

Who are we?

Introducing Ephesians

For many, the letter to the Ephesians is their favourite of the letters in the New Testament. It is not too long, but is packed with a combination of big theological themes and practical advice for living. For others, it can seem a bit daunting! Some of us looked at Ephesians a few years ago and these notes are an update of those – but there's so much to explore that a return will hopefully be welcome. In particular, there is a focus on what it means to be more secure and confident in our faith.

A lot has been written about who Ephesians was written to and even who wrote it. Ephesians is unusual in that it doesn't mention specific individuals or address particular issues in a single church. Some have suggested that it might have been written by close friends of Paul on his behalf – on the grounds that Paul spent a long time in Ephesus and therefore would have been more personal in his message.

However, the evidence suggests that Ephesians was written as a circular letter to several churches. Some early manuscripts don't have '*Ephesus*' in 1:1 –it was probably left blank so that each particular town could put its name in the blank for its own copy. We just have most copies surviving of the one sent to Ephesus. This would explain the more impersonal style that Paul uses and the thinking and the ideas are certainly in keeping with his other letters. We are therefore safe in assuming that Paul is the writer.

As with all New Testament letters, Paul doesn't write Ephesians as a theology book. It is a letter and is meant to read as such, although the style is a bit different. Here, Paul is not writing to address particular problems in a church or to correct their understanding. Instead, Ephesians is written as a letter of encouragement for its readers and includes prayers for them. It can seem pretty heavy going at first, but gets easier to understand and more practical as it goes on.



Practicalities

Within your group, some of you will probably enjoy the deep theological themes and some will prefer the practical advice, but both are important for living. So please try to listen and use all your different gifts and preferences to help one another.

As always, the questions in the 'Word' section are not designed to have 'a right' or 'wrong' answer. They are intended to start discussions so that as a group you can explore the passages together and grow

Just as Paul expresses himself in prayer and encouragement, I hope that these sessions will inspire you to pray together and encourage one another in following Jesus. To quote Paul (3:17-19 in 'The Message'), over the next few weeks...

I ask God that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all the Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God!

Further Reading

To study more of Ephesians, you may find it helpful to read through the letter in a different modern translation or use published notes (paper or online) to help you. Some people decide to read through the whole letter in one go each day for a week. You could try something similar.

If you want suggestions, we have a guide to help you with ideas for regular Bible reading on our website at the bottom of the 'Getting Involved' page at: www.christchurchalsager.uk/getting-involved

Who are we?

1: You've got a new message!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share one good and one bad moment from the last few weeks.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Use Ephesians 1:3. Each think of a few ways that God has blessed you – some may seem more ‘spiritual’ and others not. Each write them down on slips of paper. Mix them up in the middle. Take turns to pick two out and read them. After each, everyone say together ‘Praise God’.

WORD

Ephesians was probably written by Paul as a circular letter to be read out in the churches in and around Ephesus – they would hear it read out – just as you will now.

Read Ephesians 1

NB: This a tough starting chapter with lots in it. We'll spend two sessions on it. Ephesians will get easier!

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- If you replace ‘Ephesus’ with ‘Alsager’ in v1, how do you feel about being addressed in the way Paul writes in verses 1-2?

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- * Can you imagine Paul writing Ephesians 1 to the Christians in Alsager today? Why or why not?
- Paul is painting a big picture –starting with pre-creation (v4) to the end times (v14).
 - * How does it feel to be part of God’s big picture?
 - * How much are you aware of it in your daily life?
- In Mark 1:17-18 and elsewhere, Jesus chooses to call people to follow him, but they still have to make a decision to follow him. Paul makes the same point here (verses 4,11,13)
 - * How does it feel to be ‘chosen’ by God?
 - * What do you think it shows about God that he gives us a choice to believe and to follow him?
- The believers are described as ‘adopted’ as children by God. What do you find helpful (or unhelpful) about this picture? How does it make you feel?
 - * If you see God as your father by adoption, what differences could it make to the way you see God and the way you live?

WHAT NEXT?

Paul doesn’t stop giving thanks and praying for the members of the churches (v16).

- Give thanks and pray for one another.
- With Alpha starting soon, who could you invite? Give thanks for them, pray for them... and why not find a way to invite them before you next meet!

A Challenge for Everyone!

