



# GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY CHURCH

*Studies in Ephesians*

TOGETHER<sup>IN</sup> FAITH SERIES  
Leader Session Guide

Robert Driver-Bishop

GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY CHURCH: STUDIES IN EPHESIANS  
Leader Session Guide

Together in Faith Series  
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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## Ephesians 1:3-14

### Leader Session Guide

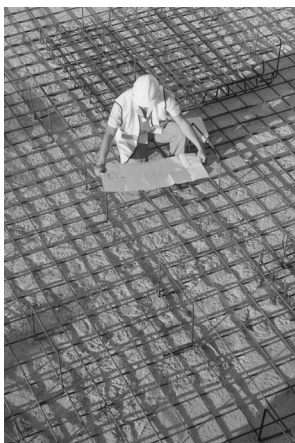
#### Focus Statement

We dedicate the building of God's extraordinary church to our "Beloved," Jesus Christ, through whom God's gracious designs are becoming a reality.

#### Key Verse

... to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:6

#### Focus Image



What are God's designs for the Church? © Cultura Limited / SuperStock

## Are We Building in Love?

### Session Preparation

#### Before You Begin . . .

Take a moment to reflect on the importance of worship in your life. Worship needs to be at the center of our lives and all that we do as a church. We do not worship only for God's benefit but for ours too. Starting our days and weeks with worship ensures "right beginnings."

#### Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
3. Check to see what materials you'll need.
4. Celebrate the centrality of worship, especially if you are meeting on Sunday mornings. Emphasize that these Book of Faith studies are designed to enhance the group's connection to worship and strengthen the overall ministry of the church.

#### Session Overview

The book of Ephesians addresses topics that are important to every church, both yesterday and today. This book speaks to congregations that desire to be healthy and dynamic. Our current culture has had an infatuation with turning to humongous *mega*-churches for answers. Ephesians, however, teaches us that Christians should be building *meta*-churches.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There are ongoing questions regarding this book. Did Paul write Ephesians? Respected scholars are divided on this issue. This book contains some unique words and theological perspectives not found in other letters of Paul. Was it even written to the Ephesians? Early copies of the letter indicate it was circulated among many early Christian churches. The book contains few local references to Paul's partners in ministry in Ephesus (unlike his other writings). Some scholars believe the book reflects issues faced by the Christian community after the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E., years after Paul's death, and was, perhaps, written by a devoted and skilled disciple of Paul. Other respected researchers maintain that Paul is the author. N. T. Wright is part of the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) school of thought. In *Paul: In*



### Meta:

(from Greek): A preposition that transforms or enhances the meaning of the original word. Metamorphosis, for example, is a change, or “morphing,” of form. *Meta*-church is a term contemporary church planters use for congregations that are in the process of being transformed from the biblical ground up—from the foundations of God’s grace in Christ to the far reaching extent of how that love is lived out in the lives of its members.



### Tip:

If you think authorship is going to be a concern for your group, you might want to do some online research on N. T. Wright and the NPP in comparison to other scholarly voices.



### Invocation:

(from Latin *invocare*): The beginning of a worship service; a petition for help or support; a calling upon authority for attention or justification, for example: “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

*Fresh Perspective* (Fortress Press, 2008), Wright questions the last century’s criticism of Ephesians, which does not allow for Paul’s use of unique language and advanced understandings about the church.

The early church never questioned the letter’s authorship by Paul or the fact that it was written to the Ephesians. Paul’s involvement with the Ephesian church was extensive. Acts 18–20 records that Paul sailed with Priscilla and Aquila from Corinth to Ephesus, then left them there and sailed for Syria. After that, Paul visited Ephesus four other times. Once, his preaching of the gospel of Jesus caused violent protests from merchants dependent on local pagan practices. Controversies arose with other Jews who did not receive Jesus as the Messiah. But Paul stood firm. All told, the apostle lived and served there for more than two years (Acts 20:31). It is understandable why this book was associated with both Ephesus and Paul by the early church.

It is possible that the temple references in the letter do not refer to the temple to God in Jerusalem but to the temple to Artemis in Ephesus. That temple was in use over a thousand-year period and was considered one of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.” In this letter are numerous building and worship illustrations that would bring the Temple of Artemis and its rituals to the minds of an Ephesian audience. Major themes in the letter—*agape* love, riches, power, and peace—all stand in stark contrast to the beliefs and practices in the worship of Artemis. Those in favor of an early date of composition also note the clear references within the book to the early divisions between Jews and Gentiles, which Paul encountered in Ephesus. Ephesians is designed to give hope and confidence to a church that was continuing to mature beyond its Jewish beginnings in Jerusalem.

### LITERARY CONTEXT

The words of Ephesians 1:3–14 may have been based upon an early Christian hymn—an **invocation**. This hymn of praise celebrates the spiritual blessings of God, especially the desire “to gather up all things in [Christ]” (verse 10). Above all, this hymn proclaims God’s “grace” and “love.” These words are at the heart of the foundational promise of Ephesians: a personal relationship with the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that was given from the very beginning of time, “before the foundation of the world”! Around this point of assurance, the first three chapters establish the reconciling role of Christ and the church in God’s divine plan for the universe. The remaining three chapters contain practical teachings by which Christians can live out