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LIFE BY DESIGN

We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make life work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him (Gen. 1:31 and Ps. 19:1).

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity (Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 6:23).

We need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the

dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God (John 3:16; Col. 2:14; and 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

We cannot escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction (Mark 1:15; Eph. 2:8-9; and Rom. 10:9).

When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity (Phil. 2:13 and Eph. 2:10).

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

MEET THE WRITERS

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TEACHING PLANS





YOUR NOTES

WE ARE CHOSEN BY GOD

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Review **Ephesians 1:1-14**: from the Bible, highlighting praise words and making a list of important points that stand out to you.

b. Read the **Introduction to Ephesians and Chapter 1 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG)** as well as the related **Expository Notes** in this **Leader Guide**.

c. Pray for the group who will be engaged in the January Bible Study.

d. Copy **Teaching Item 1: The City of Ephesus** and **Teaching Item 2: References to the Church at Ephesus**.

e. Gather Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and pens for the group.

f. Practice reading the passage aloud without pauses and as fast as possible, imitating an auctioneer.

g. Refresh yourself on the words of **The Doxology** and be prepared to lead it as a closing song.

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Introduce the session by inviting the group to share positive details about an experience, person, or activity that likely everyone supports. For example, you may ask for accolades for a well-known sports figure or celebrity, hometown hero, favorite

local cuisine, or geographic point of interest in your region. Record the attributes on a white board to highlight and state that there is a reason why you asked.

Introduce the study of Ephesians by noting that the writer is the apostle Paul, who was consistently more effusive in his praise of God than the group just was about the subject you introduced. Note that this is particularly true in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. Point to Paul's description of himself and the Christians in Ephesus in **verse 1** and ask the group to circle the descriptors in their **PSG**.

Distribute copies of **Teaching Item 1: The City of Ephesus** for a mini lecture on the background of the ancient and contemporary city of Ephesus. Highlight these facts: (1) port city located in modern day southwestern Turkey; (2) once the fourth or fifth largest city in the world; (3) known as the supreme metropolis of Asia; (4) center of worship for the Greek goddess Artemis, also known as the Roman goddess Diana; (5) housed the temple of Artemis, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; (6) visited by Paul on his second missionary journey; and (7) both the temple to Artemis and the city itself eventually failed. Also draw attention to the **PSG**, page 7, where the writer points out that the Ephesus church is one called out in **Revelation 2:4** for losing its passion. Draw attention back to the accolades written on the board to ask: **Will we still have the same mind-set or enthusiasm about this topic a year from now or five or ten?** Note

that it is to Christ's glory that He has the power to sustain sincere and effusive praise over thousands of years.

Draw attention to the **PSG**, page 8, and the writer's insight that praise comes rather naturally to human beings but that we often tend to shower that adoration inappropriately. Point to the history of Ephesus and its competing cult-like interests in pagan worship, including worship of the Roman Emperor. Distribute **Teaching Item 2: References to the Church at Ephesus** and call on volunteers to read the passages to gain more insight into the Ephesians. Draw attention to page 6 of the **PSG** to note that, for example, Ephesus experienced spiritual conflict as Christianity took root because it put a dent in the sale of busts of the goddess Artemia. Ask: **How many of you know someone who worships Artemis?** Point out that the worship of Christ not only survived but thrived and is distinctive for another reason: **God created us for praise, a concept that we will explore further in the passage.**

Invite a volunteer to read **Ephesians 1:1-14** aloud. Point to the writer's insight on **PSG**, page 7 that the grace and peace phrase in verse 2 is not a rote greeting but an expression of prayer. Note that in the **PSG** the writer suggests that the entire passage in the Greek text is one, run-on sentence of praise. Read the passage aloud again, breathlessly, by ignoring punctuation. Make the point that while we cannot utter praise without taking a breath, it remains true that God in His glory may leave us breathless in the midst of our praise.

