

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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A STUDY OF FAITH AND PRACTICE



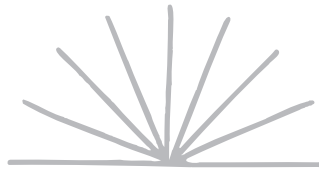
# EPHESIANS

JACKIE HILL PERRY

JASMINE HOLMES

MELISSA KRUGER

A STUDY OF FAITH AND PRACTICE



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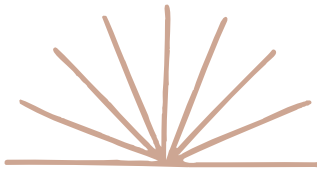
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



4	ABOUT THE AUTHORS
5	GETTING STARTED
8	SESSION ONE: <b>Introduction</b>
10	SESSION TWO: <b>Praise &amp; Prayer</b>
44	SESSION THREE: <b>Alive &amp; Unified</b>
76	SESSION FOUR: <b>Mystery &amp; Power</b>
110	SESSION FIVE: <b>Unity &amp; Maturity</b>
140	SESSION SIX: <b>Light &amp; Love</b>
172	SESSION SEVEN: <b>Empowered &amp; Equipped</b>
202	ENDNOTES
204	NOTE TAKING PAGES
209	VIDEO REDEMPTION CARD



ABOUT

## THE AUTHORS

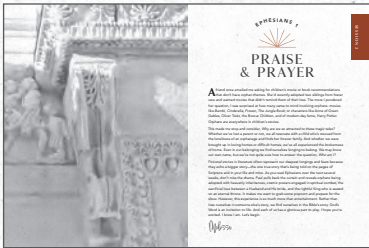
**JACKIE HILL PERRY** is a Bible teacher, writer, and artist. She is the author of *Jude: Contending for the Faith in Today's Culture*; *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been*; *Holier Than Thou: How God's Holiness Helps Us Trust Him*; and *Upon Waking: 60 Daily Reflections to Discover Ourselves and the God We Were Made For*. At home she is known as wife to Preston and mommy to Eden, Autumn, Sage, and August.

**JASMINE HOLMES** is the author of *Never Cast Out: How the Gospel Puts an End to the Story of Shame*; *Carved in Ebony: Lessons from the Black Women Who Shape Us*; and *Mother to Son: Letters to a Black Boy on Identity and Hope*. She is also a contributing author for several books and a frequent contributor for *The Gospel Coalition*, *Desiring God*, *Christianity Today*, and more. She and her husband Phillip are parenting their children in Jackson, Mississippi.

**MELISSA KRUGER** serves as vice president of discipleship programming for The Gospel Coalition (TGC). She's the author of multiple books, including *The Envy of Eve: Finding Contentment in a Covetous World*; *Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood*; *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*, and *Wherever You Go, I Want You to Know*. Her husband, Mike, is the president of Reformed Theological Seminary and they have three children.

# GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study with other women at your church or in a group setting. Or, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it with you. This will give you study friends to pray with and connect with over coffee or through text or email so you can chat about what you're learning.



## PERSONAL STUDY

Each week features five days of personal study that walk you verse-by-verse through Ephesians. You'll find questions to help you understand and apply the text, plus insightful commentary to clarify your study.



## WATCH & DISCUSS

At the end of each week you'll find pages that provide space for you to take notes during the videos and follow along with your small group discussion.



## DIGGING DEEPER

Included throughout the study are a few pages of extra reading to help broaden your understanding of Paul's original audience and the cultural context for Ephesians.

## Extra Resources



## LEADER GUIDE

A free leader guide PDF is available for download at [lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy](http://lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy). The leader guide offers several tips and helps along with discussion guides for each session.



# BACKGROUND ON THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

**AUTHOR:** Paul the apostle (1:1)

**DATE:** About AD 61

## BIG PICTURE

In God's eternal plan, God's great masterpiece, the church, has now been manifested. Christ is united with all the redeemed, whether Jew or Gentile, transforming relationships in this life and leading to a glorious future.

## SUMMARY

Ephesians is written by the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Ephesus. Paul spent three years among the Ephesians, but this letter is written about 7–8 years after his time there. His letter divides into two parts: Chapters 1–3 are doctrinal and chapters 4–6 are practical. There are no imperatives in chapters 1–3, everything is descriptive, but chapters 4–6 are filled with directives telling believers how to conduct themselves in keeping with their calling.

Paul began his letter with thankfulness as he shared with his readers about God's redemptive work in salvation (1:3-14). He wanted them to know the power available to them through Christ (1:15-19) and he reminded them that this power comes to persons who were dead in sin but saved by grace (2:1-10). In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God and to each other and are joined together in the church (2:11–3:21).

