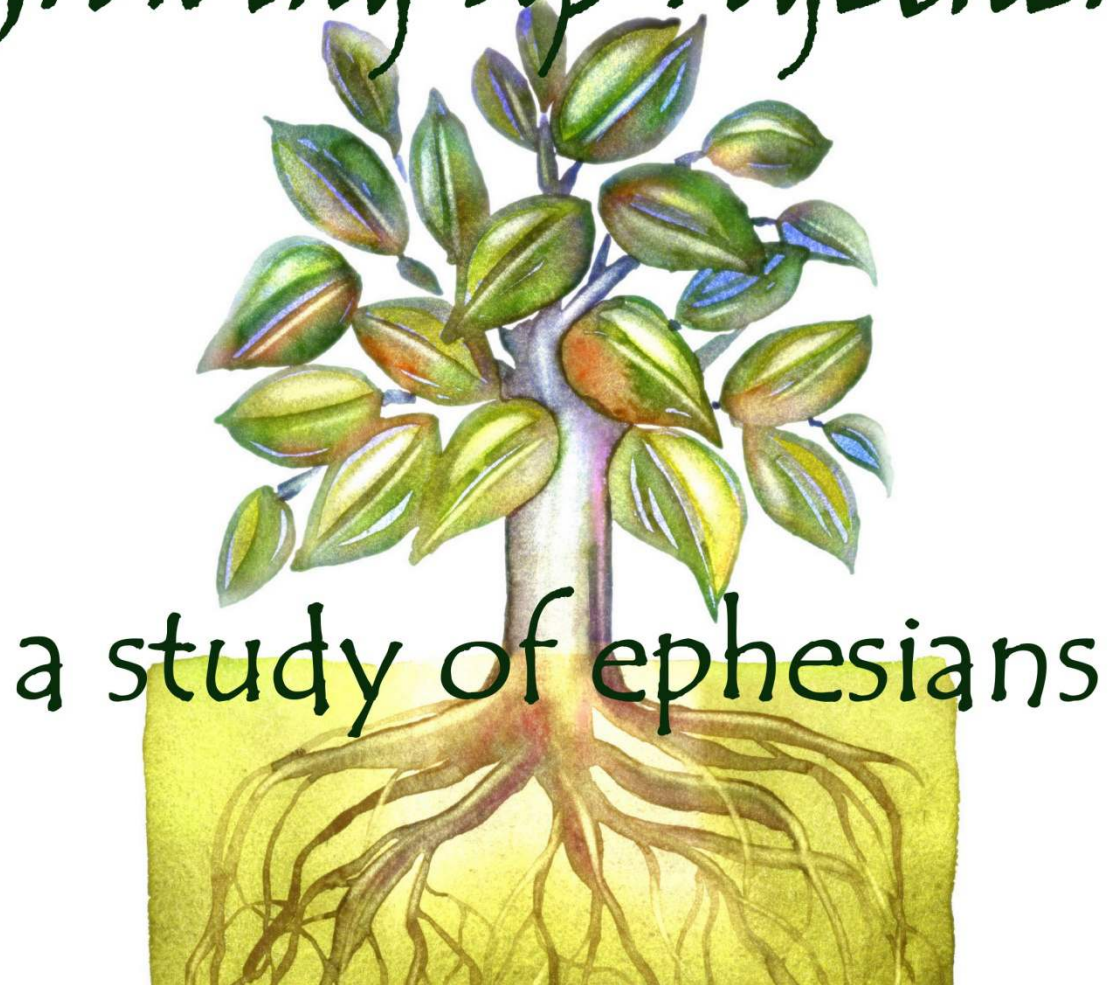


Growing Up Together



a study of ephesians

GROWING UP TOGETHER

Lesson One – Introduction

Grace. Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus is a beautiful declaration of God's grace working in our lives. From salvation, throughout our earthly life, and into eternity, God graciously works in us to bring us to our full potential in Christ.

Ephesians presents God's purpose, power, and plan for living the abundant life in Christ.

Our salvation is just the beginning of what God wants to do in our lives. He has earthly plans and spiritual purposes He wants to accomplish through us, by His power working in us. In order to accomplish these plans and purposes, God must grow us up spiritually until we reach "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (4:13).

Our salvation is God's work from beginning to end. And only the Holy Spirit has the power to transform us into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 1:19-20). But as we will see in Ephesians, both the individual and the church have indispensable roles in a believer's spiritual growth. Our spiritual maturity is a joint venture! God, the believer, and the church work together to grow us up in Christ.

Cooperative Effort

Let's take a quick look at each role. But first, I want to emphasize that neither individual believers nor the church can fulfill the role God has given us without His grace and power working in us to accomplish it. Isn't it amazing that God includes us in the work that only He can do?!

God's Role: Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Describe this work of God's grace in our lives.

Our Role: Read Ephesians 4:17 and 5:1. Describe God's expectations for the individual believer.

The Church's Role: Read Ephesians 4:11-13. Describe God's intention for the church in the lives of believers.

