



ephesians
God's plan for the body of Christ

11 studies for Individuals, Groups or 1:1

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Welcome to **God's plan for the body of Christ**

This series of eleven studies is designed to accompany the teaching series at Trinity Mount Barker during May—June 2015.

Ephesians is a most wonderful letter for the people of God—His church. It sets out for us what it means for people to become what we are *in Christ*. It identifies the objective reality for people who have received God's undeserved favour and who have been made alive *in Christ*; and then it tells us how we might become what we are. In the same way that we are made alive and raised *in Christ*, we have every spiritual blessing *in Him* that influences how we live. It has been said that Ephesians is one of the most significant documents ever written that even matches the book of Romans in its impact and influence on Christian thought and spirituality. It is a book that positions the local church at the centre of God's purposes for the world and reveals to us God's plans for redeeming His creation through it. It challenges our consumerist and individualistic views of what it means to be 'saved' and our relationship with the people of God to which we are called and of which we are a vital part. Ephesians reveals the hope of the world in the local church *in Christ*.

Each of the studies is presented in three sections. **Open** questions are intended to start discussion and help people feel comfortable sharing in a group. The **Read** section accounts for most of the questions and should be the main focus of each session. With these questions, Bible Study Group Leaders should encourage people to *answer from the passage* rather than from knowledge of other parts of the Bible. The **Reflect** questions may be used for group discussion or private contemplation and reflection.

Ephesians is a short letter of only six chapters that takes around 30 mins to read. It's sometimes very easy to get caught up in the specific details of a piece of text without really seeing the thrust of the whole — so there's great value in reading the whole letter in one sitting in order to understand the big picture; as you do this you may want to ask yourself the question — *'How does the whole letter look back to the big point in Ephesians 1:10?* We encourage you to read the whole of Ephesians out loud together as a group in your first Bible Study Group session as this will

give a feel for the main ideas of what is being communicated (*this was also how the letter would have first been heard in the early Christian church*).

At Trinity Mount Barker our Bible Study Groups normally explore a study in the week leading up to the sermon. Our purpose in adopting this approach is to encourage the study of Scripture that is not influenced by having already heard the sermon, and allows groups and individuals to independently '*wrestle with the Bible*' in each of the studies.

These studies can also be used for private study or undertaken with a friend, but we encourage you to join a Bible Study Group to gain the benefit of group learning that promotes our growing toward maturity in Christ. If you are doing these studies individually, we encourage you to let someone know, and arrange a time to meet with them to tell them how God's Word is changing your life and to pray together.

In order to get the most out of these studies, you can do three things each week before your study time:

1. **Read the passage in advance** (it really helps your understanding to read it out aloud to yourself)
2. **Pray** that God would help you to understand it more fully and how it applies to you
3. **Think about the passage**, and if you have time, take a look at the questions in the Study Guide.

This will certainly help you, but an even better principle is to think about how you can serve each other. Your preparation and attendance will help your brothers and sisters in Christ as they come together each week, so please do make it a priority.

Recommended Reading

- ❑ Clinton Arnold — Ephesians [*Exegetical Commentary of the NT*]
- ❑ Peter O'Brian — The Letter to the Ephesians [*Pillar NT Commentary*]
- ❑ Simon Austen — Teaching Ephesians [*Proclamation Trust Resources*]
- ❑ John Stott — The Message of Ephesians [*Bible Speaks Today*]
- ❑ Lee Gatiss — Ephesians Study Notes for Leaders [[*St Helen's Bishopsgate Bible Study Resources*](#)]
- ❑ [christianbiblestudies.com](#) — Ephesians—You are God's Masterpiece [*Study Through the Bible*]

Study 1 — 'Chosen In Christ

Ephesians 1:1-14

Open

Why do you think it's difficult for some people to trust God with their lives?

What work(s) of God do you most frequently give thanks for?

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

What confidence and expectation do we have as we read the opening of Ephesians (see 1:1-2 and 3:4-6)?

What does it mean that the believer '*has been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ*' (1:3; see also 1:19-22; 2:6)?

How can we be '*holy and blameless*' in his sight when we obviously still do things wrong (v4) (see v7)?

Split up into pairs to look at the spiritual blessings in this passage:

- **In the first column:** List all the spiritual blessings you see in this passage
- **In the second column:** Label each blessing according to whether it relates to the past, present or future
- **In the third column:** Decide whether the Father (God), Son (Jesus) or the Holy Spirit contributes to each blessing

What we receive	When we receive it (Past / Present / Future)	Who gives it to us

What stands out for you personally in this list of spiritual blessings?

