



Who do you  
Think we are?  
*Ephesians*

# Small Group Resources

Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019



30 September <sup>1</sup>

Who do you think we are?

## Blessed by God

Ephesians 1:1-14

*Paul's great prayer at the beginning of this letter is a celebration of the larger story within which every single Christian story - every story of individual conversion, faith, spiritual life, obedience and hope - is set. Only by understanding and celebrating the larger story can we hope to understand everything that's going on in our own smaller stories, and so observe God at work in and through our own lives.*

When have you heard of or done something like this: telling someone about an ordinary event and linking it to a larger issue? If not, what might it remind you of in your own life?

1. Read Ephesians 1:1-10. Why does Paul start with his credentials (1-2)?
2. Why is God to be worshiped and adored in this way (2-3)?
3. What has God done for us in and through Jesus the Messiah?
4. What does it mean to be chosen by grace (4-6)?
5. In what ways might God want to bless (or how is he already blessing) others through you or GBC?
6. What blessings have we received in Jesus (7-8)?
7. Paul says God gives us these blessings lavishly. How closely does "lavishly" fit the way you understand or experience God's attitude toward you? Explain.
8. What is God's big plan (9-10)?
9. How do you see this plan unfolding today?

*Paul tells the story of the cross of Jesus in such a way that we can hear, underneath it, the ancient Jewish story of Passover. Passover was the night when the angel of death came through the land of Egypt, and the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts rescued the Israelites from the judgment that would otherwise have fallen on them. Telling the story like this, the story of Jesus the Messiah, and the meaning of his death, told in such a way as to bring out the fact that it's the fulfilment of the Exodus story, is a classic Jewish way of celebrating the goodness of God. Worship, for Christians, will almost always involve telling the story of what God has done in and through Jesus.*

10. Read Ephesians 1:11-14. What is our promised inheritance (11)?
11. How do we know we will receive this inheritance (12-14)?

The word Paul uses for "guarantee" here is a word used at the time in legal or commercial transactions. The Spirit is the "down payment": part of the promised future, coming forward to meet us in the present.

12. What difference does knowing you are to receive God's inheritance in full make in your life?

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the date of the sermon on this topic. Dates may change.

PRAY

Praise God for the blessings he has given you through Jesus the Messiah and the inheritance that you will receive in full someday.

**7 October**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Under a powerful King**

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

Power is one of the great themes of Ephesians. Perhaps this is because Ephesus itself, and the surrounding area, was a place of power. Certainly, in social and civic terms the city was powerful, and was set to become more so. It was a major centre of imperial influence in Paul's day. It was also a centre of religious power.

When have you experienced something unexpectedly powerful?

1. Read Ephesians 1:15. Why is he grateful for his readers (15-16)?
2. How does Paul mix praise with petition when he prays (17)?
3. What are his specific prayer requests for his readers (17-19)?
4. According to Paul's prayer, we acquire wisdom as we get to know God. How does knowing Jesus more help us see things differently?
5. What are some practical ways we can do that?
6. What was the greatest display of power the world has ever seen (20)?
7. What should and shouldn't using this power look like in our daily lives?
8. How have you experienced this power in your life?
9. What authority does Jesus have now (21-22)?
10. King Jesus as the head of the body of believers has the church as his hands and feet. It is "his body, the fullness of the one who fills all in all." How can we, his church, act as his agents within the present world

**PRAY**

Thank God for the power you have through Jesus' resurrection, and ask him to help you use it in your daily life.



**14 October**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Living Forever**

**Ephesians 2.1-10**

We live in a world where human beings, left to themselves, not only choose the wrong direction, but remain cheerfully confident that it is in fact the right one.

Describe a time when you chose the wrong direction, whether it was while driving, in a relationship or some other situation.

