



LifeLight

*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4*

# Ephesians / 1 & 2 Thessalonians

LEADERS GUIDE

*From lecture one:*

The Letter to the Ephesians is God's inspired revelation of His purpose in our lives. Christians who mine Ephesians for its truths will find themselves making sense of the Christian life as perhaps they have never made sense of it before. Ephesians asks and answers the three big questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? They're all here...

Ephesians was written by Paul about the same time as he wrote Colossians, around AD 60, while he was imprisoned in Rome (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Some question whether Paul was the author because the letter lacks the usual personal greetings, and the contents are so similar to Colossians. But 1:1; 3:1, and other passages as well, make it clear that Paul is the author.

*The Sermon of St. Paul at Ephesus* by Eustache Le Sueur (1649)



Copyright © 2011 Concordia Publishing House  
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968  
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Written by Dean W. Nadasdy and Roger R. Sonnenberg

Edited by Brian Chisamore

Field testing coordinated by Denise Muhly and Lavern Schmidt, Lodi, CA

Cover art: Musée du Louvre, Paris/ © SuperStock

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations marked *LSB* are from *Lutheran Service Book*, copyright © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Prayers at the beginning of each lecture are from *The Lord Will Answer: A Daily Prayer Catechism*, copyright © 2004 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

This publication may be available in braille, in large print, or on cassette tape for the visually impaired. Please allow 8 to 12 weeks for delivery. Write to Lutheran Blind Mission, 7550 Watson Rd., St. Louis, MO 63119-4409; call toll-free 1-888-215-2455; or visit the Web site: [www.blindmission.org](http://www.blindmission.org).

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

## Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program		5
Session 1—Lecture Leader	We Belong to God! Ephesians 1	9
Session 2—Lecture Leader	Before and After Ephesians 2	14
Session 3—Lecture Leader	Testimony, Prayer, and Unity Ephesians 3:1–4:16	20
Session 4—Lecture Leader	The Daily Walk of Christians Ephesians 4:17–5:20	26
Session 5—Lecture Leader	Christian Relationships Ephesians 5:21–6:24	31
Session 6—Lecture Leader	The Spirit of Leadership 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:16	37
Session 7—Lecture Leader	Tested but Enduring 1 Thessalonians 2:17–4:12	42
Session 8—Lecture Leader	The Coming of the Lord 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:28	47
Session 9—Lecture Leader	Until the Lord Comes 2 Thessalonians	51
Session 1—Small-Group Leader	We Belong to God! Ephesians 1	57
Session 2—Small-Group Leader	Before and After Ephesians 2	59
Session 3—Small-Group Leader	Testimony, Prayer, and Unity Ephesians 3:1–4:16	61
Session 4—Small-Group Leader	The Daily Walk of Christians Ephesians 4:17–5:20	63
Session 5—Small-Group Leader	Christian Relationships Ephesians 5:21–6:24	66
Session 6—Small-Group Leader	The Spirit of Leadership 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:16	69
Session 7—Small-Group Leader	Tested but Enduring 1 Thessalonians 2:17–4:12	72
Session 8—Small-Group Leader	The Coming of the Lord 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:28	75
Session 9—Small-Group Leader	Until the Lord Comes 2 Thessalonians	78



## Introduction

### Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

### LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His Body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

*In-depth* means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

### LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

### LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

#### The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

#### The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

#### The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

### The Small-Group Coordinator (optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits, with the leadership team, the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

### The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session;
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

### Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

### The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader

will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another 5 minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

## Recommended Study Resources and Worship

*The Lutheran Study Bible*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

*Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

*The Concordia Organist* is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

*Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

## Recommended Study Resources for Ephesians/1 and 2 Thessalonians

Bruce, F. F. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, TX: Word, 1982. Done in Bruce's usual thorough manner with careful attention to the meaning and implications of the Greek.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984. An excellent resource, carefully done.

Kuske, David P. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. People's Bible Commentary Series. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961. A very helpful resource.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961. An older, generally reliable commentary by a Lutheran scholar.

Marshall, I. Howard. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. New Century Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. A careful exposition, including introductory articles on the problems at Thessalonica, stressing the unity of 1 Thessalonians.

Westcott, B. F. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979 reprint. Still a helpful resource by a great New Testament scholar of the past. Introductory articles include in parallel columns the relationship of Ephesians to Colossians, other Pauline letters, and also other apostolic writings. Helpful excursus appended.



## We Belong to God!

### Ephesians 1

#### *Preparing for the Session*

#### Central Focus

Belonging to Christ brings us identity, our life purpose, and the destination of our lives. In Christ, we know who we are and what we need.

#### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. identify aspects of their identity, purpose, and needs as Christians;
2. approach their Christian lives with greater celebration and certainty; and
3. pursue more actively a dynamic, growing relationship with Christ, with a constant eye on their blessings.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

#### For the Lecture Leader

##### *Session Plan*

##### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

##### Prayer

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear

them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*LSB*, p. 265)

#### Lecture Presentation

### 1 Introducing the Letter to the Ephesians

If you've ever read a poor novel or watched a poorly developed screenplay, you may have caught yourself saying, "I don't get it. Where is it all going?" A plot line with no terminus, action with no purpose, or characters with no development can leave an audience scratching their heads. Even Christians at times can lose the purpose of the drama of their walk with Christ. We can forget who we are and why God has created us and saved us.

An old story tells of a philosophy professor who gave his class a final exam with one question: "Why?" Students wrote frantically in response, but one student, gambling that the professor might be impressed with his wisdom, simply wrote, "Why not?" The old story says that the student received an A for his response. From a Christian perspective, though, the answer is hardly adequate. Christians and Christian churches need to know why they're here. Mission statements seek to define such purposes. The Letter to the Ephesians provides a treasure trove of material for formulating personal and corporate mission statements.

The Letter to the Ephesians is God's inspired revelation of His purpose in our lives. Christians who mine Ephesians for its truths will find themselves making sense of the Christian life as perhaps they have never made sense of it before. Ephesians asks and answers the three big questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? They're all here.

Before we probe the truths of this letter, let's take a look at its historical background. As with any biblical book, setting Ephesians in its original context will help us understand its message.

Ephesians was written by Paul about the same time as he wrote Colossians, around AD 60, while he was

imprisoned in Rome (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Some question whether Paul was the author because the letter lacks the usual personal greetings, and the contents are so similar to Colossians. But 1:1; 3:1, and other passages as well, make it clear that Paul is the author. The lack of personal greetings may signal the fact that the letter was intended to be circulated among several churches in the Roman province of Asia—Ephesus among them. Some have even suggested that when Paul refers to “the letter from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16), he may actually have the Letter to the Ephesians in mind.

Ephesus was a major urban and trade center in the Roman Empire, ranking with Rome, Corinth, and Alexandria. It was located in what we know today as Turkey. [If available, use a map to point out locations.] Its temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul spent more time in Ephesus (three years) than in any other city he visited. While there, his life was threatened by a riot (Acts 19). His farewell words to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20) are some of the most touching in the New Testament. Paul had a major impact on the region (Acts 19:26) and left behind a flourishing church. By the time John wrote the Book of Revelation (late in the apostolic period), however, the Church at Ephesus had lost some of its original zeal (Revelation 2:4).

Ephesians does not address any specific error or conflict in the Church, as do many of Paul’s letters. Rather, Ephesus comes as an inspiring lift for Christians who may have only just begun to see the heights to which God has called them. With picturesque beauty and Christ-centered wisdom, the letter reveals the riches, the changes, and the challenges of the Christian life.

## 2 Who We Are (1:1–14)

Paul begins his letter by celebrating who we are in Christ (vv. 1–14). He then goes on to pray for the Christians of Ephesus, revealing the primary needs of the Christian life (vv. 15–23).

Paul clearly knew who he was. He identifies himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (v. 1). With that description, Paul makes it clear that he has been sent by God on God’s mission by God’s choice and with God’s authority. Quite a self-image! Paul writes to “the saints who are in Ephesus,” to the “faithful in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). His image of his readers is no less grand than that of himself. The simple phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” marks our relationship with Christ as

the most significant aspect of our lives. That theme runs throughout the letter. After greeting his readers with his usual “grace to you and peace” (v. 2), Paul begins a celebration of the blessings we have in Christ, blessings that answer the question, “Who are we?”

### A. We Are Blessed (1:3)

The blessings we have from God “in the heavenly places” include “in Christ . . . every spiritual blessing.” Once again, “in Christ” has our blessings flowing from our communion with Christ. The picture here is one of both feeling blessed and being blessed. The blessing is there whether we feel it or not, but sensing it and celebrating it enhances the blessing all the more. That is what Paul is striving for—Christians knowing that they are blessed and looking like it.

A news reporter recently interviewed the winner of a \$45 million lottery. The sheer overwhelming “blessedness” of this woman’s experience was written all over her face! How much more, considering the eternal riches of God in our relationship with Christ, are we to wear the mind, heart, and face of the blessed!

### B. We Are Chosen (1:4–14)

Written across this section of Ephesians is our being chosen by God. Paul says it in a variety of ways: “He chose us” (v. 4); “He predestined us for adoption as sons” (v. 5); and “in Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined” (v. 11). For Paul, being chosen is central to being blessed. God chose us, not because we were holy and blameless, but so that we could become holy and blameless (v. 4). God’s choosing of us and His justifying of us through faith in Christ sets us on the way of being holy and blameless. Having chosen us before creation, the whole plan of salvation unfolds as God’s achievement of His purpose for our lives.

