

STUDY 1: INTRO AND EPHESIANS 1:1-11

You are about to look at a letter that one of the apostles, Paul wrote to a group of churches in the area of Ephesus. This guide is for you as a leader. Share as much of it with the group as you find helpful. There are activities you can do with your group to help them understand the passage more fully while getting to know one another. Also, there are questions for you to ask your group and to guide them in their understanding of this letter. After most questions are my own musings and answers. Use as you find helpful.

Along with this guide is a copy of the same questions you can give to your group members. They do not include my own musings. For those in your group that like to prepare before hand or take notes while you discuss, these will be very beneficial. Lastly, this study has been written for reading the Scriptures in the NIV.

• Context

In any Bible study, the most important element is to keep the context in front of the group at all times. It's easy to look at the passages through our own context and that will change the meaning of the passage all together. Also, a rule of thumb I always keep in front of groups is: "Turn to what you DO know to answer what you DON'T know."

So, let's get to know the context of this letter.

The first context is to know who Paul was. To learn his story will help you to more fully understand this letter. Encourage your group to read Paul's story before the first week, or in between week 1 and 2. It can be found in Acts 9-28.

The second context to keep in mind is the context of the area of Ephesus and why Paul wrote this letter. Ephesus is the capital city of the Roman province of "Asia". It was known during that time by being the home of the largest theatre-holding up to 50,000 people. Around 51 AD, Paul, at the end of his second missionary journey stayed here briefly (Act 18:18-21). During his third missionary journey, Paul remained here for a few years (Acts 19). When he wrote this letter, it was a young church.

• Outline

The letter to the Ephesians can be broken down in simplicity by the following outline:

- Chapters 1-2: KNOW the good news of Jesus
- Chapter 3: GROW in Jesus intellectually and introspectively
- Chapter 4-6:9: SHOW Jesus as servants and salt/light
- Chapter 6:10-24: GO in Jesus to the World fully armed.

• Activity:

- ❖ To more fully understand Paul's heart for the church in Ephesus, read Acts 20:13-38 as a group. Notice his amazing speech and time of prayer with the elders of the Ephesus church.
 - Talk as a group about statements Paul makes that displays his deep love for this church. Then share about an individual or group of people in your life that you have had this type of love for and why?
- ❖ After sharing your stories, someone read the following verses again:
 - Acts 20:22-23, 25, 38

Paul knew what his future would bring. Paul wrote the letter we are about to dig into from prison--probably in Rome. The belief is that he was arrested for bringing a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28-29). Ephesus was a Greek, port city and therefore brought many people from different cultural heritages. Yet it was by far predominantly Greek (or during that time also called Gentile). So, it had the opportunity to fully display what it meant to be "one in Christ". Yet Paul found himself in prison for doing just that.

While Paul was in prison, a young slave named Onesimus came and visited him. Onesimus had become a follower of Christ and came to assist Paul. Yet he ran away from his master who was also a follower of Christ. Paul returned Onesimus to his master, Philemon (you can read this story in the book of Philemon) who lived in Colosse. Paul sent another worker, Tychicus with Onesimus back to Colosse. They would have landed in Ephesus on their way back. This gave Paul the opportunity to send both letters, Colossians and Ephesians, with Tychicus to be delivered to those churches. This is the reason why the two letters are so similar. Yet, the letter to the Ephesians was written in broader terms that could have been read to any church on the way as well.

• READ EPHESIANS 1:1-10

- ❖ What do we learn about those in Ephesus that he is writing to?
- ❖ Paul begins this letter with worship and recognizing that God has blessed them with every spiritual blessing. Without unpacking the meaning of all of the things he mentions, list the things that Paul is worshipping God for:

- ❖ Six times Paul mentions how God goes about making all of this possible. How did God go about making this happen?
- ❖ Paul uses the words “chose” and “predestined”. Before talking about your own understanding of these words, what does Paul say they were “chosen” for and “predestined” for?
- ❖ While we may carry differing views on what it means to be “predestined” we cannot get around the fact that Scripture uses words like “chosen before the creation of the world”. What is your own understanding of this language and what, if anything is bothersome?
- ❖ In most major “theological” issues, there can be a tendency to focus so much on the issue that you miss the bigger points. In this passage, Paul is worshipping God! What do we learn about God and his pleasures and will?
- **READ EPHESIANS 1:11-14**
 - ❖ Paul talks about himself and the other apostles in 11, using the same language he just used. What was the purpose for God choosing Paul?
 - ❖ Paul then shows how God's plan plays out through him and to the Ephesians. What is the process Paul describes of the Ephesians “inclusion”?
 - ❖ Why were the Ephesians included?
 - ❖ To finish your time in this first study, have a worship service by simply telling your story of being “included in Christ”. How did you hear the good news? Where did you recognize God's forgiveness and his love being lavished on you?
 - ❖ Since our story is not just ultimately about us, how do you see God using you for His glory?

STUDY 2: EPHESIANS 1:15-2:10

Last week, Paul rejoiced with the Ephesians in that he and they both have been “included” in salvation because of God's love towards them. For many Christians, our understanding of the “good news” stops at this point-that we are ‘saved’.

- **Activity**

There are many things in our lives that we have only the end result in mind and miss all the elements between the beginning and end. Example: I want to get an “A” on a test but once the test is over, I don't care if I remember any of the information.

 - ❖ Share how you see this in yourself and/or in your children if you have kids. Give practical examples.
- **READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23**
 - ❖ Paul talks about some of the things he's been doing. What are the actions that Paul is taking in these verses?
 - ❖ Last week Paul was excited that the Ephesians knew salvation in Jesus. In this section, what is Paul's greatest desire?
 - ❖ Paul recognizes that there is great blessing for those that believe in Christ. What are all the ways that Paul hopes for them to know God better and all the ways he longs for the Ephesians to grow?
 - ❖ How does Paul describe the “incomparably great power” of God?
 - ❖ If you are a believer in Jesus, what does it practically mean for you that God would display the same power he used to raise Jesus from the dead in your life? Where would you like to know this power in your life?
 - ❖ Matthew 28:18-20 is known as the great commission. Read this passage. It can be broken into 3 parts: 1-authority and power of Jesus; 2-more disciples; 3-better disciples. Chapter 1 of Ephesians can be summarized in the same way. Where do you see these 3 elements in Chapter 1?

- ❖ Larry Crabb, in his book "Connecting", describes how these 3 elements flow and work together in this quote:

Releasing the power of God through our lives into the hearts and souls of others requires that we both understand and enter into a kind of relating that only the gospel makes possible, a kind of relating that I call 'connecting'. This kind of relating depends entirely on deep fellowship with Christ and then spills over on to other people with the power to change their lives, not always on our timetable or in the ways we expect but as the sovereign Spirit moves.

In reflection of this quote, how do/could you see these 3 elements playing out in your life personally?

- ❖ In the same way that verses 7-8 is a definition of what it means for Jesus to be Savior, verses 20-23 is a definition of what it means that Jesus is Lord. God is the one that makes Jesus Savior and Lord regardless of our belief. But what do you think it means to "accept Jesus as Lord and Savior"?

- **READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

- ❖ Paul gives a "before and after" picture of the lives of those that are now believers. Compare and contrast the life described in 1-3 with 4-7.
- ❖ What made all of this true of those that are believers in Christ?
- ❖ In verses 9-11, Paul talks about the role of works by describing what it did do and what it does not do. What is the role of works in the believer's life?
- ❖ What are the works that you recognize God is doing through you? If you are doing this study as a group, take time to tell one another the works you see God doing in them to build his kingdom.

STUDY 3: EPHESIANS 2:11-3:13

Since the time of the fall, the image of separation is prevalent throughout the Bible. Most vivid is the separation between God and man. Our world displays this image even more drastically.

- **Activity**

Think of all the ways you can that our world displays the image of "separation". As you name them, talk about what it might look like for those images to be reversed and to be "united".