I hope this “sampling” whet your appetite for what we are going to explore in depth together over the next 6 weeks. Next Wednesday we will start with Ephesians chapter one! But before we end our time together today, let's briefly discuss the background of the book to gain the context we need to best understand the letter.

Background and Beginnings

It is generally and traditionally accepted that the Apostle Paul (1:1 and 3:1) wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus in the early 60's AD from prison in Rome (3:1, 3:13, 4:1 and 6:20). Likely, the letter was also intended to be circulated to the other churches in the Roman province of Asia as well. That would include the seven churches mentioned in Revelation.

Paul established the Ephesian church during his second missionary journey around 50-51AD. Since, Ephesus was the capitol of Asia and a hub for commerce, rooting Christianity here provided the opportunity for growth throughout that part of the world.

Read Acts 18:18-21. Paul's first visit to Ephesus was brief, he could not stay. Who did he leave behind to carry on the work he started?

Paul spent about three years, approximately 52-55, in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (see Acts 19:1-41 and 20:1). What struck me as I read this account in Acts was the power with which the Gospel message was displayed. This powerful display generated radically different responses.

Read Acts 19:11-12. In what ways did God display His power and validate the Gospel message?

Read Acts 19:17-20. How did those who accept the Gospel respond?

Now glance over Acts 19:23-41. Those who felt threatened by the message of Christ responded with hatred and violence. Same message. Drastically different responses. Those in Ephesus who hated the message ran Paul out of the city, but the message remained and spread.

Paul's commitment to the message of Christ cost him his freedom and eventually his life at the hand of a Roman executioner. But he would not turn back. When Paul wrote Ephesians, the readers knew he was in prison for his faith in Christ. One of Paul's purposes in writing to them was to make sure his suffering did not discourage them in their commitment to stand firm in their faith (Ephesians 3:13). In fact, he encouraged them to continue to grow to reach their full potential in Christ (4:13).

For discussion: As we close our first lesson in Ephesians prayerfully consider your spiritual condition. Are you steadily growing in spiritual maturity? Are you discouraged and tempted to give up? Or maybe you're somewhere in between and need encouragement to keep moving forward toward God's purpose for you. Where are you now?

Weekly Challenge

(Each week, in addition to the weekly lesson, I will provide an opportunity – for those who have the time and desire – to go a little deeper. If you are unable to do this, please don't worry, but if you can, take the plunge!)

Before next Wednesday, read the entire book of Ephesians in one sitting. It's just six chapters! Keep a pen and paper handy. As you read, take note of the following recurring themes:

- God's grace
- The intercession of Christ on our behalf (lots of "with/in/through/by Christ")
- Contrast of life without Christ and life with Christ
- Praise and prayer

EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING

Lesson Two – Ephesians 1:1-14

Imagine that a dear friend left a large package on your doorstep. The heavy box, which was beautifully wrapped, was topped with a note written in your friend's hand.

Absolutely everything you will ever need is in this box. I give it to you freely, with much love.

What would you do? Would you bring it inside, open it and use the contents or would you simply talk about it and admire the wrapping? Most of us would begin to excitedly rip off the paper while we were dragging it inside! Then we would call our friend and profusely thank him for the indescribable gift. Next we would pull it all out of the box and begin to use it!

God has blessed us with everything we need to live an abundant life of faith in Christ. This is Paul's focus in the first chapter of Ephesians.

“He has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (1:3, NIV).

But before we explore what this incredible promise means, let's begin our study of the book of Ephesians at the beginning of the book!

Read Ephesians 1:1-2. Who wrote the letter? To who was the letter sent?

The first two verses of Ephesians is a conventional first-century address. Typically, the writer identified himself, addressed the recipients, and offered a traditional greeting. As mentioned last week in the introductory lesson, this letter was also likely distributed among all the churches in the Roman province of Asia. This is probably one of the reasons that the letter doesn't seem to address a specific problem or issue. Although the content is more general in nature, it is full of deep truth about the working of God's grace in our lives.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

The verses you just read are all one long sentence in the Greek. Once Paul started praising God he didn't stop to take a breath for twelve verses! It reminds me of an excited young child who wants so much to tell you everything; she doesn't even slow down enough to breathe. I can see Paul, hunched over the papyrus, writing with excitement and joy over what God has done.

Read 2 Peter 1:3 and compare it to Ephesians 1:3. This verse in 2 Peter helps us understand what “every spiritual blessing in Christ” means. Using the information in these two verses, describe the nature and purpose of what God has blessed us with. (For instance, are these blessings material or something else? Why does God give us these blessings?)

God has not promised us physical health or worldly wealth. His promises are spiritual in nature and eternal in scope. The blessings He lavishes on us are exactly what we need to deepen our relationship with God, grow to Christ-likeness, and fulfill God’s purposes for our lives.

Contemplating this glorious truth moved Paul to praise. Paul’s praise includes a long list (though not exhaustive) of some of the many ways God has indeed “blessed us in the heavenly realms,” centering on what the Father has done for us in Christ.

Work your way back through verses 4-14. Make a list of all the blessings we have “in Christ.”