Unless an athlete is chosen as a member of an Olympic team, she will never know the full, personal impact of performing in the Olympics. Without God’s choice, way back in His prehistory grace, we Christians would never know the blessings of life in Christ. Being blessed begins with God’s choice—not ours. In 1993, the film *Schindler’s List* depicted the true story of 1,200 Jews who were saved by a businessman who chose them to work in his factory. His choice meant their very lives. They knew it, and their gratitude, over seventy years later, still runs strong. In the New Testament, divine predestination is always presented in the context of gratitude for God’s grace, never in the sense of blaming God or questioning God’s choices.

Paul's use of the imagery of adoption in verse 5 vividly illustrates this truth. In the ancient world, when a man adopted a son, that son's entire identity and future changed. The grateful son, lavished with blessings and an inheritance, knew in a real way the significance of a father's choice. Being chosen meant everything. Many adopted children today know the power and reassurance of being loved by choice. Christians are adopted children who never stop celebrating the sheer grace of our heavenly Father's choice.

### C. We Are Holy and Blameless (1:4)

To be holy is to be set apart for God's purposes—to be different for the sake of doing God's will in our lives. In J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*, Franny has suffered an emotional breakdown of sorts. Her mother, Bessie, brews some soup in an attempt to strengthen her. Franny refuses it again and again. Finally, Bessie says in frustration, "You don't even have enough sense to drink when someone brings you a cup of consecrated chicken soup—which is the only kind of chicken soup Bessie brings to anybody around this madhouse." A cup of soup offered for healing is consecrated—set aside for the purpose of God. A Christian life in all its connections with God's will is holy, consecrated, in this sense.

The word translated "blameless" comes from a word describing an animal that is without blemish and therefore fit for sacrifice. To describe Christians as blameless people is to say we are committed to offering our Lord the very best—lives of excellent service and sacrifices that are pleasing to Him.

### D. We Are Redeemed (1:7)

We have been bought out of slavery. Paul's first readers knew the word he uses here. They saw slave markets where a ransom was paid to set a slave free. Paul identifies us here as slaves set free from bondage to sin, death, and the devil. The price paid is the blood of Jesus Christ. When we speak of being redeemed through Christ, it is no mere tit-for-tat transaction or cold economic exchange. It is one who loves us, giving His life in exchange for us. It is one dying so we can live free. There is no pawn-shop mentality to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The picture of redemption is the picture of sacrifice, suffering, and death. If we find inspiration in walking the rows of white gravestones in national cemeteries, vivid reminders of the cost of our political freedom, then the cross of Christ marks for all time the price of a greater freedom—our redemption from bondage to the forces of hell.

### E. We Are Forgiven (1:7–8)

The God we have offended, the same God of whom we may be afraid, forgives us. We are people who have faced God with our sin only to be forgiven by His lavish grace in Christ. The forgiveness of sins is at the heart of who we are. We are forever walking away from one who could have left us guilty. Instead, He has forgiven us. He is the prodigal—that is, extravagant—father of Luke 15, waiting for us to come and eager to shower us with an abundance of undeserved love.

### F. We Are Wise and Understanding (1:8)

With God's grace comes wisdom and understanding. The wisdom of which Paul writes is to know and understand the mysteries of God so that they make sense of life. Wisdom is applied scriptural truth. Wise people know God's truth (knowledge) and have a firm grasp of it so that they can articulate it (understanding), but they can also apply God's truth to their own life experiences. The wisdom God gives to Christians may appear foolish by worldly standards (1 Corinthians 1:20–25), but in the end it is the wisdom that matters most for a blessed life.

### G. We Know Where History Is Heading (1:9–10)

A church cleverly put these words of welcome on a sign out in front of its building: "Welcome to all who have no idea in the world what is going on!" There is no doubt that life can be a confusing mystery for many of us. In verses 9–10, Paul speaks of the mystery of God's will. In Paul's writings, however, a mystery is not something hidden, but rather something once hidden but now revealed. Revealed to Christians is the purpose of God for human history—to bring everything and everyone under the headship of Christ. With the use of the term "in Him," Paul is saying that God's purpose is to have everything resolved in Christ. God's will is that at last all of the confusions and divisions in the world will disappear as everything comes into relationship with Christ. God's purpose, in other words, is to have everything add up to and make sense in Christ. Finally, history, relationships, time, and space and all things seen and unseen make sense and find their consummate meaning in Christ.

As in Colossians 1, Paul presents the cosmic Christ, Lord of the universe, the Christ in whom everything converges. A wise old pastor once told a young preacher that the best question to ask in evaluating a sermon is "Why is Jesus Christ necessary here?" He said, "Take

Christ out of a good sermon, and the sermon should make no sense at all." The same can be said of life in its totality.

### H. We Are People with a Purpose (1:11, 13)

Paul speaks in verse 12 of those "who were the first to hope in Christ." He has the Jewish Christians and himself in mind here, those who saw in Christ the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies. He says that they were chosen "to the praise of His glory." Then he moves in verses 13 and 14 to speak of the Gentiles who were marked with the Spirit "to the praise of His glory." Both Jew and Gentile are brought to faith for the same purpose—to bring praise to the glory of Christ.

