

“Rich Kids”

A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Introduction

We've entitled this study of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus "Rich Kids" to reflect the fact that the apostle Paul speaks of our adoption as "sons and daughters" (1:5, NASB) and mentions our inheritance no less than three times in chapter one (1:11, 14, 18) and "riches" six times through chapter three (1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16).

When you read Ephesians, it's clear that, in Christ, regardless of our socio-economic status, we are blessed with riches beyond compare. The first chapter alone lifts us above the mundane and often frustrating reality of life on earth and directs our attention to the spiritual blessings we experience in Christ. It also serves as a remedy for occasional doubts about our own salvation.

The letter, as a whole, builds up our faith while providing practical guidance for how we are to function as a church, in marriage, in child-rearing, on the job and in many other aspects of life. Ephesians is a compact guide to life as a Christian. Serious study of the book will pay huge dividends now and in the future.

Background

It wasn't the promise of a luxury cruise that caused Paul to board ship in Cenchrea in the early spring of AD 52 as he headed toward Syria (Acts 18:18). In those days, sailing was difficult and dangerous (II Cor. 11:25, "three times I was shipwrecked; a night and day I was adrift at sea"). But Paul was driven to preach the gospel, at any cost.

After a voyage of 250 miles across the Aegean Sea, Luke tells us in Acts 18:19 that Paul arrived at the celebrated city of Ephesus. He entered the city along the Arcadian Way, a magnificent road, torch-lit at night and flanked on

either side by giant columns (some of which exist to this day). The 1,700 foot road provided a thoroughfare from the city's fine harbor to the Great Theater of Ephesus that could seat 25,000 spectators. He could scarcely have foreseen the spectacle that would develop there later due to his preaching, when a riotous crowd would chant and scream on behalf of its beloved goddess, Artemis.

Ephesus was a majestic place, at one time boasting a population of over 250,000. It was an important seaport and home of one of the seven wonders of antiquity, the temple of Artemis, the great "mother goddess."

This monument was so huge that four Athenian Parthenons could fit inside it. Ephesus was proud of its place as Temple Warden of this goddess (Acts 19:35), who was worshipped the world over (Acts 19:27).

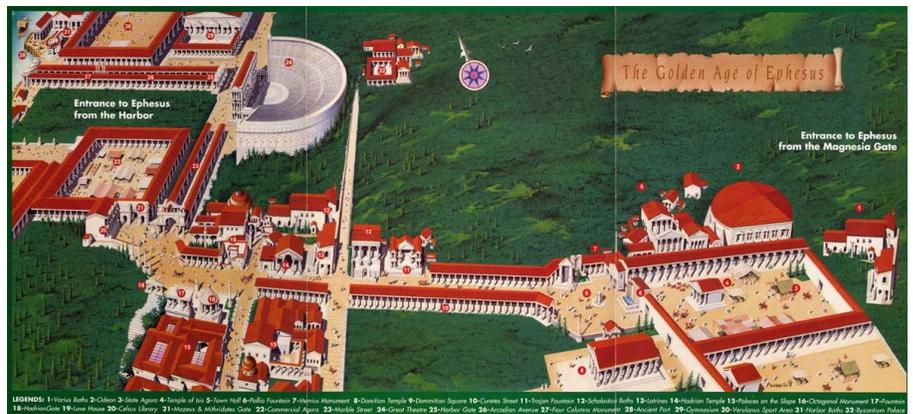
But Paul didn't go to Ephesus to stroll down the Arcadian Way, as thousands do each year today. He came to preach the gospel. On his first visit he stayed only briefly, taking some time to reason with the Jews in the synagogue there. The Jews asked him to stay on, but he declined, promising to return later "if God wills" (Acts 18:18-21).

Paul did return in the late summer of AD 52 and stayed a total of three years (Acts 20:31), longer than in any other city during his active years of preaching. It was from Ephesus that Paul and his companions would preach the gospel "so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

The "Pauline Lectures" took place every day in the school of Tyrannus, whether hot or cold, rainy or sunny. Paul carefully clarified and explained the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul stayed in Ephesus so long because it was the perfect place to reach most of the people in Asia Minor.

A few years after Paul left Ephesus, he wrote this letter to the brethren in the church there, probably in AD 62 while imprisoned in Rome (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). It's probable that Paul intended that it should be shared among the churches in the area (cf. Col. 4:16).

The letter is divided neatly into two parts: chapters 1-3 can be classified as "doctrinal" or theological while chapters 4-6 are practical — putting doctrine to work.