What do you think are the differences between spiritual blessings and other kinds of blessings?

How do we become a part of what God is doing?

How do we become aware of and receive the blessings of God?

How would you explain the difference between what (blessings) a Christian already has and what is / are yet to come?

Why does Paul use 'we', 'you' and 'our' in verses 11-13?

How is the Holy Spirit our guarantee or security of things to come (v13-14)?

Reflect

What does it mean to you that God has adopted you into his family?

What do you think it will look like for Jesus to be '*head over everything*' (v2) and with all things '*under Christ*' (v10)?

In what ways have these verses changed your thinking (about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, yourself, the church)?

In verse 12, Paul speaks about living '*for the praise of his glory*'. What does this mean and what does it look like for us to do this in our lives?

How might this passage affect our thinking and behaviour (it's helpful to think about how the truths of this passage was expected to affect the Ephesians — see 4:1, 17, 25-32)

How should this passage shape our prayers?

Study 2 — ‘Christ in the heavenly realms’

Ephesians 1:15-23

Open

In what ways do you struggle with prayer?

What do you normally pray for Christian people you don't know?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

What does Paul pray for the Ephesians? Break down what he says into (at least 6) different prayer requests.

Why do you think Paul tells them what he's praying for them (i.e. what's the point of Paul reporting the content of his quiet times)?

Paul thanks God for the love and faith of the Ephesian church. In what ways do we see the gospel realities of this passage being worked out in our own church?

How does Paul describe the church in these verses? How does this differ from your understanding of what church is all about?

What has God done to demonstrate His power?

Where is Jesus now? Why is this important for our understanding of Ephesians?

What does it mean that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you (v19–20)?

List all the things these verses tell you about Christ (v19b–23)?

What does it mean (for Jesus) to be the head of the church?

How is Jesus '*the fullness of Him who fills all in all*'?

Reflect

What does it mean to you that you are God's inheritance?

How does realising how great Christ is affect your own confidence in him?

How does this prayer change your view of the church? What role does the church play in your life?

What difference could praying this prayer make to us as a church?

How does it compare to the content of your prayers (for our church) today?

In what ways might this prayer shape your praying for our church in the future?

Study 3 — ‘Amazing Grace’

Ephesians 2:1-10

Open

What part of your past still haunts you? Why?

Do you believe that God has forgiven you for that past? Why or why not?

What can be the problem with not leaving your past behind?

What do you think it would take to leave that past behind?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

How is humanity described in 2:1-3? In what way does this description surprise you?

What were the Ephesians like before they became Christ followers?

What does Paul mean when he says they are dead? Clearly he can't mean they are physically dead can he?

Paul says that those who are dead gratify the cravings of their flesh and follow its desires and thoughts. How do you see that play out in the lives of people who are not Christians?

From the passage who is it that is deserving of wrath?

How would you define God's wrath in your own words?

What has God done about this (name 3 things God did about our dead state through Jesus)? Why has He done it?

What is the effect for believers? What difference does it make to our lives?

Why are vv8-9 so important? And how do they help you point people away from yourself and to God?

Reflect

What do you think life would be like right now if you had not become a Christian?

Split into pairs and think about how you would explain salvation to a Non-Christian.

Given that our salvation comes from Christ, what value is there in doing 'good deeds'?

What do you think these good works look like in your own life?

What do you think hinders you in doing the '*good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do?*

Study 4 — ‘God’s Building’

Ephesians 2:11-22

Open

What examples of hostility between groups of people exist in our world today?

What does inclusion require?

Why do we often find ourselves at odds with Christians who believe or live differently than we do?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

What is the link between Ephesians 2:1-10 and Ephesians 2:11-22?

How many different kinds of people in this passage are there, and who are they?

In what ways does Paul say that the Gentiles are excluded?

What does Paul want his Gentile readers to remember? Why?

What was the key event that brought Jews and Gentiles together into a '*new humanity*' (v15; also see v13)?

What was the purpose of the death of Jesus?

What did Jesus abolish? Why might this be of particular significance to the Gentiles who received this letter?

Summarise Paul's description of the church (vv19-22). What does it mean to be '*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*' (see 3:5; 4:11)?

How is the church related to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?

How does Ephesians 2:11-22 relate back to the theme sentence of the letter as a whole (Ephesians 1:10)? In other words, how does 2:11-22 fit into God's big plan?

Why is Paul telling us all this? What does he want us to do, think, or feel as a result of reading this passage? (Does he explicitly tell us to do, think, or feel something)?

