

# Adult Teaching Resources

November 3, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

All Saints Day

**Ephesians 1:11-23 – “At Home with the Saints”**

Random Readings

Luke 20:27-38 – “Trick Questions”

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 – “Right Things”

Colossians 1:11-20 – “Blown Minds”

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# At Home with the Saints

## *Ephesians 1:11-23*

### FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

*“God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...” Ephesians 1:20*

Reading the will of a loved one can be an extremely emotional experience. When the will is read, it means the writer of the will is deceased. And, it means that person cared enough about his or her loved ones to leave them something—an inheritance.

Sometimes, an inheritance is messy and ugly as siblings bicker over who gets what. They are more concerned over the stuff than they person who has passed. Sometimes, an inheritance is lovely as siblings mourn the loss of their loved one and accept the gracious gifts they receive.

In today’s passage, we read about a lovely inheritance—one that brings assurance and joy.

### Opening

After everyone arrives, ask each person to find a partner. Once each couple is settled, ask these questions for each person to share:

Have you ever received an inheritance? How old were you? Were you expecting it? What did you receive?

Was the inheritance a help, or a hindrance? Why do you say that?

Have you been a part of an inheritance situation that ended up being more trouble than the gift? What happened?

What is the purpose of an inheritance?

Are you making plans to leave an inheritance to others? What is your hope with your inheritance?

Give each couple time to talk to each other and share their stories with each other. Then, as time allows, open the conversations to the larger group and ask for a couple of volunteers to share.

## Reading the Bible

What was obtained in Christ? (an inheritance)

What is our hope that we will live for? (the praise of his glory)

When you had heard the word of truth, what also happened? (were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit)

What did Paul hear about the church at Ephesus? (their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints)

What will Paul do because of their faith and love? (he will not cease to give thanks for them as he remembers them in his prayers. He prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation)

What does Paul hope for them? (that they may know what is the hope to which he has called them, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for those who believe, according to the working of his great power)

When did God put his power to work in Christ? (when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places)

What authority has God given Christ? (he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church)

## Making Connections

How can you fill your days with praise? What does that look like? Is it even possible? How will others know what you're doing?

Verses 11-12 are filled with reminders of the many ways God has blessed believers. In what ways has God blessed you? What blessings do you consider worthy of writing down and sharing with others?

Our Lessons Writer says, "God saves believers not only as individuals, but as a community of faith." Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why do you say that?

What does forgiveness mean to you? How do you forgive others? How do they know you have forgiven them? How do you know you have been forgiven by others?

What inheritance do you want to receive from God?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Some of us, like Paul's readers, might think: 'But I don't feel so full of praise, and how can I be so sure about this eternal inheritance anyway?' Paul would respond that God offers to us a taste of heaven on earth as we open our hearts and lives to the presence of his Holy Spirit." What has been your taste of heaven on earth in relation to the Holy Spirit? How sure are you of the eternal inheritance?

## Making Connections *continued*

How has Jesus in your life affected the way you speak and act? Can you tell any differences in the way you were before you had a relationship with Jesus and now? Share your thoughts.

When have you experienced the touch of God's power? What happened? How did that touch affect you? What impact did that touch have on you?

What contemporary powers challenge the power of the Holy Spirit? How do you navigate which power to follow? When is it easy to follow the power of the Holy Spirit? When is it difficult to follow the power of the Holy Spirit?

Our Lesson Writer says, "We, as believers, are members of the church and thus part of the body. When Christ's Spirit is present, filling our lives, we become the fullest expression of Christ's power and presence on earth: the saints." Who are the saints in your life who have lived the fullest expression of Christ's power and presence on earth?

## So What?

Ask everyone to find their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Share these words from our Lesson Writer with everyone:

"We don't just praise God when we sing hymns on Sunday, but when we show love to a child on Monday, when we feed the hungry on Tuesday, when we listen to a hurting friend on Wednesday. We praise God with our lives when we visit the sick on Thursday, repair a needy neighbor's toilet on Friday, or even when we enjoy family recreation on Saturday. Because Jesus Christ has filled our hearts with amazing grace, we fill our lives with days of praise.

Consider this: in Hebrew, "to worship" and "to serve" are rendered by the same word. What are ways we can offer worship to God through service to others?"

Ask each couple to share with each other real, tangible ways they can offer worship to God through service to others everyday. If necessary, give each couple a piece of paper and a pen to record their thoughts and days.

After giving each couple time to share with each other, open the discussion to the larger group. Encourage everyone to share at least one way they can offer worship to God through service to others. Record the responses on the board so that everyone can see. If the same answer is listed two or three times, write it down again or mark the original answer so it gets recorded.

