

4⏮ DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

EPHESIANS

LIFE IN GOD'S DIVERSE FAMILY

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

DERWIN GRAY

WITH KEVIN AND SHERRY HARNEY



HarperChristian
Resources

40 Days Through the Book: Ephesians

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Derwin Gray. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises, have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Derwin Gray.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on Ephesians! During the course of the next six weeks, you will embark on an in-depth exploration of the apostle Paul's message to the church in Ephesus. You will learn approximately when he wrote the book, the audience to whom it was written, and the background and context in which it was written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Derwin Gray, you will explore the key themes that Paul relates in the book—and how they apply to you today.

SESSION OUTLINE

The *40 Days Through the Book* video and study guide are designed to be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering) and also as an individual study. Each session begins with an introductory reading and one to two ice-breaker type questions. You will

then watch a video with Derwin Gray, which can be accessed via the streaming code found on the inside front cover. There is an outline provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video.

Next, if you are doing this study in a group, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verses for the week, and then close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and all of the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from Ephesians, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire book of Ephesians.

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In Scripture, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. The great flood in Noah's time lasted forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through Ephesians.

GROUP FACILITATION

You and your fellow group members should have your own copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to help you engage with the session. The real power and life-transformation will

come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this guide.

INTRODUCTION

EPHESIANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus c. AD 60–62. At the time, he was under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day. He had few freedoms as a prisoner of Rome, but he was allowed to have guests and also write letters to some of the churches that he cared deeply about. One of those churches was a congregation in the city of Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey), where Paul had spent more than two years. One of the things the apostle celebrated was that this congregation looked like the vision of heaven that we see in the book of Revelation (see 7:9). It was a multiethnic, beautifully diverse body of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, enslaved and free people. The people in the Ephesian church were from a wide variety of tribes, people groups, and nations. On top of all this, they loved each other! They were united in Jesus. Their community not only embraced the gospel but also showed the world what that gospel could look like.

THE BIG PICTURE

Ephesus was filled with pagan temples, and idolatry was rampant. There was tension between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) that had been brewing off and on for centuries. The Jewish people held the Gentiles in contempt for mistreating their people throughout their history. The Gentiles held the Jews in contempt for seeing them as immoral and “unclean.” How were these two radically diverse groups of people going to become a loving and united family? It looked impossible from a human perspective. But Ephesians is a reminder that God loves taking what looks impossible and turning it upside-down. Our God can take enemies and make them friends. He can take people from every walk of life and help them walk in the unity of his Son.

The six chapters of Ephesians can be seen as two movements in the same story of God seeking to build a multiethnic, united, loving family of dramatically diverse people. Both sections address the same topics but in different ways. Movement one, the first three chapters of Ephesians, is about *who we are in Christ*. Paul looks at our identity as followers of Jesus and lays out more than twenty distinct and powerful pictures for us to lock into our heart and soul. When we know who God is and who we are, we have a fresh outlook on the people around us. We can see them as God does.

Movement two, chapters four through six of Ephesians, are about *how we live in Christ*. The apostle Paul communicates more than thirty commands and directives for ways that God’s diverse family members need to live in community. If we are going to be a race of grace, we must walk in the ways of Jesus,

put off old patterns and behaviors, and love others as Jesus does. When we know who we are and when we have deep conviction about who God is, then we know how to live, love, serve, and grow in community with other people.

The truth and power of Ephesians leaves a tattoo on our souls. God's plan is bigger than just us and Jesus. His vision is as big as the world and as dynamic as the people he has made. When we realize that the grace of Jesus is big enough for everyone—even people who are different than us—we can become part of God's plan to build his diverse family of faith.

EPIC THEMES

There are many themes in Ephesians that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **Jesus loves his diverse family.** Grace is the pathway into God's family. God is drawing in people from every tribe, background, and walk of life, and his family is always as diverse as the human race. Jesus is Lord and the Holy Spirit transforms hearts, so God's family can be united and love one another in the midst of many differences. When this happens, God delights, and the world looks on in wonder (see Ephesians 1:1–10).
- **We are chosen and marked.** God has a plan and a purpose. His gospel is the source of salvation and the transformation that every person needs. By his Holy Spirit he draws us, marks us, and leads us (see Ephesians 1:11–14).