- **Read Ephesians 2:11-22**

- ❖ There is healthiness of always remembering your story and from where you have come. What does Paul call the Ephesians to remember?
- ❖ What was the turning point for the Gentiles and what are the results that Paul list?
- ❖ In verses 16-18, Paul describes what Jesus has done for both the Gentile and the Jews. For each group, how has Jesus "reconciled them to God" and given both "access to the Father"? How were each foreign to God? Romans 1 and 2 can help you to see this.
- ❖ If Paul were writing this passage to us today, what people groups would you want him to replace "Jew and Gentile" with? Why?
- ❖ There is a role we each play in seeing these divisions as no longer divisions. What are the two things Paul is calling the Ephesians to do and how can you do the same thing?
- ❖ Paul ended said in 1:17 that he longs for God to "give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Before leaving Chapter 2, how would you summarize what Paul wants them to KNOW about Jesus in this chapter?

- **Read 3:1-6**

- ❖ Paul goes back and remembers his own story. What do we learn about the “mystery” made known to him?
- ❖ Paul states before this that he is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles.” In light of this, why do you think Paul is in prison?
- ❖ Again, there is a role we each play in bringing unity to the divisions we see. It meant prison for Paul. In looking at the divisions you have been thinking about, what might it mean for you? For others?

- **Read 3:7-13**

- ❖ Paul has used the image of being a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” and now uses the image of being a “servant of this gospel”. What is the reason he gives for being both of these things? How does this encourage you?
- ❖ How is Paul able to see himself in this way?
- ❖ How does Paul describe his calling?
- ❖ Why does Paul say that God kept this mystery hidden and now revealed it?
- ❖ In verse 10, the “authorities in the heavenly realms” is referring to the same authorities Paul mentions in 2:1-2 and 6:11-12: Satan and his host. As you ponder this verse, it should make you amazed at the role of the church in the eternal purposes of God. How does the church make known the “manifold wisdom of God” to these powers?
- ❖ Paul asks them to not be discouraged. His imprisonment is part of the wisdom of God being played out. Remembering why Paul was imprisoned, how is it a display of the wisdom of God?

- ❖ Paul has given new “intellectual” insight to his readers to help them GROW in their understanding of the gospel and the role of the church. In light of this information, how does this challenge your approach to “church”? What is the church, its role and your part in this?
- ❖ In the next few studies, we will see how Paul describes what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ. To end this study, spend time asking God to help you understand and embrace the eternal power of the church and your role in that. Spend time confessing ways that you may have undervalued the role of the church. Thank him for including you!

STUDY 4: EPHESIANS 3:14- 4:16

The Myers-Briggs is an amazing test that measures people in 4 areas. If you have never taken the Myers-Briggs, I would recommend you doing so. The goal is to help you identify the way you most regularly approach each area. One of the areas it measures is how a person makes decisions: either by Thinking or Feeling. This doesn't mean that all decisions are made this way, just which way you would lean.

- **Activity:**

As a group, go around the room and have the group guess how they would see each individual most likely making decisions: by Thinking or by Feeling. Then have the individual share with the group what they notice about themselves.

At the end of the last study, Paul had written the Ephesians about some very "intellectual" information about the church to help the GROW. Because growth should happen both "intellectually" and "introspectively", (Thinking and Feeling) Paul now writes about the other side.

- **Read Ephesians 3:14-21**

- ❖ Paul starts this section with "For this reason": what is the reason he is referring to?
- ❖ Paul directs his prayers toward what is going on in them "introspectively" (in their "inner being"). What are all the things he prays for them?
- ❖ Paul was an extremely "knowledgeable" man. Read Philippians 3:4-6 and his story in Acts to see this. In Ephesians 3:19, he confesses though that the love of Christ "surpasses knowledge". For those that are "thinkers" what does this say to you? For those that are "feelers" what does this say to you?

- **Read Ephesians 4:1-13**

- ❖ In Chapters 1-3, Paul has built a foundation of which he now calls the Ephesians to build upon. He is now calling them to "live out" all that he has just written about. What are the ways he calls them to SHOW Christ?
- ❖ From this list of ways he calls the Ephesians to SHOW Christ, which one(s) do you struggle with the most and how would you ask God to grow you?

