



Ephesians

Denise J. Hughes



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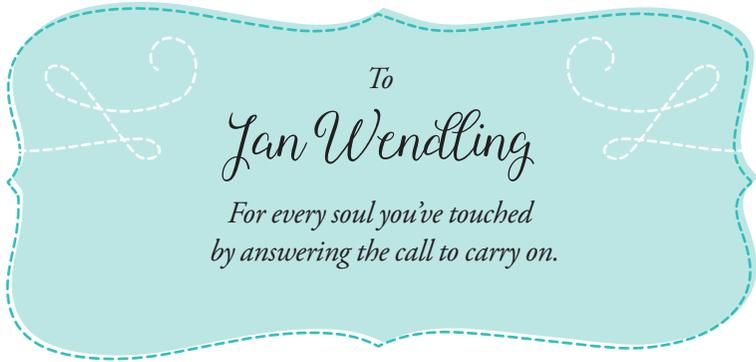
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To

Jan Wendling

*For every soul you've touched
by answering the call to carry on.*

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The Story of Word Writers

The summer before my senior year of high school, I went to camp with the other youth from my church. After one of the morning sessions, the speaker asked us to spend 20 minutes alone, reading the Bible. Twenty minutes reading my Bible? Other than sitting in church and turning to the page the pastor directed us to, I couldn't remember ever sitting down and opening the Bible for myself.

So while my friends found a separate spot to do their reading, I meandered around the campgrounds, a little lost as to what I should do. Then I came across a path that led straight uphill. So I followed the signs and hiked up the trail. While doing so I remembered the story of Moses climbing Mt. Sinai to meet with God. You know, the whole Ten Commandments thing. *I should read that story for 20 minutes!* But then I realized I didn't know where to find the story of Moses in the Bible. Even though I grew up attending Sunday school, and I knew lots of Bible stories, the extent of my Bible knowledge was pretty basic. I knew there was an old part and a new part, but I wasn't sure what the difference was.

When I reached the top of the trail, I discovered a grassy meadow encircled with tall pine trees. A log stretched across the grass like an altar hewn from nature's surroundings, so I knelt there. For some reason I thought that's how I should posture myself to read the Bible. But I had no clue where to begin.

I decided to start with the new stuff, and the table of contents helped me find the page number for the book of Matthew. But when I opened chapter 1 I discovered a genealogy, which was beyond boring, so I skipped it and moved on to chapter 2, which happens to be the story of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus. Stuff I already knew.

Then I read about Herod, who was so afraid of what the three wise men told him that he had all the boys under the age of two murdered! Somehow,

whenever we had a Christmas pageant in December, we managed to leave that part out, because I had never heard of anything so horrific. Naturally I found this story disturbing. In less than five minutes I thought the Bible was boring *and* depressing. I dumped Matthew.

I turned a chunk of pages and ended up in something called “Gal-uh-tee-ins.” Well, I didn’t know what a “Gal-uh-tee-in” was, so I kept flipping pages. But then it was more of the same: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Again, nothing in English until I came to Timothy. But I knew a guy in high school named Timothy, and I didn’t like him very much, so I wasn’t interested in anything the first *or* second Timothy had to say.

I kept flipping pages until I got to James. *Finally! Something normal I recognized!* I began anew. But as soon as I started I came across James 1:2 (NIV): “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...”

Well, I quit reading right there. I mean, who does that? This little 20-minute-Bible-reading experiment wasn’t going well. I now thought the Bible was boring, depressing, *and* confusing. Still, I had a problem because I had a good 13 minutes to go, and I was running out of Bible. And I knew at least enough to know I didn’t want to get all the way to Revelation. So I decided to give James a second chance, except I skipped chapter 1. That’s when my eyes fell on this verse in the second chapter: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19 NIV).

Now, I didn’t know much about the Bible, but I had been in church long enough to know about angels and demons. And the thought had never occurred to me that even the demons believe in God! Then I thought about Herod. He must have believed what the wise men told him about a coming Messiah as King or he wouldn’t have had any reason to kill all those boys.

The demons believed.

Herod, to some crazy extent, believed.

I believed.

I stopped right there and asked God to show me what it meant to live for Him in such a way that it’s more than just believing *about* Him. In that moment

something happened. A peace enveloped me. And I knew Jesus was there. He was with me.

After camp I returned home, and something weird happened. I had this bizarre desire to start at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis, and work my way back to James. So I did. And I discovered parts I liked. Stories I understood. Psalms I recognized from Sunday morning worship songs. But other parts still seemed boring, depressing, and confusing. So I'd return to the parts in the Bible I liked, the parts I understood, and I learned to skip over the stuff that didn't make sense.