David Posey

The Worship of Diana (Artemis)

On the outskirts of town stood the imposing temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the Seven Wonders of the World. When Paul preached about the true God, the local silversmiths who sold statues of Diana were enraged because he was affecting their profit. Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were dragged into the theater. The disciples would not allow Paul to go into the assembly (Acts 19:30). The town clerk brought order and the people were dismissed. See Acts 19:23-41.

"The Temple of Artemis (or Diana, according to her Roman name) at Ephesus ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. As the twin sister of Apollo and the daughter of Zeus, Artemis was known variously as the moon goddess, the goddess of hunting, and the patroness of young girls. The temple at Ephesus housed the multi-breasted image of Artemis which was reputed to have come directly from Zeus (Acts 19:35). The temple of Artemis in Paul's day was supported by 127 columns, each of them 60 meters (197 feet) high. The Ephesians took great pride in this grand edifice. During the Roman period, they promoted the worship of Artemis by minting coins with the inscription, 'Diana of Ephesus'" (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, pp. 345-346).



Temple of Artemis
Dictionary, pp. 345-346).

The purpose of the Letter to the Ephesians

Markus Barth, after surveying the field of the many who have proposed a specific purpose for the letter, concludes: "The advantage of recognizing many purposes is obvious. An interpreter who is willing to follow the chapters and changing themes of the epistle from one aspect to another will be more readily receptive to its actual contents than a systematizing genius who submits all details to one keen theory."

— Markus Barth, Ephesians 1-3, *The Anchor Bible*, Vol. 34, Page 58

Barth then quotes P. Pokorny who suggests the following themes:

1. The restoration of Paul's credibility which was called into question by heretics.
2. The refutation of syncretistic, partly Jewish, partly pagan gnosticism.
3. Instruction on the essence of baptism.¹
4. Promotion of unity of a church composed of Jews and Gentiles.
5. Strengthening of missionary engagement.

(Barth, p. 58)

Ephesians was written for all of these purposes and, perhaps, others. In dealing with these issues, Paul has produced "the crown of [his] writings," according to J. A. Robinson (quoted by Barth, p. 50). It is a letter that glorifies God through Christ and contends for the profound significance of the church. The letter is profound but also practical.

Ralph P. Martin, in *New Testament Foundations*, says that no part of the New Testament "has more contemporary relevance than Ephesians" (p. 223). If one purpose can be discerned, Martin believes it is the grace of God which has produced a united church, Jew and Gentile in one body. "The unity of this universal society, which is nothing less than Christ's body (1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 5:30) is his great concern (p. 233). He also discerns a "new slant" (that shouldn't be new to us) that views Christ and the church as a single entity. "The head-body metaphor...takes on a new dimension, in that the head becomes inseparable from the body" (p. 234). He concludes that the direct result of reconciliation (through Christ) is the emergence of one church, dignified here by language not found elsewhere in the New Testament" (p. 237).

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¹ This is interesting, since the word "baptism" occurs only once in Ephesians (4:5, "one baptism"). However, Pokorny recognizes that it is clearly implied by Paul in Ephesians 2:5-6 (cf. Colossians 2:12-13).

A Chronology of the New Testament

- 37 B.C. – 4 B.C. – The reign of Herod I, a Roman client king of Israel
- 27 B.C. – 14 A.D. – The reign of Caesar Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire
- c. 5 B.C. – The birth of Jesus
- 26-36 A.D. – Pontius Pilate the Prefect of the Roman Empire's Judaea Province
- c. 30 A.D. – The death and resurrection of Jesus
- c. 35 – The conversion of Paul
- 40s or 50s – *James*
- c. 45-49 – Paul's first missionary journey
- Sometime between 48 and 58, Paul writes Galatians*
- c. 50-53 – Paul's second missionary journey
- 50s – Paul writes *Titus*
- 50s or 60s – *Mark* written
- 50s or 60s – *Matthew* written
- 51 – Paul writes *1 and 2 Thessalonians*
- c. 53-57 – Paul's third missionary journey
- Spring of 55 – Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus*
- 56 – Paul writes *2 Corinthians*
- c. 57 – Paul writes *Romans*
- c. 60 – Paul writes *Colossians*, probably while in prison in Rome
- c. 60 – Paul writes *Philemon*, probably while in prison in Rome
- c. 60 – Paul writes *Ephesians*, probably while in prison in Rome**
- c. 61 – Paul writes *Philippians*, while in prison in Rome
- Early 60s – Gospel of Luke*
- c. 62 – Paul is free
- c. 62-64 – *Acts*
- c. 62-64 – *1 Timothy*
- July 18 – 19, 64 – The Great Fire of Rome. Emperor Nero blamed the Christians, and a great persecution followed.*
- Mid 60s – 1 Peter*
- c. 64-68 – *2 Timothy*
- c. 67-68 – *2 Peter*
- c. 68 – *The book of Hebrews*
- June 9, 68 – The death of Nero. Probably sometime between the Great Fire of Rome and the death of Nero, both Peter and Paul were martyred.
- c. 69 – *Jude*
- 66-70 – *The Siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.*
- c. 90's – *The Gospel of John*
- c. 90's – *1, 2, and 3 John*
- c. 90's – John receives and writes the book of *Revelation*