- ❖ The Jews and Gentiles were completely divided up until Christ. Imagine you were reading verses 4-6 as each party. What would these words say to each?
- ❖ Verses 7-10, Paul takes off on a tangent. Why does he throw in this tangent?
- ❖ What is the purpose of Christ giving grace for each to play these different roles?
- ❖ Paul tells us in these verses that our gifts are to help others grow. How are you using your gifts in the church to help others grow? If you are not, what steps can you take to do so?

- **Read Ephesians 4:14-16**

- ❖ If we each use our unique gifts according to the measure of grace Jesus gives us, what will be the result in the church?
- ❖ These are very powerful words that should challenge your entire view of Serving in the church. Being honest, what would keep you from taking significant steps to discovering your giftedness and doing all that you can to "do your work" in the church of Christ?
- ❖ End your time in this study taking verses 3:16-19 and praying them as a group (or for yourself). If you are doing this study as a group, have each person pray the entire prayer for the person on their right. Below, I have made the prayer first person to easily pray it over another:

Jesus, I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen (name of person here) with power through your Spirit in their inner being, so that Christ may dwell in (name of person here) through faith. And I pray that (name of person here), being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that (name of person here) may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Amen!

STUDY 5: EPHESIANS 4:17-5:21

Part of the decorating craze today is creatively using items in ways they were not meant to be used. Many of the “home redesign” shows are built around creatively using items that were created for one purpose to serve another purpose.

- **Activity**

- ❖ As a group, talk about items you have seen or used yourself for a purpose different than it was originally created. What were things you saw that you liked and what were things you saw that you didn't like?

- **Read Ephesians 4:17-24**

- ❖ In Chapter 2, Paul makes it clear that the mystery of the gospel is that Gentiles and Jews are now alike in Christ. So, why do you think he emphasizes to no longer live like the Gentiles? Why did he not say, no longer live like the Jews?

- ❖ What are all the ways Paul describes the Gentile culture? You also may want to read Romans 1:18-32 to see how Paul unpacks this description.

- ❖ What are the ways Paul describes the believers in the church?

- ❖ In both descriptions, Paul talks about their actions. What does he say is the root of the actions of each?

- ❖ For many that enter the church, it is because of a growing hate toward some of their behavior. So, they want to change. Many are told to change their behavior-stop doing the things they are doing. What would Paul's counsel be instead?

- **Read Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

- ❖ Paul now makes a list of the ways the church should treat one another. But what does he say is the ultimate reason? Hint: what is the “therefore” there for?

- ❖ What are all the ways Paul tells the church to stop behaving?

- ❖ What are the ways he calls the church to behave?

- ❖ What are the “new attitudes of the mind” Paul gives for behaving these ways?

- ❖ In looking at the list of the ways Paul said to “stop” behaving, which are the ones you struggle with the most?

- ❖ In looking at the list of the ways Paul said to “start” behaving, which would you desire to grow in the most?

- ❖ Looking at the list of reasons Paul says to start behaving these ways, which of these “new attitudes of the mind” do you believe would help you the most to cling to?

- **Read Ephesians 5:3-7**

- ❖ Paul puts stronger emphasis on other actions here that should not be entertained. What are the actions he list in vs. 3 and then the list in vs. 4?

- ❖ In verse 5, Paul labels the actions he list in vs. 3 as idolatry. In what way do verses 3 and 4 compare to the 2 greatest commandments found in Matt 22:37-39?

- **Read Ephesians 5:8-20**

- ❖ Again, Paul puts emphasis on the way a follower of Christ should live. It is clear that our lives look differently than they used to. What does he discuss in this section as to ways we should “not” live?

- ❖ What are the ways he says to live?

- ❖ During the time of Paul's writing, verses 19-20 were a part of the way the church lived with each other. It was not "weird". If Paul were writing this today, what do you think he would write instead?
- ❖ Looking at both lists, which actions do you struggle with and in which actions would you like to grow?
- ❖ Paul gives the secret to being able to rid ourselves of the actions we need to rid ourselves of and taking on the ones we should take on in 5:21. Read this verse. If you are in a group, have each member of the group go around the room and read this verse out loud, one at a time.
- ❖ Our reverence for Christ is what Paul prayed would grow for the Ephesians in 3:14-19. This week, have each member of the group pray this verse for the person on their left, again, putting it in first person.