I began to memorize the shorter verses I liked best. To aid my memory I'd write the verses in a notebook. I noticed that I remembered Scripture better when I wrote the words on paper. So I started to write longer passages. Soon I was writing out whole psalms. Then I noticed how the words of Scripture would seep into my prayers. Without even realizing it I was praying Scripture like it was normal.

Eventually I dared to venture into those "other parts" of the Bible. The strange and confusing parts. Whenever I read a chapter that didn't make sense, which was often, I'd write it out. With each word, each line, I said it out loud. And I asked the Holy Spirit to teach me the truth of God's Word. By this time I had gotten myself a study Bible, too, and I made use of those notes at the bottom. I thought of them as CliffsNotes.

By the time I finished my senior year of high school, writing the Word had become a regular part of my daily reading routine. Today I love writing the Word as much as ever. I like the way it forces me to slow down and absorb each word, line by line. There's something about spending a few quiet moments this way each day. The simple act of moving my pen along paper—to meditate on God's Word—quiets my soul the way David's harp soothed Saul.

And it's truly an amazing, humbling, and beautiful joy to invite you to join me on this journey through the Bible by writing the words of Scripture.

The simple act of moving my pen along paper—to meditate on God's Word—quiets my soul the way David's harp soothed Saul.

#WordWriters

Word Writers is a Bible study specially designed for individuals as well as groups. It's an inductive-plus Bible study that makes the Bible the primary source. A traditional inductive Bible study uses three key approaches to God's Word: *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*. Word Writers adds a crucial fourth dimension to the Bible study experience: *saturation*—the opportunity to write the Word. Because when we write it, we remember it. So grab a few girlfriends and get together for some tea and conversation and Word writing!

You'll notice Psalm 119:18 at the top of each new day's page, which says, "Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from your instruction."

When we write it,
we remember it.

#WordWriters

Let's make this our prayer every day before we begin our time in the Word. I'll be your guide through the pages of Ephesians, but the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. Each day of the study will begin with a short illustration that leads into the daily Scripture reading. After reading the designated passage in Ephesians, you'll come to the Diving Deeper section,

which will ask several questions. The first couple of questions will ask you about the biblical text (the *observation* and *interpretation* portion of the study). Space is provided for you to pause and answer these questions in your own words. Feel free to use this space to write some of your own questions too.

The next couple of questions will lead you to further contemplate how you can apply the truth of Scripture to your everyday life (the *application* portion of the study). Then you're invited to write the Word (the *saturation* portion of the study). Ample space is provided in the back of this book to write out the verses from Ephesians you read that day. Now, depending on your Bible's translation, the verses you write for one day may end with a comma rather than a period. That's okay. I'm using the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation, but you're welcome to use the translation you're most comfortable with.

Last, we finish each day the same way we begin—with prayer. Each daily prayer is printed at the end of each daily study. Make the words of these prayers your own, for we know when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13).

Ephesians: A Call to Carry On

When Paul wrote the final words of his letter to his old friends in Ephesus, he said, “Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 6:24). That’s his message: Undying love. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is a call to carry on with an undying love for our Lord. Because he knew.

Paul knew some strange ideas about God would soon perforate the faith of new believers. He knew the message of grace would be challenged. He knew the believers would be tempted to forget their First Love. Paul also knew his remaining days were few. With every dip of his quill in ink, the metal links of his chains clanked and clattered about him. Affixed to a Roman guard, Paul understood the reality of his likely execution, so the letter we call Ephesians reads like a farewell address. These were his final, parting words, his last chance to impart what was most important to him, for it succinctly summarizes God’s plan of salvation and the practices believers in Christ should follow.

At the time, the recipients of this letter would have understood Paul’s intention for it to be shared, not only among themselves, but among other believers as well. In this way the book of Ephesians can be read not only as a letter to the believers in Ephesus, but also as a letter to all believers, including us today.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is a call to carry on with an undying love for our Lord.

#WordWriters

Day 1

But God

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction.

PSALM 119:18

I grew up attending church. It's sort of a requisite when your dad is the pastor. My father preached. My mom led worship. And my grandma played piano. I knew all the Sunday school stories, and I can even remember sitting in a Sunday school class, repeating the teacher's prayer for Jesus to come into my heart. I believed in Him. I really did. But I grew up confusing Christ-as-a-way-of-life with church-as-a-way-of-life. Not that church is bad. Not at all. I just had some growing up to do. Still do. We all do. But God, in His rich and infinite mercy, loves us too much to let us settle for anything less than the fullness that is ours in Christ.