Reflect

How does this passage demonstrate that in the kingdom of God, we are all on level ground?

How does remembering that Christ is our cornerstone help us to accept those in the church who are not like us, or who disagree with us?

What are some ways that community can help you transform to be more like Christ? Give a specific example of when that has happened in your life.

What habits do you need to change in order to be more involved with other Christians?

Study 5 — 'What's the point of Church?'

Ephesians 3:1-13

Open

What was your conversion experience (i.e. when you became a Christian)?

Why would it be good to recognise that you are not an important person, but that you have an important job to do? What is the difference?

How would you define '*church*'? What features are fundamental to the people of God and which are merely cultural preference or tradition?

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

What is the link between Ephesians 2:11-22 and Ephesians 3:1-13?

Why *specifically* is Paul suffering in prison?

What are Paul's 'administration' responsibilities regarding God's grace?

What is Paul's place in God's plan to unite all things in Christ? Is he at all special and if so, how?

What is the divine '*mystery*' mentioned in vv3:3?

Who has been kept in the dark regarding this secret and why?

How was this secret revealed?

What does Paul say about his experience of the grace of God?

What two responsibilities were given to Paul in his ministry?

In contrast to keeping this mystery hidden in the past (v9), what is God's intent for the church *now*?

What is the purpose of the church, according to v10? What does that actually mean in practice?

From the letter so far, what is '*the manifold wisdom of God*' (see 1:8; 1:11-13; 2:19-22)?

What is God's eternal purpose (v11)?

According to v12, what has Christ given us?

How would Paul's experience of imprisonment (v13) be for the Ephesian's glory?

Reflect

Sometimes our mission changes as we grow and mature. How has yours changed? What is your mission at this point in your life, and why?

Are you more tempted to smugness, thinking God is lucky to have you on his team, or to complaint, thinking God isn't fair? Why do you think you are tempted toward that?

What habits or traits do you have that show you are tempted to act like you are the centre of the universe?

How might you describe yourself in terms of humility, as Paul did in this passage?

What are some ways you feel wonder at what God has done in and through you?

Why can we approach God with freedom and confidence in spite of our flaws (v12)?

What do these verses tell us about church?

How does Paul's description of church differ from your initial answer?

How might you '*do church*' differently as a result of studying this passage?

Study 6 — ‘A Prayer for Christ’s People’

Ephesians 3:14-21

Open

Thinking about the content of your prayers, what do you normally pray about? How do you decide what to pray for?

What has most helped you grasp God’s love for you?

Describe a powerful example of God’s love in your life?

What can you do to better experience God’s love in your everyday life? Brainstorm ideas.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

What is the motivation for Paul's prayer (what is the reason in '*For this reason ...*')?

Who is Paul praying for?

What is the single thing that Paul prays for (v16)? What does this mean?

If you have verse 16, what will follow from that (according to vv17-19)?

In v17 Paul prays that '*Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*'. Why does Paul ask this for the Ephesians who are Christians? Doesn't Christ dwell in them already? How does Jesus Christ dwell in our hearts?

Why does Paul use four dimensions to describe God's love (v18)?

How would you explain v19 in comparison to Ephesians 1:23?

How does v20 encourage us in light of what Paul has been praying in vv14-19?

What is different about this prayer and the one in 1:15-23? What accounts for this different emphasis?

How does God exactly '*do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine?*'

How does God '*receive glory in the church and in Christ Jesus?*'

What words or themes in 3:20-21 are echoes from the rest of chapters 1-3? How does this benediction (blessing) tie together the main themes that have run through the first three chapters of Ephesians?

Reflect

Three times in vv14-21 Paul mentions '*love*' and '*power*'. What do we learn about power and love in these verses?

What is your attitude toward church? How is it similar or different to Paul's?

What is Paul's main concern in this prayer? How will we see it being answered in our church if we pray this prayer?

How might your prayer life change as a result of studying this prayer?

What is the big idea of chapters 1-3?

Is there a pattern to Paul's writing; e.g. does he state his point, illustrate it, then apply it, or does he give a main point followed by 5 sub-points, or is there a different pattern to these chapters?

What have you learned by studying these (three) chapters and how has it made a difference in your life or the way you relate to God?

Study 7 — ‘Building the Body of Christ’

Ephesians 4:1-16

Open

Sometimes pride looks an awful lot like humility. There are times that our pride convinces us to put on a great show of what looks to all the world like humility so that we will be seen and acknowledged by others. We swell with pride when we hear, *‘He is humble’*. Why?

