

# Ephesians Study 1

**Prayer: Father, be in our reading, our seeing, our hearing. Help us to begin to grasp the whole story you have always been telling.**

Eugene Peterson writes that what we find in Ephesians is the “persevering, patient, unhurried work of growing up in Christ.” Peterson calls it practicing resurrection—by which he means that the mature Christian life is something we do not originate and do not create. Resurrection, after all, is what happens, and can only happen, when one is dead. Paul is writing to a community about what it means to be this kind of practicing community, one that lives into what it means that God has done the work of resurrection, of bringing us back to a whole life.

The goal of this time of study is to see in these old words what it would mean to practice resurrection, what it would mean to have our imaginations enlarged as individuals and as a community. The goal is to revisit familiar words with both our intellects with a deep study of the text and our hearts, with a patient contemplation of our responses, all the while trusting that God is in the middle of his work of transformation with us.

This study is based on N. T. Wright’s Ephesians and Eugene Peterson’s Practice Resurrection and was originally written for NHH’s women’s group.

As we go forward and study Ephesians, we have to keep the “whole” in our mind when we look at this part. The WHOLE, being the whole story of Scripture – the story of delighted creating, of creation being separated, of calling back, of longing, of love and ordinary human life being brought back to God, within God, within the WHOLE.

An example of the importance of reading the parts in light of the whole can be found in Ephesians 6:22. This is the verse about wives submitting to their husbands. If that was all you read from this letter, how would you live that out? What would you glean about God’s character from that verse?

But if you pan out, you would see that that verse has to be read in conjunction with the rest of the passage, with men submitting to their wives and mutual submission all around (vs. 21-33).

How does reading more of the whole give you a picture of who God is?

And then if you pan out again and you will have a chance to realize WHY Paul is writing these things. If you read the whole book of Ephesians, you will see that he is

writing about what it would mean to live in the reality of God reconciling everything to Him (Chapter 1:10) and that in Chapter 6 he's specifically addressing relationships that traditionally are imbalanced in power—husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. The submission passages have to be read in the light of the whole book. Suddenly the imperative to be submissive to each other is not a “must” in order to be a proper and accepted Christian, but it is an invitation to respond and participate in the work God is doing in bringing everything back together in Jesus, to that resurrection work. Grasping the whole is very important for a deep reading the parts.

### **Response**

Even before you read a word of Ephesians, ask God to go before your reading, your seeing, your hearing.

What questions do you have for God as you start this study? What do you want him to talk to you about? Write these out and come back to them periodically as you work through the whole study.