



**EPHESIANS: WEEK 1**

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## **EPHESIANS – SMALL GROUP SERIES**

### **THEME: HOLY LIVING**

### **WEEK 1: GOD’S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE**

**Bible:** *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Ephesians 1:4 (NLT)*

**Bottom Line:** God has always had an amazing plan for His people and His Church.

### **INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS**

In our Bibles, Ephesians is what we would call one of the New Testament books.

However, we need to recognize that this is actually a letter that we are reading.

It was written by Paul, a former Jewish teacher who converted to Christianity and became a traveling preacher, church planter, missionary, etc.

Paul wrote the letter to the church at Ephesus in approximately A.D. 60 from Rome where he was imprisoned.

Ephesus was a familiar location to him as he had spent at least two years as a missionary there, which you can read about in Acts 19.

We think of letters today as being something written by one person as an email or something sent through the postal service to one person.

But in the first century, this letter would have been written very carefully and intentionally and then hand delivered.

Paul most likely had others who helped him write this letter.

And when it was delivered, it would have been read aloud and then shared with other churches.

Paul intended to strengthen and encourage the Believers in the area, which he still does with all of us who read his letter today.

## TEACH

Paul's letter can be divided into two sections.

The first section, chapters 1-3, tells of the Good News of what Jesus did for us in his death and resurrection and how God's grace through Jesus created a new unified and multi-ethnic family.

The second section, chapters 4-6, challenges the listeners/readers to allow Jesus' story to impact their story and develop holy living.

This includes unity even with diversity, as different people and gifts work together to build up the church.

And Paul uses a good amount of creative language like metaphors to show that this holy living is like changing out of old clothes and into new ones, being in a committed marriage relationship, and putting on armor to be prepared for battle.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To understand what it means to live the holy life that Paul describes, you first need to understand what makes the story of Jesus "good news."

How would you explain what the "good news" of Jesus is?

How did God change our story with Jesus' story?

2. It could be said that we are at a point in history where we are very much aware of the diversity and differences in the people around us.

What challenges do we face in living out the unity Paul describes with our diversity today? (or is that something you hope to learn through this study since Paul seems to be speaking directly to a modern issue?)

3. Without looking at these last four chapters yet, what types of things do you think Paul will be challenging us to get rid of and what will he be asking us to do as part of living a holy life?

**Read Ephesians 1:1-14** - The Church has always been part of God's plan.

*1 This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.*

*2 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.*

*3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. 4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.*

*9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.*

*12 God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. 13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. 14 The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.*

## **TEACH**

As Paul opens this letter, he begins before the beginning of Creation, pointing out God's planning, love, and control.

He describes the covenant family of God's original people and how everyone else now can be adopted into His family thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus.

Paul describes both God's mercy and grace here.

God's mercy is not giving us the punishment we deserve because of sin—total separation from God.

And God's grace is giving us a gift that we do not deserve—forgiveness of our sins and God's presence in us through the Holy Spirit.

There's a lot of language that looks back into history and a similar amount that looks forward to an "inheritance" and the future with God.

All this has been part of God's plan and is available to all people everywhere, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We have heard some powerful stories of what people have gone through to adopt children.

In fact, there may be someone in this group who has been adopted.

When you think about God's love for us, how do you see that in action through this process of adoption (because of His mercy and grace)?

2. Some people think of the church as a building or an organization.

But here Paul clearly describes the church as a family.

How does that change what we think about the church when we use family language vs. building or organization?

3. What questions do you have about sin, forgiveness, God's grace, or how to follow Jesus?

### Read Ephesians 1:15-23 – Paul's prayer for believers

**15** Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, **16** I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, **17** asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. **18** I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

**19** I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power **20** that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. **21** Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. **22** God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. **23** And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

## TEACH

If we were to hear someone say, "Since I heard about you, I haven't stopped praying..." we might think they heard something bad about us and were praying for us to change or get help!

Here, Paul is using that language to express how he prays thankfully to God for what he has heard about these believers.

Then he goes on to share some of what he has prayed for them: spiritual wisdom, hearts flooded with light, hope, and an understanding of the power of God, who God is, God's authority, and God's presence.

### Discussion Questions

1. What specific things do you imagine Paul would have heard about these people when he describes hearing about their strong faith and love for God's people?
2. In verse 17, Paul talks about the growth process of gaining spiritual wisdom and insight.

When you look back over the last two years of your life, in what areas have you grown in spiritual wisdom and insight?

3. Take a moment to process the truth from verses 19-20: The same power that God used to raise Jesus back to life from the dead is the same power of God that works in us and through us.

How does that make you feel? What is your response to this truth?

4. Grab an index card or a piece of paper.

Write out a prayer putting what Paul said to these believers around Ephesus into your own words for the people of your church today.