"To the praise of His glory" is a vivid purpose statement for the life of the Christian. We are people of praise. That means our lives celebrate Christ. Our attitudes and our actions are meant to lift people to see Christ with us and within us. An African American preacher once preached on the glory of Christ, repeating the statement, "I have seen the glory." He rolled that *o* in *glory*: "I have seen the glo-o-o-ry!" he exclaimed again and again. He saw the glory, he said, in the baby of Bethlehem, in the preacher of Galilee, in the triumph of the cross, and in the heaven-opening victory of the resurrection. As he spoke, you could see the glory on his face—in the praise, in the fervor, in the enthusiastic witness!

Christians are like the villager at the foot of a mountain. He has been to the summit and can describe it for others so that they want to go there. We are like an astronaut back from space, who has seen the greater universe, the bigger picture, and she can tell of it in such a way that her listeners want to know when the next shuttle leaves. Christians point to Christ, praising the glory we've seen in Him—"glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

### I. We Are Sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13–14)

The Holy Spirit is the down payment, the earnest money, of our heavenly inheritance. The Holy Spirit brought us to faith and, as Martin Luther put it in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, the Holy Spirit also keeps us "in the true faith." In other words, we are secure. Our place in heaven is guaranteed. A deposit has been made. Our reservation is confirmed in the ongoing presence and power of the Spirit in our lives.

These nine qualities contribute to the solid identity of God's chosen people. We know who we are, and every

return to our identity lifts us to new heights in our walk with Christ.

## 3 What We All Need (1:15–23)

Paul turns next to revealing his prayers for the Ephesians. What the Ephesians needed, we all need. Paul prays for that which every Christian needs.

### A. We All Need Encouragement and Prayer (1:15–16)

What a thrill it must have been for the Ephesians to know that Paul continually thanked God for their faith and for their "love toward all the saints." What's more, he kept on praying for them. Those prayers encouraged the Ephesians. A young missionary tells of receiving a letter from a disabled elderly woman in a nursing home. She simply wrote, "I'll be praying for you at 8:30 a.m., Eastern Standard Time, every morning." The missionary figured out the differences in the time zones and thought of the woman often just at the moment of her prayers. He wrote back that he treasured the woman's prayers and knew that they had a powerful impact on his work. Near the woman's bed, framed and on the wall, is the missionary's letter. They have never met, these two Christians, but in a very real way they depend on each other. We all need encouragement in prayer. Sometimes it is all that we can give, and sometimes it is all that we receive. Yet the singularity of the gift makes its impact no less significant.

### B. We All Need to Know Christ Better (1:17)

Knowing Christ is more than just knowing about Him. It is being in a close, personal relationship with Christ. Knowing Christ is looking like Christ, saying what Christ would say, doing what Christ would do. It is similar to a couple who has been married for many years and can actually finish each other's sentences, know just what the other is thinking, and get the same idea at the same time.

In the Christian life, the Holy Spirit brings about such close communion with Christ. It comes, as Paul says, through wisdom and revelation. Through revelation, we find out more about Christ, drawing closer and closer to Christ through the Spirit. Wisdom takes what we know about Christ and our relationship with Christ and puts it to work in life. Wisdom is applied revelation.

Clearly, for Paul, our relationship with Christ is a dynamic enterprise of learning and growth. The well-

known prayer of Richard, bishop of Chichester, summarizes this well:

O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and  
Brother,

for these three things I pray:

May I know Thee more clearly,

Love Thee more dearly,

And follow Thee more nearly.

### C. We All Need Hope (1:18–19)

Hope is the certainty of our “glorious inheritance,” as Paul puts it. Hope is having “the eyes of your hearts enlightened” with a vision of glory. In the play *Camelot*, Merlin the Magician tells King Arthur how he and the young knight differ. Arthur, he says, lives in the now, while Merlin lives in the now having been in the future already. “I live backwards,” Merlin says to Arthur. “Because of that, while you grow old, I youthen.”

Christian hope is not magic. It is real faith that sees heaven in the future with all its glories. In this sense, Christians live in the now, having been in the future already. With such a hope, we can become a “youthening” force in a world of fear and despair.

### D. We All Need the Divine Power That Raised Christ from the Dead (1:19–23)

Paul closes this opening chapter with a celebration of the divine power of God that raised Christ from the dead and established His rule over all things, including the Church. That power, “His great might,” as Paul puts it, is at our disposal. It is a prayer away. It is as close as our Lord is close, as real as our Lord is real.

“How does it feel to be so close to the seat of power?” asked a reporter to a young aide of the President of the United States. “Great!” said the aide. “But I also understand that he has the power—I do not.” The power of God is different. God infuses His people with His creative, death-shattering power. The power of Christ runs through the Church, “His body,” as Paul calls the Church in verse 23.

