

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE CHURCH BOOK

EPHESIANS

The book of Ephesians is the church book. Some of the most rich and profitable information on what it means to be part of a church, and how we operate with one another exists right here in the verses and chapters of this letter.

But first, what do we know about the Church of Ephesus?

By the time we get to Paul's second missionary journey, we find that in Acts 18 and 19 that Paul had made it to this major metropolis area— and was it major.

The city of Ephesus was one of the largest and greatest cities in the Asia Minor province of Rome. They were known for the world trade business. They had one of the busiest ports in the region. Aside from commerce, they were one of the most pagan in terms of false worship. They had a temple dedicated to the goddess Diana and the temple there was known then as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

We should always remember this Gospel-spreading tactic of Paul. Paul went where the people were. It was like taking a giant rock to create the biggest splash possible, and from there, the ripple effect would move out in all directions.

But in Acts 18, Paul met up with a sweet, godly couple named Priscilla and Aquila, and while he stayed with them, he went to the Jewish synagogue and preached there for about three months, before leaving to go to Jerusalem. These people didn't want Paul to leave, but Paul said that he had to go, but he would return.

True to his word, and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, Paul did make a return to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. And God blessed the time there immensely. Person after person began coming to Christ and Luke tells us in **Acts 19:20** "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." In fact, God's word prevailed so much that some silversmiths got together and noticed that their profits were taking a huge hit because the little shrines to the goddess Diana that they sold were no longer being purchased like they used to because of the life-changing Gospel. They assembled at the stadium there in town and for two solid hours cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" If you start messing with the devil's money, you'll start getting the devil's attention.

Paul's total ministry in Ephesus lasted for about three years, but before he left, he called some of the area pastors together to encourage them before he would leave and most likely not return. In that discourse, we learn that Paul, in his time in this area, had reached this entire region. How is that possible? Did he use social media? Did he take out some ads? Did he use local

broadcasting? No, nothing like that. **Acts 20:20** “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,”

That is how Paul started his ministry, and that is how Paul multiplied the ministry— one house at a time.

By this time of this writing, who knows how many churches and Christians were are in the area. Paul is in prison by this point, and instead of writing to one particular church, he is writing to an entire region— how exciting! Paul was in chains in Rome but was still able to explain what it meant to have freedom in Christ.

How to Think About Ephesians

It has been said before, but it will be helpful to recall once more that when you’re reading the letters of Paul, he usually follows a pattern of how he structured the letter. First, Paul would talk about who we are in Christ— doctrinal matters— then he would talk about what his readers were to do in light of that truth— practical matters.

The book of Ephesians follows this pattern exactly. In the first three chapters, you’ll notice that Paul speaks about who we are, and then in chapters four through six, Paul discusses what we do.

The Blessings of God’s Wealth (Chapters 1-3)— Here is a beautiful section on the great blessings of the believer. This is what makes us who we are in Christ.

God Has Blessed Us (Chapter 1:1-6): Verse 3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:” And then we move down from there in how this blessing was worked out in our lives from before all time.

Jesus Has Blessed Us (Chapter 1:7-12): In these verses you see that Jesus blessed us with redemption, his wisdom and prudence, answers for our eternity, and has blessed us with a spiritual inheritance.

The Holy Spirit Has Blessed Us (Chapter 1:13-14): Here we see that the Holy Spirit given to us is just the downpayment of our salvation (Earnest), until we get to go to heaven to experience the full force of our salvation!

God’s Power Has Blessed Us (Chapter 1:15-23): Paul offers a prayer in this section that expressly explains that God grants us understanding of Himself, understanding of our heavenly wealth, and understanding of the power that indwells the life of the believer. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives in us!

God’s Salvation Has Blessed Us (Chapter 2): In chapter 2, Paul gives the multifaceted blessings of what God’s salvation brings to the believer. And understand, that God’s salvation is just that. God’s salvation. It is a free gift and one that reconciles us to God through Christ. Christ laid the groundwork and now creates believers to be built up together through the Holy Spirit.

God’s Glory Has Blessed Us (Chapter 3): Here is one of the great sections of the Bible. We love to think about angels. The thought of them is both mysterious and filled with wonder as we think about these spiritual beings and how they operate before God and work in our lives. Here we learn that when angels look at us, they are equally curious and filled with wonder. God displays His manifold wisdom in our salvation to the angels. Chapter 3:10 “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” Are you curious about angels? Well, the angels are curious about us! All of this is to display the Glory of Jesus Christ by the church.

The Basics of Our Walk (Chapters 4-6)— Here, Paul teaches us how to live in light of what God has done for us. The key word in the first half of the letter is the word ‘blessed.’ The key word in the second part of the letter is the word ‘walk.’