Look back at your list. This is why Paul got so excited. Don’t you just want to shout out loud? Or jump up and down?! We are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven! God has lavished His grace on us (love this!) and sealed us with the Holy Spirit until we receive our eternal inheritance as His beloved daughters! Amen and amen!

Verses 4-14 are a beautiful description of what God does when He saves us. Before salvation, we are separated from God because of our sin. But then God intervenes! Paul’s description shows how each member of the Trinity works in our salvation. Let’s consider the vital role of each.

Describe the role God the Father has in our salvation:

Describe the role Jesus has in our salvation:

Describe the role the Holy Spirit has in our salvation:

Our salvation is based solely on the character and action of God. The Father initiates our salvation. He chooses us in love and calls us to hope in Christ. Jesus makes our salvation possible by satisfying the requirements that God's justice demands. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Jesus paid our debt with His own blood. The Holy Spirit applies God's saving work to our lives. He restores our spiritual life. The Spirit's presence with every believer is God's promise that we belong to Him. The Spirit protects us and guarantees our eternal life to come!

God's spiritual blessings for us proceed from the Father, are made possible by the Son, and are activated in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We've seen what God has blessed us with and how we receive His blessings. Now let's consider "why."

Why did God choose to "bless us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ?" Make a list below of all the reasons you can find in verses 3-14.

You may have really had to dig to answer that last question because there are so many treasures hidden in that passage. So, to summarize, God saved us and lavished His blessings on us because:

- He wants to make us holy and blameless (vs 4)
- It pleased Him and He wanted to (vs 5)
- Our salvation will bring Him praise (vs 6)
- He is loving and full of grace (vs 6-7)
- To carry out His plans and purposes in Christ (9-11)

Oh, there is so much more in these verses we could dig out! But we must finish up for today or I am afraid you won't come back! But, before we go, let's make some personal application.

Think about your current life circumstances – physical, relational, and spiritual. Even though God's blessings to us are spiritual in nature, they powerfully apply to every single thing God has allowed into our lives. What circumstance in your life needs to be affected by His blessings today? How can the "riches of God's grace" work in this circumstance to bring Him praise?

Contemplate the blessings of God today and respond with praise!

Weekly Challenge

(Each week, in addition to the weekly lesson, I will provide an opportunity – for those who have the time and desire – to go a little deeper. If you are unable to do this, please don't worry, but if you can, take the plunge!)

This week I challenge you to memorize Ephesians 1:3. I've been working on 1:3-6 for a couple of weeks now, so I know you can do it!

POWERFUL PRAYER

Lesson Three - Ephesians 1:15-23

I love technology. I have a laptop, an iPad, an iPhone, and a Kindle. There is no end to the wonders I can perform with these four marvelous tools. With my iPhone alone I can remotely turn on my porch lights, record my favorite television show, and never again lose my car in a parking garage.

The power to do all that and more is in the palm of my hand. Just one problem: My knowledge of *how* to do it is limited. I can do a lot with these tools – in fact, I’ve even taught others who know less than me. But I still have much to learn before I will be using these devices at their full potential.

The Christian life is similar. Last week we learned that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. As Peter put it, we have everything we need for life and godliness. All this is available to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But have we learned how to stand on, rest in, and apply these blessings to our lives?

In the passage we studied last week (1:1-14), Paul beautifully elaborated on the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Then, beginning in verse 15, Paul shifts from praising God for what He has done into thanking God for his readers and interceding with the Father on their behalf.

Paul’s Prayer

Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

When Paul wrote this letter, it had been at least five years since he had seen the believers in Ephesus, but he had heard wonderful reports about their faith. Their continued growth encouraged him and fostered thanksgiving. In turn, Paul encouraged them with his letter and prayers for them. Paul’s relationship with the believers in Ephesus demonstrates that God designed our faith to be relational. He never meant for us to be lone Christians! We see this truth all throughout Scripture and will look at it more closely later in this study.

These believers had “every spiritual blessing” and strong faith in Christ, yet Paul still prayed for them. Why? Although the full power of the Holy Spirit resided within them, they had not accessed everything God had already made available. They still had some growing and learning to do. It sounds just like me! How about you?

Look back at verses 15-23. Make a list of the specific things Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus. Focus on verses 17-19.

One thing that helped me see the heart of Paul's requests for the Ephesians was to temporarily take away the descriptive words and phrases. Here's what I ended up with:

I pray God will give you insight and discernment so you will grow in your knowledge of Him. I pray God will help you understand: 1) the hope to which He has called you; 2) the riches of your eternal inheritance; and 3) the resurrection power that is available to believers.

Before we take a brief look at each of these, let's recall how this "insight, discernment, and understanding" is possible. To do that, we'll take a quick detour to two of Paul's other letters.

Read Romans 8:9-10. Who lives within every believer?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. How are believers able to understand spiritual things? How is it possible for believers to grow in their personal knowledge of God?

