

ONE - Study of Ephesians

Part 1 - God's Dream

Today we start a new series in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is a concise and theologically rich book containing the essentials of Christianity and how to live as a follower of Jesus. It sets forth so grand a picture of our position, responsibilities, privilege, and calling in Christ that you can't help but be amazed at the magnificence of God's goodness in His plan for us.

To help with some of the heavy lifting, here's just a few things you can do to help supplement our Sunday's together:

1. Read it through so you get a little familiar with the whole book.
2. Prayerfully read through the book in bite size chunks using a devotional guideline and a study Bible.
3. Listen to Riverlife Bible Streams podcast, episodes 11-16 on Ephesians that will support the series that will take a closer examination of the text.

Introduction to Ephesians

Authorship – Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter and sets his credentials in two interesting statements (Ephesians 1:1 and 3:1). Written as a one of four prison epistles circa AD60-62.

Occasion – This letter was written to the followers of Jesus in the city of Ephesus and surrounding areas and was written to bring encouragement to the young and growing churches of the region.

Ephesus was a large and important trading city on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Paul is writing to a people he had previously invested into (Acts 19-20). The believers there existed as a small congregation before he came, but in a few years, God shook the entire city and the gospel extended throughout the entire region (Acts 19:10; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9).

Ephesians is broken into two main parts

1. Chapters 1-3 are focussed on securing our identity in our position in Christ, the emphasis is on the vertical relationship we have with God that gives us purpose. We are His body, the church recreated to do good works.
2. Chapters 4-6 are looking at how we live out our identity in love and unity and in relationship with others and submission to Jesus our Lord.

Central to this letter is the idea that the church as “Christ’s body” is the Spirit-formed church—incarnating Jesus’ continuing ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. We live in unity as one body in our families, our neighbourhoods, and churches because of God's grace.

Greetings – Ephesians 1:1-2

Every good letter starts with an introduction and this is somewhat of a typical ancient greeting. Paul states his credentials for writing and passes his usual and distinctive Christian greeting of grace and peace, found in seven other letters but is also two main themes he will mention throughout the letter.

God’s Master Plan – Ephesians 1:3-10

From eternity past the Father has purposed to choose and bless a covenant people (Genesis 12:1-3).

Through Jesus anyone can be adopted into that family. In Christ we can be saved from the penalty of our sin and find God’s grace.

In Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. These are blessings relating to life in the Spirit. The realm where the promises of God’s Word and the gifts of the Spirit are available through God’s grace – the presence of His Spirit at work in you.

Sons and Daughters – Ephesians 1:4-6

God brings us into a relationship not of servant to master but of a son or daughter to a father.

The all-encompassing work of the Son of God accomplished redemption, thus bringing full acceptance by the Father.

The Father sees us in the beloved Son and everything that is accomplished by His Son has been carried into our lives.

We can claim no merit before the Father. Grace is found only in the beloved Son through faith.

If the words chosen, adopted, and accepted child, actually rang true and were wholeheartedly accepted by every follower of Jesus, it would transform the way we relate to God the Father and to one another.

For the Praise of His Glory – Ephesians 1:11-14

It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for – the praise of His glory.

God's presence by the Holy Spirit in our lives now, is a down payment for what is a promised future. This future promise or inheritance will be the flooding of the whole earth and heaven with His presence and grace.

The Holy Spirit at work, in and through you, is to the praise of God's glory!

Response

Paul outlines an incredible list of blessings given to those who follow Christ. These blessings describe our position in Christ – the foundation of our walk, ministry and mission as a Christ follower. Without both an understanding and appropriation of these blessings, even though we are infinitely rich spiritually, we will remain impoverished and powerless. When we understand and appropriate all that we have in Christ through the power of His Spirit in us, we will be transformed into dynamic and powerful believers, able to play our part in Christ's transformational work in bringing His kingdom to earth.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your personal response to this incredible passage concerning your inheritance as a Christ follower?
2. What difference would it make to your life if you really lived in the fullness of that inheritance?
3. If we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, why is it that we so often feel discontent in our lives? How do these verses help?
4. What difference has the residence of the Holy Spirit as an outcome of salvation made in you?
5. If Christ is the centre of God's plans for everything, is He at the centre of yours? How should our priorities be shaped by Ephesians 1:3-14?