Every believer has a "But God" story. For me it was an invitation to read the Bible alone for 20 minutes. That's when my life changed forever. For you it might have been something else. Maybe it was a sermon. Or an altar call. Or a conversation with a friend over coffee. God woos each of us individually and differently.

Are we focused more on church-as-a-way-of-life or Christ-as-a-way-of-life?

#WordWriters

Paul, the writer of Ephesians, had a dramatic "But God" story. He grew up attending synagogue, and he knew the Scriptures as well as anyone. His life was steeped in religious culture. He knew plenty *about* God. And he thought that was enough. But God literally

stopped Paul in his tracks as he walked the dusty road to Damascus. He encountered the risen Jesus and was never the same again. A man once filled with a murderous hatred for believers was transformed by God's grace (see Acts 9:1-25). And the same saving grace that changed Paul's life continues to change

lives today. This is true in every believer's life. We were heading down a certain road, maybe not to Damascus, but down a path that would eventually lead to our own destruction. But God had other plans.

Now let's dive into Ephesians!

Read Ephesians 1:1-2

The journey of growing in spiritual maturity—becoming more like Christ in thought and deed—begins the moment we surrender our lives to God. Even Paul, knowing the Scriptures as well as he did, had some growing to do. This is the overarching theme in his letter to the Ephesians. We've been saved by grace. Yes. But we still have some growing to do. Paul's letter is a call to carry on in our growth and understanding of who God is and how we are to live as His children.

Diving Deeper

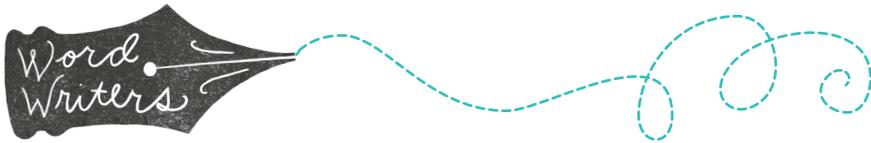
Who determined Paul would be an apostle?

To whom did Paul explicitly write his letter?

Not everyone has a dramatic conversion like Paul's. But every believer, at some point along life's journey, has encountered the risen Christ. We were heading in a certain direction. But God had other plans. Take a few moments and write down your own "But God" story below or in a separate special place. Who can you share your "But God" story with today?

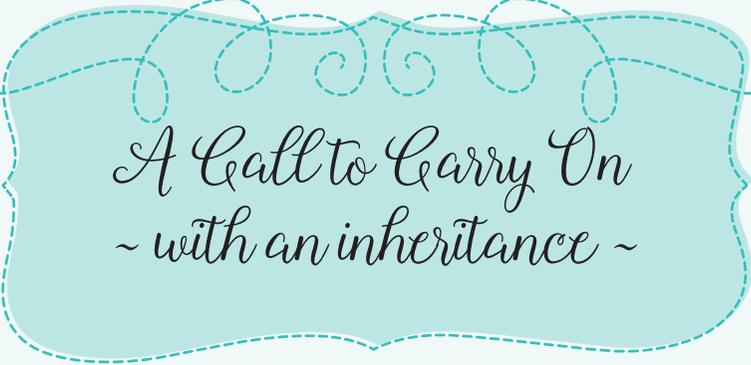
You might think that Paul is being somewhat braggadocios by calling himself an apostle. But a closer look shows that Paul says he's an apostle by God's will. It wasn't his doing. It was God's doing. Put another way, Paul is acknowledging that he can't take any credit or glory for the work he's doing for the kingdom. It's all because of God. God not only saved Paul but He also gave him a mission: to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, which was basically anyone who wasn't a Jew. In the same way, God not only saves us, but He also calls us to a kingdom purpose. What is the kingdom purpose for which God has called you?

If you're not sure, that's okay too. Let's make it our prayer that through this study God will reveal His kingdom purpose for each of our lives.



Okay, friends. This is where the rubber meets the road—or where the pen meets the paper! Turn to the lined pages in the back of this book and write out Ephesians 1:1-2.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the work You have begun in my life. As I begin this new journey through the book of Ephesians, I pray that You will open the eyes of my heart to the kingdom purpose for which You have called me. And with each word from Scripture I write, I pray the Holy Spirit will continue to teach me the truth of the Word. Amen.



A Call to Carry On ~ with an inheritance ~

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to receive a surprise phone call from someone saying I had been named in the will of a person I didn't even know. It's never happened, of course, but a person can dream, right? Well, Paul opens his letter almost like a person reading a will—a will that lists the saints' inheritance from God. And since you and I are saints, this inheritance is ours in Christ too!