Growing in Knowledge and Understanding

Now that we've confirmed that God is able to answer these prayers through the presence of the Holy Spirit, let's get back to Paul's requests. First, Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would grow in their knowledge of God. The Greek word translated as "know" in the NIV and "knowledge" in the ESV is *epignosis*. It refers to the "fullness of knowledge acquired through personal acquaintance."

What's the difference between knowing about someone and knowing them personally?

What are some things you are purposefully doing to get to know God better? Is there something else you could be doing to experience God, His character, and His ways?

Next, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would grow in their understanding of three specific things. He asked God to help them understand the present benefits of their salvation in Christ, their future inheritance as children of God, and the power that made both possible.

The Greek word translated as “calling” or “called” in verse 18 is “used especially of God's invitation to man to accept the benefits of salvation” (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words). Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 4:1 to refer to our current earthly life. *Our relationship with God gives hope for this life, not just the next.*

In what ways have you experienced God's blessings in this life? How does your relationship with God give you hope for today?

Read Titus 3:7, Matthew 25:34, and Galatians 3:26-4:7. Compare these passages to Ephesians 1:5 and 18. These passages help us understand the nature of our “future inheritance.” Check all of the following statements that accurately reflect the teaching of these passages.

Those God saves become His child and Jesus' sibling and co-heir.

God's heirs will inherit eternal life.

God's heirs will share in His Kingdom.

Each of God's heirs are on equal standing with all God's children.

God's heirs are Abraham's seed, children of promise.

God's heirs also receive the Spirit of His Son.

Are you reeling yet from the enormity of all God's promises? If you're still on your feet – or in your chair – the impact of this next truth should take care of that.

Resurrection Power

Reread Ephesians 1:19-20. What miracle does Paul say was accomplished by the same power that is working inside believers?

Did you tremble when you answered that question? The exact same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and gave Him authority over all things is the exact same power that is available to believers today!

Believer, what area of your life needs to experience this power today? Are you facing an overwhelming challenge? Does some stronghold have a stranglehold on you? Has God called you to a task, ministry, or area of service for which you feel inadequate? If so, write that below.

Considering the “incomparably great power for us who believe,” how can God work in the area of your life you wrote above?

As Paul ended his prayer in chapter one, he reflected on the power and position of Christ. We serve a Savior who has both the power and authority to rule and reign!

Reread Ephesians 1:20-23. Rewrite these glorious truths about Jesus in your own words.

Weekly Challenge

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians can help us pray for ourselves and others. When we pray Scripture, we can be assured we are praying in God’s will! Print a hard copy of Ephesians 1:15-23. Put it in your Bible or where you have your quiet time. Use it this week to pray for others.

BEFORE & AFTER

Lesson Four – Ephesians 2:1-22

We've all seen them many times. Those "before and after" photos that portray the dramatic difference that some diet, makeover, or remodeling project wrought. Even many popular television shows like "The Biggest Loser," "What Not to Wear," and "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" find their success in the "before and after" theme.

The "before" lacks something vital, suffers from some affliction, or fails to fulfill its purpose. The "after" has received what it lacked, been healed and made whole, and can meet its fullest potential. We love this transformation, the process of becoming an "after."

Chapter two of Ephesians reads like "Extreme Makeover: Spiritual Edition." Paul paints a graphic picture of what we looked like before God saved us. Then Paul reveals the beautiful "after" portrait. He also clearly shows us what Christ did to cause the transformation.

Read Ephesians 2:1-22 to get the "big picture" effect.

Now, let's dig in. You're going to need something to write on, so grab a tablet, piece of paper, or your journal. If you printed a hard copy of this lesson, you can even turn it over and use the back. Now draw a line right down the middle from top to bottom. Label the left column "before" and the right column "after."

Before

Look back through 2:1-22. As you do, in the left column of your paper list all words, phrases, and facts that describe our condition "before" God saved us.

My list was long – and ugly. How about yours? Before God saved us our condition was dire and "hopeless." Let's condense all of Paul's disturbing descriptions to two basic truths:

1. We were dead in our sins.
2. We were separated from God.

Read Romans 3:23, 5:12-14 and 6:23. Explain why we were "dead" before God saved us.

We were separated from God, who is Spirit, because our spirits were dead from the effects of sin. We were “objects of wrath” – deserving of God’s punishment. We were unbelieving and under God’s condemnation (see John 3:17-18). But praise God, He did not leave us that way!

After

Look through chapter two again. This time look for the words and phrases that describe our condition “after” God saved us. Write these words and phrases in the right column of your paper. When possible write them across from the corresponding condition in the left column. For instance, “before” salvation we were “dead in our transgression” but after salvation we are “alive in Christ.”

Here is a picture of our spiritual “before and after.” Before, God intervened we were dead and eternally separated from God, but after His saving work of grace, we are alive in Christ and reconciled to God. Very similar descriptions are found in several other biblical passages. Let’s take a look.

Read Titus 3:3-7. What additional “before and after” descriptions do you find in this passage?

According to verse 5, what causes our spiritual rebirth?

Jesus talked about this spiritual rebirth in a conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus.

