

Ephesians *in the Heart*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ephesians 1–Ephesians 6.*

Memory Text: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (*Ephesians 2:8–10, NKJV*).

Visitors to London climb on board the London Eye, a Ferris-wheel-like attraction. From 450 feet above the River Thames you can see it all: Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, and the many historic palaces and cathedrals. For New Testament scholar Nicholas Thomas “Tom” Wright, “the letter to the Ephesians stands in relation to the rest of Paul’s letters rather like the London Eye. It isn’t the longest or fullest of his writings, but it offers a breathtaking view of the entire landscape. From here, as the wheel turns, you get a bird’s-eye view of one theme after another.”—*Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (London: S.P.C.K. [Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Publishing], 2004), p. 3.

In Ephesians, Paul is not focused on issues of local concern. The letter reads as though Paul were addressing believers everywhere and Christian churches wherever they exist. The letter’s timeless feel allows the “breathtaking view” Paul offers to invade our own world and thought. As we review each chapter, let’s keep this question in mind: What important truths embedded in Ephesians should continue to shape our lives as believers?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 30.

We Are Blessed in Christ

Someone has described Ephesians as the Alps of the New Testament. Paul, our mountaineering guide, takes us on a rapid ascent in Ephesians 1. We are quickly breathless and amazed at the view from the summit.

Reflect on Ephesians 1. What especially inspires you? What peaks do you see?

Ephesians 1:3–14 functions like a map at a mountain’s summit that identifies the peaks on the horizon, as Paul orients us to our blessed place in the vast landscape of the plan of salvation. The scenery covers the full span of salvation history, from eternity past, through God’s grace-filled actions in Christ, to eternity future. God’s redemption of believers reflects divine initiatives taken “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), which are now being worked out in our lives (*see Eph. 1:7, 8, 13, 14*). These pre-Creation strategies will be fully accomplished at the end of time (*Eph. 1:9, 10*). Then, “all things,” both “in heaven” and “on earth” will be gathered together or united in Christ, and God’s plan for “the fullness of time” (*ESV*) will be fulfilled (*Eph. 1:10*). Then, we will experience fully God’s mysterious plan (*Eph. 1:9*). In the present, we may be certain that the Christ-centered salvation in which we stand is an important part of God’s wide-reaching plan for the redemption of “all things.”

Being on a mountaintop inspires thanksgiving. In Ephesians 1:15–19, Paul gives thanks to God as he prays that believers may experience the salvation God has planned for them. We find ourselves on another steep climb as he points us upward to the risen, ascended, exalted Christ, who rules over every imaginable power for all time (*Eph. 1:20–23*).

Through the grace of God expressed in Christ Jesus, we may live this day on the mountaintop!

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that Christ “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (NKJV). Think about what that means. Chosen in Him before the world existed! What great hope should this offer you in regard to God’s desire for you to be saved?

We Are Redeemed for Community

As you read Ephesians 2, seek to answer the following question: What has God done for us through His Son Jesus Christ?

“But God. . . .” Those two words must be the most hope-filled ones known to humankind. In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul describes the grim past of his audience. Sharing the plight of all humanity, they were bent toward rebellion against God, their lives dominated by sin and Satan (*Eph. 2:1–3*). “But God, who is rich in mercy . . .” And what did God do for them and for us? (1) He made us alive with Christ—Christ’s resurrection is our own. (2) He raised us up with Christ—Christ’s ascension is our own. (3) In heaven, He seated us with Christ—Christ’s coronation is our own (*Eph. 2:4–7*). We are not just bystanders to the cosmos-shifting events of Christ’s life! God takes these remarkable actions, not because of any merit in us but because of His grace (*Eph. 2:8, 9*), and He intends believers to live in solidarity with Jesus and practice “good works” (*Eph. 2:10*).

If Ephesians 2:1–10 teaches that we live in solidarity with Jesus, Ephesians 2:11–22 teaches that we live in solidarity with others as part of His church. Jesus’ death has both vertical benefits, establishing the believer’s relationship with God (*Eph. 2:1–10*), and horizontal ones, cementing our relationships with others (*Eph. 2:11–22*). Through His cross, Jesus demolishes all that divides Gentile believers from Jewish ones, including the misuse of the Law to widen the gulf (*Eph. 2:11–18*). Jesus also builds something—an amazing, new temple composed of believers. Gentiles, once excluded from worship in sacred places of the temple, now join Jewish believers in becoming one. We, too, become part of God’s church, a “holy temple in the Lord” (*Eph. 2:19–22*).

Through the grace of God, you have the privilege of living this day in solidarity with Jesus and your fellow believers.