In the second half of the letter, Paul explained how our beliefs transform how we live. He focused specifically on how our faith impacts our church life, personal life, and family life. To conclude his letter Paul called his readers to put on God's armor to avoid Satan's temptations and to triumph over his attacks (4:1–6:24).<sup>1</sup>

## PLACES IN EPHESIANS ►

This map highlights some of the key places from Paul's third missionary journey in and around Ephesus.



**GALATIA**

**SYRIA**

**SAMARIA**

**GREECE**

**ASIA**

**MEDITERRANEAN SEA**

**AEGEAN SEA**

**EPHESUS ON THE MAP**



Philippi

Athens

Corinth

Thyatira

Ephesus

Antioch

Crete

Rhodes

Cyprus

Tyre

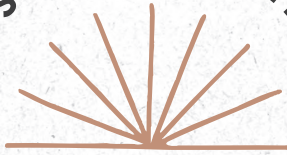
Caesarea

Jerusalem

Alexandria

**EGYPT**

## SESSION ONE



# INTRODUCTION

**T**he book of Ephesians is often known for the individual themes it addresses. Within the six brief chapters of this letter, we encounter some of the most famous New Testament passages on topics such as God's work in salvation; unity and diversity in the body of Christ; Jesus as the cornerstone; spiritual gifts; submission; familial relationships; and the need to prepare for spiritual battle by putting on the full armor of God.

Like all of Scripture, though, this book of the Bible was never meant to be parsed out into excerpts, disconnected from the full context. When Paul wrote Ephesians, he wrote a single letter to a specific church full of real saints. Everything from his opening greeting to his run on sentences and intercessory prayers was crafted within a theological framework that he ordered with intentionality and care. And it's with this same carefulness that we should read it as recipients today.

As we study Ephesians, it's tempting to get lost in the trees and miss the forest. There are so many beautiful individual truths to explore, but we also want to see the larger picture of God's purposefulness and goodness

as we consider the entire epistle. The first half of Paul's letter reveals God's loving pursuit of His adopted children, as well as the abundant riches of our spiritual blessings. In these chapters we read one of the clearest presentations of the gospel in all of Scripture, along with Paul's heartfelt prayers for the spiritual health of the church. Then with chapter 4, Paul makes a clear transition to faith in practice. As saints who have been transformed from death to life through Jesus Christ, how now do we live? What virtues and characteristics should be evident in our daily lives? How do we relate to one another with love? How do we live out of the abundant grace and mercy God has showered on us? And how do we fight the battle of faith while we wait for Jesus to return?

As we study verse-by-verse through this letter together, we hope you'll walk away with a deeper understanding of your merciful and forgiving Father, as well as your calling as His beloved and adopted saint. As you increasingly understand the riches of His kindness, we pray that you'll walk in a manner worthy of your calling—to the praise of His glorious grace.

## WATCH &amp; DISCUSS



Watch the Session One video. Discuss the following questions with your Bible study group. A more extensive leader guide is available for free download at [lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy](http://lifeway.com/ephesiansstudy).

- 1 Going into your Ephesians study, what is one thing you know about this book of the Bible? It could be anything from a key teaching or famous verse, to who wrote it or why.
- 2 After watching the introduction video, what excites you about studying Ephesians? What do you hope to learn about who God is and who you are in Him?
- 3 Jackie describes Bible interpretation as a community project. What are some ways we can encourage, challenge, and hold one another accountable as we go through this study?
- 4 What is one thing you will ask God to do as He works in you through this study?



EPHESIANS 7



# PRAISE & PRAYER

SESSION TWO

A friend once emailed me asking for children’s movie or book recommendations that don’t have orphan themes. She’d recently adopted two siblings from foster care and wanted movies that didn’t remind them of their loss. The more I pondered her question, I was surprised at how many came to mind involving orphans: movies like *Bambi*, *Cinderella*, *Frozen*, *The Jungle Book*; or characters like Anne of Green Gables, *Oliver Twist*, the *Boxcar Children*, and of modern-day fame, *Harry Potter*. Orphans are everywhere in children’s stories.