Spend some time talking about the importance of this practice, not only as a spiritual discipline and discipleship tool, but also as a way of sharing the inheritance we have been given.

## The Challenge

This week choose one action item each day that you can offer worship to God through service to others. At the end of each day, write down what you did and how that action glorified God and served others.

## Prayer

*Loving God, create in each of us a loving, servant's heart that will put others first. Give us the energy to praise you daily with our work so that others might see you in what we do. May the inheritance we are given be spread to everyone we meet. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**What do we know about Ephesus?**—Ephesus was an important port city in the first century, located on the central coast of what was then called “Asia,” now the country of Turkey. Impressive ruins of the ancient city are located near the modern city of Selçuk and a 45-minute ride from the port of Kusidasi, from which busloads of cruise ship passengers come to admire what remains of its imposing public buildings, temples to various gods, ritzy “terrace houses” occupied by the rich, and public facilities that all could enjoy.

Ephesus currently sits several miles inland, but it was once a major port city. In the first century, the Cayster River brought a procession of ships to an accessible and protected harbor, but the river silted in long before modern dredging equipment was available. The loss of the harbor contributed significantly to the city’s demise.

During its heyday, Ephesus was a major city, perhaps second in importance only to Rome. Estimates of its population have exceeded 200,000, though 50,000 is a more reasonable figure. A large theater near the port could seat more than 25,000. The city had a rich history as a Greek and later Roman city. Like most port cities, it was quite cosmopolitan in nature, with inhabitants from a variety of nations and ethnic backgrounds.

Ephesus served as the capital of Asia under Roman rule and was famed as the home of a large temple to the Greek goddess Artemis, known to the Romans as Diana: Acts 19 describes how artisans who sold images of Artemis felt threatened by the Apostle Paul and sparked a riot designed to force him from the city. Today, only a single column remains from that temple: most of it was robbed and repurposed in antiquity.

The letter claims to have been written from the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, beginning with the words: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus (1:1). Paul describes himself as a “prisoner for Christ Jesus” (3:1) or “prisoner in the Lord” (4:1), suggesting that he was writing from prison after being arrested for his activities related to spreading the gospel. Paul was imprisoned briefly on several occasions (2 Cor. 11:23), and after being arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36), he was held for trial in the coastal city of Caesarea (about 58-60 C.E., Acts 23-26) before appealing to the emperor and being taken to Rome, where he remained in prison for at least two years and may have been executed there (60-62 C.E., Acts 27-28).

Four of Paul’s letters are known as “prison epistles,” and include references to his captivity. These include Philippians (1:7, 13-14), Colossians (4:3, 10, 18), Ephesians (3:1, 4:1, 6:20), and Philemon (1, 9, 10, 13, 23). Second Timothy, more commonly regarded as a “pastoral epistle,” also claims a prison setting (2 Tim. 1:8, 16; 2:8).

## Digging Deeper *continued*

Paul had worked among the Ephesians for quite a while (Acts 19), so it is surprising that the letter contains very few personal references, and the author speaks more of having heard about the Ephesians (1:15) than of having known them personally. This has led some scholars to suggest that the actual author was not Paul, but one of his companions or admirers. Thomas B. Slater, writing in the Smyth & Helwys Commentaries, calls the letter “deutero-Pauline” (*Ephesians* [Smyth & Helwys, 2012], 20), and Andrew T. Lincoln (*Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Thomas Nelson, 1990]) is even more convinced that a disciple of Paul wrote the letter in Paul’s name, drawing heavily on Paul’s earlier letter to the Colossians for his imagery.

Other writers maintain that Paul was indeed the author, arguing that the stylistic differences may be due to his use of an amanuensis (scribe) who may have flavored Paul’s dictation with his own style. The lack of personal references may indicate that Paul was writing mainly for new converts who had come into the church since his time there, or that the letter was designed to be shared with multiple churches. For purposes of simplicity, we will refer to the author as Paul while remaining aware that Paul’s thought may have been reflected in the words of a close disciple.

The oldest and best Greek manuscripts do not include the words “in Ephesus” (1:1), leading some to believe that the letter was written as an encyclical, to be passed around and read among all the churches, with a blank space in the first sentence to be filled in with the name of each local church.

**How is the letter to the Ephesians organized?**—The first three chapters of Ephesians speak beautifully of how the church fits into God’s redeeming plan for the universe, with all things being brought together under Christ (1:9-10). Chapter three ends with a prayer and a doxology, as if it were the closing part of the letter.

The last three chapters consist of practical advice and encouragement for readers to live their lives in a way that is worthy of membership in the body of Christ, suggesting that the letter may have come from two hands, or that it may be a composite of two letters.