- **God is making a new race of grace.** God is making a family of people from every nation and background. All are invited into God's race of grace and united to each other. It is a shocking vision of God's power to save, heal, and bind people into a community (see Ephesians 1:15–2:13).
- **God delights when his family lives at peace with others.** The peace that Paul writes about is not a cessation of turmoil or tension. It is a picture of people walking with Jesus toward each other and becoming a family. It was no easy task for Jews and Gentiles to live in peace and become a model of unity for the world. But, in the power of Jesus, it became a reality in the church in Ephesus—and it can be a reality in the church today (see Ephesians 2:14–22).
- **We are servants of the gospel.** Everyone will end up serving someone or something. Followers of Jesus learn that serving the gospel, sharing it with the world, and being a model of the transforming power of Jesus is the absolute best investment of our lives (see Ephesians 3:1–21).
- **We are called to a new life.** Followers of Jesus are called to strip off the old ways and take on the heart of Jesus. Out with impurity, greed, obscenity, and in with humility, patience, love, and thankfulness. As we allow Jesus to shape our lives, his family becomes healthy, vibrant, and shines the light of the gospel in our dark world (see Ephesians 4:1–6:9).

INTRODUCTION

- **We are called to stand strong.** There is a battle at hand. Our awareness of that battle does not change the reality of it one single bit! There are dark forces of evil at work in the heavenly realms, and every person in God's family needs to stand, put on the armor of the Spirit, and fight back. When we do, we will see the victory of Jesus (see Ephesians 6:10–24).

In a world of division, conflict, and polarization, the same Jesus who united the Jews and Gentiles, enslaved and free people, men and women, and people from every tribe and tongue some 2,000 years ago in Ephesus, is ready to do it again. God is still building his diverse family of faith. It will not always be easy, but when we participate and partner with God in his plans, we bring him glory, bless other believers, and serve as a witness to the world.

SESSION 1

A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

EPHESIANS 1:1–23

Of all the revolutionary ideas found in the Bible, one that should shake us and wake us up is that God turns enemies into friends and is uniting people of radically diverse backgrounds into one beautiful and loving family.

WELCOME

The Bible is full of revolutionary ideas. This should not surprise us. From the first word of Genesis to the final word of Revelation, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is speaking. He is sovereign, all-powerful, glorious, and his ways are not our ways. When God spoke at the beginning of all things, the heavens, the earth, and all of creation sprung into existence out of nothing (see Genesis 1–2). This is stunning beyond description. One day the Spirit and the bride will

say, “Come” and all of history will be rolled up like a scroll (Revelation 22:17). Amazing!

Sometimes we read the words of God contained in the pages of the Bible and forget how counter-cultural and shocking they were at the time they were written—and how shocking they still are today. Instead of being amazed, we pass over these ideas as if they are common. Because they are familiar, we forget that they are revolutionary.

Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). This call runs counter to our human nature and is as shocking today as it was when Christ declared it some 2,000 years ago. John wrote, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). What depth of love could have moved the Father to offer his precious Son for us? James wrote, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10). God’s call for each of us is to put aside our own personal pride and look first to the needs of others. These words are revolutionary in the culture of our day.

We find these similar staggering words in the opening of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ . . . he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to *bring unity to all things* in heaven and on earth under Christ” (1:4–5, 8–10, emphasis added).

God chose before the foundation of the world and adopted us into his own family. The Almighty Creator has made known

to us the mystery of his will. And he desires to bring unity to all things under Christ. He is birthing a family of diverse people who will be a loving and united family today and forever. This vision bears the seeds of heavenly revolution!

SHARE

Think about what it would look like if local Christian congregations became a picture of beautiful diversity and radical unity. What message would this send to the world around us? What would onlookers learn about our God just by looking at us?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Churches in the first century were trans-cultural and were socially, economically, and racially diverse

EPHESIANS

The precious blood of Jesus not only forgives sins but also unleashes the heavenly power needed to create a family out of people from every tribe, people group, and nation

Separate ingredients or a wonderful salad—which will it be?

All people (Jews and Gentiles) can be reconciled vertically to God and horizontally to each other through Jesus

The grace of Jesus creates a new and diverse family that is blessed beyond description (Ephesians 1:1–6)

A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

God makes enemies into family through the redemption offered in the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7–10)

God turns enemies into friends by sealing us with his love in the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:11–14)

God turns enemies into a loving family when we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus (Ephesians 1:15–23)

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

- I. What impacted you the most as you watched Derwin's teaching?

EPHESIANS

2. What are ways that churches today are taking Jesus-honoring steps forward in embracing diversity in the family of God? Why is it important that we continue making this a priority in the life of the church?