1

Overview

Read Ephesians chapter 1 (at least 3x)

The first chapter of Ephesians soars like an eagle (to borrow a line from Don Alexander's song, "Saints Lift Your Voices). Read and enjoy, then we'll talk about it in class. Lesson 1 is an overview of the chapter; in lesson number 2, we'll dig deeper into the chapter.

1. Who is Paul speaking to here? Why is it important that we keep this in mind?

2. Circle and list words that need definition/explanation.

3. Highlight key themes and/or sentences that stand out to you.

4. Note terms or ideas that are repeated or are contrasted with other terms/ideas.

5. What is Paul's "big idea" in this text? What does he want us to "get"?

6. Paul mentions several benefits we enjoy in Christ in this chapter. Name a few.

7. Any "ah ha" moments.

- As we reflect on 1:7-8, think about the depth of God's forgiveness. Read Psalm 103:8-14; Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 8:1, 31-39. How does this knowledge affect you?

2

Additional Questions on Ephesians 1

1. "Predestination" (1:5, 11) is a term often applied to the Calvinistic view that individuals are either chosen to be saved or rejected, *unconditionally*. Thus the term "predestination" often is used as a synonym for "unconditional election." While we reject unconditional election, there is a *biblical* doctrine of "predestination." Can you explain it?
2. What was the meaning of "adopted as sons" to the original audience? What does it mean to you?
3. What is the "mystery" that has been made known to us? (v. 9; cf. 3:9).
4. What does Paul specifically pray for? [vv. 16-19]. Explain.
5. How would you explain "the eyes of your hearts"? [v. 18]
6. What does "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" mean? [v. 18]
7. What does "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might" [v. 19] refer to?
8. What does Paul mean by "heavenly places" (lit., "heavenlies")? [v. 20]

9. What is the *true* status of Christ today, according to vv. 20-21?

- Compare Paul's view of Christ's place with the status of Christ in the mind of most Americans today – how is he regarded in our society?
- Is there any impact of v. 21 on issues that arise in our daily walk here on earth (e.g., politics, government, work, relationships)?

10. What is included in “things” have been put under his feet? [22a]

11. In what sense does Paul use the term *ekklesia* (“church”) in v. 22 – local or universal?

12. Look carefully at v. 23: What does it say about the *significance* of the church?

13. What does v. 23 say to someone who claims that they love Jesus but are not interested in church?

14. Some popular commentators call Ephesians a “spiritual power bar”?
Do you agree? Why?



3

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. We have argued that Paul tells us *who we are* before he tells us *what to do*. Does this text support that view?
2. How does Paul describe the "dead" in vv. 1-3? *Who* was in this state (dead)?
3. Describe the impact of "But God..." in v. 4. Why do those two little words mean so much?
4. When did God bring us back to life? How did he do it? Why? Cf. Colossians 2:12-13
5. 2:6 says that God "raised us up with him (Christ)" and "seated us with him in the heavenly place in Christ Jesus." What does that mean? Where are we, spiritually-speaking? Cf. Colossians 3:1; Philippians 3:20.
6. What does Paul mean by "the coming ages" in v. 7? Is it still in the future or is Paul saying "from now on"? Does it matter?
7. What is the "gift of God" (8) – our faith or our salvation or something else?
8. What is the meaning of "not the result of works" (v. 9)? What kind of person "boasts" in his works?
9. We are God's "workmanship" (V. 10) . Who does "we" refer to? Do you sense any special significance in this wording? We have been created for good works – what are they; how do we "walk" in them?

4

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. Paul is addressing an issue that was common in churches in the first century – what is it? Is there an application in our time?
2. Describe the process that brought the Jews and Gentiles into the status of "one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (2:15). Was that prophesied about in the Old Testament?
3. What is the outcome of this "process"?
4. What "access" Paul talking about in v. 18? What does "in one Spirit" mean?
5. What are some of the analogies Paul uses to describe this new relationship.
6. What issues did churches face in becoming this new "dwelling place" (2:22)?
7. Describe the application of this process to us in the church today.