Read John 3:1-8. What did Jesus say must happen for someone to be saved (“enter into the Kingdom of God”)?

Sin-dead spirits made alive again by the powerful activity and presence of the Holy Spirit! But does God simply pour out His Spirit on sinners because He loves us? Scripture is clear that God loves us and desires to have a relationship with us. But no matter how great His love, our holy

God cannot ignore our sin. In his classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers elaborates.

The great miracle of the grace of God is that He forgives sin, and it is the death of Jesus Christ alone that enables the divine nature to forgive and to remain true to itself in doing so. It is shallow nonsense to say that God forgives us because He is love. Once we have been convicted of sin, we will never say this again. The love of God means Calvary – nothing less! The love of God is spelled out on the Cross and nowhere else. The only basis on which God can forgive me is the Cross of Christ. It is there that His conscience is satisfied. – Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, November 19

God's love desired mercy. But God's justice required that the price for sin be paid. God demanded the death penalty for our sin and then provided it Himself through the death of Christ. Ultimate mercy. Transforming grace.

Transforming Grace

Although God's work of grace on our behalf is sprinkled throughout the entire chapter, the heart of God's transforming work is found in verses 4-10. The first three verses of chapter 2 paint a dismal scene of our "before" condition. But then we get to the "but!" ***But because of His great love for us...***

Reread Ephesians 2:4-10. Write every phrase that includes a "with Christ," "in Christ," or "with Him" or "in Him."

Now reread Ephesians 1:19-20. What parallels do you see?

Christ's death and resurrection satisfy the justice of God. Our salvation is possible because of this work of Jesus on our behalf. According to what we see here in Ephesians, Christians - those who have trusted in Christ's work for salvation - also identify with His resurrection and glorification! Our new life is truly "in Christ." We have been joined with Him. God's work *through* Christ is His work *in* us.

God works through Christ for our benefit. We cannot buy or earn our salvation. God graciously gives it through the vehicle of faith. And even our faith is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit (2:8-9). We have no reason to boast only great cause to glorify our Savior.

Eternal grace. Paul tells us why God undertook this great spiritual “before and after.” God made us alive in Christ, raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms so He could continue to display His incomparable grace and kindness throughout all eternity (2:7). We are His glorious masterpiece (2:10), proof of God’s great goodness and unceasing mercy. May He be praised!

Repurposed

Recently, I met with a staff member of a local church. After our meeting she gave me a tour of their lovely facility. The older section of the building had just been remodeled and updated. My guide used the term “repurposed” to highlight the fact that the rooms were being used differently than they had been before. For instance, the former sanctuary is now a gathering room for groups and old children’s classrooms are now offices for preschool staff.

Reread Eph 2:10. How have you been spiritually “repurposed?” Describe the difference between “your” purpose for your life before salvation and God’s purpose for your life after salvation.

God has a purpose for your life. He poured out His grace and gave your new life. He raised you up in Christ and even now you “sit with Him in the heavenly realms.”

I’d love to hear your thoughts about your “before and after.” What’s the biggest difference God has made in your life personally?

Weekly Challenge

Do you know Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart? If not, I challenge you to memorize these two verses this week. These verses, which encapsulate the Gospel message, will help you share the Good News with those around you!

STRENGTH IN TRIALS

Lesson Five – Ephesians 3:1-21

In October 2009, Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was arrested for “turning his back on Islam” and “converting Muslims to Christianity.” In September 2010, Nadarkhani was found guilty of “apostasy” and sentenced to death by hanging.

Still imprisoned, this thirty-two year-old husband and father of two will be executed unless he denounces his faith in Christ and returns to Islam. According to Iran's judiciary, Nadarkhani's execution has been delayed because they want time to "use whatever means necessary to cause him to convert to Islam."

A council member of Pastor Nadarkhani's church reported that the Iranian court has given the pastor four opportunities to recant his faith. Nadarkhani can reject Christ and live or stand firm in his Christian faith and be hung. All four times Nadarkhani refused to deny Jesus.

When you hear stories like this one – Christians facing persecution for their faith – how does it make you feel? Are you encouraged in your faith or discouraged?

Paul's Suffering

In our introductory lesson several weeks ago, we learned Paul wrote Ephesians from a Roman prison. One of his purposes in writing this letter to the Christians in Ephesus was to make sure *his* suffering did not discourage them in their commitment to Christ (3:13).

Paul's commitment to the message of Christ brought him great earthly suffering, but he refused to turn back. Before we get into the third chapter of Ephesians, let's take a brief look at Paul's adversity to set the stage.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. List all the hardships Paul faced. (Note: Taken out of context it might seem like Paul is boasting. Instead he is combating false teachers who have used their “credentials” to lead many in the church astray.)

How did Paul view these trials and persecutions? Read Romans 5:1-5 and Philippians 3:7-11 to help with your answer.

Scripture clearly teaches that believers *will* face trials, difficulties, and even persecution. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33) and the world will hate us because it hates Him (John 15:18). So we shouldn’t be surprised when we encounter trouble. In fact, we should prepare for it, expect it, and “count it all joy!”

