

SARAH RICE

Becoming a Gospel- shaped Woman

A
BIBLE STUDY
THROUGH
EPHESIANS

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How to use this Bible study

The message of our cultural moment is that a self-made identity brings real freedom and happiness. “You are your own greatest source of knowledge, truth, and love,” numerous voices proclaim. “You can build an existence and even a faith that works for you.” Unfortunately, millions of women have bought these lies and spiraled, often unknowingly, further down a path of destruction.

In an effort to proclaim the truth, I wrote the book *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood: How losing yourself & finding your identity in Christ changes everything*. I wanted to help women see that the Creator who made us in the beginning is the only one with the authority to define us. While our rebellion against him left us in a major identity crisis, God sent a rescuer—the ultimate source of knowledge, truth, and love—to bring us back to him.

Only in Jesus do we find who we truly are. And only in Jesus are we progressively transformed into the people God created us to be. By faith in Christ’s finished work, we *receive* a new identity with numerous benefits and implications for our everyday lives. This is what Ephesians is all about, and, therefore, this New Testament letter served as the basis for my book.

Shortly after *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood* was released, I wrote this workbook to help women in my church (and now you) study Ephesians in its entirety. The goal of this resource is to get you into the biblical text, studying and thinking on your own before reading my commentary and application of the text in the corresponding chapter of *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood*. In addition, this guide enables you to study the letter as a whole, not just the sections I exposit in the book.

Each chapter in the workbook prompts you to read a portion of Ephesians and answer eleven to thirteen questions about it. Many of these are comprehension questions (What does the text *say*?) and interpretation questions (What does the text *mean*?). A few of them are application questions (How does this text *apply* to my life?).

I highly recommend that you read *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood* alongside this study guide, however it is possible to use the resources separately. The organization of the Bible study follows the structure of the book, and using the two in tandem is the way to get the most application out of the Scripture you're studying. At the end of each lesson in this workbook, there is a prompt to read the corresponding chapter in *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood* and answer the end-of-chapter discussion questions from the book. I've provided blank pages at the end of this workbook for you to jot down answers to those discussion questions if you so choose. Both resources can be used for individual or group study; however, I encourage you to study alongside sisters in Christ from your local church if you are able.

The QR code below links to a digital answer guide with commentary from my teaching notes. This will be helpful if you are planning to lead a group, or if you simply need help resolving uncertainty about a particular question. Let me challenge you to think through (even wrestle with) each question thoroughly before turning to this help. This is how learning happens!

In the last few verses of Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 3, Paul prays for the Christians to whom he's writing. He doesn't ask God to bless them but, rather, to help them comprehend the blessings of the identity they already possess *in Christ*. And this is what we need as believing women today. We need to *know* who we are in Christ (and the numerous benefits that come with that) so we're able to stand firm against the lies, false gospels, and schemes of the devil. Identity in Christ is the only path to true freedom and flourishing, and, through the Word, the Spirit helps us know and live in light of this identity. So, let's study Ephesians!



Context and Overview of Ephesians

*E*phesians is a New Testament letter written by “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1:1a). Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus around AD 60–62 when he was under house arrest in Rome. He spent three years in Ephesus, a major port city on the west coast of Asia, during his third missionary journey (see Acts 19 – 20).

Although the letter was written to the early church about 2,000 years ago, it’s incredibly applicable to the identity issues we face as modern Christian women today. In the first half of the letter (chapters 1 – 3), Paul highlights what it means to be *in Christ*. He surveys what Jesus accomplished in his cross-work, rejoices in the spiritual blessings lavished on believers, and wonders at the mystery of the gospel finally revealed. This half of the letter focuses almost exclusively on what God has done for his church.

In the second half of the letter (chapters 4 – 6), Paul explains how a believer’s identity in Christ impacts the practicalities of life—work, relationships within the church, family, sexuality, temptation, and suffering. The final chapters of the letter explain how the church is to live in light of her identity in Christ.

Before beginning Lesson 1, take time to read or listen to Ephesians in one sitting. This will take, on average, about 20 minutes and will give you the big picture of the letter you will be studying. Please note that I have used the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV) in formulating the workbook questions.

Lesson 1

The Only Good News

What the gospel is and what it isn't

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

You may be wondering why we're beginning in Ephesians 2, and here's the reason: In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul gives us a 30,000-foot picture of our salvation. It's in this overview that we learn some crucial truths about what the gospel is and what it isn't. We will go back and cover all of Ephesians 1 in the next two lessons.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

1. Throughout history there have been three general views about human nature: Man is *well*, man is *sick*, or man is *dead*.¹ Based on 2:1, which perspective does the Bible clearly teach?
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1. James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians, An Expositional Commentary* (Baker Books, 1997), p. 46.

2. What do you think it means to be spiritually dead? Do you remember this stage of your life? If so, describe what characterized your mindset, motivations, choices, and actions during this time.

3. What three things does the spiritually dead person follow (2:2-3)?

I.

II.

III.

4. Who is the prince of the power of the air? Who are the sons of disobedience?

5. List and describe the three attributes of God highlighted in 2:4-5.
(e.g. Mercy is God not giving sinners what they deserve.)

I.

II.

III.

6. Through God's mercy, love, and grace, sinners are granted a new *nature* and *position*. In Christ, they are made spiritually _____(2:5) and seated with him in the _____(2:6). Does the spiritually dead sinner contribute anything to this change (2:8-9)?

7. Paul says believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6). What does this mean? How is this possible if Christ is in heaven and we are here on earth? (Hint: Remember that Christ is our representative.)

8. The benefits of God's grace are applied to the individual by_____
(See 2:8 and Romans 5: 1-2).

9. In whom do we place our faith? (Hint: See Galatians 2:16.) How is biblical faith different from the world's exhortation to "Just have faith!"?

10. Ephesians 2:1-10 could be described as the general conversion story of every true Christian. Although each believer came to faith through a different set of circumstances, all were raised from spiritual death to life. Describe the unique circumstances that led to this change in your life.

11. God's grace grants believers a new identity and purpose. Ephesians 2:10 says believers are God's workmanship (or masterpiece) created in Christ for_____. What specific roles are you fulfilling in this season of your life? What tasks are you carrying out? Think back and note some ways God prepared you for these works in advance.

Father, I praise you for bringing the spiritually dead to life by your mercy and grace. Thank you for rescuing me from the depths of my sin and giving me a new nature, position, and identity in your Son. I am positionally seated with Christ at your right hand in heaven. What a wonder! I did nothing to contribute to these changes; they were all a gift of your grace. Thank you for re-creating me in Christ for your purposes. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Now that you have engaged with the biblical text, read chapter 1 of *Gospel-Shaped Womanhood* and answer the discussion questions.

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