

Finding
Fulfillment
On Life's Uncertain Seas

The Book of Ephesians

D O R O T H Y D A V I S

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In Dedication

*To my mother-in-law, Alice,
with gratitude for your labor of love at the computer
and your encouragement of my writing ministry.*

FINDING FULFILLMENT ON LIFE'S UNCERTAIN SEAS

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Preface

As this tiny sapphire sphere called Earth spins in the vast blackness of space, the human specks that scurry upon it often pause, look up at the myriad of stars, and ponder ancient questions: What is life all about? Why am I here? Since the dawn of creation, man has desired to understand his significance, to know the reason he exists. The human heart must have a goal in life if it is to have a sense of worth.

In our society today, human beings often feel like frail, battered vessels adrift on a thrashing sea of confusion and despair. Surrounded by a shadowy mist, they seek a desirable land called “fulfillment,” but between them and this land are the hidden rocks of rejection, insignificance, and failure. To many people it seems hopeless to steer a course safely into the harbor of fulfillment without becoming shipwrecked on these treacherous rocks. And many people chart a course that seems right, such as the way of wealth, the way of fame, or the way of pleasure, only to end up sinking into an empty void.

But there is a way! Can’t you see it? The sure, steady light of God’s Truth shines a path through the dangers of life’s uncertain seas. If we follow that light, we will come ultimately to fulfillment and step on shore with joy and a great sense of satisfaction.

The New Testament book of Ephesians discusses vital issues that pertain to the human problems of rejection, insignificance, and failure. As we follow the light of God’s Word, the Bible, we will see how to overcome these defeating feelings and live as women of worth—worth that is bestowed upon us by God Himself.

Introduction

Suppose you had just met a man and struck up a conversation with him. In the course of your discussion you learn that he had been reared in a cultured environment, had graduated in the top of his class in a renowned academic institution, and had become a determined, untiring worker in his profession, attaining recognition and accomplishment. No doubt you would have considered this man to be highly successful, living a fulfilled life. But you would have come to the wrong conclusion.

Actually, the man I just described lived about 2000 years ago, and his name was Saul of Tarsus, later called “the apostle Paul.” You see, despite all his earthly attainments, this man was not fulfilled because he lacked a right relationship to God and a proper purpose in life. At the foundation of his life he was spiritually empty.

But one day he had an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. (You can read about it in Acts 9:1-19.) His whole life did a 180-degree turn. As Paul himself later expressed it, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:7, 8). Paul had finally found true fulfillment—not in his own accomplishments, but in knowing his Lord and God and in doing His work. Paul died a fulfilled person, declaring, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

After putting his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul became a traveling missionary, starting churches of believers in cities all across the Roman Empire. One of these churches was in the city of Ephesus, in what is now the country of Turkey. Sometime later, about A.D. 60, Paul wrote a letter to these Ephesian Christians while he was in prison in Rome for preaching about Christ. The letter he wrote to them is the New Testament book of Ephesians, a book that encourages believers to live up to their rich heritage in Christ.

How to Use This Study

Each lesson in this study is divided into five sections. Follow these suggestions as you prepare each lesson.



I. SOUNDING THE DEPTHS OF YOUR HEART

Following the introductory comments, these questions will prepare your heart to study God's Word. The answers to these questions will not be discussed in class.



II. IN LIGHT OF THE SCRIPTURES

The questions in this section concentrate on the actual text of God's Word and will help you understand what God's Word says.



III. CHARTING YOUR COURSE

As you answer the questions in this section, you will see how the truths of God's Word apply to your life.



IV. DROP ANCHOR

This section is personal. It is designed as a starting point to help you put God's truth into practice.



V. STEPPING OUT ON FAITH

These final words will help seal firmly in your mind what you learned from the Bible passage.

Incredible Credentials

Ephesians 1:1-14

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

Rejection. It is a feeling that can cast the soul into utter despair. It is the devastation of a spouse’s unfaithfulness, the betrayal of a friend, the scar in a child’s heart because of a parent’s lack of love. We fear rejection and crave the security of being wanted, loved, and cared for.

Hopefully, each of us has people in our lives who provide emotional security. Yet the perfect Father, the ever-faithful Friend, the Lover of our souls is God. The first chapter of Ephesians is overwhelming with astonishing spiritual truths. It is worthy of our serious study and meditation. The woman who personally receives these truths as her own will never need to fear total rejection, for God will always be there with open arms to receive and love her. She will live with the foundational knowledge of her own significance, a significance based on God’s acceptance.

When we come to Him and become His daughters, He not only accepts us but also makes us heirs of all Christ’s wealth. We now live with incredible credentials: children of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ of all God’s riches!



I. SOUNDING THE DEPTHS OF YOUR HEART

- In your opinion, what are the most important credentials you have in life?

- How do these contribute to your value as a person?



II. IN LIGHT OF THE SCRIPTURES

Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

1. In the opening verses of Ephesians, the Scriptural spotlight shines on God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fountain of spiritual blessing that is about to overflow upon us springs from the Godhead. In verse 1, what two terms are used to describe believers in Christ? Of what might these phrases remind the reader?