Read James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:3-7. According to these two passages, how can God use trials in the lives of His children?

How can knowing these biblical truths about trials prepare us to face them?

Understanding the nature of trials is vital for standing firm in tumultuous times. Paul and the Ephesians had to face them. We have to face them. Will we allow God to use them for our spiritual growth or will we waste them? Like Paul encouraged the Ephesians, let’s encourage one another to stand firm in trials and rejoice in what God will do through them.

Now back to Ephesians!

Paul’s God-given Ministry

Read Ephesians 3:1-13.

When Jesus intercepted Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), He not only saved Paul, He also called him to ministry. Paul used the term “mystery” to describe a “secret plan” God made clear to Paul and commanded him to carry out.

According to Ephesians 3:6, what is this “mystery?”

Reread 3:7-9 and describe Paul’s God-given ministry?

In the Old Testament, God hinted at His plan for the Gentiles. As early as Abraham’s call He declared that “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Isaiah looked ahead to the Messiah who would be “a light for the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6). Yet, God did not fully reveal His ultimate intentions to until the first century.

I love how Paul described himself and the work God gave him. He saw himself as a “servant of the Gospel.” He considered this call as God’s grace working in his life and he recognized obeying it would be impossible without God’s power.

Contemplate for a moment God’s call on your life to service, ministry, and obedience. Have you submitted yourself to God’s call? Do you lean on God’s power working through you to obediently carry out His call?

Look back at verse 1. Where is Paul and why?

Although God chose to offer salvation to the Gentiles, many Jews violently resisted this “mystery.” They believed the Jews were exclusively God’s chosen people. Ironically, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem when a Jewish mob took advantage of a misunderstanding concerning Trophimus, Paul’s Gentile-Christian companion from Ephesus. (You can read about it in Acts 21.)

Encouragement Needed

Approximately three to five years passed from the time of Paul’s arrest to the writing of this letter. The believers in Ephesus knew Paul was imprisoned and why. Paul, assured he was in God’s will, did not want them to be discouraged because of his sufferings.

Reread Ephesians 3:12-13. What glorious truth did Paul declare to encourage them in their faith?

The Greek word translated as “freedom” in the NIV in verse 12 refers to liberty of speech. Believers in Christ have the blessed privilege to boldly enter into God’s presence and talk freely and openly to our Savior!

How would this great privilege help the Ephesian believers?

Praying for Growth

Paul returns to prayer in verse 14. This prayer powerfully shows what God can accomplish - and desires to accomplish - in the lives of believers. Remember, God has *already* “blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” These blessings are already available to us. Paul’s prayer “is concerned with the appropriation of God’s provision in Christ through the Spirit” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, volume 11).

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 from the NLT below:

¹⁴ When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵ the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁶ I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. ²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Make a list of Paul’s requests for the Ephesian believers.

Who enables these blessings to be active in their – and our - lives?

Our God, the Creator of heaven and earth, has all power and unlimited resources. He longs to pour His power and love into our lives through the presence of His Spirit. As we *continue* to trust in Him, our relationship with Him deepens and grows and we experience more of His blessings.

Paul's prayer moves to a doxology of praise in 3:20-21. Can't you feel the intensity of Paul's worship even in the written words. *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine... God is able!*

Read Ephesians 3:20-21 out loud as a prayer of praise to God.

What life circumstance threatens to discourage you now? How can remembering your freedom to approach God encourage you?

What blessing of God do you need to experience the most today? Using Paul's prayer as a model, write your plea to God, knowing He is able!

Weekly Challenge

Before next week, identify someone in your life that needs encouragement. Pray for them daily and send them a hand-written note of encouragement. I'd love to hear about any results!

LOVE, SERVICE, & MATURITY

Lesson Six – Ephesians 4:1-16

You received something special in the mail today. The postmark reads “London, England.” The heavy linen paper smells faintly of lilac. Inside the first envelope is a second and your name is written in calligraphy across the front. Tucked inside is a gold-embossed invitation. Underneath the sheer vellum covering it reads:

*You are cordially invited to Tea
Buckingham Palace
Saturday, February 25, 2012
4 o'clock in the afternoon
Her Royal Majesty
Queen Elizabeth II*

(Right now you’re thinking this is silly, but play along for just a moment. I promise there’s a point.)

After you accepted the invitation and booked your plane reservations what would you do? Perhaps you’d go shopping for something “appropriate” – maybe even a hat and gloves! Then you might do a little research about how to greet the queen and how to address her. I discovered that a curtsy is the traditional greeting for a woman. “Your Majesty” is the correct first response and then “ma’am” is sufficient every time after that.

If I were invited to tea with the Queen of England I would do everything possible to dress, speak, and act in a way that was worthy of the occasion and the company. I’m sure you would too.

Yet, we’ve received an invitation far greater than an afternoon at Buckingham Palace and we don’t always respond in a worthy manner. Our Creator has invited us to join Him in heaven for eternity. What’s our response?

Called to Love

Read Ephesians 4:1-3 and fill in the blanks.

