

Walk This Way

Ephesians



**8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

Walk This Way

Ephesians

by Bryson Smith



matthiasmedia

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How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The Format

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are two types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for individual study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Ephesians and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for group study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your

own pace. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.

- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of Ephesians, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

For more input:

- See 'Tips for leaders' on page 69.
- We have some audio resources available which expound the relevant passages—see page 73 for more details.

Before you begin

We recommend that before you start Study 1 you take the time to read right through Ephesians in one sitting. This will give you a feel for the direction and purpose of the whole letter, and help you greatly in placing each passage in its context.

1

Ephesians 1:1-15

You've got it all!

David looked disappointedly around the room. Numbers were down for Bible study tonight. Some of the group were away on holidays. Some had to work back at the office. Some were sick. All valid reasons, but David couldn't help feeling disappointed. Three Christians sitting together in a lounge room seemed so insignificant. But it was too late to cancel the night now, so with just a hint of weariness in his voice David opened proceedings: "Let's open in prayer".

Sometimes being a Christian can seem pretty ordinary. That's why the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is such a great part of the Bible. When we read Ephesians our eyes are opened to the awe-inspiring dimensions of what God has done for us in Christ. It's as if the apostle Paul leads us to the edge of a look-out and stretches out in front of us the enormous view of God's plans for the universe, and where we as Christians fit into these plans. The size and scope of the view just becomes more and more mind-boggling the further we read.

A letter like Ephesians, therefore, tells our friend David that no matter how small his Bible study group is, being a Christian is never insignificant. Being a Christian is *radical*. Being a Christian puts us with Jesus Christ at the very heart of the universe.

So hold onto your hats as throughout these eight studies we throw ourselves into some of the most profound parts of the New Testament.



Investigate

Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

1. Reread verses 3-14. List all the things that God has done for us.

2. Write down what you think is meant by the following words and phrases.

spiritual blessings (v.3)

heavenly realms (v.3)

predestined (vv.4-5,11)

adopted (v.5)

redemption (vv.7,14)

the mystery of his will (v.9)

conformity with the purpose of his will (v.11)

for the praise of his glory (vv.12,14)

3. Is there any one spiritual blessing which impresses you more than the rest?

4. Why do you think Paul mentions so many blessings in this section rather than concentrating on just a couple? What effect does it have on you when you consider all these blessings together?

What God has done

In some respects, verse 3 is the summary verse for this intense section of Ephesians. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. No blessing is lacking; no blessing is overlooked; no blessing is held back. Name a spiritual blessing, any spiritual blessing, and, if you're a Christian, you've got it.

Notice, however, that the phrase is spiritual *blessing*, not spiritual *gift*. There is a difference. Paul is not saying that every Christian is equally gifted for every task. In fact, in Ephesians 3 Paul will say quite the opposite. Christians have a great diversity of gifts. But

3. What role does predestination have? Try and write verses 11-12 in your own words.

How has God blessed us?

We've discovered that we have every spiritual blessing. But how? How has God gone about achieving these privileges for us? The big phrase is *in Christ* (v.3). In fact in these first 14 verses Jesus is mentioned 15 times!

Paul emphasizes that it is only through a relationship with Jesus that we receive these great privileges. The principle is simple; if you don't have Jesus, you don't have the blessings. That's because all these spiritual blessings that Paul mentions come to us through Jesus' work on the cross.

In verse 7, Paul says we were redeemed by Jesus' blood. That happened at the cross when Jesus gave his life as the payment necessary to buy us back from sin. In the same verse we are told of our forgiveness. That happened at the cross when God's anger was poured out onto Jesus so that his mercy could be poured out on us. In verse 5, we are told of our adoption as God's children. The word "adopted" implies we weren't always his children. Something happened that enabled us to be welcomed into God's family. It happened at the cross when Jesus opened the door for a relationship so intimate with God that we can call on him as our Father.

It all happened on the cross. The only reason we have every spiritual blessing is because Jesus *gave* us every spiritual blessing by his work on the cross.

Unbelievably, that's not all. A new dimension has still to be added. Being "in Christ" incorporates us into God's future plans for creation.

Paul tells us that history is not simply a random collection of

happenings. History is the working out of events in conformity to God's will. Creation is heading towards a climax at which everything and everyone will come under the headship of Jesus Christ (vv.9-10). That makes being a Christian very exciting because it puts you at the very centre of God's plans for the future. When you are in Christ, you are already at the place to which all of creation is heading.

Are you starting to see how breathtaking the view is from this chapter? God has done absolutely everything for us. We hold every spiritual blessing. And how has he done this for us? Through Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross showers us with blessings and puts us at the very centre of God's plans for the universe.

One question still remains. Why on earth would God be bothered to do this for us?



Investigate

1. What are some possible reasons why God would bless us so much?

2. What reasons does Paul give for God blessing us so much? (vv.4,7,9)

3. If we were actually chosen before the creation of the world (v.4), to what extent can this depend on our own abilities?

Pulling the threads together

In the course of this chapter we have skimmed some of the most magnificent verses in the Bible. Hopefully by this stage you're thinking something like "Gee, I don't think we've really done justice to these verses". A brief study like this can't.

Paul has taken us to the edge of a lookout and he has allowed us to gaze into the vastness of God's plans for the universe. It is a view with Jesus at the centre of everything and with us possessing everything in him. This is a view so breathtaking that it ought to revolutionize our lives.

Being a Christian may be many things but it's never small scale!



Think it through

1. If we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, why is it that we so often feel discontent in our lives? How do these verses help us?
2. Considering what God has done for us, how do you think we should respond?
3. Do you believe that God really does work out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will? When is it hard to believe this?

4. “Being a Christian is bad for your self-esteem.” Do you agree? What does this passage tell us about ourselves?

5. If Christ is at the centre of God’s plans for everything, is he at the centre of yours? How should our priorities be shaped by Ephesians 1:3-14?