

Day One Ephesians 1:1-14

I. Background Information

Section One

Apostle (v1): this literally means someone sent with a message. The apostles were the small group of followers Jesus chose to lead the church after He would die.

Ephesus (v1): a major urban center of Asia on the Aegean Sea. The first century population is estimated at 300,000, making it one of the larger cities of the Roman empire. It was extremely prosperous as a commercial center, provincial capital, and port city. It was known for its many monuments, theaters, and temples and was an international tourist center. It was so profitable that its leaders operated the first world bank. It was filled with political fighting, divided between the rich and a poor dehumanized underclass. There is more written about this church than any other in the New Testament. You can read more about its beginnings in Acts 18-20.

Grace (v2): this is when we are given a gift or favor which we do not deserve

Spiritual gift from the heavenly world (v3): in this chapter, this is another way of saying God has given us everything we need for our relationship with Him.

Read Passage

** underline main ideas as you read

** especially notice all of the things God has done for his people

II. Summary

Paul begins this letter with much enthusiasm. Even though he is in prison, it seems like he was having a good day! He simply reminds us of how blessed we are that God has done so much for us through Jesus. He especially stresses that this was God's plan from before the beginning of the world. (v4,5,9,10,11)

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.

2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?

3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?

4. For what people or situations do you need to thank God today?

5. For what people or situations do you need to ask God's help today?

6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Two Ephesians 1:15-23

I. Background Information

Holy Spirit (v13): In the Bible, God is spoken of as one being, but as existing in three different forms (or persons) at the same time. The Holy Spirit another way of speaking of God.

Christ's body (v23): this is a common name for the Christian church. The church is the physical presence of Jesus on the earth now - it represents Jesus - and is controlled by Him as a body is controlled by its head. This image also communicates that Christians have an extremely close relationship with Jesus.

Read Passage

** underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

In the second half of this chapter, Paul tells the Ephesians that he keeps praying that God will enable them to see these blessings. In reading this chapter you see how clearly Paul saw God's love and how this perspective gave him hope and joy in a life that could easily have been very discouraging.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.
2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?
3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?
4. For what people or situations do you need to thank God today?
5. For what people or situations do you need to ask God's help today?
6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Three Ephesians 2:1-10

I. Background Information

Spiritually dead (v1) : this is Paul's way of saying that before we ask God to forgive us, we have no relationship with Him. It is as if we have never met Him and so do not know Him and have Him with us to help us and teach us and guide us. It also carries the dark idea that in the end of our life we will be punished for our disobedience by being abandoned by God forever. This is the death that really matters in the Bible.

Ruler of the spiritual powers (v2) : this is a way of describing Satan. In the Bible his origin is unclear, but he seems to have once been an angel and now rules over other angels who rebelled against God. He is spoken of as powerful and always trying to oppose God's plans and desires.

Mercy (v4): when someone deserves punishment, but we choose to not punish them, we are showing mercy to them.

Union with Christ (v6) : when we are forgiven, the Bible describes us as united with Jesus. We have a very close relationship with him and our identity is now closely connected with Him. Marriage is a clear picture of this -- two people become one unit.

Saved through faith (v8) : Saved is the picture that we were in trouble and were rescued. Faith is a word for believing or trusting God and it is the key to our rescue. God sent Jesus to pay for our disobedience by dying in our place - and now offers forgiveness to anyone who will simply reach out and take His offer of love. Every other religion teaches that we must work for forgiveness - do many religious acts or do more good things than bad things. The Bible teaches that this is impossible because we must be perfect to be with God. Therefore God chose to let Jesus live a perfect life for us and also to suffer our punishment for us -- he did all the work that was necessary. Our part is say thank you to God and to now follow Jesus

Read Passage

** underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

In this chapter, Paul continues to talk about all that God has done for us through Jesus. Here he especially focuses on the contrast that we used to be dead and actually following Satan, but now we are alive and have a living daily relationship with God. He also stresses that this is true simply because of our faith in what God did through Jesus for us. Our forgiveness was a gift offered to us - not something we earned - and not something we must continue to earn. We are free to simply follow Jesus and try to do the things God would want us to do, but know that even when we fail, God will still forgive us when we say we are sorry.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.
2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?
3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?
4. For what people or situations do you need to thank God today?
5. For what people or situations do you need to ask God's help today?
6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Four Ephesians 2:11-22

I. Background Information

Gentiles (v11) : this was the Jewish word for anyone who was not a Jew.