Live a life _____ of the _____ you’ve received.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul beautifully describes our great salvation. This is the “calling” (or “vocation” in the KJV) he refers to in 4:1. Our “calling” is our invitation from God to partake of the divine blessings of redemption. If you have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ you have received this calling.

Paul’s encouragement to live a life worthy of the One who saved us is not merely a suggestion or recommendation. The Greek word translated as “urge” is a serious appeal. Paul pleads with the

Ephesians – and with us - to live the kind of life that adequately reflects what God has done for us. Since God has saved us from eternal destruction our lives should show it.

In verse two Paul mentions four character traits that will be displayed in a “worthy” life. Next to each one listed below, write the antonym of that trait.

Humility:

Gentleness:

Patience expressed in forbearance:

Love:

How will exhibiting these positive traits help us maintain peace and unity with other Christians (vs 3)? What would happen if we displayed their antonyms instead?

The Greek word translated as “love” in verse two is *agape*. *Agape* is the kind of love God has for His Son – and for us. It is love expressed in deliberate action and God set the example.

But demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8. NIV).

Agape seeks the welfare of others. It is not based on fickle emotions, but on an act of the will. It is not dependent on the character of the object of love, but on the character of the giver.

Why is the truth that God’s love for us is based on His choice and character important?

Read John 13:34-35. What did Jesus command us to do and why?(Note: “Love” in this passage is “agape.”)

Why does agape expressed in the church have such an impact on the world?

Unity Modeled in the Trinity

Read Ephesians 4:4-6. How many times does Paul use the word “one?”

Paul moves from urging us to unity with each other in verse three to highlighting the unity of our Trinitarian God in verses 4 to 6. Biblical scholars believe Paul based these three verses on a creed of the early church. This creed teaches us important truths about God:

The unity of the church reflects the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The same Spirit indwells each believer, each local church, and the universal church.

The presence of the Spirit connects believers to each other and makes unity possible.

All believers are unified by faith in the same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Water baptism identifies believers with Christ and each other.

The same Father reigns with sovereignty over all and in all.

Gifts for Service

Read Ephesians 4:7-13.

Paul now moves from the unity of the body to the unique place of service for each individual believer within the body. The church – the body of Christ – is a living, breathing entity. Yes, unity is vital, but unity does not release the individual from obeying His God-given role. God gifts us for and calls us to a specific function. God’s goal in this is to maintain the health of the body and carry out His purposes in the world.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to emphasize the truth that Christ gives gifts to people. The ascended, exalted Christ not only fills the entire universe with His authority and power, He also fills His people with the ability to serve Him.

Based on Ephesians 4:7 & 11 who chooses and distributes spiritual gifts to believers?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. According to verse 7 why are individual believers given spiritual gifts?

Note: Here in Ephesians 4 Paul attributes our spiritual gifts to Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 12 he calls them a “manifestation of the Spirit.” This is not a conflict but rather another testimony to the unity of the Godhead!

God gives specific spiritual gifts to individual believers in order for that believer to serve others. My gifts are not for me. Your gifts are not for you. Let's see how God wants to use them.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. List below every purpose for our gifts you can find in these verses.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. Paul's beautiful portrait of the body of Christ teaches rich truth about the church and God's role for us in it.

Did you catch God's vision for the community of believers? We cannot be "independent" Christians. When God saved us He saved us into His family, into a community of faith. We cannot be everything God wants us to be apart from a vital connection to a local church. Our local church cannot attain "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" unless we are fulfilling our God-given and God-gifted role in the body.

Has this week's lesson expanded or changed your understanding of the church? If so, how?

Weekly Challenge

Prayerfully reflect on your place of service in the local church. Are you fulfilling the role God designed for you? Maybe you've let the busyness of life keep you from obeying God's call. Perhaps you're doing too much and taking someone else's place of service. Ask God to show His specific place or places of service then step out in obedience.

FROM FUTILITY TO FULLNESS

Lesson Seven – Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:1-20

During my teenage years I struggled on the edges of bulimia. By God’s grace it did not take me under, but I did exhibit much of the typical behavior common to bulimia such as bingeing and purging. My “purging” was in the form of excessive exercise and going for days without eating anything.

Like any young woman who suffers from anorexia or bulimia I believed I needed to lose weight - even after my periods stopped. When I looked in the mirror I saw hips and thighs that did not look like the models’ in the magazine. I wanted to look like them. My thoughts had conformed to the ways of the world and those thoughts – even though they were wrong – dictated my behavior.

The way we think dictates our behavior. If we think like the world we will act like the world in all its futility. But if we adjust our thinking to God’s will and way we will begin to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NIV).

Hardness or Holiness

*Read Ephesians 4:17-19. How does Paul describe worldly thinking (like the “Gentiles”)?
Check all that apply:*

Futile
Lacks understanding
Ignorant

What is the result of this kind of thinking?

Read Ephesians 4:20-24. What is the result of thinking in accordance with God’s truth?