It’s an amazing thing, this infusion of power in Christians. It’s not unlike the news stories of people lifting many times their weight in an emergency with a sudden rush of energy. A life is saved, an injury prevented, as a power beyond their own takes action. Christians have such power, “the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe” (v. 19). Lives are saved for eternity. Humble people do great things. Fittingly,

it is Christ who gets the glory from Paul—and from us. After all, we were called “to the praise of His glory.”

### Concluding Activities

Close the session by speaking a brief prayer, perhaps for the privilege of growing in God’s Word together. Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

## Before and After

### Ephesians 2

#### *Preparing for the Session*

#### Central Focus

In the light of what we were, and considering what we've become, what a difference Christ makes in our lives!

#### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. gain insights into the ongoing struggle in their lives between the old person they are by nature and the new person they are in Christ;
2. find confidence and grateful celebration in what Christ has accomplished for them; and
3. consciously do good works in faithful gratitude for Christ's heaven-opening, atoning work.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

#### For the Lecture Leader

##### *Session Plan*

##### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

##### Prayer

Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached word into

our hearts so that we may receive and believe it, and be gladdened and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts. Make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, and through Your inspiration think what is right. By Your power fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (Martin Luther, 1483–1546)

#### Lecture Presentation

### 1 Introducing This Section of Ephesians

Paul has just celebrated the rich blessings of belonging to Christ. He has identified key aspects of our identity in Christ. He has focused the purpose of our lives in the words "to the praise of His glory." Everything, writes Paul, eventually makes sense and finds its consummation in Christ. He also has specified his own prayers for the Ephesians, signaling central needs in the Christian life.

Now Paul moves on to consider the changes that occur in the Christian life. Using the Ephesians themselves as his case study, he highlights what they were like before their conversion and how different they are now. What's more, he describes in detail just how Christ made the difference.

Caution should be given to pushing the "before and after" model for this chapter too far. What we were without Christ and what we are with Christ are not two totally separate worlds. Warring within us is this difference. We are as Christians very much like a recovering alcoholic, who is never fully recovered in this life. The opportunity for relapse is ever present. Any Christian who has ever struggled with old, recurring sins knows how the "before" of our lives has a way of sneaking into the now. Elsewhere, in Romans 7:14–20, Paul writes of this struggle in his own life. Martin Luther spoke of it in terms of the Old Adam in us needing to be drowned on a daily basis—vivid imagery taken directly from Romans 6. In this sense, Christians are confronted with the before and after of Christianity every day of our lives.

It's similar to a person undergoing a "total makeover." She comes out of the makeover salon looking like a completely new person. Underneath, though, she is the

same basic person—same skin, same hair, same face. For her to maintain the new look, it will take work. In the Christian experience, that work is the work of Christ and His Spirit, the work of justification and sanctification. It's much deeper, too, than skin-deep changes. The changes brought about and maintained in the Christian life cut to the center of our lives. They are changes with eternal implications, and changes readily seen by those around us. As one little girl puts it, "If Jesus lives inside of me, and Jesus is bigger than I am, then some of Jesus ought to show through."

So what we were like before Christ and what we are like now is no static before-and-after story. Unlike the metamorphosis of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly and never returning to the cocoon again, we Christians face a return to our past every day. Days of disbelief and disobedience present themselves continually. The tension between the before and after persists throughout our Christian lives on earth.

Some of us have never personally known life apart from Christ, but the same tension of life apart from Christ and life with Christ persists for us as well. Where there is sin, death, and the devil, the stubborn "Old Adam" rebounds in us all. This chapter has us face our past haunting and encourages us to leave it behind—on a daily basis.

## 2 Life before Christ (2:1–3, 11–12)

The Ephesians were Gentiles before they were Christians. Paul had this fact in mind as he described their lives before their conversions. At times, Paul uses "you" in reference to the Ephesian Gentiles. At other times he uses "we," in reference to Jewish Christians. The pronouns signal the universal infection of sin. His description of life apart from Christ has us confront the pull of the dark side in each of us. Life before Christ has these characteristics.

### A. We Were Dead in Our Transgressions and Sins (2:1)

In 2:1, Paul describes life before Christ as no life at all. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins." Sin kills. We miss the mark God has set before us. We stray off the road of righteousness. Sin kills the spirit and the will. What's more, sin separates from the life God has to give. In this sense, more than in any other, life without Christ is a walking death.

With the finality of a casket shut and a corpse buried, we will not be revived or resuscitated. A listener once

challenged a missionary with the words, "You speak of sin as a great burden. I feel no burden of sin." The missionary responded, "If I were to place a 5,000 pound weight on a corpse, do you think the corpse would feel the load?" "No," said the young listener, "because it's dead." The missionary drove the point home, "And that spirit which feels no weight of sin is dead too."

Spiritual death leads directly to a physical death, and, ultimately, to a death that is eternal. (Romans 6:23) "The wages of sin is death." The Christian's struggle with the past is a life/death struggle.