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-7. What forces lure or compel us to go in the wrong direction spiritually (1-2)? What reasons have you heard people give for the direction they're going in their life?
2. What, according to Paul, characterizes people who are going in the wrong direction (3)?
3. What has God done for us to get us on the right road (4-6)?
4. Why does God love us so much?
5. How did your own "change in direction" through Christ come about?
6. God made us alive and raised us up in Christ (4-6). What does verse 7 say God desires to accomplish by this?
7. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What is the means of our salvation (8-9)?
8. Paul's gospel is all about grace that is more than mere enrichment. It gives life to the dead. It is God's free, undeserved gift. Many people think they can earn their salvation by doing good works. Do you ever feel like you need to earn God's favour or grace? If so, why do you think it's hard for you to accept his grace as a free gift?
9. Why did God save us (10)?
10. The "good works" which Paul mentions in verse 10 are not the same as the "works of the law" (which he rules out in Romans) which marked people as members of the Jewish community. The "good works" are the way of life Christians must now travel in the right direction, after the disastrously wrong journey described earlier. What are some good works for which God created us?

*Verse 10 is one of Paul's central statements of how Christians are at the centre of God's new creation. We are, he says, God's workmanship. This word sometimes has an artistic ring to it. It may be hinting that what God has done to us in King Jesus is a work of art, like a poem or sculpture. Or perhaps, granted what he goes on to say, we are like a musical score; and the music, which we now must play, is the genuine way of being human, laid out before us in God's gracious design, so that we can follow it.*

11. How do you respond to the idea that you are God's artistic creation?

**PRAY**

Thank God for providing salvation by grace and not expecting you to be good enough or do enough to earn it. Ask him to show you what good works you can do this week to demonstrate your salvation.

**21 October**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Part of a family**

**Ephesians 2.11-22**

The word Paul uses in verse 12 to describe people as having no god is the word from which we get our word atheists. This is ironic, because that's what Gentiles used to call Jews, and then came to call Christians as well, since neither Jews nor Christians had statues of their gods!.

When have you sought to be part of a new group: a new country, a circle of friends at school or work, or a club? Describe your experience.

1. Read Ephesians 2:11-16. How does Paul describe Gentiles before they became part of this new group (11-13)?
2. What did Jesus do specifically for Gentiles on the one hand (12-14) and for Jewish people on the other (14-15)?
3. Consider how those receiving this letter from Paul might have reacted to these verses. How easy or difficult do you think it was for them to live out the oneness they were called to as fellow believers in Christ?
4. Why did God do all this (16)?
5. What challenges often come up when groups of people who used to be separate come together to form one group?
6. How well are different groups in your church or Christian fellowship included in a single body? Explain.
7. What changes do you need to make to encourage more ness to include others who are different in your church?
8. How, considering Ephesians 2:1-3 (and ahead in 4:17-24), can we tell the difference between the "differences" which we must disregard within the church and the "differences" which are still important?
9. Read Ephesians 2:17-22. How did Jesus' life and death bring peace for both Jews and Gentiles (17-18)?
10. In what ways have you experienced this peace?
11. Paul describes our equality in Jesus with three images: citizens, family and building. How is each of these three words descriptive of people before and after they become Christians (19-22)?  
*Paul is declaring that the living God is constructing a new temple. It consists not of stones, arches, pillars and altars, but of human beings. Some Jews had already explored the idea that a community, rather than a building, might be the place where God would really and truly take up his residence. But until Paul nobody had said anything quite like this.*
12. Look again at each of these three images—citizens, family members and a building. What are the implications for being a citizen of God's kingdom?



13. How should our interactions with each other be different because we are members of God's family?

PRAY

Thank God for the opportunity to be part of his family and ask him to use you to make others feel welcomed into it.

**4 November**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Part of a secret plan**

**Ephesians 3:1-13**

What is one dream you've had that came to fruition?