3. How is the Church made more beautiful, strong, and effective when we view it more like a salad than just the individual ingredients that make up the salad? What do we miss out on if we don't celebrate and embrace our differences?

4. **Read Ephesians 1:1–6.** What are some of the blessings God brings into our lives and his church when we learn to walk in unity? How have you personally experienced one of these blessings?

5. **Read Ephesians 1:7–10.** Of what are we set free through the blood of Jesus? How should this transform the way we live as individual Christians and as the family of God?

6. Read Ephesians 1:11–14. When we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and filled with the Spirit, we experience power for transformation. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit doing one of these things in your life:

- Helping you follow God’s purpose and live in his will?
- Helping you live with confident and growing hope?
- Letting your life bring praise and glory to God?
- Empowering you to walk in unity with believers who are different than you?
- Helping you live with awareness of the heavenly inheritance that is yours?

How can your group members specifically pray for you as you seek to grow in one of the areas listed above?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is from Ephesians 1:3:

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.

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Then go around the room and ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verse from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is one practical next step you can take to walk in harmony and unity with Christians who are different than you?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the wonderful diversity in his people (and Church) all over your community, nation, and the world. Lift up praise for specific ways God has made people unique and beautiful.
- Confess where you have been fearful or resistant to embrace believers from different tongues, tribes, nations, and backgrounds.
- Pray for unity in your church, the churches in your community, and in the body of Christ around the world. Ask God to use the unity of his people to be a shining light in our dark world.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse(s) to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Ephesians, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, on the last day, you will review the theme of the session, reflect on what you have learned, and review how it has impacted your life.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Ephesians 1:3:

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.

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

Reflect: Let those words wash over your soul and expand your mind. Through faith in Jesus, you now have at your disposal “every spiritual blessing.” Full and complete forgiveness of your sins . . . *check!* The fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in you . . . *check!* Heaven as your home . . . *check!* The family of God, the Church, as a haven in this lonely world . . . *check!* The list goes on and on. What are some of the spiritual blessings God has given you? Ponder them, write them below, reflect on good gifts, and seek to live with a growing awareness of “every spiritual blessing.” Lift up a prayer of thanks to Jesus for making all this possible.

DAY 2

Read: Ephesians 1:1–10.

Reflect: You have been adopted into the family of God. We all have been—if we have placed our faith in Jesus. This puts us on equal footing before the cross, in the heart of God, and in his Church. Every one of us should lift our voices in praise and bow our knees in adoration. One reason we should live and walk in absolute unity in the family of God is that God saw fit to adopt us as his daughters and sons. Like a beautiful tapestry, God is weaving together people of every imaginable

background and making us one. Why is it so important that we learn to see every believer—including ourselves—as invited guests in God’s family?

Journal:

- What potential problems might we experience in the Church if we see ourselves as “natural born members” of God’s family who have a special place but look at other people in the Church as adopted guests?
- God is seeking to bring unity all over our divided earth, and one way he accomplishes this is through the examples of Christians and churches who live and walk in unity. What are simple steps of unity you can take in the flow of a normal day?

Pray: Ask God to show you where your attitudes, behaviors, or words might be causing division or disunity in the church and confess these patterns. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you and through you to bring unity in your home, friendships, and the Church.

DAY 3

Read: Ephesians 1:11–12.

Reflect: God has a plan. He moves with divine purpose. Our creator does not act in random ways. He chooses and moves in ways that will accomplish his divine will. The end result is always his glory. When our world feels out of control, when conflicts arise, when our own weakness gets the best of us, we can turn our eyes to heaven and know that the Maker of all things is still on the throne and is in the process of working all things for the praise of his glory. How can you turn your eyes to heaven when life gets crazy and feels out of control?

Journal:

- How has God surprised you in the past by showing up, delivering, protecting, or leading you in difficult times? Write down one or two specific times you looked back and recognized that God was in control even when things seemed chaotic.
- What are you facing today that feels like it is spinning and veering off course? How can remembering God's

sovereign presence and movement in the past help you stand strong in your faith as you face this situation in the present?

Pray: Invite God to bring to your mind and heart different times in the past when he has guided, protected, or led you through hard times. Lift up thanks for his sovereign power being unleashed in your life and pray for your eyes to see his presence with you today.

DAY 4

Read: Ephesians 1:13–14.