### B. We Followed the Ways of This World (2:2)

Imagine a person whose entire perspective on life had been shaped only by television programming. What would such a person's morality be like? His sexual ethics? His attitude toward violence? The value he placed on life? How strongly would he desire to serve others?

The world sets standards different from those of Christ. Life before Christ is lived by a set of standards that usually settle for the lowest common denominator—standards such as, "What's in it for me?" or "How much can I get away with?" or "It worked for them; why shouldn't it work for me?" So a newspaper reporter observes Mother Teresa washing the sores of a leper and says to her, "I wouldn't do that for all the money in the world." And Mother Teresa responds, "Neither would I." Two separate worlds with two distinct sets of standards collide in those statements. Before Christ, we blended into the world's mediocre, self-focused values. After Christ, we adopted a new set of challenging standards, those given us by God.

### C. We Followed the Ways of the Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air (2:2)

Paul, like Christ in John 14:30, recognized the power of Satan at work in the world. Calling Satan "the prince of the power of the air" marks Satan's sphere of influence beyond mere earth. He is a personal spirit beyond any earthly creation, a spirit who joins the world in working disobedience.

Before coming to faith in Christ, sinners can honestly say, "The devil made me do it." The death Paul speaks of in verse 1 made us immune to awareness of the influence of both the world and the devil on our desires and behavior. We simply did not notice. It is as if someone put something foul in the air that we breathe. We take it in, and it has a tremendous influence on our wakefulness, our mood, and

our health, but we never notice it until it's too late. The influence of the devil is like that—subtle but significant.

### D. We Were Disobedient (2:2)

We may know the Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and other truths of God's will, yet still willfully sin. We have a conscience pricked by the laws of God written on our hearts, yet we still intentionally do what we know is wrong or fail to do what we know is right. This kind of willful rebellion characterizes life before Christ. No wonder the apostle John can write in 1 John 3:6, "No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning." This continued disobedience refuses to be changed, that is, to repent. The word *incorrigible* comes to mind. We are like the strong-willed child who simply chooses again and again to be disobedient.

### E. We Gratified the Cravings of Our Sinful Nature (2:3)

The word Paul uses for passions carries the idea of wanting that which is forbidden, seeking that which is clearly wrong. Before Christ, our glands speak louder than our brains or our conscience. We follow our appetites. Like Big Bellied Ben in the old nursery rhyme, we eat the church, we eat the steeple, we eat the town, we eat the people. Our insatiable desires take us to extremes—as when in ancient Rome they built *vomitoria* in homes so that the gorged could regurgitate and return to eat more. It was such a craving that brought on the first fall into sin. The problem, as one wag put it, "was not the apple on the tree, but the pair on the ground." Adam and Eve and the rest of us just wanted what they wanted and took it. That's the "passions of our flesh" at work.

The "desires of the body" of which Paul writes is fallen human nature without God. It is our natural tendency as sinners to do the wrong, to lay ourselves wide open to temptation and sin. Jesus described sins coming "from within, out of the heart of man." He said, (Mark 7:20–23) "All these [sins] come from within." That warped inside of us is our sinful nature.

The story goes that G. K. Chesterton, the Christian writer, once responded to an invitation to write a response to the question "What's wrong with the world?" The London *Times* was running a series of responses to the question. Chesterton wrote back:

Dear sir,

What's wrong with the world? I am.

Yours sincerely,

G. K. Chesterton

That is the response of one who has faced his own sinful nature and the cravings that nature sets in motion. Before Christ, the sinful nature has free reign in our lives. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy caught the dynamic changes that happen in Christ where the desires of our sinful nature are concerned. He wrote of his own conversion:

Five years ago I came to believe in Christ's teaching, and my life suddenly changed. I ceased to desire what I had previously desired and began to desire what I formerly did not want. What had previously seemed good to me seemed evil, and what seemed evil seemed good. . . . The direction of my life and my desires became different, and good and evil changed places. (Leo Tolstoy, as quoted in *1500 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, Robert Beckhouse, ed. [London: Harper/Collins Publishers, 1991], 95.)

### F. We Were under the Wrath of God (2:3)

Before Christ, we lived under God's wrath. Whether we knew it, felt it, or ignored it, the justice of God was at work in our lives—condemning us, damning us. Like the law of gravity, its impact was continued whether we were conscious of it or not. So God was our judge, giving us what we deserved, punishment. Under that wrath, we walked the walking death of the damned. The Bible never minces words concerning God's righteous anger and judgment on sinners. Life apart from Christ is life in the hands of an angry God.

In Ephesians 2:4–10, Paul presents in beautiful detail the atoning work of Christ on our behalf. Before we probe these verses, though, we'll continue our look at the characteristics of life before Christ as they surface in verses 11–12. Paul's focus here is on the Gentiles and their lives before Christ.