Ephesians 2:8–10 has played a role in the conversion of many. Martin Luther found in these verses a grace that won his heart, and he discovered as well some central affirmations of the Reformation: salvation comes by faith alone, through grace alone, by Christ alone, and to the glory of God alone. In 1738, eighteen days after experiencing conversion in London’s Aldersgate Street, John Wesley preached at Oxford University, offering “a cry from the heart” and “the manifesto of a new movement.” His text? Ephesians 2:8. (See A. Skevington Wood, “Strangely Warmed: The Wesleys and the Evangelical Awakening,” *Christian History* [magazine], vol. 5, no. 1 [1984]).

We Are the Church of the Living God

Why is it both important and exciting to be part of God’s church?
Ephesians 3.

We are encouraged when we hear church members say positive things about the church. However, the most enthusiastic among us falls short of Paul’s exuberant testimony in Ephesians 3 about the church. Paul starts a report of his prayers for believers in Ephesus (*Eph. 3:1; compare Eph. 1:15–23, NKJV*) but breaks off to discuss God’s creation of the church (*Eph. 3:2–13*), and then completes his prayer report (*Eph. 3:14–21*). Along the way we come to understand important things about God’s “plan” or “mystery”:

- In eternity, God conceives of “the mystery” or “the plan” about the church (*Eph. 3:3–5, 9, 11*).
- Through the life and death of Jesus, that long-hidden plan is “accomplished” (*Eph. 3:11, NKJV; compare Eph. 2:11–22*).
- By revelation, Paul learns “the mystery” of the church and the astonishing fact that Gentiles are to be full partners in it (*Eph. 3:3–6*).
- Paul participates in spreading this good news as preacher to the Gentiles of “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (*Eph. 3:8, 9*).
- With many won to Christ, the church, composed as it is of both Jews and Gentiles, displays “the manifold wisdom of God” to “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 3:10, NKJV*), announcing their coming doom (*compare Eph. 6:10–20*). The plan to unite all things in Christ (*Eph. 1:10*) is underway, and their time is short.

This understanding of the church motivates Paul to pray for believers. Why not imagine him praying the heartfelt prayer of Ephesians 3:14–21 about you? Why not imagine him praying that you will be “filled with all the fullness of God” (*Eph. 3:19*) and participate fully in the amazing, unfolding mystery of a unified church?

What are the kinds of barriers between believers in our church that, in light of what Paul has written, should not be there? What can you do to help remove them?

The Unity of Faith

In Ephesians 4, Paul asks believers to stop doing some things and to be sure to do others. What are those things?

Ephesians 4 begins and ends with calls to care for each other as church members (*Eph. 4:1–3, 32*). Between these invitations, Paul offers strong support for the idea that we should nourish unity in the church. He begins by listing seven “ones”: There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (*Eph. 4:4–6*). We are bound together by these spiritual realities. We are, in fact, united.

While unity is a theological certainty, it requires our hard work. So, we should always be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit” (*Eph. 4:3, NKJV*). One way each of us may do so is by being an active “part” of the body of Christ (*Eph. 4:7–16*). Every member is a gifted part of the body and should contribute to the health of it (*Eph. 4:7, 16*). And all should benefit by the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (*Eph. 4:11, 12*). These, like ligaments and tendons, have a unifying function, helping us grow up together into Christ who is the Head of the body (*Eph. 4:13, 15*).

At the time, Paul also told them “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (*Eph. 4:14, NKJV*), words that clearly suggest that the early church faced some internal struggles from “the trickery of men.”

As Paul moves toward his final appeal, to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (*Eph. 4:32, NKJV*), he asks believers to avoid their former hard-heartedness (*Eph. 4:17–24*) and to avoid anger and harsh speech, substituting instead language that builds up and imparts grace (*Eph. 4:25–31*).

This chapter on unity is easy enough to read when things are peaceful. It is more challenging—and important—to read it when we become embroiled in some conflict. Are you remembering today to experience the unity of the body of Christ, the unity for which He died?

What are ways that we can contribute to the unity of our church, both at the local and worldwide levels? Why is it important that we do what we can?

We Are Recipients and Givers of Grace

As you read Ephesians 5, reflect on how Paul asks us to live out the gospel in our relationships with others. Which of his exhortations is especially meaningful to you?

If you start reading Ephesians 5 at its beginning, you may miss the full power of an important theme. So, start instead with Ephesians 4:32, in which Paul tells the Ephesians to “be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (*NKJV*).

As believers, we are called to model our behavior toward others on God’s forgiveness and grace toward us. We are to imitate God! (*Compare Matt. 5:43–48.*)

Paul contrasts this imitating-the-love-of-God lifestyle with the usual, pagan approach. Instead of treasuring others as brothers or sisters in the family of God, humans all too often use others for their own sexual pleasure and then brag about it (*Eph. 5:3, 4*). He warns that such an approach has no future in the new world God is planning (*Eph. 5:5–7*).

