

IN NEXT LEVEL

Ephesians
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SESSION 1: Intro and Overview (1:1-2)

Opening Thoughts

- Paul (likely) wrote this letter in AD _____ from _____ in Rome.
- Ephesians was probably a *circular* letter –
- Approaching with the right disposition – *What do you want?*

Ephesians 1:1

- “Paul, an _____ ...”
- To God’s people...
 - o In...
 - o In...

Ephesians 1:2

- Peace...
- Through grace...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the most important letter you have ever written or received? What makes it stand out?
2. What role has Ephesians played in the shaping of your faith up to this point (that you are aware of)?
3. Generally speaking, what do you expect from studying the Bible? What do you want from this study of Ephesians?
4. What do you know about Paul coming into this study? What is the significance of him being an “Apostle”?
5. When you read the “grace in peace” line in Paul’s letters, how often do you slow down and think through what he’s saying? What are we missing when we fail to take a close look?

SESSION 2: Prelude – An Ode to Salvation (1:3-14)

Opening Thoughts

- Ephesians is *a celebration of Christ's saving power*.
 - o Eph 1-3: Christ's saving power for us (proofs of his power)
 - o Eph 4-6: Christ's saving power in us (participating in his power)
- But first, Paul gives us a prelude, an overture, an ode to salvation.

Unpacking Ephesians 1:3-14

- The sentence itself is impressive!
- The overwhelming form fits the content...
 - o Being saved is awesome, and God is awesome for saving us...
 - o All of _____ has been working through all of _____ to save all of ____.
- Concretely, God has done you...
 - o God _____ us (to be holy and blameless).
 - o God _____ us *for adoption*.
 - o God _____ us.
 - o God has _____ us.
 - o God has _____ truth to us.
 - o God has _____ us.
 - o God has _____ us with the Spirit.
- The blessings of the gospel become real to those who...

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are you most likely to get caught singing about?

2. What are you most likely to get caught crying about?
3. On a scale from 1-10, how “lucky” of a person are you? Why?
4. What did you learn from this video that you didn’t know before?
5. Which of these “blessings” most resonates with you right now? Why?
6. What practical difference would it make if you began each day by intentionally reminding yourself that God has done many good things for you?

SESSION 3: Prayer and Thesis (1:15-21)

Paul's Prayer

- Paul prays that God would move, and reports this prayer to those he prays for.
- *For this reason... I keep asking... that you may know...*
 - Friendship...
 - Hope...
 - Inheritance...
 - Power...

Paul's Thesis

- Jesus is more powerful than anyone or anything else in this .
- God's unparalleled power has been manifested in Jesus.
 - unsurpassable greatness of his power...
 - working...
 - of the might...
 - of his strength.
- What else does he say about this power?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Why do you pray for people? Why do you tell them that you're praying for them?
2. How do your prayers for people compare to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?
3. What difference does it make to call this the thesis statement? How does it relate to the rest of the book?
4. How hard is it for you to believe that Jesus is the most powerful person in this universe over which he rules? Why?

SESSION 4: Proof #1: From Death to Life (2:1-10)

Opening Thoughts

- Don't read past the familiar parts too quickly!
- Initial thoughts on Ephesians 2:
 - o Must take the two parts together.
 - o Must take it *personally*.

Ephesians 2, Part 1 (2:1-10)

- How do we know Jesus is most powerful? He brings dead people back to life.
 - o Problem (2:1-3)
 - A
 - B
 - C
 - o Solution (2:4-10)
 - Made alive with...
 - Saved by...
- You know what you need right now?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What movie do you think gets better every time you watch it? Why?
2. Do you tend to read too quickly through passages like this, or are you good at slowing down and soaking in the truth?
3. What are some different ways people today explain "what's wrong with our world"? How does these answers compare or contrast to what Paul says in Ephesians 2?
4. True or False: We will appreciate the solution to the extent that we comprehend the problem? (If true, what should we do with this?)
5. What kind of "works" are you tempted to rely on to establish your place with God? Why?

