

## Ephesians Part 1 – Blessed



### Ephesians 1

In today's session we start our journey through Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. Focusing on the first chapter, we will discover how blessed we are as followers of Jesus Christ and the difference he makes in our lives. Following Paul's example, we will take time to recognise how our church is a blessing and give thanks for the people within it.

#### You will need:

- Spiritual Blessings handout
- Writing paper and envelopes



### Beat



#### Leader's notes:

*For the next six sessions the group will be focusing on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It would be great if each person had a copy of the letter to use and take notes throughout the sessions. They could use a journalling Bible or bring a notebook to write down all they are learning about this letter. Although this is optional, there are reminders throughout the sessions to encourage the group to jot down what they have discovered.*

#### Ask:

What do you know about the book of Ephesians in the New Testament?

Over the next six weeks we will be exploring the letter written by Paul to the Ephesian church. Watch the clip carefully to discover the historical background behind this letter. There will be questions to discuss once the clip has finished.

#### Leader's notes:

The following clip will be used throughout the session. Timings are given for each section.

#### Watch:

Ephesians Historical Background – Why was Ephesians written? (5:08)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FfIE2jS7-k>



**Watch: 0:00–2:24**

## Discuss

- What key question lies at the heart of the letter to the Ephesians? *Who has God made us to be?*
- What kind of city was Ephesus? *A large important city in the Roman Empire with a focus on business and trade.*
- Who was attracted to Ephesus? *What did they bring with them? Immigrants came to the city who brought with them their cultures, worldviews and religious beliefs.*
- How did the people of Ephesus view worship? *Many different gods were worshipped and people were free to worship whoever they wanted.*
- Which goddess did Ephesus worship above all others and how was she worshipped? *Artemis of the Ephesians was worshipped as the goddess of fertility and protection. She was also known by the Romans as Diana.*
- What was special about the temple built for Artemis? *It was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world and thousands of people would visit as a pilgrimage. Images of the temple of Artemis are available online.*
- How did the Ephesians view the spiritual world and what did they do to protect themselves? *The Ephesians saw the world as full of demons and dark spirits plotting their downfall. They would protect themselves by practising superstitions and magical rituals.*
- How was the Jewish community different within the ancient city of Ephesus? *How did this cause division? The Jews worshipped only one God. This created tension as they kept themselves separate from the rest of the population.*

### Leader's notes:

After discussing the above questions, ask the group to describe the city of Ephesus at this time. Encourage the group to jot down what they have discovered.

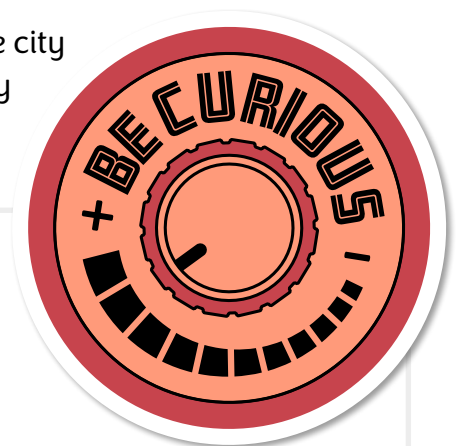


If your group is interested, then watch the following clip to discover another goddess of Ephesus who is still part of the popular culture today.

### Watch:

The Goddess Nike: ancient symbols and sportswear – Bible Trek – Ephesus Series – 05 (0:59)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y1OzVRWx5E>





**Read:**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:  
<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
(Ephesians 1:1-2)

**Ask:**

What do we discover in the opening verses of this letter?

**Say:**

Most scholars believe this letter was written by Paul but it is possible that it was not specifically sent to the church at Ephesus but was a 'round robin' intended for all churches. The phrase 'in Ephesus' (v1) isn't included in some of the earlier manuscripts and appears nowhere else in the letter; and there is no reference to any individual or specific situation in the church – unusual for a Pauline letter. [You may want to insert the name of your own church/corps here!] But it is generally agreed that the letter responded to the challenges faced by Christians in southwestern Asia Minor.

**Watch 2:24-3:53****Ask:**

What were some of the challenges facing the church at Ephesus?