5

Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. Paul describes the means through which he came to know and reveal the gospel regarding the Gentiles [3:1-9]. Describe it. Define the following terms: "stewardship"; "mystery"; "revelation"; "insight"; "Spirit"; "gospel"; "minister"; "grace" (as used in this paragraph); "the very least of all the saints."
2. What does 3:1-9 tell us, if anything, about the inspiration of Paul's letters? See Galatians 1:11-12.
3. In 3:10, Paul says, literally, *"that might be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies through the church the many-faceted wisdom of God."* Explain how the church "makes known" the wisdom of God (hint: this is not an "evangelism" text). What is "manifold" wisdom?
4. When did God formulate the plan for the church? When and how were the plans "realized"? What did it do for us?
5. Why might the Ephesians "lose heart" [3:13]? What does that mean?

6

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. Paul starts this section with "for this reason" [v. 14]. What is he referring back to?
2. Notice and comment on the occurrences of the connecting words, "that," "so that," "and," "now" in vv. 16-20.
3. Explain vss. 14 & 15. What "family" is Paul talking about?
4. What, exactly, is Paul asking God to do for the Ephesians in his prayer?
5. This paragraph emphasizes power and strength (vv. 16, 18, 20). Where does this power and strength reside and for what purpose? How do we access it?
6. Explain the analogy: "rooted and grounded in love" [v. 17].
7. What does "breadth, length, height and depth" mean? (After all, we are supposed to "comprehend" it).
8. Explain the paradox: How can we "know" something that "surpasses knowledge" [v. 19]?
9. The term "fullness" (Gk., *pleroma*) occurs again in this paragraph (see 1:10, 23 and 4:13). If we are "filled" with "fullness of God" what are we filled with?
10. How does – or *should* – v. 20 affect the content, frequency and fervency of our prayers and our outlook on life?
11. Who is the object of glory – the church or God and Christ? [v. 21]

7

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. What is Paul's main concern in the first half of chapter 4 (vv. 1-16)?
2. Paul uses the term "walk" seven times in Ephesians (2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). What does it mean?
3. What is the "calling" that we are to walk worthy of? What specific qualities does Paul mention? What do they all have in common?
4. What is the "unity of the Spirit"? (Cf. Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 1:10).
5. What part do each of us (members of the body) play in the unity of a local church?
6. What is Paul's point in multiplying the "ones" in 4:4-6?
7. How is "grace" used in v. 7?
8. What "gifts" did Christ give "to men" (v 8)? Cf. Romans 12:3-8.
9. The gifts were given for what purpose?
10. What is the ultimate goal?
11. What is every member's *personal* obligation in this endeavor?

8

Read Ephesians 4:17-24. Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. What does Paul mean by "Gentiles" in v. 17?
2. Describe their "walk" (compare 2:1-2).
3. What does "callous" [2:19] mean? Describe the process that would lead someone to becoming callous? (Cf. I Tim. 4:1-2)
4. How have we "learned Christ"? (V. 20).
5. Paul "assumes" the recipients of this letter have "heard about him" and were "taught in hm" (v. 21). Explain.
6. Describe the process of "putting off" and "putting on" (vv.22-24; cf. Colossians 3:5-10).
7. What does Paul mean by "renewed in the spirit of your minds"? (v. 23; cf. Romans 12:2).
8. What is the "new self" and how do we (or *did* we) get it?

9

Read Ephesians 4:25-32 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. What's the "therefore" there for? [v. 25]
2. Do you see any connection between the dozen or so imperatives in these verses, or are they random?
3. Who is our "neighbor" in this text? [v. 25]
4. Paul seems to be justifying anger in v. 26 (*orgízō* – be angry). If so, what kind of anger and what's the "caveat"? (Reconcile this text with Matthew 5:22).
5. V. 28 suggests that there may have been those in the church who profited from some kind of thievery. What are some modern forms of "theft"? What does Paul tell them to do, beyond not stealing anymore? Cf. II Thessalonians 3:10, "*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat...*"
6. What is "corrupting talk" ("unwholesome word" in the NASB)? What are we to do instead?
 - You may be familiar with the notion that we should ask three questions before we speak (especially if it is critical speech): (1) Is it True? (2) Is It Necessary? (3) Does it Edify? Do we see that formula here?
 - Another rule is to "say nothing unless it improves on silence." Agree?
7. Is verse 30 speaking of the person of the Holy Spirit or is Paul saying do not grieve God's holy spirit. What does it mean, in either case? Compare this verse with 1:13-14.
8. Describe each of the terms in v. 31. Is there a connection between them? What is the difference between "wrath" and "anger"?
9. The model of the attitude Paul commands in v. 32 is God? Discuss the impact of application of that in a local church.