Pastor and Theologian John Dickson says that humility is *‘the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself’*. How does this description match your life?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

What does it mean to live a life worthy of the calling you have received?

What is the repeated word / idea in 4:1-6 and how is it related to the message of the book of Ephesians (see 1:10)?

What does God want for the Church according to this passage (4:1-16)?

Does this describe our church? If not, why not?

How do we '*bear with one another in love*'?

What is the '*unity of the Spirit*'?

Explain *how* each of the following elements plays a part in [our] salvation:

a. The Body

b. The Spirit

c. Our Hope

d. The Lord

e. Faith

f. Baptism

g. God

Why do you think Paul stresses the oneness of verses 4 and 5?

What does 4:7-10 tell us about Jesus and the church?

What does Jesus give the church to ensure that God's desires for the church are fulfilled?

In what ways do the leaders identified in v11 contribute to a healthy church?

How do these gifts operate in our church, and does it work / is it working to fulfil God's purposes for us?

What must God's people do to be mature (compare 4:13 with 4:3)?

What is the alternative to [Christian] maturity (4:14)?

What must we do to become mature and loving (4:15-16)?

What stops the church from growing up properly?

Reflect

How can you be sure you are not an 'infant' Christian?

What does Paul say a mature church will be like?

After reading the Apostle Paul's words here, what do you think will be the likely difficulties for people who try to live the Christian life without being members of a local church?

How does this practically change what we do in church and the part we play in it?

In the light of Ephesians 4:1-16, how should we pray for our church and its leaders, and other churches and their leaders?

Study 8 — ‘Learning and Living Christ’

Ephesians 4:17—5:2

Open

One writer wrote that '*Thoughts are often out of control and as natural as breathing*'. How can we change them? Name some ways that have worked for you or others you know of.

How has your language changed since you've become a Christian?

Read Ephesians 4:17—5:2

What is the structure of this long passage? How would you split it up into its component parts of bite size chunks of about 3-10 verses each?

What is the key problem with the Gentile way of life?

What does v19 tell us about the consequences of this way of life?

What is the key difference in the Christian life?

How does this section relate to 4:1-16?

What is the '*truth that is in Jesus*'?

How are we '*made new in the attitude of our minds*'?

What are the characteristics of the '*new self*'?

What do all the reasons given for living differently in vv25-32 have in common? Is there a common theme or reason for us to live differently?

How could we '*give the devil an opportunity*'?

According to the passage how and why are we to work?

What is an unwholesome word?

How could we '*grieve the Holy Spirit of God*'?

How is v32 the antidote to the issues mentioned in v31?

Looking at the two '*therefores*' of 4:25 and 5:1, what do they relate to and what do they tell us about Christian living?

What's the point of 5:1-2?

How are we meant to be '*imitators of God*'?

Reflect

How much does 4:17-19 resonate with your life?

Which of the commands in vv25-32 do you have the most difficulty following? Why?

What is the problem with the '*old self*'? What are you doing about this?

How can we change the deeply ingrained habits of our words? Give practical ideas.

If you were asked, '*What is your goal for our church?*', how would this passage shape your answer?

What does it mean to '*walk in the way of love*'?

Study 9 — ‘Children of the Light’

Ephesians 5:3-13

Open

When have you felt that you were lost in the darkness? What brought you into the light?

When you were younger, was there someone you wanted to be just like when you grew up? What about them made you want to imitate them?

Why are some offenses so hard to forgive?

What is the difference between forgiveness and trust? Are they the same? Does one automatically mean the other? How might you forgive someone that you don't trust?

Read Ephesians 5:3-13

There are several reasons from this passage why we should not indulge in the sins mentioned in v3-4. What are they, and how are they related to the rest of Ephesians?

Thinking back over the last week, how does your language compare with the list of prohibitions in v4?

What is the right alternative to these thoughts and words? Why is this so significant?

Why is greed called 'idolatry' (v5)?

How do you know whether you are [in] light or darkness (v8)?

What does it mean to '*find out what pleases the Lord*' given what we have already seen in 4:21-24?

How is this section different from 4:25-32? Why didn't Paul just include sexual immorality, impurity and greed when he addressed lying, anger, theft and bitterness in the previous section? What is different about the focus of this section?

What does it mean to '*live as children of the light*' (v 9)?

How can we expose the unfruitful works of darkness (v11) if we are not to even mention them (v12)?

As well as light exposing darkness, what else can happen (5:8, 13, 14)?