### G. We Were Separate from the Chosen People of God, Israel (2:11)

A great ethnic, moral, and religious barrier had divided Jew and Gentile for centuries. Jews hated Gentiles. The physical covenant of circumcision marked a Jew as other than a Gentile and a Gentile as other than a Jew. Jews spoke a daily prayer of thanks that they had not been created Gentiles. Intermarriage was forbidden; funerals were held for Jews who married Gentiles. A Jew rubbing elbows with Gentiles in public was considered unclean.

This separation between Jew and Gentile intentionally walled off Gentiles from the message of a promised Messiah. It would be the privilege of the nation of Israel

to present the world's Messiah. Gentiles were left to wait for their time. They were not citizens of God's chosen nation. They were not acquainted with the covenants of God. In short, they had none of the advantages or privileges of the chosen people of God. They were outsiders and strangers to the plan of God for human history.

### H. We Were Separate from Christ (2:12)

Paul likely used the title "Christ" here as the Greek counterpoint of the Hebrew title "Messiah." Both mean "Anointed One." Before Christ, Gentiles had no promise of a Messiah, no legacy of prophets foretelling the Promised One. For Gentiles, schooled in Greek thought, history was a matter of cycles going nowhere. The Hebrew notion of a linear history with a plan and terminus was foreign to Greeks. For them, history would cycle and recycle, destined to repetition and redundancy.

Life before Christ and after Christ ends up looking like the difference between nihilism (life is going nowhere) and destiny (life has a purpose and an end). Jews held on to their destiny confirmed in the promises of the Anointed of God being sent to save and to rule. Gentiles were without Christ in this deeper sense—they had no promised Messiah.

### I. We Were without Hope and without God (2:12)

Without God, there is no hope. The Gentiles of Paul's day had their religion—a pantheon of gods and goddesses borrowed from Greek culture. For all their temples and sacrifices, though, Gentiles saw death as final. Their gods were immortal, but they were not. As long as they offered their pinch of incense to these gods, they were hopeless.

Everyone has a religion, that to which they give their hearts and their worship. The tragedy of the myriad of religions is that they stop at the cemetery. Two grave diggers stood aside as they lowered into a large grave the body of a wealthy man sitting in his Mercedes. One looked at the other and said, "Now that's living!" No, it isn't. It's dying. Only the God revealed in the Scriptures, the God of sacred Jewish history and the God revealed in Jesus Christ, promises life beyond the grave. Those who live apart from Christ are hopeless without Him.

It's quite a description of life before Christ that Paul offers his readers. He wanted them and us to realize how far we've come in Christ and how easy it is to lapse into the old history—ever with us. Let's turn now to some of the most beautiful, inspired language ever used to capture the work of Christ on our behalf.

## 3 What God Has Accomplished for Us in Christ (2:4–10)

Given all that we were and all with which we still struggle, how we need the Good News of Christ's atoning work! Here is what Christ has done for us:

### A. In Christ, God Has Made Us Alive (2:4–5)

Paul has already described life before Christ as no life at all—as being dead in our trespasses and sins (v. 1). Now we find that God has "made us alive together with Christ." Christ, in His own words, came to bring us life (John 10:10). As Paul writes elsewhere, "to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

Sin separated us from the life God had to give, but because of God's "great love with which He loved us," He has made us alive with Christ. The sheer grace of God comes through as we realize that we could no more bring ourselves this life than a corpse can resuscitate itself. "By grace you have been saved," Paul reminds us.

This grace of God, His lavish undeserved favor, makes us alive. It is like the bland and lifeless professor in the novel *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*. When at last love touches his heart, he comes to life for the first time. He is changed, truly alive for the first time. He sees it and says it. His identity, his purpose, his desires all revolve around the woman who has chosen to love him. God's grace is like that. The force of God's love in Christ changes us from rebellious sinners on a death walk to hell to the beloved of God with a whole new life to live in Christ.

### B. In Christ, God Has Secured Our Place in Heaven (2:6–7)

Verses 6–7 present a difficult passage. The verses emphasize how our union with Christ assures us of our place in heaven. Just as Christ has ascended to sit at the right hand of God the Father, so we can be confident that our place "in the heavenly places" is secure. This union with Christ, already providing a foretaste of our reward, displays the riches of God's love. Christ is often called the firstfruits of the resurrection. Here He appears as the firstfruits of the ascension. The grace of God doesn't just save us from hell—it delivers us to heaven.

Imagine how at the turn of the last century, families desiring to immigrate to the U.S. would send one member ahead. Sometimes months would pass before they would hear that their loved one had arrived and was doing everything possible for the rest of the family to follow. That loved one's presence in the new country left

those in the old country already sensing the blessings that were to be theirs. That is the dynamic at work here. Christ is in heaven, victorious after the living, dying, and rising. As surely as He is there and has done all that is necessary for us, we will follow. His grace, His love, in going before us, has made it possible.