- Ephesians isn’t very long. Why not set yourself the challenge of reading it all through in one go before you meet next time – or listen to it on an audio version of the Bible (such as on CD or the free YouVersion Bible App). Or even read it each day for a week.

Who are we?

2: You are Chosen!

NB: There are 2 sheets this week. Please print enough of the second sheet for everyone to have one each.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share one thing that you 'follow' or 'support'.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each draw simple pictures of at least 3 things that are important to you. Put them all in the middle of the room. Say short prayers of thanks for these things.

WORD

Today, we're returning to Ephesians 1, but focussing on one aspect.

Read Ephesians 1 (again!)

This week, please all do the first activity, then use some of the remaining questions, leaving yourselves time for the last section.

Activity

On your own consider these 6 questions & write your answers...

1. Imagine someone asking you 'Who are you?'
How would you answer? (be honest)

For Questions 2-6, answer on a scale of 0 (none) to 10 (completely):

2. How much difference does being/not being a Christian make to your answer for question 1?

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3. How much do you feel accepted by God?
4. How secure do you feel about who you are?
5. How clear do you feel about your purpose in life?
6. How significant do you feel?

Now discuss your answers in pairs (or 3s).

Finally, summarise your thoughts with the whole group.

Next...

In verses 4-14, Paul makes several statements about what it means to be Christians. He then prays that the Ephesians will grasp these truths (verses 17-22). On the supporting sheet, there are some more of these statements from the Bible.

- Read through the statements. (You could read them through out loud in turn – without saying the Bible references).

Take a few moments to think quietly about them, then discuss them together in detail...

- How do you feel about them?
- Which ones do you feel more or less confident about?
- How might your life be different if you were always confident of these statements?
- What can you do to increase your confidence?

WHAT NEXT?

- Following on from the discussion, take time to pray specifically for one another. Restrict yourselves to things that people in the room are concerned about – not praying for people outside the room.
- Once you've prayed for people in the room, then pray for people who aren't in the room – whether local or far away.
- Pray also for this month's Alpha Course.
- Has anyone had a go at reading/listening to Ephesians in one go?

When printing PDF set: Page Sizing=Multiple, Pages per sheet=2, Orientation=Portrait

Who are we?

Supporting Sheet for Session 2

Please ensure everyone has a copy of this sheet to take home.

Who are we? If we are choose to be followers of Jesus (Christians), then the Bible describes what that means for us. Some of these statements have been listed below (by authors Anderson & Goss). You may find it helpful to regularly read the list to yourself, reflect on it and pray about it over the next few weeks.

I AM ACCEPTED

I am no longer rejected, unloved or dirty.
In Christ I am completely accepted.
God says:

John 1:12	I am God's child.
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Corinthians 6:17	I am united with the Lord and I am one with him in spirit.
1 Corinthians 6:19, 20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
Ephesians 1:1	I am a saint, a holy one.
Ephesians 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child.
Ephesians 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Colossians 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven for all my sins.
Colossians 2:10	I am complete in Christ.

I AM SECURE

I am no longer guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned.
In Christ I am totally secure.
God says:

Romans 8:1,2	I am free forever from condemnation.
Romans 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good.

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Romans 8:31-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Romans 8:35-39	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Corinthians 1:21,22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Philippians 1:6	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Colossians 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Timothy 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.
Hebrews 4:16	I can find grace and mercy to help in time of need.
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I AM SIGNIFICANT

I am no longer worthless, inadequate, helpless or hopeless.

In Christ I am deeply significant and special.

God says:

Matthew 5:13,14	I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
John 15: 1,5	I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life.
John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit.
Acts 1:8	I am a Spirit-empowered witness of Christ.
1 Corinthians 3:16	I am a temple of God.
2 Corinthians 5:17-21	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
2 Corinthians 6:1	I am God's fellow-worker.
Ephesians 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.
Ephesians 2:10	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Philippians 4:13	I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

Who are we?

3: You are Saved!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

If you were saved from a near-certain death, how would it change how you lived?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Play some quiet instrumental background music. In the quiet, each ask God to bring to mind things you need to say sorry for. Then in silence say sorry to God for them. Next, one person (or several) read out Psalm 103. Then allow a bit more time for each person to thank God for his forgiveness and to ask for his help. Finish by saying: 'Amen' out loud together.

WORD

Read Ephesians 2

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- In your experience, what differences are there in the way we live between following 'the way of the world' (v1-3) and following the way of Jesus (v4-10)?