Uncircumcised/Circumcised (v11) : the Jewish people cut the some skin off of the end of the baby boys sex organ. This was a sign that they were dedicated to God.

Covenants (v12) : a special type of agreement or contract. The covenant referred to here was the promise God made to the Jewish people to watch over them and use them to do His work -- and the laws He gave them to guide their society.

Sacred Temple (v21) : a temple is a special building for worship ceremonies. Here it is a picture of all of the people who follow God. People from every nation who follow Jesus are like stones used to build this special building dedicated to the worship of God.

Read passage -- underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

In the second section, Paul stresses that even though God first began to reveal Himself through the Jewish nation, now all people from every nation who follow Jesus are equally His people. We are now all one big family of brothers and sisters and God wants to use all of us in the work He is doing in the world.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.

2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?

3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?

4. For what people or situations do you need to thank God today?

5. For what people or situations do you need to ask God's help today?

6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Five Ephesians 3:1-22

I. Background Information

prisoner (v1): Paul is writing this from prison. He was put there because the authorities were trying to stop him from starting new churches.

In past times (v5): he is referring to all of the time before Jesus, but especially to the 4000 years of Jewish history recorded in the first half of the Bible called the Old Testament.

Prophets (v5): a prophet was a person God chose and used to speak His message to people. Usually they reminded the people of God's laws and sometimes told of things that would happen in the future. Most of the Old Testament was written by these people.

Gospel (v6): this word means 'good news' and is used to refer to the news about Jesus' life and what He did for us.

Angelic rulers and powers (v10): this refers to the good and evil spirits. These are beings also created by God, but not of flesh and blood like us. It is interesting that Paul says that God is teaching them things through His work in us.

Read passage -- underline main ideas

II. Summary

The first part of this chapter continues Paul's thought from chapter two that God has sent Jesus to bring forgiveness to all people from every nation. The plan that He would do this through sending His son Jesus was not known in the past, but now this good news is clear. By accepting this offer of forgiveness we can now come to God freely with no fear of punishment and no more shame. (v12) He ends by praying that they may understand this amazing love of God for us.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.

2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?

3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?

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6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Six

Ephesians 4:1-16

I. Background Information

Lord (v5): another word for master or ruler

Evangelists (v11): a person often used by God to help people understand the gospel and begin to follow Jesus

Pastor (v11): a person with ability to lead and care for groups of Christians

Christ's full stature (v13): a person's stature is how important or respected they are -- here it is a way of saying we will be more and more like Jesus

Read passage -- underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

In the first section of this chapter, Paul is stressing that God uses each of us in the church to do a special job. He has designed things so that as each of us listen to God and obey Him, we all experience more and more of the peace and joy in life that God wants for us. God intends for the church to be like a family that loves each other. This means that being part of the church is very important for a Christian. It is a gift from God, but also a place where God has given us a responsibility. We need our church family and they need us.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.

2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?

3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?

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Day Seven

Ephesians 4:17-32

I. Background Information

heathen (v17): people who live life ignoring God and disobeying His laws

vice (v19): habits and ways of living or thinking that are against God's will

indecent (v19): things which are immoral and against God's design for our sexual lives

giving the devil a chance.. (v27): the Bible says that the devil is constantly trying to get us to disobey God. Each time we follow his ideas and sin, we become part of the problems in the world which sadden God and bring more and more pain to people. Paul is telling us to be aware of this danger and not let the devil lead us into any of this behavior.