SESSION 5: Proof #2: From Hostility to Peace (2:11-21)

Opening Thoughts

- We were made for...
- But our desire for community doesn't always match our experience of it.

Ephesians 2, Part 2 (2:11-22)

- How do we know Jesus is most powerful? He unites divided communities.
- Before we get general, we need to hear it in context.
 - o World is divided into "Jews and foreskins" (Gentiles) –
 - o But this division, instituted by God mind you, was .
 - o And now, in , it is overcome.
- Only the cross overcomes our conflict because only here do we find a unity that is deeper than our differences.
 - o Yes, we are different. But what is the same?
 - o This doesn't end the conversation about race, but it is necessary to start that conversation well.
- Two points of reflection for application:
 - o You can't have Christ without....
 - o We come to one another through...

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is the best experience of community you've ever known? What made it so special?
2. Why do we experience such a wide gap between our desire for close friendship and the reality of broken relationships?

3. Why is it helpful to remember the original Jew-Gentile context of this passage?
4. What difference does it make for our efforts at unity to know that Christ's power is demonstrated when divided communities come together in him?
5. What steps can you (as a person, family, group, church) take to move toward God's ideal for the church?

SESSION 6: Proof #3: Spread Through Suffering (3:1-21)

Opening Thoughts

- Let's review:
 - o Intro (1:1-2)
 - o Prelude (1:3-14)
 - o Prayer and Thesis (1:15-21)
 - o Proof #1: Death to Life
 - o Proof #2: Division to Peace

- Problem! If Jesus is Lord of all, why does his appointed apostle suffer so much?

Ephesians 3:1-13

- Paul's exposition of his ministry is bracketed by hardship.

- But this doesn't negate God calling him into ministry. It reinforces it.
 - o Comes by grace...

 - o "Look in the mirror!"

- The church manifests God's wisdom before the watching universe.

Only thing left to do? Pray. (3:14-21)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What kind of people do you personally find most impressive? Why?
2. What have you learned so far from this study of Ephesians?
3. How much does it bother you that most of the world doesn't find Christianity impressive?
To what extent has the marginalization of the church made you question your faith?
4. How does Paul's situation actually help to prove the power of Jesus?
5. How might this "power in weakness" dynamic help you see your life story differently?

SESSION 7: Participating in Church (4:1-16)

Opening Thoughts

- The two halves of Ephesians:
 - o Chapters 1-3 –
 - o Chapters 4-6 –

Ephesians 4:1-16

- “Walking worthily of this calling...”
- Good people make good _____, and good churches make good _____ .
 - o Good people make good churches –
 - o Good churches make good people –
- How to become good people/churches?
 - o United effort –
 - o Graced leadership –
 - o Shared mission –
 - o Sound doctrine –
- We begin participating in Christ’s saving power at _____ .

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. When you hear “church,” you think...
2. When have you seen the church at her worst? When have you seen the church at her best?
3. What from this text confirms your view of what the church is for and how she should work? What from this text sharpens or even corrects your view of the church?
4. Are you faithfully fulfilling your part in the life of a local church? Why or why not? If not, are you going to do anything to change this?
5. If you are a church leader, which part of this text most indicts the ministry you lead?

SESSION 8: Participating in Transformation (4:17-5:20)

Opening Thoughts

- The question is not if we will change. The question is...
- God's vision for his people only happens if we...

Three Guiding Ideas (4:17-24)

- Individual-in-community
- Old-versus-new
- Mind-and-body

What to do? Identify and replace bad habits (4:25ff)

- your mind
- your body
- the process

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. If someone came to you and asked for wisdom on growing spiritually, what would you tell them?
2. Eugene Peterson once described spiritual growth as "a long obedience in the same direction"? How does that relate to what we see here in this text? What difference does this make for how you follow Jesus today?