This made me stop and consider, *Why are we so attracted to these tragic tales?* Whether we’ve lost a parent or not, we all resonate with a child who’s rescued from the loneliness of an orphanage and finds her forever family. And whether we were brought up in loving homes or difficult homes, we’ve all experienced the brokenness of home. Even in our belonging we find ourselves longing to belong. We may know our own name, but we’re not quite sure how to answer the question, *Who am I?*

Fictional stories in literature often represent our deepest longings and fears because they echo a bigger story—the one true story that’s being told on the pages of Scripture and in your life and mine. As you read Ephesians over the next several weeks, don’t miss the drama. Paul pulls back the curtain and reveals orphans being adopted with heavenly inheritances, cosmic powers engaged in spiritual combat, the sacrificial love between a Husband and His bride, and the rightful King who is seated on an eternal throne. It makes me want to grab some popcorn and prepare for the show. However, this experience is so much more than entertainment. Rather than lose ourselves in someone else’s story, we find ourselves in the Bible’s story. God’s Word is an invitation to life. And each of us has a glorious part to play. I hope you’re excited. I know I am. Let’s begin.

Melissa

# EPHESIANS 7



## GREETING

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## GOD'S RICH BLESSINGS

<sup>3</sup>Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. <sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. <sup>5</sup>He predestined

us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

<sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the right time — to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

<sup>11</sup>In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

<sup>13</sup>In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. <sup>14</sup>The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

### **PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL INSIGHT**

<sup>15</sup>This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup>I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be

enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

### **GOD'S POWER IN CHRIST**

<sup>20</sup>He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — <sup>21</sup>far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

<sup>22</sup>And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

DAY ONE  
1

## YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Begin by reading or listening to the entire letter to the Ephesians.

### EPHESIANS 1:1-2

---

#### Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.

*Ephesians 1:3*

It's six chapters and should take you about twenty minutes. If you don't have time to read the entire letter right now, listen to it later today while you go on a walk, ride in your car, or are doing chores around the house.

At this point in my life, I receive a lot of uninteresting mail. From the packaging alone, I can easily sort my stack of envelopes between bills to pay and junk mail to toss. That's why I'm always excited to see a hand-addressed letter with a familiar name in the corner. In a world of impersonal greetings and various requests, it's wonderful to receive mail from a friend.

The letter to the Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Ephesus. As we begin our study, it's helpful to remember that these are real historical figures, living in a particular cultural context. These are words between believers, meant to encourage both their faith in Jesus and their practice (living out) of that faith.

Now return to Ephesians 1 and read verses 1-2 (p.12).

1. How does Paul identify himself at the beginning of this letter?
2. Read Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1 also. What do you learn from these passages about Paul's current situation as he writes this letter?

Our study begins where the letter begins—by identifying its author. Paul describes himself as an apostle—by God’s will. It’s important to note that Paul didn’t choose this position of authority for himself. Rather, God appointed him for this role when He appeared to Paul in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-16).

In addition to describing himself as an apostle, Paul referred to himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1) and “the prisoner in the Lord” (4:1). Paul wasn’t speaking figuratively here; he was imprisoned for his service to the Lord and wrote many of his New Testament letters while under Roman guard (Acts 28).

- 3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. How did Paul describe himself in these verses? What did he mean that he persecuted the church of God? (See Acts 9:1-19 for more of Paul’s background. In these verses he’s referred to by his Hebrew name, *Saul*. *Paul* is his Greek name.)**

Don’t miss the irony here—one of the greatest persecutors of the early church wrote Ephesians as a prisoner for the gospel. Meeting Jesus transformed Paul’s life, and he became one of Christianity’s greatest missionaries. In his own words, “I intensely persecuted God’s church and tried to destroy it . . . But when God, who from my mother’s womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles . . .” (Gal. 1:13-16). This transforming power of the gospel is one of the themes we’ll see in the early pages of Ephesians.

- 4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:37 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What did Paul understand about his authority as an apostle?**

Paul’s words weren’t just his opinions. Like Moses and the prophets before him, he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His words were written at a particular time to a particular church, but they are intended for all Christians for all time.

As we read the book of Ephesians, I hope you'll be encouraged (and maybe a little surprised) by how relevant Paul's words are to you in your life today. Just as in creation, God speaks and life bursts forth. As we read and study God's Word, it's life-giving. These words are powerful, not because they're the words of Paul, but because they're breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16).

- 5. Before we get too far along, it's also helpful to know a little bit about the letter's recipients. How does Paul address the Ephesians at the beginning of this letter? Is that identification surprising to you? Why or why not?**

Paul visited Ephesus on his third missionary journey, and Luke records the highlights of his time there in Acts 19.

- 6. Read Acts 19. Note what you learn about the following:**

- ◆ Jewish response to Paul's message (see 19:8-9)
- ◆ Time spent in Ephesus (see also Acts 20:31)
- ◆ Religious background of the Ephesians

- 7. Now read Acts 20:17-38. What else do you learn about Paul's ministry among the Ephesians from this passage?**

These passages from Acts help put into context Paul’s ministry among the Ephesians. Even though his initial greetings may seem impersonal, Paul spent three years with them. During those years his teaching was met with a wide variety of responses, as we see in Acts 19. Most likely he wrote this letter to them during the time of his imprisonment in Rome, which sets this letter about 7–8 years after his time in Ephesus.