Jesus, I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen (name of person here) with power through your Spirit in their inner being, so that Christ may dwell in (name of person here) through faith. And I pray that (name of person here), being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that (name of person here) may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Amen!

STUDY 6: EPHESIANS 5:22-6:24

The second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself." Yet, most of the time we are tempted to "treat our neighbors as they have treated us." Part of Showing Christ is the way we serve and love one another.

- **Activity**
 - ❖ Tell about a time in which you "loved" another person in a way that was completely opposite from what that persons behavior or attitude deserved to be treated. What did they deserve and why did you love them the way you did?
 - ❖ What type of person (attitude, behavior, lifestyle, personality) is the hardest person for you to love and why?
- **Read Ephesians 5:23-33**
 - ❖ This is a section of Scripture that is very familiar to people and has become very controversial in Western society. Before discussing this section, read 5:22 again. What is the command Paul gives here and why has he given it?
 - ❖ Before digging into 22-24, let's look at 25-31 first. What are the ways the husband is called to love his wife?
 - ❖ In last weeks study, we looked at behaviors that would be counter-cultural. How would these actions have gone against the culture during Paul's time of writing?
 - ❖ How would these actions be counter-cultural today?
 - ❖ If you are a woman, what would it practically look like to you to be loved in this way? If you are a man, what do you think it would look like to love your spouse in this way?
 - ❖ Now, looking back at 22-24, what are the ways a wife is called to love her husband?

- ❖ In the original Greek, there are two words used that are translated in English as “submit”. The word “*dogmatizo*” is used and means to “submit to rules”. The word “*hupotasso*” means “to voluntarily subject oneself.” What are the differences in these 2 words?
- ❖ Here, Paul uses the Greek word “*hupotasso*”. How would this be counter-cultural during Paul’s time? How about now?
- ❖ If you are a man, what would it practically look like to you to be loved by your wife in this way? If you are a woman, what do you think it would look like to love your spouse in this way?
- ❖ It would be easier to love a spouse if they were to first love you in the way shown here. So, most spouses wait until the other loves them in this manner. But why does Paul say to love one another this way? (Hint: 22)
- ❖ What is the reason Paul tells us he is giving this example in 32?
- ❖ How does he summarize the relationship between a husband and a wife?
- **Read Ephesians 6:1-9**
 - ❖ Paul continues to talk about relationships people are in. What does he call children to do in relationship with their parents? How about Fathers to their children?
 - ❖ Part of the reality of Paul’s time is slavery. But a slave during that time was someone that owed a debt to another and had to work it off. How does Paul call the one in slavery to treat their earthly masters?
 - ❖ How are Masters called to treat those in slavery to them?
- ❖ Again, Paul’s call in each of these relationships is to love the other in the way they would love themselves and out of a love and fear of God. In thinking about your own relationships, who are people that you struggled to love in this way? Who are you waiting to love you first before you love them?
- **Read Ephesians 6:10-20**
 - ❖ Over and over, Paul has talked about the “heavenly realms” and “authority and powers” in Ephesians (1:3, 10, 20-22; 2:2, 6; 3:10-11). What are the ways that the “powers of the dark world” display themselves in relationships?
 - ❖ When our relationships are broken, we tend to take it out on that person. How does verse 12 help you to approach these broken relationships?
 - ❖ Draw a picture of a “stick person”. On this person, put the “armor of God” on them by writing the words Paul uses in the location of this armor. Which of these pieces of armor stand out to you personally and why?
 - ❖ What is the only “offensive” weapon that Paul describes and why is this important?
 - ❖ This last section is Paul’s call to GO and he describes the armor we are to wear as we GO. On top of all the armor, how does Paul call us to pray?
- **Read Ephesians 6:21-24**
 - ❖ Paul closes his letter with final words to his friends. After sitting in Ephesians these past weeks, what would be your final “take away” from this letter?

End your time praying that God might allow you to Know Jesus more, Grow in Jesus more, Show Jesus more, and Go in Jesus more.