2. What two gifts are the Father and the Son able to give to us according to verse 2?

3. In verse 3, what did Paul declare that God has done for us?

4. From where do these blessings originate? Why is this significant?

5. Paul went on to discuss these blessings more specifically. They cover the past, present, and future. In the ages past—before the earth was even created—God *knew* about each of us! He planned to bring us into being. What else did He do (vv. 4, 5)?

6. What reasons are mentioned in verses 4-6 as God's motivation for doing this?

7. According to verses 7 and 8, what benefits does a person receive when she is "in Christ"?

8. Verses 9 and 10 tell us of a mystery that God has revealed to us that will take place in the future. What is this mystery?

9. What is the ultimate purpose God has for having predestined and chosen us to be His own (vv. 11, 12)?

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10. In verses 13 and 14 we are given a summary of *our* part in salvation. (Remember: God's part was choosing us, lavishing His grace upon us, and sending Christ to die for us so that we could have forgiveness of sin.) What are we to do?

11. What does God do the moment we receive Christ and the good news of salvation? Why does He do this (vv. 13, 14)?



III. CHARTING YOUR COURSE

1. Reread verses 1-14. What “picture” of God the Father does this passage develop in your mind? How does this enhance your sense of trust in Him and your ability to approach Him as your Heavenly Father?

2. Look up the word “adoption” in a Bible dictionary. (See also Galatians 4:4-7.) What does this word mean to you spiritually? How should this affect the way you live?

3. Look up the word “redemption.” What does this mean to you spiritually? How should this affect the way you live?

4. The idea expressed in verses 11-14 is that we have received an inheritance along with Christ. What might this inheritance be? When will we fully receive it? (See also Romans 8:17 and 1 Peter 1:3-5.)

5. What are the reasons, stated several times in this passage, that God has done all these things on our behalf?

6. Explain how each of the following blessings makes you a woman of worth.

God’s choosing you before the world began

God’s sending His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die and shed His blood for your sins so that you could be redeemed from sin’s slavery

God’s adopting you into His family

God’s sealing you with His Spirit as a guarantee of your inheritance with Christ

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God's lavishing spiritual riches and blessings upon you by His grace

An Illustration to Examine: The Prodigal Son

Read Luke 15:11-32.

7. Describe the qualities of the father.

8. How might the son have experienced rejection?

9. Relate this parable to God's loving acceptance of you.



IV. DROP ANCHOR

How has God spoken to you through Ephesians 1:1-14?

- ___ God loved you and valued you so much that He sent His precious Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and shed His blood for your sins (John 3:16). God has provided the only way that you can go to Heaven when you die. You cannot do anything to get yourself there. You must believe what God says and trust Him. Have you ever accepted Christ as your Savior and received forgiveness for your sins? If not, why not talk to Him in prayer right now? Ask Him to become your Savior. Ask God to adopt you as His daughter and bring you into His family through Christ. The best credential in life is to be one of God's children (John 1:12).

- As one who has put her trust in Christ already, take an honest inventory of your life. Are you living as a pleasing, obedient daughter to your Heavenly Father? Are you placing a high value on the spiritual riches and grace He has for you? Is your life bringing praise and glory to Him? If not, ask Him today to teach you how to live a life that will please Him. As the Spirit points out areas in your life that God wants to change—habits, relationships, words, attitudes, thoughts—obey Him and commit yourself anew to live as one who will walk worthy of belonging to Him.
- Do you feel as if God might not love you because you have failed Him in some way? What did you learn in this lesson that assures you that God loves you with no strings attached? We *never* merit His love and grace; He gives it to us because of the *merits of His Son*. Talk to God about how you feel, but focus your faith on what the Bible tells you about God’s love for you. If you are “in Christ,” God couldn’t love you more!
- Upon what are you placing your value as a human being: your looks, your abilities, your education, possessions, background, accomplishments, religious good works, moral life? The Bible declares that our value is based upon our relationship to God by faith, grace, and mercy. Begin to see this as your greatest asset and make it a personal daily priority to cultivate your relationship with God. When He is truly the Lord of your life, He will do great things in you, for you, and through you!



V. STEPPING OUT ON FAITH

Before a woman can find fulfillment in life, she must understand her own significance. Without God and the truth expressed in His Word, a woman will seek significance through a variety of sources that are, at best, unstable. She may depend on her appearance, but appearance can change. Perhaps she looks to her skills, but the demand for those skills

may diminish. She could be counting on wealth, position, or possessions, but if adverse circumstances arise, all of these can disappear in a day.

Personal significance must have its foundation in that which is unalterable: God and His Word. If we base our worth on our relationship to Him, one that cannot fall apart because of *His* faithfulness to us, we will have a solid foundation upon which we can build a successful life. All the other factors that make us “feel” significant may ebb and wane, but the mainstay of our personal value, God’s acceptance, will be securely supporting us.

God loves us and wants us to be His children. But the Bible declares that we are all sinners (Romans 3:23) and by our sin are spiritually separated from God. He sent His Son to earth to live, die an agonizing death as the punishment for our sins, and be raised from the tomb. All of this was for our benefit—so that through our putting our faith in Jesus Christ, God could forgive our sins, redeem us from Satan’s control, and adopt us into His own spiritual family. He now cares for us and blesses us with abundant grace and spiritual wealth. And the best is yet to come!

Do you fear rejection? God will accept you in Christ. Once you come to Him, He’ll never let you go. In this vessel of Christ’s love, we set sail for the land of fulfillment!