



Sterling

Study Guide to *Ephesians*

How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups to read and discuss Scripture together. It is meant to be life-giving, not a chore. If this becomes a chore, change it or use something different.
- Use what you find helpful, but do not let yourself be bound to the guide. Feel free to expand what you like and disregard what is not helpful for your group. Do not force conversation, but allow it to come naturally. Some parts will speak more to some groups than to others.
- This study has been divided into sections that should be readable in one sitting together. Again, do not be bound to the guide. If you read more or less than what is planned, that is okay. Work at your own pace.
- There are two models of questions provided to guide your conversation. There are **general questions** that can be applied to any text, as well as **text specific questions**. Use what works best for your group, or both.
- Remember to read Scripture in context. It is easy for us to pick and choose what we like and to miss the bigger picture. Be mindful of the difficulty of reading in context especially when we only read short sections at a time.
- Read, listen, share, pray. Allow the Spirit to work.

General Questions (can be asked after each section)

1. Which parts of this text resonated with you? Which parts did you like?
2. Which parts of this text did not resonate with you? Which parts did you not like?
3. Which parts of this text did you not understand? What questions do you have?
4. Which parts of this text teach you something about God?
5. Which parts of this text can you apply in your daily life?

Background to *Ephesians*

- The book of *Ephesians* is a letter attributed to Paul, written around AD 60.
- This letter is less personal than other letters by Paul, suggesting this was written with the purpose of being distributed among many different churches. This is a letter for the church as a whole.
- It is likely that Paul was writing this letter from prison as he refers to himself being bound or in chains several times in this letter.
- As the church was just beginning but spreading quickly, many forms of conflict emerged. The Gentiles were new to this faith but were welcomed in as fellow believers. But it was clear that disdain existed between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Major Themes

- The first three chapters outline the grace of God for all of humanity. The last three chapters outline what our response to that grace should be.
- God's plan has always been that the whole world would be redeemed. We were made for relationship with God.
- The centre piece of God's work in the world is God, not us. He is in control. He is the one who saves. We are saved because He wants it to be so.
- Christians are called to unity and working together. We are one body.
- The Christian life is a moral life. God doesn't just call us to do whatever we want. There is a clear way to life, and that life is a battle.

Text Specific Questions

1. Paul's introduction in Ephesians (1:1-2) does not include the usual greetings and individual messages as some of his other letters. This is interpreted to mean that Paul meant this letter to be distributed to the church in Ephesus as a whole. How might this influence the way we read this letter, some 2,000 years later?
2. Our spiritual blessing (1:3) is shown to us in God's choosing us to be holy and blameless (1:4). The forgiveness and redemption we are given is described as lavish (1:8). How have you experienced God's spiritual blessings that He has freely given us?
3. What is the mystery that has been finally made known to us (1:9)? Why is it described as a mystery? What does it mean that God's plan was always to bring all things under Christ (1:10)?
4. Predestination, as Paul uses it, is not in conflict with human free will. It has more to do with God's plan and intention. We are made to be in relationship with God, whether we choose it or not. God longs to save all of us, whether we want it or not. How does this understanding of predestination affect how we read 1:11-14?
5. What is Paul saying in his prayer for the people (1:15-23)? What if we use this prayer as we pray for others?

Text Specific Questions

1. The dichotomy of life and death is not uncommon to the Bible. Paul again emphasizes that we have been made alive through Christ (2:5). What does that life look like? What does being dead in our transgressions (2:1) mean?
2. We have been saved by grace through faith (2:8). But sometimes we believe we are saved by our faith because of grace. What is the difference between these two statements? One puts the emphasis on us and one puts it on God. Grace is God's act and faith is our response. How can we shift the focus on God?
3. There was clear hostility between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Imagine what it might have been like for the early church to blend such different groups of people into one church, and accepting each other.
4. Christ's plan of redemption involved removing the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles (2:14). This would not have been an easy proposition as each side thought the other did not belong. But Christ came preaching peace (2:17). How does the life of Christ break down walls of hostility in our lives and church?
5. Those who are in Christ are now part of the same family (2:19). How can we live this out in our context? What does it mean for Christ to be the cornerstone (2:20)?

Text Specific Questions

1. Paul mentions another mystery, which he, as a minister of the gospel is able to share. This mystery is that Gentiles are heirs together with Israel (3:6). What is the inheritance the family of God is given? Who is now welcomed into the family of God?
2. Although Paul is so well known for his work in the early church, he still considers himself to be the least of the people of God (3:8). How might humility help us understand the grace of God?
3. Paul reminds us that God's plan to make His presence known is to use the church (3:10). What does that mean for us and our ministry as members of the church? How have we shared this mystery of Christ?
4. Because of God's grace and plan, we are able to approach God with faith and confidence (3:12). What does that mean for us? How might this affect our prayer?
5. What might it mean to take Paul's prayer (3:14-21) for ourselves or pray it for others?

Text Specific Questions

1. The universal (throughout time and space) church is once again described as the body of Christ of which Christ is the head (4:4,15-16). How might we unpack this imagery? What does it mean to be part of the body?
2. We are implored to keep the unity of the Spirit (4:3). How have we witnessed this going well or not well in our church life? What does it mean to be unified? What is required of us to make that happen (4:2)?
3. What does it mean to put off the old self and put on the new self (4:22)? How might that affect our desires, our will, our attitude, our action, our hearts?
4. Paul gives a long list of the things we should and should not do as children of God (4:25-5:20). Which ones of these make sense to us and which do not? Which do we have trouble with? Which is the Holy Spirit convicting us of and changing us in?
5. If we are children of the light, we should live as such (5:8). How do we allow God to work through us rather than to try to figure it all out on our own? What does it mean to expose things we keep hidden to the light?

Text Specific Questions

1. This passage about relationships cannot be separated from the rest of the letter. It is from the context of God's grace and our response that Paul invites us to submit to one another (5:21). What does it mean to submit to each other? How might this mutual call shape the rest of Paul's instructions for households?
2. Why should we submit to one another? How does the life of Jesus exemplify service and submission?
3. Describe the different relationships of wives-husbands (5:22-33), children-parents (6:1-4), and slaves-masters (6:5-9). What does Paul say about each one? What is each one called to do?
4. Whenever we use Bible passages as a way to oppress or control, we run into big problems. Instead of using these passages to tell others what to do, read them from your perspective. What are you called to do? As a husband, wife, child, parent, servant or boss, what does it mean for you to submit?
5. Paul uses the metaphor of Christ and the church to describe the husband and the wife (5:25-27)? How might this help us understand the role of a spouse in marriage? How might we live this out?

Text Specific Questions

1. In this last section of Ephesians, Paul introduces us to the battle that we, as Christians are all engaged in. It is a war that takes place not against the physical, but the spiritual (6:12). Many people have different beliefs about this. What is your understanding of the spiritual realm, the presence of evil and spiritual warfare?
2. Paul does not question the battle, but tells us how we are to fight - by arming ourselves with the armour of God (6:13). This imagery is a great way for us to remember the things that God has gifted us with for this battle. What are the pieces of armour? How might they help us in the fight to live the Christian life?
3. The armour of God is God's gift to us. They are not the tools we bring to the table. How can we rely on God and trust in him in this battle?
4. Prayer is such an important part of this fight which Paul encourages us to do always (6:18). How do we use prayer? What troubles might we have with prayer? How has prayer helped us in life?
5. Take Paul's closing words (6:23-24) as a benediction for you as you go out to fight the good fight.