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- Paul makes a strong contrast between our status as the 'way you were' and the 'way you are'. But although our status changes, often our lifestyles are slower to change and we make plenty of mistakes. How do you find this is true in your experience? How do you tend to respond personally? What do you think God's view of this is?
- Paul is so keen to emphasise God's role in saving us, that he mentions his love, mercy, grace, kindness and gift within a couple of sentences! How does this fit with your picture of God?
- How easy do you find it to accept that we are saved by God's grace and not by our own works (v8-9)? What difference should this make to the way you live?
- Sometimes we feel that doing good works are an optional extra in life, but Paul points out that although good works don't save us, we are designed to do them (v10). What do you think of this? Is this how you think in practice?
- What does it mean to be members of God's household together in which God's Spirit lives (v19-22)? How do you feel about it?

WHAT NEXT?

Paul writes that we are both God's workmanship and created to do good works (v10).

- Share one good thing that you could do this week that you don't do in a normal week. Commit to doing it.
- Have you had another look through the list of statements from last week. If so, how helpful have they been?
- Pray for one another & pray for Alpha that the guests would feel welcomed and relaxed, make friends, enjoy the course and also grow closer to God through exploring issues of faith and life together.

Who are we?

4: You are Loved!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share: Who is one of your best earthly friends and why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each draw/sketch/paint a picture expressing God's love. If you want to, explain what you've done and why.

WORD

Read Ephesians 3

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How do you react to the role of the church Paul gives in verse 10?
- Imagine approaching God –what would you be thinking? How does this compare to verse 12?
- Paul switches from teaching to prayer in v14-21. How would you feel if someone prayed this prayer for you?
- What does Paul's prayer say about his relationship with his readers? What does it say about God's relationship with us?

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- Paul mentions love and power throughout his prayer. How does Paul's picture of love and power compare with the world's today?
- In what ways have you experienced the love that Paul describes?
- Many people in our community today would not begin to recognise the scale of God's love. What reasons can you think of for this? What do you think would cause this to change?
- In what ways can you show others the scale of God's love –as individuals... as a group... as a church?
- What situations would you like God to act powerfully in? Can you imagine him doing it? How easy do you find it to believe that God could do immeasurably more than this –using the same power that he has placed within us (v20-21)?

WHAT NEXT?

Imagine how Alsager might be different if large numbers of people chose to follow God's ways. Ask God to do immeasurably more than this and pray for one another that he would use you.

Now split into twos. Share any personal situations that you would like God to act in. Pray for one another by reading out verses 14-21 to each other in turn.

Who are we?

5: You can Grow!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share a story of a time when you recently felt you grew in your faith –whether small or large.

WORSHIP

ASK if there is anyone who plays an instrument, but not normally in public (whatever standard), whether they could learn a simple Christian song to play for next week & bring the words.

Now use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Get some tree seeds/nuts (beech nuts, conkers etc) and some dead leaves. Each take a dead leaf. Read out loud verses 22-24. In the silence, each think of things you want to get rid of from your life that are ungodly. Put the leaf back in the middle and say sorry to God for them. Then take a nut/seed. Think of a way you could be more righteous and holy –like God. Talk to God about it -committing yourself to becoming more like him and asking for his help.

WORD

Read Ephesians 4:1-5:2

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

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Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- In verse 3, Paul is anxious to maintain unity within the church. What can you do to increase unity within our church?
- To what extent do you view other local churches as competitors or as partners? What are the strengths and weaknesses of having a variety of local churches? How much should we do together and how much should we do apart?
- Paul closely links spiritual growth & maturity ('building up the body' – v12, 16), with action –works and service. How can we grow spiritually through action?
- Paul lists a few examples of gifts (v11) to be used for building up the church. What gifts or talents do you have and how could you better use them in the life of the church?
- Paul lists a series of 'do nots' and 'get rid of's' in v17-31 but he also gives some positive advice. What does it mean to adopt this new life (v24) & to be like God (24 & 5:1-2)? How could this change how you live in practice?
- Using these verses as a guide, how would you respond to someone who said 'I'm a good person. I keep the law. I put myself and my family first and I'm tolerant of others. That's enough isn't it?'

WHAT NEXT?

There are wristbands that say 'WWJD' –'What Would Jesus Do?' In 2-3s share situations in your life when it might be particularly helpful to ask that question of yourself. Pray for one another.