### C. In Christ, We Are God's Workmanship, Not Our Own (2:8–10)

Again Paul emphasizes that we are saved by grace. No human effort saved us, no good works in obedience to the Law. Again, the death-to-life change in the Christian experience makes human effort possible. Corpses don't resuscitate themselves! Our rescue, our life, comes as a gift from God. There is no room for boasting here, only for gratitude and thanks.

Many new Christians—and veterans of the faith as well—have a difficult time with this idea that our good works cannot contribute to our salvation. Not only is it true because we are dead in our sins, but it also holds true because the only way good works could save us with a perfect and just God is if our whole life were perfect. God cannot accept a 99 percent morally perfect life. He requires 100 percent perfection. The mandate is clear in the words of Jesus (Matthew 5:48), "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Just as clear is the failure of every human being who ever lived to meet that mandate for perfection. As Paul writes in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

This is the crisis of humanity. How then are we saved? "Through faith," Paul writes. We simply trust that Christ did what was necessary for our salvation. He lived the perfect life in our place. He died, taking our punishment on Himself. He rose from the dead, conquering death's hold on humanity. By entrusting our very lives to Jesus Christ, we are saved.

Then what becomes of good works? We have been created by God for the very purpose of good works, Paul writes. God has much work for us to do. Good works are a crucial aspect of the Christian life. Our good works, however, become an expression of thankfulness for all Christ has done for us, not an attempt to win heaven by approaching perfection. That is a lost cause. The cause has been won for us by the one whom God has sent—His Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the whole world.

Critical in teaching these verses is maintaining a balance between discounting good works as winning us salva-

tion and the importance of good works as an expression of a grateful trust in God. A vivid illustration of the latter tells of a couple whose son was killed in the Vietnam War. He died saving the life of another soldier. A few years later, the couple visited the home of the soldier their son had saved. They had never met him before. He was clearly drunk, rude, and used vulgarity the whole time with them. He never once acknowledged the sacrifice of their son. As they closed the door behind him at the end of the evening, the father of the soldier killed looked to his wife with tears in both their eyes and said, "To think our son died for someone like that." Good works are a natural outgrowth of the gratitude and faith we have toward the one who gave His life for us.

## 4 Life after Christ (2:13–22)

After Christ has come into our lives, our relationship with Him brings us blessing upon blessing. "But now," writes Paul (v. 13) of the difference in our lives because of Christ. This is how our lives look because of Christ.

### A. We Are at Peace (2:13–15)

Gentile and Jew are made one in Christ. The vivid separation described in verses 11–12 disappears as Christ, the Great Peacemaker, takes the barrier down. The law Christ abolished "in His flesh" is not the moral law, which still stands to bind consciences and show us our sin. (See Matthew 5:17.) The law He abolished is that set of ceremonial laws that separated Jews from Gentiles. In beautiful language, Paul speaks of Christ creating one new man out of two "in one body." The image is that of Jew and Gentile at peace with each other in the one Body, the Church.

Any church still struggling with ethnic or cultural prejudice can find great motivation in these verses. In Christ, the barriers disappear.

### B. We Are Reconciled to God (2:16–17)

Paul uses a word for "reconcile" that is used of enemies becoming friends. We were God's enemies. In Christ, we have become God's friends. The means of reconciliation is the cross. The hostility between Jew and Gentile disappear as both come under the influence of the immense sacrifice of Christ. With a twist on a historic battle slogan, Paul today might say, "In this sign (the sign of the cross of Christ) reconcile." Peace with God and peace between Jew and Gentile become twin blessings of the cross of Christ.

### C. We Have Access to God (2:18)

The picture of Christ here in the use of the word “access” is that of one who gets us in to see a king. In Christ, we can approach the throne of God with confidence (Hebrews 10:19–22). Jew and Gentile alike have this access to the Father by “one Spirit.”

### D. We Belong to the Household of Faith (2:19–22)

Beautiful imagery captures the warmth, security, purpose, and dynamic growth of the Church. To call the Church “the household of God” is to use the language of family. The foundation of the apostles and prophets and the tested cornerstone of Christ carry the assurance of a secure and tested community. When Paul calls the Church “a holy temple,” he is highlighting the Church’s purpose in Ephesians, that of praising the glory of Christ, who dwells with them by His Spirit. Finally, in verse 22, the Church is clearly still under construction, revealing it to be a dynamically growing entity.

A parent who suddenly found himself with an empty nest after raising three children was heard saying, “I don’t think I ever realized how much I had until the children were gone and the house was quiet and we could look at the richness of it all.” One doesn’t have to wait to celebrate the richness of life in Christ. Look at how we’ve changed. Look at all Christ has done for us. Look at how the barriers have disappeared. Look at the household of faith to which we belong. With Paul, the best time for celebration is now, in the midst of it all.

---

### Concluding Activities

Speak a prayer, perhaps thanking God for the great change He has brought about in our lives in Christ and asking His encouragement for continued growth. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.