Read passage -- underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

Now Paul moves to talking about the daily life of someone who follows Jesus. We are to be "new" people who look like Jesus whom we follow. Though our forgiveness is a gift - not something we work for or earn - it results in a life of trying to please God and this means a constant effort to turn away from anything that would dishonor or disappoint our heavenly Father.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

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3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?
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Day Eight

Ephesians 5:1-20

I. Background Information

sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice (v2): the Jews burned sweet smelling incense in the Temple as a symbol of prayers rising to God. Here Paul is comparing Jesus' giving of His life for us with this incense and saying it was very pleasing to God.

greediness is a form of idol worship v5: worshiping statues of gods was a common practice of the ancient cultures in Israel, but it was strictly forbidden by God in the Bible. It is seen as worshiping false gods instead of the true God. Greed is a type of idol worship because people are depending on money for their security instead of trusting in God to take care of them.

wrath (v6) : anger and punishment

filled with the Spirit (v18) : instead of seeking pleasure in alcohol (drunk with wine), Paul encourages us to let God fill us with the joy and peace and life that comes from knowing and serving Him -- sort of being filled up with Him instead of wine.

Read passage -- underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

Love continues to be the theme in this chapter. Paul uses the picture of darkness in contrast to light. We used to follow the values and practices of the world, but now we must be completely different - like darkness that changes to light. He especially mentions the areas of sex and money which are at the heart of so much sin. He ends the first section with the famous words that we should be filled with the Spirit. The world thinks that pleasure and completeness are found in sex or money or alcohol, but Paul says we will find much more as we follow Jesus and know God more each day. We will find that each day is filled with reasons to sing and thank God.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

1. What did you learn today? Write down a few thoughts you have about what you read.
2. What questions do you have after reading and thinking?
3. Is there anything you think God wants you to do based on what you read today?
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6. Take time to talk to God about these things. (talk and listen)

Day Ten

Ephesians 6:1-9

I. Background Information

slaves (v5) : in the time of Jesus slaves were very common. In some cities slaves were a large portion of the population. However, these were not people who were forced to be slaves. They were mostly people who owed money and were working to repay their debt.

Read passage -- underline main ideas as you read

II. Summary

A Christian home starts with a loving marriage, but this should lead to a loving family. Parents are responsible to train and correct their children, but always with love. Also children must obey their parents. They also must learn to be people of love.

The same responsibility to love and do what is best for others even applies to Christians if they are slaves or masters. Today this would apply to our roles as workers or supervisors. We must always act in a way that would please Jesus. Remember that no matter where we work or what our job, we are really working for God if we are Christians.

III. Daily Thoughts (write out your answers)

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May 2000

I have been with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for the last 27 years, but have had the privilege of working with International students only since 1992. It is particularly for you - my international friends - that I have written this guide. I hope it will help you find the richness and joy I have found in the Bible.

Until I began working with International students I did not realize how much background information is necessary to understand the Bible. I grew up with the Bible and learned the vocabulary, cultural background, religious setting, historical development.... etc, one little piece at a time over the years. Therefore, as an adult I just assumed everyone knew these things. My International friends have opened my eyes.

My goal in this guide is to give you the basic information you will need to understand and learn from this book of the Bible. I have tried to keep my comments simple and short to not confuse you with too much information -- and to not let them become a substitute for reading the Bible itself.

This guide is designed as a work book to be used as part of your time reading the Bible and talking with God each day. I recommend that you simply walk through the steps as I have arranged them. The background information will prepare you for your reading and then the short summary will help highlight the main points of each chapter.

Since the goal of reading the Bible is to spend time with God - listening to Him and talking with Him, I have included a few questions to help you reflect on what you have read. This will guide you into your conversation with God after your reading. I hope you will take the time to do these last steps. Without them, your time will be shallow and you will miss the real blessing and benefit of the Bible. It is not just a book of information. It is like a letter from God to us which He has written over many years -- and through which He continues to speak. It is a doorway into God's presence where you will discover a relationship with Him. If you open your ears, you will hear Him speaking to you -- teaching, guiding, comforting, correcting... Enter into a discussion with Him -- listen as you read and as you write your thoughts and even as you talk to Him about what is on your mind. And if you hear Him telling you to do something, trust Him enough to obey. His commands are usually simple, but often difficult. However, you will find that following Him will lead you to real life.

May God's grace and blessing be with you as you seek Him.

Warmly,

Len Andyshak

This guide is based on the Today's English Version of the Bible. I chose this translation of the Bible because it uses vocabulary which is very common to our daily speech and because it phrases ideas in a way which is easy to read. I think you will find it a very understandable and enjoyable translation.