

Hearing the Music of the Gospel in Ephesians

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Before you begin this study, be sure to read the article entitled, “Christ-Centered Bible Study.”

In the *Bible Study Methods* course we introduced you to a simple process for studying the Bible using the book of Ephesians. Since we only had the opportunity to study one passage in the class, you will have the opportunity to study the rest of Ephesians following a simplified version of the process we outlined in the class (see below).

NOTE: Copies of the course materials for Bible Study Methods including notes and worksheets can be found at <http://ibs.campuscrusadeforchrist.com> under the “Resources” link.

Bible Study Methods

an invitation to discovery

SURVEY THE BIG PICTURE

Survey the big picture by analyzing the . . .

- Historical Context
- Literary Context
- Redemptive Context

STEPS TO SURVEY

- Consult commentaries to establish the author, audience and date
- Create a book summary
- Consider how your passage fits into God’s plan to create a community of redeemed people for his glory through Jesus Christ

EXPLORE THE PASSAGE

Carefully explore the biblical text by applying the interpretive approach that best fits the genre of the passage.

(Different genres require different interpretive steps.)

STEPS TO EXPLORE

- The following steps are helpful when studying an epistle:
- Create a structural layout
 - Read your passage several times making careful observations
 - Ask questions for understanding
 - Consider interpretive options
 - Compare several translations
 - Study the meaning of key words
 - Consult commentaries

DISCOVER THE BIG IDEA

Summarize the results of your interpretive journey.

STEPS TO DISCOVER

- Create a textual outline of your passage
- Summarize the big idea of your passage in a single sentence (the author’s big idea)

RESPOND TO GOD

Respond to God through his Word.

STEPS TO RESPOND

- Determine how the passage applies today by considering how it fits into God’s story
- Consider how the passage exposes your fallen condition
- Consider how the passage points you to Christ and his redemptive work
- Determine personal response(s)

Preparation

Ephesians can be divided into 12 sections. For this study, we would like you to select a total of six passages to study—three from the first half of Ephesians (column one) and three from the second half of Ephesians (column two).

- 1:1-14
- 1:15-21
- 2:1-10
- 2:11-22
- 3:1-14
- 3:14-21
- 4:1-16
- 4:17-32
- 5:1-21
- 5:22-33
- 6:1-10
- 6:11-24

Scripture not only contains “dance steps.” It also contains “music”—the music of the gospel. The steps that follow are designed to help you hear the music of God’s grace as you read Ephesians. (Feel free to include other elements in your study that you find helpful.)

Step One: Survey the Big Picture

Begin by creating a “working copy” of the passage you are going to study. For example, if you are studying Ephesians 1:1-14, print a copy of the text on which you can make notes. (If you don’t have Bible software, type “ESV text” into a Google search, you can pull up an electronic the ESV translation of Ephesians to print off for your passage.)

In the *Bible Study Methods* course we discussed three types of context: historical, literary and redemptive. You may find it helpful to review Lecture #2 in your course notes. (These notes are also available on-line at <http://ibs.campuscrusadeforchrist.com> under the “Resources” link.)

Begin by briefly summarizing the context for your passage. (NOTE: *Each of the Ephesians studies in the collection we gave you has a brief summary of the context you may find helpful. These studies are also available on the IBS website.*) Answer some of the following questions for your passage:

- What are some of the major themes or topics?
- Look at the sections that precede and follow. What comes before and after? What clues does this give you for understanding this text?
- If your passage is in the first half of the letter, how does it relate to what Paul is trying to say about what God has done for us in the gospel?
- If it is in the second half of the letter, how does it relate to Paul’s exhortation to “walk worthy of our calling” in 4:1?
- How does this passage fit into God’s story? (You may find it helpful to consult *God’s Big Picture* by Vaughn Roberts)

Step Two: Explore the Passage

In this step, you are going to explore the passage in more detail. Begin by making observations in the working copy of your passage using the observation key from the BSM course. You may also find it helpful to consult worksheet #4 (“Observation”) in your Bible Study Methods notebook or online (see info above). If you feel really ambitious, create a structural layout of your passage and make observations on it like we did in class.

