

As you read this chapter in a few different versions, think about the phrases and words that capture your attention. Mark them and then notice how the various translations compare.

PONDER CAREFULLY

1. What is the theme or big idea in each of these paragraphs?

1 - 6

7 - 16

17 - 32

2. In verse 1, Paul is obviously making a transition from what he has written in the first half of the letter to the second half. What is he now introducing according to the first 6 verses? How do you explain the concepts of “walk worthy” and “make every effort” (verses 4: 1 & 3) in light of what you learned in chapters 1 - 3?

3. What is the purpose of the various gifts that Christ has given to the church? Do you think everyone has a special gift, unique to them? Compare the information in I Corinthians 12: 4 - 11.

4. If the goal is “maturity in the Lord” for the church, how would you describe what that looks like?

5. How does Paul describe those people who do not have God’s Spirit, who “continue to live as the Gentiles (anyone who has not encountered Christ) do”?

6. What are the traits that will characterize someone who is being “made new by the Spirit of God”?

7. In what way does verse 30 motivate you? Read the verses in Paul’s prayer - 3: 16 - 17. Is there a connection?

RESPOND PERSONALLY

Would you agree that “progress in the right direction” is what Paul desires for those to whom he is writing? He longs to encourage and inspire them, to motivate and to help them “to stand mature and fully formed in the likeness of the Savior” (Eph. 4: 13 - The Voice) As you ponder these verses once again, ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts. What is He asking you to honestly face and be willing to change so that you will reflect Jesus more clearly?

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Lesson 5 - We Can Live a Life Filled with Love

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 4: 1 -2 (NIV)

PREPARE QUIETLY

Will you take a few minutes to consciously quiet your mind, put away your “to do” list, and think about the presence of Jesus? He is right there with you, waiting to embrace you with his love and to assure you of his mercy and grace. Read Psalm 103: 11 - 18 and then give Him your thanks for Who He Is and for His everlasting love for you.

LISTEN INTENTLY - Read Ephesians 5:1 - 6:9

It's important that you spend time simply reading and meditating on God's Word, so be sure to absorb all that you can. What words, phrases, big ideas catch your attention?

PONDER CAREFULLY

There are several different ways that various translators divided the paragraphs in verses 19 - 21, but the most literal and accurate one is the ESV which adds “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” to the list of ways that addresses how “being filled with the Spirit” will be evident as we walk (live) wisely as God's beloved children. The 3 illustrations, wife and husband, child and parent, slave and master are all illustrations of those who take submission seriously, along with praise and thanksgiving.

1. Give a title to each section and try to summarize the theme in one sentence.
5: 1 - 14

5: 15 - 6: 9

2. There are several guidelines for how “God's dearly loved children” should live life in verses 5: 1 - 21. What are they? If you rewrite the “do not's” in these verses and make them positive statements, how would it sound?
Ex. Instead of “no sexual immorality”, you might say, “ a life of moral integrity and purity”.
What impact does the negative statement make that might not be as effective if Paul had only used the positive?

3. What is the best way to “understand what the will of the Lord” is - verse 17? How does this work for you?

5. Submission is not a popular concept in our culture. What does it mean and what does it not mean do you think? What characteristics and attitudes are synonymous with submission? In what ways did Jesus demonstrate them?

6. What advice does Paul give to the Ephesians that he might want you and your friends to listen to most carefully?
About marriage -

About parents and children -

About employers and employees (masters and slaves) -

RESPOND PERSONALLY

This would be a good time to go back and reflect on the ways that God has “blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ” - Ephesians 1: 3 - 23. How is it possible to live a life filled with love - 5: 1 - 2? It is in Christ alone and by the power of the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Give Him your thanks for what He will do in you and through you in the days ahead.

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Lesson 6 - We Can Be Strong and Stand Firm!

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

Ephesians 6: 10 - 11

PREPARE QUIETLY

This is your special time to come into the presence of the Lord and to learn from Him through studying His Word, so take a few minutes to quiet your mind and heart and think about His love for you. Read slowly and thoughtfully Romans 8: 35 - 39. Is there anything that you need to confess so that His love can flow fully and completely into your very being? In the quietness of the moment, let His Word and the Holy Spirit speak to you.

LISTEN INTENTLY - Read Ephesians 6: 10 - 24

After you have read this passage several times, try making an illustration to help you visualize what is described?

PONDER CAREFULLY

1. What is the theme of each of these sections?

6: 10 -18

6: 19 - 22

6: 23 - 24

2. As you review this letter to the Ephesians, how many times has Paul emphasized that “our strength is found in Christ and in His mighty power”? Find as many of these verses as you can. Why do we need to be reminded of this truth so often? In what ways is this a counter cultural concept?

3. Why do we need God’s armor? What do you believe about the reality of the devil and the reality of the powers or demonic forces that are in the unseen world?

Matthew 4: 1 - 11

I Peter 5: 8 - 9

James 4: 7 - 8

I John 4: 1 - 4

4. Describe the armor in your own words. Why is each part essential? What does it protect and how?

5. Paul’s final words are about the importance of prayer. Why? What do you believe praying will accomplish? What does it mean to pray for all believers, everywhere? How does being alert and praying fit together?

6. When Paul could have asked the people to pray for so many other things and yet he simply asks for boldness to speak the Gospel to both Jew and Gentile, what does this say to you? to the church?

RESPOND PERSONALLY

What would your prayer request be if you were writing a letter like this? Is there a part of your armor that needs to be recovered, renewed or revitalized? The One who loves you with undying love is waiting to make you and keep you strong - every day in every way so that you can become mature in Him!

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Sermons by Darrell Johnson – firstbc.org/#!sermons/kkmbo – “Navigating an Alternate Reading of Reality”

Sermons by John Piper - desiringgod.org/messages/by-scripture/ephesians1

Sermons by Ray Pritchard – keepbelieving.com/scripture/ephesians

TRANSLATIONS

New International Version

New Living Translation

English Standard Version

New King James

The Amplified New Testament

The Message

The Voice