

# WALK THIS WAY



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



EPHESIANS

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 matthiasmedia

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## » HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

### 1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty 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

The studies contain four main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

## 3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

## 4. How to use these studies in a small group

- 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 triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.
- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how

sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.

- 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. If you are a group leader, the material in the appendix ‘Tips for leaders’ will help you think through how to use these studies in a group setting.
- If your group members usually don’t work through the study in advance, it’s extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the ‘Implications’ to focus on.
- 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 the Bible, 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.

## 5. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Walk this Way*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

## 6. 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.





## » STUDY 1

# YOU'VE GOT IT ALL!

[EPHESIANS 1:1-14]

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 late 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, 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.

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**Read Ephesians 1:1-14.**

1. Re-read 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 blessing (v. 3)
- heavenly places (v. 3)
- predestined (vv. 4-5, 11)
- adoption (v. 5)
- redemption (v. 7)
- the mystery of his will (v. 9)
- according to the counsel of his will (v. 11)
- to the praise of his glory (vv. 12, 14)

- 
3. Is there any one spiritual blessing that impresses you more than the rest? If so, which one and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  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?

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## 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 here in 1:3, Paul is talking about something much more important than gifts. Paul is talking about our spiritual status and

intimacy with God, and in that respect every Christian has it all. We cannot be any more treasured and important to God than we already are. We are his forgiven children. We call the Creator of this universe our Father. His Spirit lives in us. We have been lavished with the great secrets of life. These are staggering things that God has done for us.

Putting it all together, these verses tell us that if you're a Christian you've got it all, no matter how old you are or what nationality you are or what job you have or what your marital status is. You do not need anything else spiritually. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing.

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**Read verses 3–14 again.**

5. What role has Jesus had in our receiving spiritual blessings?

6. What do you think it means to be “in Christ”?

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

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## 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 "adoption" 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" also 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 according to God's will. Creation is heading towards a climax at which everything and everyone will be united in 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 bother to do this for us?

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

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

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

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## 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!



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

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

### » **Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God for lavishing us with his grace and for giving us every spiritual blessing—even at the cost of his own dear Son.
- Ask God to help you trust that he's generously given you everything you need, even if he hasn't given you everything you want.
- Ask for the Spirit's help in shaping your priorities and desires around God's purposes.



## » STUDY 2

# PAUL AT PRAYER

[EPHESIANS 1:15-23]

IT'S ALWAYS FASCINATING TO watch a master craftsman at work—to see a sculptor create a thing of beauty out of a shapeless block; to witness a potter shape an intricate bowl from a lump of clay; to watch an artist producing a work of art. It's exciting to kneel next to the apostle Paul as he prays.

Paul is a master of prayer. More of Paul's prayers have been preserved in the Scriptures than of any other New Testament writer. Listening in on Paul's prayers can help us to pray better, because they reflect a passion, a clarity of thought and a Christ-centeredness that is often lacking in our own prayers.

In Ephesians we have now reached one of Paul's prayers, and it's a prayer that may not have just been for the Ephesians. Some of the earliest manuscripts of this letter actually don't have the

words "in Ephesus" in verse 1—the letter is simply addressed "to the saints". Furthermore, this letter is quite uncharacteristic of Paul because it contains few personal details (compare Romans 16). That's unusual, since Paul had spent a couple of years in Ephesus and would have personally known quite a lot of people in the church. Putting all this together, it is quite possible that this was really a circular letter from Paul designed to be passed around lots of churches. The copy we have translated in our Bibles is simply the copy that was sent to the Ephesian church.

If that is the case, what we have in 1:15-23 is the sort of prayer that Paul would pray for all Christians! If Paul were here today, these would probably be the sorts of things he would pray for you.