Draw attention to the phrase **spiritual blessing** in verse 3 and direct the group to complete the activity in the **PSG**, page 11, **Every Spiritual Blessing**, to identify the points of praise or blessings that

Paul proclaims in the passage.

2. Invite a volunteer to read **Ephesians 1:3-6** and ask the group to volunteer the key words that stand out to them. Be prepared to draw their attention to the words **chose**, **predestined**, and **adopted**. Invite the group to share feelings or thoughts that these words evoke. Draw attention to the Bible verses and examples on **PSG**, page 10 to help the group understand God's continued pattern of choosing, predestining, and adopting people for particular roles and assignments, beginning with salvation. Acknowledge initial questions the group may have regarding human will, predestination, and God's sovereignty with the declaration that election and free will are both congruent and paradoxical concepts that must be accepted by faith. Note that you will explore the topic in more depth later in the session.

Encourage the group to review **verse 4** to find God's goal in choosing us for salvation. Define what it means to live holy and blameless lives. Talk about how God chose us to be in Christ to reach that goal and how, outside of Him, it cannot be accomplished.

Call on the group to expound on the benefits of adoption as God offers it, including receiving the care, protection, love, blessing, and inheritance of everlasting life. Be careful to point out that adoption also draws the adoptee into a larger family of brothers and sisters who also share in these blessings. Compare an adoptee's family with the church of Jesus Christ for those who have been reconciled to Him. Ask: **For those of you who have adopted, what prompted you?** Focus on concern for the child but also the benefits that the family expected to receive: love, purpose, fulfillment. Point to **verse 5** and **the good pleasure of His will** as the way God views the matter of bringing

people into the kingdom.

3. Call on a volunteer to read **verses 7-10** aloud and lead the group to define the word **redemption** by elaborating on the phrase **through his blood**. Read Isaiah 53:5 to quickly summarize Jesus's mission and sacrifice on the cross and the transaction that takes place every time someone receives Jesus. Discuss the concept of grace and its riches from the perspective of God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the individual who receives salvation. Ask: **What form does grace take for each of these?**

Encourage the group to draw arrows in their **PSGs** to connect these key phrases in verses 9-10: **the mystery of his will, purposed in Christ, a plan for the right time, to bring everything together, things in heaven and things on earth**. Ask: **Was what God set in motion by sending Jesus a whim, an accident or a coincidence, a Hail Mary—or a brilliant, perfectly conceived and executed strategy for setting things back into divine order?** Encourage the group to recall all the missteps that are being righted (the rebellion of angels, the introduction of sin into the world, etc.) through God's plan for redemption.

4. Call on a volunteer to read verses 11-14 aloud and ask them to define **inheritance**. Encourage thinking of it broadly as being entitled to all that God offers. Delve deeper into an understanding of predestination in balance with free will by directing the group to underline the phrasing that outlines God's role (**predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement to the**

purpose of his will), but circle those that point to human responsibility in this equation (**already put our hope in Christ, when you heard the truth, when you believed**). Call on a volunteer to read **Romans 8:28**, noting that Christians cherish this promise and trust God's power to sovereignly control even the worst of circumstances for good. Ask another volunteer to read **Proverbs 3:5-6** and inquire: **What does making your path straight mean? Does it mean you never veer from the straight and narrow or that, no matter what, God sovereignly straightens out the path as you go because He loves you and offers His protection?**

Draw attention to the role of the Holy Spirit as described in **verses 13 and 14**. Ask: **How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit help you know that God has executed His divine plan in your life? How does it help others?** Be prepared to point to **John 10:27-28** or **2 Corinthians 1:3** to help make your point.

Point to the final phrase in the session passage **the praise of his glory** noting that Paul ends the passage with the way he began it, in worship. Guide the group to complete the **PSG** activity **Praise Him! Praise Him!** on page 16 by writing their own praises. End the session by **calling on a volunteer to recite the words to the hymn of praise dating back to the 1500s** so familiar to so many. Lead the group in singing **The Doxology** together. If necessary, encourage the group to look up the words on their cell phones.