As you begin, pray through the passage you're working on. In Psalm 119:18, the Psalmist prays, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Pray that God would open your eyes to "wondrous things" in his Word. As you work through the passage, you may find the following helpful:

- Summarize your observations.
- Consult the Ephesians small group lesson for your passage from the collection of Ephesians studies we gave you (available online <http://ibs.campuscrusadeforchrist.com>).
- Compare several translations of your passage for better understanding. You can find other translations on-line (see www.bible.org or www.crosswalk.com).
- Look up the meaning of important words (see worksheet #5 for help).
- Read Snodgrass' discussion of your passage in the *NIV Application Commentary*.
- Write a paraphrase of the passage in your own words.

Step Three: Discover the Big Idea

This is where you draw everything together. First, try to capture the big idea of the passage in a single sentence. (If you feel really ambitious, create a textual outline of your passage.) Then, summarize the primary theological truths in this passage (see worksheet #7, "Theological Analysis").

- In your own words summarize what this passage teaches about the nature and attributes of the triune God.
- In your own words, summarize what this passage teaches about humanity (both in our fallen and redeemed states)
- In your own words, summarize what this passage teaches about the gospel and the nature of God's saving work.

Step Four: Respond to Christ

Most of us approach Scripture as compilation of ethical directives telling us how to live. If we read the Bible this way, our application of Scripture will amount to little more than looking for "dance steps." In order to "dance" the Christian life, we need music—the music of God's grace in Christ. In the Bible Study Methods course we suggested that, from Genesis to Revelation, Scripture does two things: (1) it paints portraits of our brokenness and (2) points us to a beautiful savior. (NOTE: On these points, be sure to review the notes from the lecture entitled "Christ-Centered Application" as well as the article entitled "Christ-Centered Bible Study.") Hence, there are two important questions you want to ask you as you consider how God wants you to respond to him:

- What does this passage reveal about your spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?
- How does this passage point you to Christ and the 'good news' of the gospel?

The "Apply" section of the Ephesians studies we gave you will help you ask these questions. Reflect on these questions as you study each passage of Ephesians.

Go back and look at what you have discovered so far. How is God leading you to respond to Him in and through this passage? Take some time to read the passage slowly and pray through the passage as you consider your response. (*You might read through your passage one verse at a time and turn each verse into a prayer. For example in 4:1, "Lord enable me to understand the riches of my calling so that I might walk in a manner worthy of you. Help me envision what it looks like to live in a way that pleases you. Open my eyes to see those areas of my life where I resist embracing your calling. . . ."*)

Sharing What You Have Discovered

In Ephesians 3, Paul explains to his Gentile readers that the grace of God was given to him for their benefit (Eph. 3:2). It is clear that Paul viewed himself as a “steward” of God’s grace. This is a very interesting way of talking about “grace.” We often think about “grace” exclusively in relation to our personal salvation. Have you ever thought of the grace of God as something that was given to you *for the sake of others*? One of the key themes in God’s story is that God blesses us to be a blessing to others. Consider Abraham. God did not bless Abraham merely for his own benefit; God blessed Abraham so that he might be a blessing to others (see Genesis 12:1-3). The same thing is true for us. God pours his grace *in us* so that it can flow *through us* into the lives of others.

Over the last few weeks you have had the opportunity to hear the music of the gospel as you have reflected on Ephesians. Remember that God enables you to experience his grace so that it can flow into the lives of others. To this end, I would encourage you to take the following steps:

1. Form a habit of sharing what you are learning. When you meet with students during the week, share with them what you have been learning in the Scriptures.
2. Teach the 12 Ephesians studies to a small group you are leading. These studies are excellent for young students because they address many of the foundational truths of Christian growth. (These studies are available online at <http://ibs.campuscrusadeforchrist.com>. Click the “Resources” link.)
NOTE: If your campus has set materials for small groups, you should talk with your trainer and local leader(s) about how you might use these studies.