3. Read through Ephesians 4:25-5:21 and make a list of three things: old habits to reject; new habits to replace them with; reasons why we should do this. Then think or talk (prayerfully) through what you should do next.

SESSION 9: Participating at Home and Work (5:21-6:9)

Opening Thoughts

Paul's "Household Code" (Ephesians 5:21-6:9)

- Masters and Slaves
 - Slavery in the Roman world was...
 - But slavery was still...
 - Paul sows the seeds that undercut slavery by...
 - Paul's teaching here should also be mined for wisdom about work today.

- Parents and Children
 - Children are addressed as responsible moral agents.
 - Children are called to _____ and _____.
 - Paul addresses fathers, by which he probably means parents, by which he definitely means fathers.
 - Fathers and mothers exercise authority toward Christ-centered ends.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Share (or think about) some stories that would help someone understand what comes to your mind when you think about "home" and "work."
2. What do we learn from Paul including practical instructions on family life in his letter?
3. What is your opinion of what Paul says here in relation to slavery? In what ways do your experiences make it hard to understand what Paul says or how other people read this text? How can you better listen to both?
4. How does your home line up against what Paul says here regarding parents and children? If you are parents, in what ways have you fallen into the trap of caring more about your kids' worldly prospering than faithfulness to God? How can you properly balance both?

SESSION 10: Participating in Marriage (5:21-6:9)

Opening Thoughts

- What are some dangers in trying to unpack this text?
- As Christians, we don't root our convictions in the world around us.

Four Thoughts on Marriage from Ephesians 5

- The marriage relationship operates within mutual submission to one another in Christ.
- Marriage works best when husbands and wives believe the gospel and follow Jesus together.
 - o Understanding this text in context of Paul's practical instructions...
 - o Understanding this text in context of Paul's letter as a whole...
- The marriage relationship is a sign of God's love for his people.
- Within these larger contexts, husbands and wives have unique roles in marriage:
 - o Husbands to exercise headship in love
 - o Wives to respectfully submit (to place themselves under)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Finish this statement a few times: *Marriage is...*
2. What does it mean to say "the gospel is the secret to marriage"? Do you believe this? Why?
3. What difference does it make for both spouses to be actively living out the teaching in which 5:21-33 finds a home? What can you do when only you are following Jesus?
4. What would most folks in our culture say is the purpose of marriage? How does this differ from a biblical view of marriage? How does understanding the ultimate purpose of marriage change the way we engage our spouses (or marriage in general)?

5. If you are a husband, what is God calling you to do in obedience to this text? If you are a wife, same question? How important is it that each of take responsibility for our part?

NEXT LEVEL: EPHESIANS
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SESSION 11: Participating in Warfare (6:10-24)

Opening Thoughts

- The Christian life is not a _____, it's a _____.
- Here Paul brings to a close the "moral exhortation" he started in 4.1..

Ephesians 6:10-20

- "Be strong in the Lord..."
- Why do we need to "be strong"?
- Who is our enemy? What do we learn here about him?
 - o Never underestimate the severity of our situation.
 - o But never underestimate the power at our disposal.
- "Put on the armor of God"
 - o Where does it come from?
 - o What is it?
 - Note how *thorough* it is...
 - Note how *normal* it is...
- How can we increase our odds of winning??

Ephesians 6:21-24

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Are you more likely to see demons around every corner or doubt the existence of demons altogether? Why?
2. When you think of spiritual warfare, what kinds of “combat” come to mind? How does this differ from what Paul is calling us to in Ephesians 6? Why is it important to note the contrast between this and what we might expect in this regard?
3. Why does it matter that God gives us his own armor?
4. Why do you think prayer is not assigned an actual piece of armor? Why do you think Paul give it so many words instead of just saying “and be sure to pray”? What difference does this warfare context make for how you pray?



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A person is silhouetted against a bright sunset over a body of water, holding a fishing rod. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange glow. Trees and reeds are visible in the foreground and background.

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