1. Read Ephesians 3:1-13. What was God's secret plan (1-6)?
2. How did he reveal his plan (2-5)?
3. What three great privileges did the Gentiles attain (together with the Jews) in this plan (6)?
4. How did God accomplish this plan (7)?
5. What does this plan of God's—the plan itself, the fact that God kept it hidden and then revealed it, the way he accomplished it—reveal about the character of God?
6. What task did God give Paul (8-9)?
7. How does Paul describe God's secret plan (10)?

*The heart of the present passage is verse 10, which is one of the New Testament's most powerful statements of the reason for the church's existence: the rulers and authorities must be confronted with God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, and this is to happen through what the church is, namely, the community in which men, women and children of every race, colour, social and cultural background come together in glad worship of the one true God.*

*Earthly authorities and their shadowy heavenly counterparts—always tend to create societies and social structures in their own flat, boring image, monochrome, uniform and one-dimensional. Worse: they tend to marginalize or kill people or groups who don't fit their narrow band of acceptability. The church is to be, by the very fact of its existence, a warning to them that their time is up, and an announcement to the world that there is a different way to be human.*

8. How can your Christian fellowship explore the riches of Christ described by Paul?
9. What does it mean to approach God with confidence and assurance (11-12)?
10. How can these two characteristics change the prayer life of your Christian community?
11. Why does Paul describe his sufferings as his readers' "glory" (13)?
12. The fact that Paul is in prison is a sign that the Christian way is indeed posing a decisive threat to the rule of evil in the world. In what specific ways can we, as God's people, challenge the power of evil today in a way that provokes a reaction?

**PRAY**

Thank God for revealing his secret plan and for the incredible riches he has given you in Christ.

Praise God for the diversity of people and cultures in his church. Ask that this diversity might grow to fulfil its purpose of making God's wisdom known around the world.



**11 November**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Powerful in love**

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

Power and love are the themes that run through the great prayer that Paul prays for the young Christians to whom he is writing.

What examples of the love of power or the power of love have you seen or experienced?

1. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. What is Paul's frame of mind when he prays this prayer (14-15)?
2. Paul's first request is that God would strengthen and empower them in their inner beings (16). What resources does God have to do this?
3. What does it mean to be strengthened "in your inner being"?
4. What are Paul's next prayer requests (17)?
5. What characterizes someone in whom King Jesus dwells?
6. Why does Paul pray that love would be their root, their firm foundation?
7. Finally, Paul prays that they will know God's love. How does he describe that love (18-19)?
8. What difference can a fuller understanding of God's love make in specific ways, like how we interact with others, how we view ourselves, how we manage our finances and so forth?
9. How does this prayer come back in verse 19 to where it stopped in 1:23?
10. How are verses 20-21 an appropriate ending to this prayer?
11. How are Paul's prayers like or different from the kinds of prayers you or those in your community pray?
12. What might God do in and through you as a community? As an individual?

**PRAY**

Reflect on the fact that God is perfectly capable of doubling, trebling, going so far beyond what we think he might do. This isn't a magic trick. God's power is not ours to do what we like with.

Pray verses 16-21, personalising them, putting yourself, fellow Christians and your church in the prayer by name.



**18 November**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Living out a calling**

**Ephesians 4.1-16**

Paul takes his readers back to the fundamental instructions on living the Christian life. He reminds them how they began and what it was all about. The Christian life begins with a calling. He isn't referring to the specific "calling" or "vocation" that different Christians have—teacher, nurse, business leader and so forth.

*Before Paul gives his list of gifts Jesus has given to his church, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18. This would have reminded first-century Jews of Moses going up Mount Sinai and coming down with the stone tablets of the law after he had rescued Israel from captivity in Egypt. Paul sees a parallel in Jesus. After "the new Exodus" had been achieved in Christ's death and resurrection, setting humans free from bondage to sin and death, Jesus "went up" to the heavenly realm where he now reigns. Instead of coming down again with the law, as Moses had done, Jesus "returned" in the person of the Spirit, through whom different gifts are now showered on the church.*

When you buy something that comes with instructions, do you read the instructions? Why or why not?

