

## Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

## Ephesians 1:1-14

### Overview

Ephesus was a big, busy city. Paul knew it well, having spent years there working alongside the believers to strengthen the faith of the fledgling community there and to evangelize the traders, merchants, soldiers, carpenters, and shipbuilders who walked the streets, speaking any number of languages and practicing a host of religious modes of worship. In writing to this congregation, Paul isn't seeking to argue against some specific heresy that was threatening the spiritual integrity of the congregations there. He wasn't writing to address a known conflict. He was writing, as we see in this first section, to solidify their identity in Christ, to remind them of the power of the gospel that they believed, and to provide a vision for the ways in which their lives in Christ should be new precisely because Jesus has conquered death and was now reigning with the Father. But Paul doesn't begin his letter with discipleship strategies, moral exhortations, or specific commands. Instead, he offers them a doxology, a call to praise a big, holy God who had set his love upon these believers. That is where we begin our time in Ephesians — a call to worship the God who has made us new.

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

**2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, **8** which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight **9** making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **10** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

**11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, **12** so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. **13** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Ephesians 1:1-14**

## Supplemental Passages

### Acts 18-19

These passages highlight portions of Paul's second and third missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world. At the close of chapter 18, note especially Paul's brief stop in Ephesus. Then, through Acts 19, Paul spends several years ministering amongst the brothers and sisters in that city. We are also shown the influence of the cult of Artemis within Ephesus as the gospel transformation taking place amongst believers there pushes against not just the religious practices in Ephesus, but also the economic infrastructure built around it.

### Colossians 1

It's often argued by scholars that Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians in close proximity to one another, and that notion is supported by the similarities that we find in the opening chapters. Both offer an elevated vision of the authority of the risen Christ, a desire for the believers in the respective cities to grow in their understanding of what it means to be united to Christ, and God's cosmic plan for the redemption of all things.

## Suggested Songs

"Grace Alone" by King's Kaleidoscope

"Christ is Mine Forevermore" by CityAlight

"Blessed Assurance"

"All Hail the Glorious Christ" by Sovereign Grace Music

"Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me" by CityAlight

## Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) As you read through Acts 18-19, how might Paul's time and experiences with the Church in Ephesus influence the way he opens this letter in 1:1-14?
- 2) What observations stand out as you read through Ephesians 1:3-14? What does Paul say about God (Father, Son, and Spirit)? What does he say about believers?
- 3) Throughout this letter Paul is going to encourage the growth and maturation of these believers in Christ, which will certainly be reflected in how they live, both individually and collectively. That being so, why is it important that Paul begins with this reminder of who God is and what he has accomplished on behalf of believers?
- 4) How are you most tempted to doubt the security of your relationship with the Lord? How do these first 14 verses offer confidence and security for believers in their relationship with Christ?
- 5) Paul is inviting the Ephesians to join him in praising the Lord in these verses. What does that imply about the role of worship in the daily/weekly life of a Christian? Beyond Sunday morning, what practical activities might help you cultivate this sense of worship in your daily life?