Ephesus was a port city on the west coast of Asia (part of modern-day Turkey), where one could find a variety of religious practices. The presence of a synagogue meant that it was home to a number of Jewish families. The culture was inundated with idolatry, reliant upon magical arts, and curious about demons. At the center of religious life was the worship of Artemis, whose temple was located in Ephesus and was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Additionally, the worship of the emperor and his family was a prominent feature of life. Imagery of emperors as warrior gods appeared on coins and altars throughout the city.<sup>1</sup>

- 8. Paul’s first words to these Ephesian saints were “grace” and “peace,” which is a standard part of Paul’s greeting in all of his New Testament letters. Look up the following words in a standard English dictionary, and write the definitions below.**

<b>GRACE</b>	
<b>PEACE</b>	

**Why do you think these two terms were Paul’s chosen way to begin his letters?**

As Paul wrote this letter, he understood the cultural practices and religious tensions of the Ephesians. The gospel—the good news of grace and peace freely given through Christ—was an unwelcome religious message for many who profited off magic arts and idolatry. It was most likely difficult to be a Christian in this hostile culture, so Paul’s initial address to the “faithful saints” offering “grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” would have been an encouraging and welcome greeting.

You may not feel like much of a saint some days (nor do I!), but it's the biblical identification of the people of God. It's not a name for the super spiritual or theologically trained. It's the name of everyone who by faith believes in Jesus. In our next lesson, we'll explore more of what that means, but for today, take a little time to let that identity sink into your soul. The question *Who am I?* has its first hint of an answer: *I'm a saint!*

Knowing who we are matters. When we try to earn our relationship with God by working harder, it leaves us exhausted and weary. And no matter how hard we try, we can never be good enough to earn the identity of a saint. It's a name that's given to us—just like Paul was given the title of apostle. Yes, we still struggle with sin, but by faith in Christ, we can rest assured that God greets us with grace and peace and considers us His saints.

## *Reflect*

---

*Today, as you go about your day, remember that you are a beloved saint. And God invites you to cast all your burdens on him because he cares about you (1 Pet. 5:7). Spend some time in prayer thanking Him for the grace and peace that are freely yours in Christ. Ask Him to help you live joyfully as a saint, set apart by Him and for Him.*



# ONE REALLY LONG SENTENCE

## Read Ephesians 1.

Have you ever written something and, upon re-reading it, realized, *Wow, that was a really long and complex sentence?* Or perhaps you've experienced sending a "quick" voice messaging a friend, and suddenly you're at the ten-minute mark? I know I'm guilty of both!

The passage we're studying today and tomorrow has a similar feel to it. Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with the longest sentence in any of his epistles. In our English translations, verses 3-14 are broken up into multiple sentences. But in the original Greek this entire passage is one long sentence. As commentator John Stott notes, "His speech pours out of his mouth in a continuous cascade. He neither pauses for breath, nor punctuates his words with full stops."<sup>2</sup>

Today we'll spend some time observing what's in the text, and then tomorrow we'll consider how to interpret what it means and apply it to our lives. We'll follow this same pattern (observe one day, then interpret and apply the next) throughout our study of the first two chapters of Ephesians.

## Now read Ephesians 1:3-14.

9. **When someone talks without pausing to take a breath, usually they're pretty excited about something. Who (and what) is Paul so excited to talk to the Ephesians about?**

DAY TWO  
2

## EPHESIANS 1:3-14

---

### Memory Verse:

Blessed is the God  
and Father of our  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us  
with every spiritual  
blessing in the  
heavens in Christ.

*Ephesians 1:3*

10. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with a benediction or praise of all that God has done on our behalf. List out every verb in this passage describing what God has done for His people.

Example: God blessed us with every spiritual blessing (v. 3)

11. Look up the following words in a standard English dictionary. What do you learn?

<b>PREDESTINED</b> (v. 5)	
<b>REDEMPTION</b> (v. 7)	
<b>SEAL/SEALED</b> (v. 13)	

Paul is clear from the beginning of his letter that God is at work in our lives and in the world. These three terms point to God's past, present, and future work. Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for redemption. He was thinking about you and me long before we were even born. If that's difficult for you to wrap your mind around, it is for me too! And it's a good reminder that God's ways are beyond our comprehension. While we may not always understand the ways God is at work, we can rest assured that He has a plan. He is active in our lives now and forever.

12. Go back through this passage (pp. 12-13) and underline every time you see the words "according to." List out each of these phrases by writing out "according to X." (Hint: you should find it four times.)