The entire passage in Ephesians 1:3-14 is a reminder of the spiritual inheritance we have already received from each Person of the Trinity.

- Verses 3-6 declare our inheritance from God the Father.
- Verses 7-12 proclaim our inheritance from God the Son.
- Verses 13 and 14 decree our inheritance from God the Spirit.

We'll spend the next three days reading through this “will,” if you will.

Day 2

The Father's Plan

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction.

PSALM 119:18

Let's say my dream came true and I was named in the will of a person I didn't even know. Imagine how awkward that would be, walking into a room where all the family members were gathered to hear about their own inheritance. They'd all look at me and wonder who I was and why I was there. (Frankly, I'd wonder why I was there too.) But that's exactly what Paul was trying to communicate to the believers in Ephesus—who they were in Christ and why they were there. They were mostly Gentiles, and they'd been told for forever that they would never be a part of the Jews' heritage. They were not considered "family."

But that all changed with Jesus. When Jesus died and rose again, He rewrote His "will" by establishing a new covenant. Under the new covenant, the Gentile believers were now part of the family. They had been adopted.

We've been adopted too. This is part of our inheritance from God the Father. We've been chosen. Adopted into His family. And we've been given a kingdom purpose to live out for His glory.

Read Ephesians 1:3-6

Remember when I shared that some parts of the Bible were confusing to me when I first started reading it? Yeah, this is one of those places that has caused some confusion. Not just for me but for lots of folks in the Christian community. Because in several places Scripture says God has "chosen" and "predestined" some people to live with Him forever (see Romans 8:29-30 and John 6:44). If

this is the case, then it doesn't seem fair. Why would a loving God not choose everyone? This would appear to contradict other places in the Bible that clearly state that God does not play favorites (see Romans 2:11). The Bible also says God does not wish for anyone to perish, but for all to come to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus (see 2 Peter 3:9).

So which is it? Has God “chosen” and “predestined” some people and not others? Or does God give everyone a “fair chance” to choose whether they want to serve Him? In theological terms we call this:

- the doctrine of election (*where God chooses His people*).
- the doctrine of predestination (*where God decides the purpose for His people*).
- the doctrine of free will (*where God gives all people the choice to follow Him*).

At first glance these doctrines appear mutually exclusive: Either God chooses His people or God gives all people a choice. But in Isaiah 55:9 we read that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. This means there are some things we can't fully grasp with our finite minds, and our human inability to fully comprehend this paradox doesn't make it untrue. So it's not either-or but both-and. It's not either election or free will, but both election and free will. In God's sovereignty He chooses us and He predestines a purpose for us, but He also gives us a free will.

In *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer underscores this same premise. We pursue God, yes, but only because He first pursued us. The disciple John said the same thing in 1 John 4:19: “We love because He first loved us.” In this way we can never take credit for our pursuit of God. Because He chose us first. The gift of His grace is all His doing. By embracing the paradoxical truth of “not either-or but both-and,” we are saying we acknowledge God's ways are higher

We pursue God
because He first
pursued us.

#WordWriters

than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. In Christ all things are possible, including both election and free will.

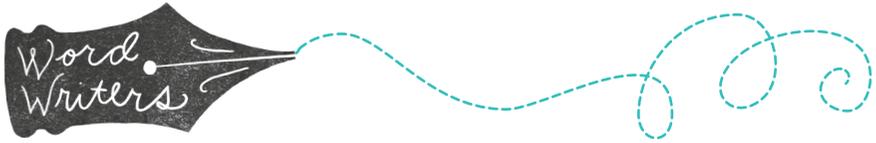
Diving Deeper

When did God choose us in Christ?

Why did God want to adopt us as His children?

In Paul's day adopted children had the same legal rights as any other son or daughter, which included the rights to their father's inheritance. Knowing you are a joint heir with Jesus, how might you live differently?

Have you ever wrestled with the notion of God's "chosen ones"? How do you reconcile this paradoxical truth in your own words? (To read more about the scriptural truth of election, see Romans 8:29-30 and John 6:44. To read more about the scriptural truth of free will, see John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:1-4, and 2 Peter 3:9.)



Today let's write out Ephesians 1:3-6, the portion that speaks of our inheritance from God the Father.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for choosing me to live with You forever. Help me to remember that You chose me before the creation of the world, and You desire for every person to know You. Thank You for the kingdom purpose You have given to me. Help me to live out Your purpose for my life. Amen.