*New Christians carried unhealthy beliefs from their past.*

*The new believers were unable to let go of their previous practices and superstitions.*

*Animosity between Jews and Gentiles carried over into the church leading to division.*

**Ask:**

- Do you see any of these challenges reflected in our churches today?
- If so, what do they look like?

**Leader's notes:**

*For this activity, each member of the group will need a Spiritual Blessings handout, which shares a range of translations of the Scripture. The aim of the activity is to create a visual representation of the 'spiritual blessings of Christ' found in these verses. You can either work as a whole group or divide into smaller teams. The different translations should help the group to understand what Paul is trying to communicate to the Ephesians. The group can represent the blessings of Christ in whatever creative way they prefer. Once the group have completed their visual representation, they can then share and discuss it together.*

**Ask:**



- Which of these spiritual blessings connects with you the most?
- Which means the most to you?

**Watch: 3:53–4:22**

**Ask:**

What does Ephesians teach us about our identity in Christ?



## Sound Check

**Say:**

Paul brings this part of his letter to a close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the believers in the church. As you listen to Ephesians 1:15–23, jot down some of the prayer requests made to God by Paul.

**Leader's notes:**

Encourage the group to follow the Scripture in their Bible.

**Read:**

<sup>15</sup> Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, <sup>17</sup> asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. <sup>18</sup> I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called – his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

<sup>19</sup> I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. <sup>21</sup> Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else – not only in this world but also in the world to come. <sup>22</sup> God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. <sup>23</sup> And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

(Ephesians 1:15–23 *NLT*)

Write a letter to your church, using Ephesians 1:15–23 as a starting point. The focus of the letter is to share with your church what you are thankful for and how you will pray for them in the future.

**Leader's notes:**

This activity can be done in small groups or individually. Although much communication today is digital, you may want to provide the group with writing paper and envelopes. Share ideas together about where your church needs encouragement and give the group time to complete their letter. At this point they do not need to place it in the envelope and seal it.



## Bridge

**Ask:**

- How often do you spend time praying for your church?
- When it comes to taking the time to pray for our church, what can we learn from the Apostle Paul?

## Selah

**Leader's notes:**

For today's Worship section, allow the group to read their letters as part of a time of prayer for your church. When you have shared the prayers together, the group can place them in the envelope. If appropriate, give these letters to your church leadership team to share at an upcoming meeting or before morning worship. Adapt this activity to your own church as the main aim is for the leadership to know that the young people have taken time to pray for the church as a whole.

## Coda

**Say:**

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

**Ask:**

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from the first chapter of Ephesians?

**Leader's notes:**

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.







## *The New International Version*

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

**(Ephesians 1:3-14 NIV)**





## *The Amplified Version*

<sup>3</sup> Blessed and worthy of praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as [in His love] He chose us in Christ [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and blameless in His sight. In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined and lovingly planned for us to be adopted to Himself as [His own] children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the kind intention and good pleasure of His will – <sup>6</sup> to the praise of His glorious grace and favour, which He so freely bestowed on us in the Beloved [His Son, Jesus Christ]. <sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood, [which paid the penalty for our sin and resulted in] the forgiveness and complete pardon of our sin, in accordance with the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and understanding [with practical insight] <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> with regard to the fulfilment of the times [that is, the end of history, the climax of the ages] – to bring all things together in Christ, [both] things in the heavens and things on the earth. <sup>11</sup> In Him also we have received an inheritance [a destiny – we were claimed by God as His own], having been predestined (chosen, appointed beforehand) according to the purpose of Him who works everything in agreement with the counsel and design of His will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ [who first put our confidence in Him as our Lord and Savior] would exist to the praise of His glory. <sup>13</sup> In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and [as a result] believed in Him, were stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit [the One promised by Christ] as owned and protected [by God]. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit is the guarantee [the first instalment, the pledge, a foretaste] of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own [purchased] possession [His believers], to the praise of His glory.

**(Ephesians 1:3-14 AMP)**





## *The Message paraphrase*

<sup>3-6</sup> How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

<sup>7-10</sup> Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people – free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

<sup>11-12</sup> It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

<sup>13-14</sup> It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free – signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first instalment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

**(Ephesians 1:3-14 MSG)**