Write the letters on a card in your wallet, purse or diary or put them on your mobile phone or computer. Over the next few weeks, try to ask yourself that question as you face decisions or go about your daily life.

Who are we?

6: You are Together!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Imagine you're at a meal with some friends and they start belittling a common friend. How would you respond?

WORSHIP

In near-darkness, read out Ephesians 5:3-7. Take time to say sorry to God for wrongs in your life that come to mind as you hear the passage.

Now light a candle and read verses 8-14. Continue to reflect in silence, asking God to fill your life with light.

Now read verses 15-20. Then even if you don't normally, why not try using a simple worship song –ideally led by the person who volunteered last week. The others can sing or just read out the words.

WORD

Peace Warning! There are bound to be some strongly held opinions on these passages. Don't forget what's just been written in Ephesians in the way you discuss it! Maybe read 4:1-3 again first!

Read the remainder of Ephesians 5:3-6:9

Now use **some** of the questions below

- How do you feel when you read verses 3-5? How do Paul's words highlight the scale of God's grace and forgiveness? How should we live in response?
- What practical steps can we take in our lives to 'live as children of light' (v8) and avoid falling into repeated sin?

Before discussing specific relationships...

- Look at 5:1-2 & 5:21. In our relationships with one another, how do we submit to one another (see also 5:1-2)? Does submission mean

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being doormats (think of Christ as our example)? Who do you find it hardest to submit to?

Paul explains how husbands and wives should submit to one another – the extent to which this is shaped by the culture of the time is the subject of much debate. However, try discussing:

- ‘What would a marriage be like if a husband and wife followed Paul’s teaching perfectly?’ and ‘What things are good or bad about the state of marriage today?’

Paul addresses his comments on how husbands should behave to husbands & his comments on wives to wives. He doesn’t tell husbands what they should expect/demand of their wives or vice versa.

- What differences do you think it would make today if people concentrated on perfecting their own roles in relationships, rather than expecting/demanding of others?

On other relationships...

- 6:1-4: How do you feel about Paul’s advice to children and parents? How can it work in practice?
- The advice in 6:4 is that ‘bringing children up in the training and instruction of the Lord’ will avoid exasperating them. How could this be true?

For everyone...

By addressing slaves and masters, Paul is not condoning slavery. He is giving guidelines for those in these positions on how to behave. Choose a role that you have (parent, child, spouse, employer, sister etc)...

- What advice do you think Paul would write today to you in this role? Each write it down, then discuss your answers together.

WHAT NEXT?

Pray for one another –that relationships would be strengthened.

Pray for others known to you struggling with relationships (keeping confidentiality)

Who are we?

7: You can Pray and be Strong!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share one of your favourite films & why you like that film or that type of film.

(IDEA: You could decide to watch a film together as a Growth Group at home or at the cinema –either as a pure social or have a discussion after about it from a Christian perspective)

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Ephesians 6:18 says: ‘Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.’

Use some clay or salt dough or plasticine or similar.

Each make a model of something that is important to you. Talk to God about it as you make it. If you want, share what you’ve made at the end.

WORD

Leave yourselves extra time to pray this week at the end!

Read Ephesians 6

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you’ve been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven’t noticed before?

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Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What does it mean to be 'strong in the Lord' (v10)?
- How do you feel about the idea of spiritual battles (v11-12)? What dangers do you think there are in either over or under focussing on 'spiritual attack'? Which do you tend to do? How and why?
- Divide the group into 2-3s. Each consider one or two pieces of the armour. How in practice could you equip yourselves with this armour on a regular basis? Each share your thoughts with the whole group.
- How can we pray more as a church (v18)? How can you be part of it?
- How do you feel about sharing the good news about Jesus 'fearlessly' (v19 & 20)?

WHAT NEXT?

Paul says 'always keep on praying for all the Lord's people' (v18). Spend longer praying this week...

Try using lots of short prayers (maybe limit them to two sentences max!) rather than fewer longer ones & encourage everyone to have a go. If in doubt, 'thank you God for my friends', 'thank you for this church' or 'please bless this group' would all be great!

Spend time praying in this way for...

- one another (people in the room)
- others known to you (people not in the room)
- our church –members, leaders, groups, activities, outreach etc
- the local community –including groups within it
- wider world issues