

The Man who makes a *Difference*



**7 BIBLE STUDIES
IN EPHESIANS FOR MEN**

Tony Payne

THE MAN WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

7 Bible studies in Ephesians for men

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INTRODUCTION

The approach of these studies

There seems general agreement among people who know about these things that the modern man is in trouble. In the confusing, stressful, fast-paced world of the 21st century, most of the old certainties about being a man have been overturned. The workplace is changing; the culture is changing; the acceptable roles of men and women are changing. And the modern man, caught in the middle of it, apparently feels a complete failure.

What should a man be and do? What should define him? What should be the goal of his life? How should he spend his time, his money, his energy? How should he relate to women? To his kids? To other men?

When we turn to the Bible to find answers for these perplexing questions, we find something quite strange (to us at least). The Bible doesn't have a lot to say about 'men' as such. Of course, it is full of stories about particular men, and teachings that apply to men, but it doesn't spend much time discussing what is really distinctive about men (as opposed to women). What is the deep-down essence or nature of manhood? The Bible doesn't seem much interested in the question.

In fact, from its opening pages the Bible only really tells us about men as they relate to other people—as husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, neighbours, citizens, slaves, and so on. This says important things about how God made us. We are not created to be isolated individuals. We are born and live in a web of relationships of many kinds, and these relationships are of the

essence of who we are. It is a very modern goal to ‘to get my head together and find out who I really am’, just me, alone. This is almost impossible to do, the Bible would suggest, without describing all your relationships, for they describe who you are. You are this person’s husband, and that person’s son, and that person’s brother, and that person’s master. That is who you are, and how you should understand yourself.

In fact, perhaps that is what being a man is all about: making a difference in all of our different relationships: as fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, and more. And we will need to begin with our most fundamental relationship—our relationship with God, our Creator.

One other word of explanation is necessary about these studies, regarding why they are all in Ephesians. Why not pick a variety of passages from all over the Bible to explore the different relationships men have? That would be a worthwhile exercise, and indeed future titles in this series will (God willing) explore some of those other passages. And even though this study focuses on Ephesians, various other passages are included along the way for cross-referencing and further study.

However, it is an important principle of Bible study that we allow God to speak and dictate the issues that are important for us to discuss. We should allow him to set the agenda, rather than immediately allowing our questions and issues to set the agenda. And so I have written ‘seven Bible studies in Ephesians for men’, rather than simply ‘seven Bible studies for men’. The idea is to look at Ephesians, and allow that part of God’s word to set the agenda of study, while particularly seeing how it applies to men in their various relationships.

These studies will not answer every question you have, or address every perplexing issue that a modern man might face. It would be foolish to think that seven short studies could do so. But my prayer is that in studying this majestic part of the Bible, and in particular its relevance to men, you will be challenged and encouraged to live for Christ, and make a difference for him in every area of your life.

The format

One of the aims of these studies is not only to encourage and strengthen Christian men by reading the Bible, but to do so in a way that is achievable—in other words, not to make the pressured lives of men more pressured by having studies that are too long and complicated, or that require extensive preparation. As a result:

- each study is designed to be completed in around 50 minutes (if you want to spend more time, there are some optional ‘extension’ Bible passages and questions in most studies);
- there is no set preparation or homework between each study;
- if individuals want to do some further reading in their own time, the optional extension passages can be read; there are also three short articles printed as appendices that can be read and discussed in conjunction with studies 3, 5 and 6. Also, since the studies are largely based in Ephesians, reading and reflecting on Ephesians would be a useful way to do some extra preparation.

It’s also worth pointing out that while these studies have been written with small groups in mind, they are nevertheless very suitable for individual study. Use them as a supplement or alternative to your own personal Bible reading for a few weeks.

Thanks

My thanks goes to the men who trialled these studies in their small groups, and made valuable comments to improve them. My thanks too to Phil Wheeler, Deryck Howell, Russell Powell and Phillip Jensen for their input and comments.

Tony Payne
November, 2000

- a. What do you think of the following quote? Do you agree with its basic thrust?

A boy's spirit begins to shrivel very early in life, until (often as not) he loses touch with it completely. By the time he becomes a man, he is like a tiger raised in a zoo—confused and numb, with huge energies untapped. He feels that there must be more, but does not know what that more is. So he spends his life pretending to be happy—to himself, his friends and family...

Not to put too fine a point on it, men are a mess. The terrible effects on our marriages, our fathering abilities, our health and our leadership skills are a matter of public record. Our marriages fail, our kids hate us, we die from stress and on the way we destroy the world! (STEVE BIDDULPH, 'MANHOOD')

- b. What would you say are the main problems and challenges in your own life as a man?

3. What does God say?

Ephesians 2:1–3 describes the natural, everyday state of men everywhere. Read it aloud and discuss the questions that follow.

- a. What are the different characteristics of this 'walk' or lifestyle?