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-6., What elements comprise that calling to faith Paul has in mind here (1-5)?
2. How can we "bear with one another in love" (2)?
3. Describe the unity that God has given us with other believers (locally or around the world) even when we have differences with them (3-6).
4. What threatens unity in your Christian community?
5. How can we maintain and guard this unity we have with other believers?
6. What is the "single hope" that goes with our call (4-6)?
7. Read Ephesians 4:7-16. Some diversity exists with the unity Paul emphasises in the previous verses. What is this diversity (7, 11)?
8. Why does God give some believers the leadership gifts mentioned in verses 11-12?
9. It's not the gift that matters; it's using the gift that's important. What are the results of using the ministry gifts God gives us (13-16)?
10. Based on the images Paul uses in verse 14, what seem to have been the main obstacles to his readers' faith in Jesus?
11. Where does your church need to grow toward maturity?
12. How can you use the gifts God has given you to enable this to take place?

**PRAY**

Thank God for your calling to faith and the body of believers he has put you in. Ask for his help to maintain unity in your body and promote growth using your gift(s).



**2 December**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Living with a new mind**

**Ephesians 4:17-24**

When it comes to changing our behaviour, would you agree that the mind is the place to begin rather than the body? Explain.

1. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. How does Paul describe the pagan mind and heart (4:17-18)?
2. What behaviour resulted from that thinking (4:19)?
3. How is this thinking and behaviour like our culture today?
4. In contrast, what teaching did the believers receive (4:20-24)?
5. How can we be "renewed in the spirit of our mind" (4:23)?
6. Read Ephesians 4:25—5:2. What are the sins Paul says we are to put off?
7. What new behaviours are we to put on instead, and what reason does Paul give for each?
8. How prevalent are these "new behaviours" in our culture today? Why do you think that is?
9. What's the overriding reason to change our thinking to change our behaviour (4:30)?

*The word Paul uses for "God's mark" could refer to the "seal" or official stamp on a document or package, marking it out for a use or occasion. The mark indicates who it belongs to and what it's for. If we are marked out by the Spirit's personal presence living in us, think how sad it makes that Spirit if we behave in ways which don't reflect the life and love of God.*

10. Which of these old ways of thinking and behaving do you need to put off?
11. Paul says we should imitate God (5:1-2). How can we do that?
12. Scan through the "new behaviours" again that are found at the end of Ephesians 4, but this time read them as a description of how God acts toward us. How does that make you think and feel differently about the whole passage?

**PRAY**

Praise God for how he acts toward you. Ask God to show you areas of thinking and behaviour that are wrong and how you can change them, so you can imitate him.





**6 January**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Walking in the light**

**Ephesians 5.3-20**

In many ways the world of Paul's day wasn't much different from ours today, particularly in the cities where he spent most of his time. Casual sex and all kinds of curious practices associated with it seem to have flourished.

What is a recent ad you've seen or heard that uses sex to sell something? How did you respond to it?

1. Read Ephesians 5:3-10 What is Paul's remedy for immorality (3-4, 7)?
2. What reasons does Paul give for this remedy (3,5-6)?
3. What has influenced your view of sex?
4. Has your view changed at all through the years? If so, explain.
5. In contrast to the culture of Paul's day, how are we to behave (8-10)?
6. Read Ephesians 5:11-20. What should our attitude be toward "the works of darkness" (11)?
7. What are some works of darkness we encounter on a regular basis?
8. How can we expose those works of darkness to the light, or truth (12-14)?
9. What commands does Paul give for how believers are to conduct themselves (15-20)?
10. What is one practical way you can live out each of Paul's commands?
11. Based on verse 19, what role did psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs seem to play in Paul's life?
12. How is that like or different from how hymns and choruses are used today?
13. How have hymns and spiritual songs been important to you?