Instead, believers are to turn from the darkness of their past and “walk as children of light” (*Eph. 5:8–10*), mimicking the Father’s love. Again, Paul warns us away from “works of darkness” done “in secret” (*Eph. 5:11, 12*). By contrast, we are to live in the light of Christ (*Eph. 5:13, 14*). Rather than wasting our lives in drunkenness, we will be “redeeming the time” by offering thanks to God for His love (*see Eph. 5:15–21*).

Paul extends his theme of imitating God’s love as he advises Christian husbands and wives. Christ’s self-sacrificing love for the church becomes the model for Christian husbands (*Eph. 5:25–33*), while the loyalty of the church toward Christ becomes the model for Christian wives (*Eph. 5:22–24*). Rather than using the gift of human sexuality in a debauched and selfish way, a Christian husband and wife focus on valuing and treasuring each other, becoming “one flesh” (*Eph. 5:28–33*).

“Be imitators of God as dear children” (*Eph. 5:1, NKJV*). By God’s grace, you are called today to live out that exhortation in your relationships with others.

How does Ephesians 5:2, which tells us to “walk in love,” help us understand what Paul means in Ephesians 5:1 about being “imitators of God”?

Further Thought: We conclude by reflecting on Ephesians 6, where we discover that we, the church, are the peace-waging army of God.

In Ephesians, Paul has portrayed the church as the body of Christ (*Eph. 1:22, 23; Eph. 4:11–16*), as God’s temple (*Eph. 2:19–22*), and as the bride/wife of Christ (*Eph. 5:21–33*). In Ephesians 6:10–20, Paul describes the church as God’s army and offers a vigorous call to arms. It is a passage that offers much benefit and risks misunderstanding.

We could misunderstand Paul’s words as a call to take up military weapons or to be combative in our relationships with others. Paul, though, has been emphasizing unity, edifying speech, and tenderheartedness (*see especially Eph. 4:25–5:2*). He describes God’s good news as “the gospel of peace” (*Eph. 6:15*). Through this vivid military metaphor, the church is not exhorted to wage war in the traditional sense. Rather, we are to wage peace in the spiritual battle against evil. Paul steps onto the battlefield of the great controversy and calls us to enlist in God’s army.

We should do so with a realistic assessment of the enemy in view since it will never do to underestimate the forces arrayed against us. We don’t confront just human enemies but “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*), led by a wily general, the devil (*Eph. 6:11*). However, we need not be daunted by our enemies. God is present with us in the battle (*Eph. 6:10*) and has supplied us with the finest of weaponry, His own armor, the “armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11; compare Isa. 59:15–17*). He has placed at our disposal truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit (*Eph. 6:13–17*). With God going before us and our being equipped from head to toe in the armor He has supplied, we cannot fail. Victory is assured.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we are not saved by our works, what does Paul mean when he writes that we were “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (*Eph. 2:10, NKJV*)? What, then, is the purpose of our good works?
- 2 Paul writes: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (*Eph. 3:20, NKJV*). What power works in us, and how should this power be made manifest in our lives?

Praising God for Epilepsy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Anna Rozenberga has struggled with epilepsy since she was a child in Riga, Latvia. It wasn't only about seizures. Epilepsy affected her emotions and brain functions. It was hard for her to focus. She longed to be healed.

The summer after she graduated from high school, the 19-year-old teen went to a psychic who claimed she could heal her. When the psychic saw she could not help, she told Anna about another client who found healing through a pastor's prayer. The psychic gave Anna the pastor's phone number.

"He will tell you a lot about his church and God, but don't listen to him," she said. "Just take the healing and leave. The rest of what he says is a lie."

Anna called the pastor. In their phone conversation, she heard for the first time about the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They agreed to meet. At their second meeting, the pastor prayed for Anna. But the epilepsy remained.

Anna liked the pastor and accepted an invitation to attend Bible studies. Later that summer, she attended a small group meeting at the church. Then she went to a Sabbath worship service. "You know what?" she told her mother afterward. "I think the church is good."

So, Anna's mother went with her to church. A few months later, Anna was attending church with both her mother and father. The next summer, Anna and her mother were baptized. A year later, her father was baptized. Then her grandmother and brother were baptized.

Over the years, many people have prayed for Anna. She has been anointed with oil. But the epilepsy has remained. Anna wondered why God had not healed her, but then it struck her. Like to the apostle Paul, who also prayed for relief, God was saying to her, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (*2 Corinthians 12:9, NKJV*).

