

# God's big plan for Christ's new people



**Ephesians**

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# Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, mums and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↻ **Talkabout:** most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** the Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** these questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨 **Getting personal**, is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



# Why study *Ephesians*?

*"My Christian faith is really all about my personal relationship with Jesus."*

*"I can have church anywhere. I don't need to go to a building or be with a lot of people."*

*"My friends and I do church at our favourite coffee shop."*

*"Why should I join a local church? I'm a Christian so I'm part of the universal body of Christ. Isn't that enough?"*

Perhaps you've heard comments like this before. Maybe this is how you're currently thinking about church. Today, many Christians view the Christian faith primarily in terms of individual or small-group activities; faith is a personal and a private matter. At best, church is something we do out of convenience, and at worst, it distorts what it means to be Christian. "Spiritual" experiences and beliefs are the important thing, but the concrete, gritty reality of living together as Christ's people is just an optional extra.

Paul however shows us a radically different view of church in his letter to the Ephesians. Not only is the church of Christ not an inconvenient extra, it is the display of God's wisdom to the universe! The church is God's handiwork, made up of people from every kind of background, living under the gracious rule of Christ Himself. As part of the church we are hand-selected by God through Christ so that, by being a new kind of community, we will show the world the mystery of God's electing love.

In short, Christianity is far more corporate and public than we might expect. We are redeemed individually, but we are placed in a family. Living out the Christian life means living together with others who love the same Lord. It means actively participating in the church, for the church is God's only plan to raise us to full maturity in Jesus Christ.

The ten sessions in this Good Book Guide will help us, as groups or individuals, to discover from Paul's letter the richness of God's grace in His church, and to grow as part of the body of Christ.





Ephesians 1 v 1-14

# BLESSED IN CHRIST

## talkabout

1. What words or phrases come to mind when you think of the word “church”?

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## investigate

The book of Acts includes an account of Paul’s time in Ephesus, describing the remarkable beginning of the church there and giving us the historical background to this letter. As we will see, these dramatic events later came to be reflected in some of the themes of his letter.

### Read Acts 19 v 1-20

2. Who did Paul preach to in Ephesus (v 8-10)?

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3. Contrast the message that Paul brought to Ephesus with the beliefs already held by some there (v 1-6). What happened to those who accepted the message preached by Paul?

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- How did people change when they accepted this message (v 17-20)?

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4. What other responses were there (v 9, 13, 17)?

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**▶ Read Read Acts 19 v 23-41**

5. What was the reason for Demetrius' opposition (v 25-27), and what does this tell us about the new Ephesian Christians?

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6. What was the city clerk's verdict on Paul and his colleagues (v 37)?

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**▶ Read Acts 20 v 17**

7. Paul spent three years in Ephesus (v 31). What was the most significant result of his time there?

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➤ **Read Ephesians 1 v 1-3**

8. Who is this letter from, and who is it addressed to?

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- How should this shape our attitude to these studies?

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### getting personal

To receive a greeting like this should definitely make us pay close attention. Paul's words here in verses 1-2 are more than a throwaway greeting. They are trumpet blasts—a reveille blown in our ears—to wake us from our slumber to give attention to the word of the living God in the Scriptures.

➤ **Read Ephesians 1 v 3-14**

9. What *exactly* does verse 3 tell us about the blessings that Christians receive from God? (When, where, how much and how?)

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10. What does “every spiritual blessing” look like? To help you answer this question, fill in the table:

Verse	How has God blessed us?	What else is said about this blessing?	What difference does it make?
v 4		1. Who? 2. When? 3. For what?	

Verse	How has God blessed us?	What else is said about this blessing?	What difference does it make?
v 5		1. How? 2. Why did God do this?	
v 6		How?	
v 7		1. How? 2. What does that mean for us?	
v 8			
v 9-10		What is His will?	
v 11	"We were chosen" (NIV) is better translated as "we have obtained an inheritance" (ESV).		



Verse	How has God blessed us?	What else is said about this blessing?	What difference does it make?
v 13a		When?	
v 13-14		What does the Holy Spirit do for us?	

**11.** In the first 14 verses of Ephesians, how many times is the phrase “in Christ” (including “in him” and “in the One he loves”) used?

- What truth about our world does this emphasise?

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optional

## explore more

Paul frequently describes Christians as “in Christ”. The great doctrine of our union with Christ runs throughout the whole letter to the Ephesians. It’s there when Paul discusses the inter-ethnic relationships of Jews and Gentiles (ch. 2), the mystery of marriage (ch. 5), and especially as he describes what it means to be saved. Read the following passages from Paul’s letters to find out in more detail what it means to be “in Christ”.

- Ephesians 1 v 13
- 2 Corinthians 5 v 21:
- Galatians 2 v 20:

What does this mean for us in practice? See 1 Corinthians 6 v 14-20 and 2 Corinthians 6 v 14-17.

## ➔ **apply**

12. What troubles you at the moment—tempting you to question whether you can go on as a Christian?
- How does verse 3 help you?

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## **getting personal**

Whatever the thought, idea or feeling that makes you doubt you can be a faithful Christian, it is *lying* to you. “Every spiritual blessing in Christ” has already been given to you. Your life is blessed beyond anything that you have ever imagined. This is a gargantuan... colossal... staggering... dumbfounding... enormous truth! Get hold of it with all of your might and plan how you will start to live it out this week.



## **pray**

- *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”*
- Let everything you say to God now be shaped by this truth.