If you heard the Apostle Paul speaking about a '*spiritual person*', what do you think he would mean you to understand?

Reflect

A question for personal contemplation: Do you ever have sexually immoral or impure thoughts? If so, what would the apostle Paul say to you (5:3-7)?

Practically speaking, how are we to avoid being '*partners*' with the world without withdrawing from it? How should we live in the world?

Knowing Paul's argument in this passage, how would you answer a Christian person who says their private life is completely irrelevant to their public, Christian ministry?

Study 10 — ‘The Marriage of Life & Faith’

Ephesians 5:14—6:9

Open

How has God shown you that He is faithful and trustworthy?

What does the word ‘*submission*’ make you think of?

Is there any kind of work that you really enjoy? If so, what is it?

Read Ephesians 5:14—6:9

What does it mean to '*be careful how you live?*

Verses 15-18 contain several contrasts ('*not this, but that*'). What are they?

Why do you think Paul mentions drunkenness?

Given that drunkenness leading to debauchery is its opposite, what does being 'filled with the Spirit' mean?

Verses 19-21 unpack v18 and give at least four results of being filled with the Spirit. What are they?

Where are we to '*make melody*' and why is this so important?

According to these verses, what would you expect to see in Spirit-filled Christians — in church, alone and in relationship with others? What is their motivation?

How do we '*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*'?

What difficulties might people have when they first read vv22-33? Why might they have these difficulties?

Why should wives submit to their husbands? What example are wives to follow in this?

How much are husbands to love their wives? What example are they to follow in this?

How did Jesus Christ sanctify [make holy] and cleanse the church?

What was the great mystery?

How does the context of v22-33 help us to understand what Paul is teaching about the unity that is to exist between wives and husbands?

According to this passage, what does it mean to be a good husband/wife?

What does it mean practically for children to obey their parents?
What promise is attached to this command?

How could fathers provoke their children? Explain what it means that fathers '*bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*'?

If we think of slavery as the first century equivalent of employment, what do verses 6:5-8 tell us about our attitude to work?

Why should slaves work hard (6:8)? What motivation do *masters* (employers) have to treat their *slaves* (employees) properly? What do these two commands have in common?

Reflect

How can you live each day carefully and wisely (v15)? Give practical examples?

How do you know when you are filled with the Holy Spirit? How does your life reflect His presence?

How do you react to the idea of being told to submit to someone?

How does this passage challenge our understanding of headship and submission? If you are married, how might you need to change as a result of these words?

How can we see all the necessary details of our day as God's work? What makes them God's work?

Study 11 — 'Dressed for Battle'

Ephesians 6:10-24

Open

How would you define a spiritual battle?

Which of the following three areas is hardest for you to keep straight in your work: your mind, your will, or your emotions? How does one affect the others?

How can we know when we should seek a new job instead of staying in the one we are currently in?

Read Ephesians 6:10-24

The passage starts off with '*finally be strong in the Lord and his mighty power*'; what do you think this means?

Is spiritual warfare about marching across the land to claim the ground for Jesus according to these verses? If not, what kind of battle is it and what is our objective?

In vv11-13 why do you think Paul emphasises '*standing*'?

Read Isaiah 11:4-5; 52:7; 59:17 and make a list of all the armour mentioned, then describe what is meant by each of the parts of the armour of God in our passage:

- a. The Belt of Truth
- b. The Breastplate of Righteousness
- c. Fitting your Feet
- d. The Shield of Faith
- e. The Helmet of Salvation
- f. The Sword of the Spirit

How are we to put these on? Why?

According to Ephesians, what are the devil's schemes (2:2; 4:27)?
What does he *not* want to see in the church?

Verses 18-20 tell us that prayer needs to exist in all our spiritual warfare. What does it mean to pray in the Spirit?

What instructions are given for prayer (how should we pray and for whom should we pray)?

What does Paul ask for?

How was Paul an '*ambassador in chains*'?

Who was Tychicus? What mission did he have? How could he encourage the Ephesians?

Why should love be associated with faith?

What group of people does the grace of God rest on?

What do vv21-24 tell us about the purpose of Ephesians?

Reflect

Give an example of a spiritual battle that you know you fight daily.

If Christ has already defeated the devil, why do we still struggle in a spiritual battle?

How do Paul's prayers compare with our own? Where do we need to change?

How would you summarise the teaching of Ephesians as a whole into one sentence. Try to get the main emphases of the letter into your sentence, without making it as long as Ephesians 1:3-14!

What is the one main thing that studying Ephesians has taught you?

How has studying Ephesians changed you?

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