**PRAY**

Ask God to fill your heart, mind and imagination with his truth, so you can live in a way that is pleasing to him.



**13 January**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Living in relationship**

**Ephesians 5.21-6.9**

Paul addresses all these types of relationships when he writes to the Ephesians. He prefaces his instructions with a general, overriding one. Paul assumes, as do most cultures, that there are significant differences between men and women, differences that go far beyond mere biological and reproductive function. Their relations and roles must therefore be mutually complementary, rather than identical. Equality in voting rights, and in employment opportunities and remuneration, should not be taken to imply such identity. And, within marriage, the guideline is clear. The husband is to be fully mindful of the self-sacrificial model which the Messiah has provided. The church became the Messiah's bride, not by being dragged off unwillingly by force, but because he gave himself totally and utterly for her.

Briefly describe your ideal marriage, family or relationship with co-workers?

1. Read Ephesians 5:21. What attitude are we to have toward others?
2. What should submission look like in daily life?
3. Read Ephesians 5:22-33. Why does Paul tell wives to submit to their husbands (5:22-24)?
4. How does remembering that a wife is really submitting to the Lord affect submission to a husband?
5. How are husbands, in turn, to treat their wives (5:25-33)?
6. How does comparing a husband's love for his wife to how the Messiah loved the church remove any danger of the husband abusing the wife's submission?
7. What are some practical ways husbands and wives can live out 5:33?
8. Read Ephesians 6:1-9. What does it mean for children to obey and honour their parents (6:1-3)?
9. How can fathers—and mothers—practice the commands for them in verse 4?
10. How are slaves, or employees, to do their work (6:5-8)?
11. In turn, how are masters, or employers, to treat their slaves, or employees (6:9)?

*Children and slaves evidently have, in Paul's eyes, what we would call "rights" as well as the parents and masters. When ancient philosophers drew up codes of behaviour, as they did from time to time, the weight was always the other way around. Slaves and children were to be obedient, and that was the end of it. Now Paul insists on a mutual responsibility.*

12. Choose one role from this: husband, wife, parent, child, employer, employee. When is it hard for you to follow Paul's instructions for that role, and what would help you change?

**PRAY**

Thank God that we can have new relationships through faith in Messiah. Ask him to help you live according to Paul's instructions here.



**20 January**

**Who do you think we are?**

## **Ready for the battle**

**Ephesians 6:10-24**

Describe a time when you were engaged in spiritual battle and how you handled it.

1. Read Ephesians 6:10-17. What we have in this passage, and what I believe is required again and again as Christians face the daily and yearly battle for the kingdom, is a sober, realistic assessment of the struggle we are engaged in and of the weapons at our disposal. What strength do we have for this battle (10)?

2. What kind of warfare are we engaged in (11-12)?

3. To win the battles, God has provided a set of armour for us (13- 17). Identify the six pieces of armour and a specific way we might use each today.

4. In what way is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, an offensive weapon in contrast to the other defensive weapons?

*The "word" in verse 17 is clearly the same as in 5:26, that is, the word of the gospel through which God accomplishes his powerful, cleansing work in people's hearts and lives.*

5. Which piece of armour is difficult for you to utilise and why?

6. How can you learn to actively "take up" that weapon?

7. Read Ephesians 6:18-20. The final weapon, if it is to be classed as one, is prayer. How does prayer help us fight spiritual battles (18)?

8. How is prayer hard work for you (18)?

9. What does Paul ask his readers to pray about for him (19-20)?

*The word Paul uses in verse 20 for "boldly" could almost mean "brazenly."*

10. How are these requests relevant for ourselves and other believers today?

11. Read Ephesians 6:21-24. Why does Paul include these personal notes about Tychicus (21-22)?

12. Why do you think Paul emphasizes peace in his closing greeting (23-24)?

**PRAY**

Thank God for providing this armour for the battles you encounter and ask him to help you remember to use it, especially prayer.