Reflect: In the ancient world, letters were closed with a seal. Hot wax was poured to close the letter and make it secure, and then a signet ring or stamp was pressed into the wax as it cooled. The imprint of the seal showed who it was from. It was like a signature on an email. When we placed our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit of the living God fell on us, moved into us, and placed his seal on our heart. We are his. He watches over us. Every follower of Jesus bears this seal. It is one of the

things that unites us and makes us one. What are signs that the Holy Spirit of God has moved into your life and marked your heart with his presence?

Journal:

- When you first placed your faith in Jesus, how did you experience the Holy Spirit of God moving into your life and placing a seal on your heart?
- What inheritance have you already received from God? What are you promised to receive when you see him face to face one day?

Pray: Thank the Father for sealing you with the Holy Spirit and ask for the power of the Spirit to help you live each day for the praise of God's glory.

DAY 5

Read: Ephesians 1:15–18.

Reflect: When we know we are adopted, loved, and sealed by the Spirit of God, it should move us to pray with fresh vigor for

other believers. This is what the apostle Paul did. He could not stop giving thanks for God's people in the church at Ephesus. They were in his heart, on his lips, and lifted up. He could not stop praying for them! How should we pray for the beautiful and diverse family of God? What does the apostle Paul model in his joy-filled prayer?

Journal:

- What specific prayers does Paul lift up in Ephesians 1:16–18? How can you make these prayers your prayer as you lift up other Christians you know?
- How can you make each of the prayers modeled by Paul a universal prayer for all Christians around the world?

Pray: Pray for believers around the world to know the riches of God's glorious inheritance. Pray that they will recognize one of these great gifts is the spiritual reality that the diverse people of God are one united family.

DAY 6

Read: Ephesians 1:19–23.

Reflect: Let the truth of this passage sink into your soul. The mighty power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and conquered sin and hell is in you! Jesus rules and reigns over the entire universe and over your life. He rules through all history and for eternity. He is the head over all things for the sake of his Church, the family of God. Where do you tend to look for strength and energy when you feel depleted? What does this passage say about God's power?

Journal:

- What situations sap your energy? What are ways you can look to Jesus, rely on your Savior, and draw strength from his endless reserve of heavenly power?
- One of the ways God empowers us is through the community of his diverse and global family. Who are people in the church who bring you encouragement? How can you connect with them in ways that will empower you and them?

Pray: Praise God for the power he has to rule and reign over all things. Ask him to fill you with the strength you need in any areas you are feeling empty and in need of divine strength.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Ephesians 1:3:

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.

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

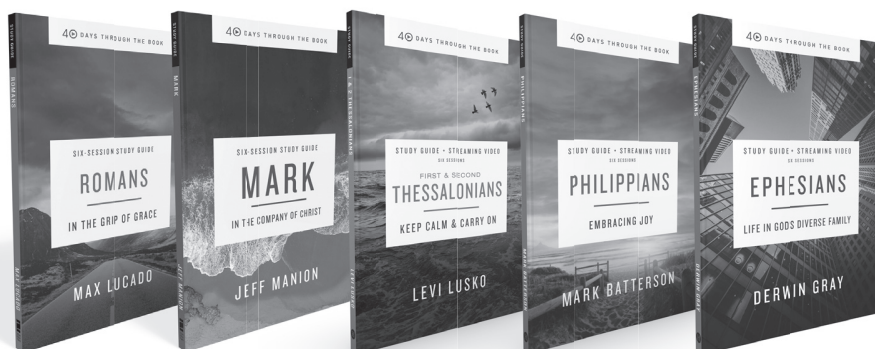
Reflect: The source of the spiritual blessings that God lavishes on us is found in Jesus. As we walk with him, grow in faith, love him more, and share his good news with others, we experience his blessings. What are ways you can go deeper in your relationship with Jesus in the coming week? How can you make time to sit at his feet, reflect on his Word, and share his love? As you are in Christ, you experience the spiritual blessings he has prepared for you.

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

Study Books of the Bible with Trusted Pastors

The 40 Days Through the Book series has been designed to help believers more actively engage with God's Word. Each study encourages participants to read through one book in the New Testament at least once during the course of 40 days and provides them with:

- A clear understanding of the background and culture in which the book was written,
- Insights into key passages of Scripture, and
- Clear applications and takeaways from the particular book that participants can apply to their lives.



ROMANS

MARK

**FIRST & SECOND
THESSALONIANS**

PHILIPPIANS

EPHESIANS

In the Grip of Grace

In the Company of Christ

Keep Calm & Carry On

Embracing Joy

Life In God's Diverse Family

Max Lucado

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