

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 1:15-23

Overview

In his small but powerful work, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer begins his exposition of the attributes of God by offering his argument as to why it is crucial that Christians think rightly about who God is. He says:

“A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect or ignoble thoughts about God.” (6)

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians would support Tozer’s argument. Paul begins with God, offering a call to praise the Lord in his opening statement (1:1-14) because of who God is and what he has accomplished in the lives of the Ephesians through his adoptive, redeeming work. And, now, having rooted everything in God, Paul begins to shift his focus with this thanksgiving prayer. Here, Paul begins to introduce the notion that our right conception of God and our understanding and application of God’s work in our lives will lead us toward life change. Christ’s death and resurrection don’t simply say something about the power of God, they offer a tangible hope in the messy and often discouraging experience of everyday life.

How does the hope that is mine in Christ inform my daily decisions? How does the authority of the resurrected Christ shape my everyday existence? Those are the things that we, alongside the Ephesian believers, are invited to consider this week.

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, **18** having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might **20** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15-23

Supplemental Passages

Psalm 8 and Psalm 110

Paul utilizes portions of each of these Psalms in this section. Both of these Psalms were ultimately recognized as anticipating and describing the coming Messiah, to the extent that even Jesus himself spoke of them in this way (see Mark 12:35-37, for instance). In Ephesians, Paul utilizes these Psalms to speak to the power and authority of Jesus as the Messiah who had been raised from the dead and granted all authority.

Philippians 2:1-18

In this, another of Paul's letters, we are presented with a description of the exaltation and ultimate authority of Christ, along with the fact that it was through the sacrificial humiliation of crucifixion that Christ's resurrection and exaltation were accomplished. All of this is intended, much like in Ephesians 1, to provide a proper conception of God that corresponds to a transformed life for believers.

Suggested Songs

"What a Beautiful Name" by Hillsong

"Grace" by CityAlight

"All Hail the Glorious Christ" By Dave Fournier and Matt Papa

"In the Shadow of the Glorious Cross" by Sojourn Music

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Paul begins verse 15 with "For this reason," which points back toward the content of the previous section (1:3-14). Re-read that section. How does Paul's emphasis there lead him to, and inform, his prayer of thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers?
- 2) How would you describe your prayer life? Consistent and rich? Sporadic and difficult? Somewhere in between? What are your greatest challenges in prayer and why are they challenges?
- 3) Paul is praying that the reality of who God is and what God has done in their lives would serve as the foundation for life change amongst the Ephesians. How does that square with the ways in which you typically pray for yourself and others? How might the Lord be inviting you to adopt Paul's modeled prayer here into your own prayer life?
- 4) Why is the resurrection crucial for Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (look closely at 1:19-21)? How should the fact that Jesus is resurrected and reigning impact how we live? More to the point, think about how the resurrection and reign of Christ impact how you think about stuff, relationships, your job, challenging situations, etc.
- 5) Take some time, as a group, to pray with thanksgiving for one another. As you pray, we would encourage you to allow Paul's words in Ephesians 1 to shape your specific prayers for one another.