Walk in Unity (Chapter 4:1-16): In verse 3, Paul says, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And then he goes on to explain how that is to happen.

Walk in Purity (Chapter 4:17-32): The emphasis here is to put on the “new man” God gives which only yearns after what Christ desires.

Walk in Love (Chapter 5:1-6): We are to follow the same footsteps of love that Christ set for us.

Walk in Light (Chapter 5:7-14): While everyone else walks in darkness, we who have the light of Christ, need to walk in the light and reprove this dark and evil world.

Walk Carefully (Chapter 5:15-17): Be on the lookout because there is danger everywhere.

Walk in Harmony (Chapter 5:18-6:9): Relationships in marriage, in family, and work-life are challenging. But there is a way to have harmony in the various relationships we have in our lives.

Walk in Victory (Chapter 6:10-24): What is interesting about these verses is that Paul puts every struggle of your life in the context of a spiritual battle. Is your struggle with a family member? It’s spiritual. Is it with a neighbor or a boss? It’s spiritual. Is it a struggle with laziness? It’s spiritual. Paul said, “It’s all spiritual!” But God has given you spiritual armor for the spiritual battles that you face. And despite how we live sometimes, there is a way to advance forward. We can walk in victory.

What to Look for in Ephesians

References to the Eternal:

The Blessings in the Heavens— This was covered earlier, but Paul calls for God to be blessed because he had blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. This is a little much for us to understand, but aside from what you can experience in Christ now, there is so much more to it. All that God has in store that you cannot experience now on this earth, you will experience one day in heaven. You may not hold all of God’s treasure in your hand, but you will one day because it’s already yours right now.

The Bewilderment in the Heavens— This was also covered briefly, but once again, what we have here is the fascination of the angels toward us because of the wisdom of God who worked out our salvation.

The Battles in the Heavens— Once you make it to chapter 6, Paul gives us a sobering reminder that the battles that we have to face in this life aren’t really because of some physical process of life, rather it is because of the unseen battle that is taken place all around us, all of the time.

Prayers: There are some very beautiful prayers in the Bible, and two of them happen right here in the Book of Ephesians.

The first prayer is found in Chapter 2:17-23 and here Paul prays that God’s people would have a greater knowledge of God the Father, a greater knowledge of God’s Word, a greater knowledge of our spiritual inheritance, and a greater knowledge of God’s power in us.

The second prayer is found in Chapter 3:17-19. This prayer is that God’s people would be strengthened by the might of the Holy Spirit, that Christ would dwell richly in their hearts by faith, that God’s people would be able comprehend the incomprehensible (the love of Christ) in order that they be filled with all the fulness of God.

And if a prayer like that is prayed, Paul said you better hold on because God "... is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," (3:20).

We all could some prayer like that in our lives.

Pictures of the Church: Paul speaks of the 'Church' in an institutional sense (Church lifestyle), to get Believers on board with what each local Church body should look like when you walk through the doors and meet your fellow Church members. Paul is a great teacher and he knows our minds like to think in pictures. Paul gives us three pictures to describe a Church family, so he can help us think a little more clearly about Church life.

The Church is like a Body— Each local Church congregation is like a singular 'body' and just like our head tells our body what to do, since Jesus is our Head, He tells a local Church Body what to do. Every job Jesus has given us to do, we should do. Every instruction Jesus has given us to follow, we should follow. Every direction Jesus tells us to take, we should take. We exist to do what our Head tells us to do. We're the body and Jesus is the Head.

The Church is like a Building— Here's another powerful picture of what we should be as God's people. As we learn God's Word together, and as we serve together, and as we suffer together, and as we grow in maturity together, Paul says it's like we're bricks all being laid on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and strategically put in place so that we would all be strengthened and be a part of grand, glorious building. God is building you up, and making you part of something special when He puts you in a Church home! You can't be built up on the building if you're never in the Building!

The Church is like a Bride— In Ephesians 5, we're met with a final picture where Paul paints for us a portrait of marriage as it relates to Church. Jesus is the husband and the Church is the Bride. And Jesus loved His Bride so much that He gave Himself for her. When you're part of a Church family, you're part of an institution that Christ loves more deeply than you can imagine. Church is a place to experience the love of Christ in a special way. And here's what is tremendous— Church is where you get to express your love back to Christ in a special way; just like in a loving marriage relationship.

What to Gain from Ephesians

Think Eternal— Perhaps what stands out most of all in this little letter is how big Paul wants you to think about the eternal. Over and over he calls us to cast our minds and hearts into the heavenly realm and then tells us to walk worthy of our heavenly calling. Do you think you can find them all?



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