Now 30, Anna sees epilepsy as a blessing. Since it is an illness she must deal with every day, she has learned she needs to trust God even more. Some Sabbath mornings she feels like staying in bed, but then she remembers she is scheduled to participate in church. So, she goes to church and trusts that God will pull her through.

Epilepsy also has helped her witness. The challenge has given her empathy for others. She doesn't always mention her epilepsy when she first meets people, but she has found that being vulnerable about herself helps others open up and listen. "So my epilepsy has helped me spread the Word," Anna says. "I am thankful for the challenges with my health."



This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to two projects in the Trans-European Division, including one in Latvia. Thank you for planning a generous offering this Sabbath.

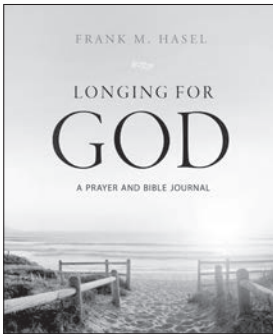
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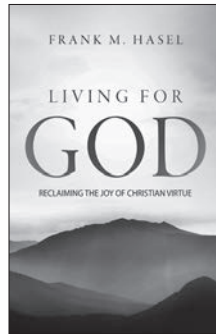
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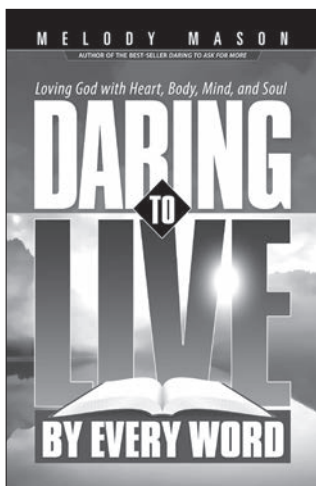
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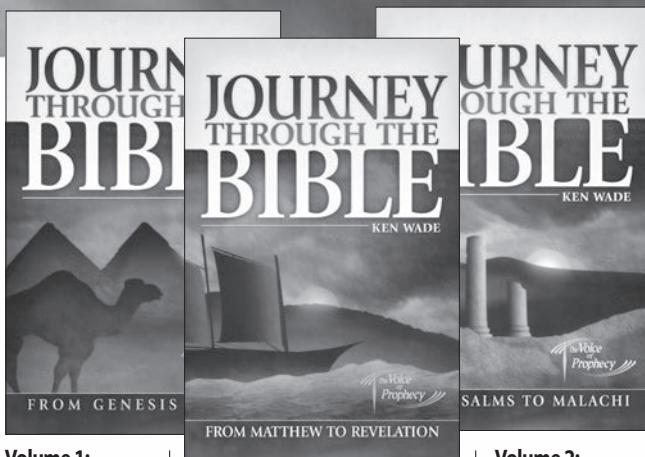
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“God’s Mission—My Mission,” our study for this quarter, written by the directors of Global Mission Centers, will not only share theological insights into mission but also provide tools and ideas on ways to reach others for Christ. The Thursday portion of each lesson will provide challenges of how to do this. As the quarter progresses, the challenges will increase. The goal in mind will be to take the challenge, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide, and report back in Sabbath School the following week about how things went. This time of sharing will be used to generate further ideas and to pray both personally and collectively. By the end of the quarter, our hope is that we will be able to look back and see how the Holy Spirit took our humble efforts and worked mission miracles for the honor and glory of His name.

Lesson 1—God’s Mission to Us: Part 1

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The God Who Reaches Out to Us** (*Gen. 3:9–15*)

MONDAY: **The God Who Longs to Be With Us** (*Gen. 26:3*)

TUESDAY: **The God Who Became One With Us** (*Matt. 1:18–23*)

WEDNESDAY: **The God Who Continues to Be With Us** (*Luke 19:10*)

THURSDAY: **The God Who Will Come Back for Us** (*John 14:1–3*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Before we understand the mission of God, it is essential to better understand the God of mission.

Lesson 2—God’s Mission to Us: Part 2

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Triune God: The Origin of Mission** (*Eph. 1:4*)

MONDAY: **Making Disciples: The Focus of Mission** (*Matt. 28:16–20*)

TUESDAY: **The Eternal Gospel: The Message of Mission** (*Rev. 14:6, 7*)

WEDNESDAY: **God’s People: The Channels of Mission** (*Gen. 12:1–3*)

THURSDAY: **The World: The Arena of Mission** (*Rev. 7:9, 10*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 28:19*

Sabbath Gem: In spite of separation caused by sin (*Isa. 59:2*), through His mission, God continues to restore the broken relationship with humanity. Because of this relationship, we not only come to know God but also share with others our experience with Him and His saving love.

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