10

Read Ephesians 5:1-6. Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

1. Again, what's the "therefore" there for? [v. 1]
2. "Be imitators of God" [v. 1]; "walk in love, as Christ loved us..." [v. 2]. These are high ideals, to say the least: "imitate God" and "love like Jesus" (see I Peter 1:15-16). Why does the Holy Spirit set the bar so high?
3. After commanding these ideals – *to imitate God and walk in love as Jesus loves* – Paul then turns abruptly to diametrically opposed practices: sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness...[vv. 3-5]. Why? Does it have anything to do with "*who you are*" governing "*what you do*"?
4. Define each of the negative terms that Paul lists in vv. 3-4.
5. What is the consequence for engaging in these practices? Who is "deceiving [them] with empty words" [v. 6a]?
6. Who are the "sons of disobedience" [v. 6b; see 2:2; I Pet. 1:14]?

11

Read Ephesians 5:7-21. Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

In this paragraph, Paul urges us to steer clear of anything that belongs to "darkness." He begins with "therefore, do not become partners with *them*," referring back to "sons of disobedience" (v. 6). Paul has a lot to say about "fellowship" (*koinonia*) and "partnership" in these verses. He also repeats his "before and after" argument for at least the fifth time (see 2:1ff; 2:11ff.; 2:19ff.; 4:17ff.). We were *this* (sinful, walking in darkness) now we are *this* (children of light). The "one-man revolution" continues: who we *are* governs what we *do*.

1. We are to walk "as children of light" [v. 8]. What is the "light" that we are to walk in? See I John 1:5-7. What is the "fruit" of walking in the light?
2. What does "discern" mean?
3. We are to avoid the unfruitful works of darkness [v. 11]. Is that something specific or sins in general? We are also to "expose" them. How do we do that? What's the result?
4. How are we to walk? [v. 15ff.]
5. "The days are evil" [v. 16] – in what sense?
6. Can we understand what God wants from us? [v. 17]
7. Explain the contrast of the avoidance of drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit. How are we filled with the Spirit, according to this text?
8. What is the purpose of congregational singing? (cf. Col. 3:16)
9. How important is gratitude to Paul?
10. What is "submission"? Who is to submit to whom?

13

Read Ephesians 6:1-9 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience (“then”)? How does it apply to us today (“now”)? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

Paul next provides brief instructions on four relationships: children to parents; parents to children; slaves to masters; masters to slaves.

1. For each relationship, summarize the teaching:

- Children to parents –

- Parents to children –

- Slaves to masters –

- Masters to slaves –

2. There is one point in all of these instructions that connects them. What is it and how does it strengthen the instructions?

3. Is Paul promoting slavery? Why doesn't he speak out specifically against it?

14

Read Ephesians 6:10-24 Read this paragraph and, before answering the questions below, write out what you see here. What else do you see? (Keep looking). What did it mean to the original audience ("then")? How does it apply to us today ("now")? How can I communicate the message of this text to others?

Paul ends the main part of his letter with the famous analogy of putting on the full armor of God and then ends with a final greeting in vv. 21-24

1. Explain the possible reasons Paul chose this particular analogy. What cultural or historical facts is he drawing on? When his original audience read the word "armor," what picture probably came to mind?
2. What is the purpose of this "armor"?
3. Who or what is the enemy? Where is the enemy located?
4. Describe the meaning of each piece of armor:
 - belt –
 - breastplate –
 - shoes –
 - shield –
 - helmet –
 - sword –
5. What does Paul tell his audience to pray for? What specific supplication does he ask them to offer on his behalf?
6. What is the substance of his final greeting?

Review

1. What new insights did you discover in this study of Ephesians?
2. How did this study enhance your view of grace?
3. What changes or adjustments should the church implement based on the lessons in Ephesians?
4. What specific changes will you make in your life, based on this study?
5. What practical lessons from chapters 4-6 did you find most interesting?
 - Unity in the church (chapter 4)
 - Speech (chapter 4)
 - Walking in the light (chapter 5)
 - Wives and husbands (chapter 5)
 - Other relationships (chapter 6)
 - The Whole Armor of God (chapter 6)