Here’s a suggested outline for the book of Ephesians.

### I. Opening words

Salutation – 1:1-2

Blessing – 1:3-14

Thanksgiving – 1:15-23

### II. God’s New People

God’s grace in Christ – 2:1-10

God’s people brought near – 2:11-22

### III. God’s Mystery and Majesty

The mystery revealed – 3:1-13

The mystery indwelling Spirit – 3:14-21

## Digging Deeper *continued*

### IV. God's People in Community

Living in community – 4:1-16

Living as God's people – 4:17-5:2

Maintaining community – 5:3-20

### V. God's People at Home

Husbands and wives – 5:21-33

Parents and children – 6:1-4

Masters and servants – 6:5-9

### VI. Concluding Remarks

The army of God – 6:10-17

Prayer requests and blessings – 6:18-24

**A major city**—The theater at Ephesus, located near the ancient port, was capable of holding up to 25,000 people.

**Inheritance**—I still remember a summer, more than 20 years ago, when I was a pastor and accompanied a youth/adult mission team to Williamsburg, Ky., where we did construction work. While there, we visited Cumberland Falls. It was a beautiful and majestic sight. The Cumberland River runs quietly through the mountain valleys until it gets to just this spot, where it turns to thunder as it pours in a horseshoe shaped cataract that drops for almost 70 feet. A heavy mist rises from there and waters the plants clinging to life on bare rock across both sides of the valley. It is an impressive, heart-pounding sight.



As I stood and looked over the roaring falls, I thought of my young daughter, who had recently died, and said to myself, “I wish I could show this to Bethany.”

Then it occurred to me, “If only a fraction of what we believe about heaven is true, then Bethany has far more wonderful things than this to show me!” In this life we cannot know exactly what lies beyond this life, but in Christ we have the hope of an eternal *inheritance*, and that can give us daily cause for praise and for joy.

**Heart visions**—Paul uses vivid imagery to describe the result of spiritual insight in v. 18: “with the enlightening of the eyes of your heart.” What are some ways we may “see” with our hearts?

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Real power**—As Paul sought to magnify the power of God, he used no less than four words to describe it. Literally, v. 19 would read something like *“and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of the strength of his might.”*

The word translated “power” is from *dunameōs*, the root of English words like “dynamic,” “dynamo,” and “dynamite.”

The word for “working” is *energeian*, the root of our word “energy” and others derived from it.

The word for “strength” is *kratos*. The verbal form means “to rule.” From it we get the “democracy,” which describes rule by the people” and “autocracy,” where people are ruled by a single “autocrat.”

The word translated “might” is *īscuon*. It speaks of one’s ability to accomplish things, and is the same word used in Mark 12:30, where believers are enjoined to love God with heart, soul, mind, and *strength*. Christ’s capability goes far beyond ours.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Did Paul teach predestination?

Several verses in this chapter, especially vv. 4-6 and 11, are often cited by those who believe that God has chosen only certain people for eternal salvation, with all others being left out, and humans having little say in the matter.

Could this be correct? Volumes have been written either for or against the doctrine of predestination. It is one of the five cardinal beliefs of Calvinism, classically defined by the acronym “TULIP.” The five points are “Total depravity” (all humans are naturally sinful); “Unconditional election” (God “elects” only certain people to be saved); “Limited atonement” (salvation is limited to those God has chosen); “Irresistible grace” (those whom God has chosen cannot resist their call to be saved), and “Preservation of the saints” (those who are thus saved cannot lose their salvation).

Many modern adherents of Calvinism, also known as “the Reformed tradition,” might quibble a bit over doctrine, but this is the basic view, in which select scriptures such as Eph. 1:4-6, 11 are plucked out of context to support the idea that humans really have no free will when it comes to seeking salvation.

If one believes that God has picked out every individual who will be saved, of course, there is no point in spreading the gospel. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great debate between “Particular Baptists” (who believed that Christ died only for those particular “elect” persons) and “General Baptists” (who believed that Christ died for all). Today’s “Primitive Baptists” still hold tightly to this predestinarian view, and are diminishing in number. Other Calvinists – including many Southern Baptists – have managed to work evangelism into their understanding of the doctrine, arguing that one should faithfully proclaim the gospel even to those who are predestined not to be saved.

As noted in the lesson, a better view of Paul’s teaching is to understand that God has “foreordained” that all who turn to Christ and seek salvation have a place in God’s kingdom. God saves us not only as individuals, but as a community of faith. Paul was not suggesting that God has a checklist of predestined believers, but that God has a place for every person who seeks grace and follows Christ. Those who believe this cannot help but give praise to God.