“To be made new” or to “renew” in Ephesians 4:23 is the Greek word *ananeo*. Here’s the definition from *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*:

The "renewal" here mentioned is not that of the mind itself in its natural powers of memory, judgment and perception, but "the spirit of the mind," which, under the controlling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, directs its bent and energies Godward in the enjoyment of "fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ," and of the fulfillment of the will of God.

Read Romans 12:1-2. According to Paul in verse 2, what will be the result of the “renewing of our minds”?

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul systematically presents the great salvation we have in Christ. Now here in 12:1 he says “therefore.” Because of everything God has done for us, since Christ paid our debt on the cross, our proper response is full submission to God and His will. This submission, which Paul describes as a “living sacrifice,” will result in two things:

1. We will no longer conform to the world and its ways.
2. We will be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) through the renewal of our minds.

The English word, “transformed” is translated from the Greek word *metamorphoo*. *Metamorphoo* refers to a change of condition and form. This is a **continual** process, not a one-time event. It is an ongoing renunciation of the world and its ways and a renewal to God’s thinking and ways. We must *continually* reject the world’s ways, constantly checking to see if our thoughts, attitudes and behaviors measure up to the pattern of Christ.

The more our thinking is renewed to be like the way God thinks, the easier it will be for us to see and understand God’s plan and ways, His design for things. It will become easier and easier to walk in His will.

Keep in mind, we can only do so much to change our thinking. We can fill our minds with God’s truth and fight the lies of the world, but only the Holy Spirit can bring real spiritual transformation. He is the agent of both our rebirth and our renewal (see Titus 3:5).

Right Thinking Leads to Right Relationships

In both the Romans and Ephesians passages we read, Paul clearly taught the general truth that right thinking fosters holiness and Christ-likeness. Now, beginning in Ephesians 4:25, Paul gets specific. He contrasts some particular futile behavior with particular Christ-like behavior.

Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and 5:1-7. As you read, fill in the table below. On the left side, list all the worldly characteristics that Paul says we must “put off.” On the right, list all the holy characteristics we must “put on.”

PUT OFF	PUT ON

Did you notice how Paul’s teaching in these verses center around how we should treat our fellow Christians? In last week’s lesson we learned that God commands His children to love each other like He loves us. This table we just filled out is a practical profile of what loving behavior should – and shouldn’t – look like.

Compare the profile on the left to the profile on the right. Which type of person would find the most fulfillment and joy living in the body of Christ? Why?

We covered an awful lot of ground in the last two questions. I want to go back and highlight one particular verse.

Read Ephesians 4:29 and write it below.

The Greek adjective translated as “unwholesome” or “corrupt” literally means “rotten or putrefied.” It refers to language that is itself rotten or that spreads rottenness.

Instead of spreading rottenness, what should our speech accomplish? How can this verse serve as a guide for our own speech?

Now look back at the table you completed. Underline or highlight everything that has to do with our mouths, the way we talk, or what we say.

Did that exercise impact you with the magnitude of the need to carefully watch your tongue? If not, go back and do it again! If you still aren’t convinced, read James 3:1-12.

Step into the Light

Read Ephesians 5:8-20.

The Bible repeatedly uses “darkness” and “light” to represent sin and holiness, the things of the world and the things of God, the realm of Satan and the Kingdom of God. Jesus declared Himself to be “the light of the world” (John 8:12) and the Apostle John wrote that “God is light; in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

Several times in Ephesians, Paul has contrasted his readers’ life *before* Christ with their life *in* Christ. Now he does it again using this familiar motif of darkness and light. Because God has brought the Ephesians out of the darkness and into the light, they should “live as children of light.”

List all the direct commands you find in this passage. (Depending on how you break down the sentences you may find as many as 13!)

Yes, Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12). And He calls those of us who belong to Him to reflect His light in the dark world.

You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14a, 16)

This week we've seen a very clear picture of what God expects of His children. How are you doing? What are your areas of strength? Weaknesses?

Weekly Challenge

Memorize Ephesians 4:29 this week. Then find a situation in which you can actively practice it! I'd love to know how you "built others up according to their needs" with your words!

PRINCIPLES FOR RELATIONSHIP

Lesson Eight – Ephesians 5:21-6:9

On Black Friday, November 2008, hundreds of out-of-control bargain hunters busted through the front doors of a Long Island Wal-Mart. The frenzied mob barreled through a line of employees in the entry knocking some to the ground and sending others fleeing for their lives. In the stampede, one young male employee was trampled to death.

Although extreme, this is an example of our selfish sin nature in action. With no concern for others, each person selfishly acts to fulfill their own desires, charging ahead no matter who might get hurt in the process. Every man – and woman – for himself.

But this is not God's way. He is not a God of chaos and selfishness, but of order and love. He has established a hierarchy for His people and our relationships. Ephesians shows us God's ordered design for marriage, family, work, and the church. When we willingly follow His design we will discover the joy, peace, and fulfillment in community that God intends.

Rules of Engagement

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and 6:1-9. Make a list of all the categories of relationships Paul discusses.

Write out 5:21 below. Circle the verb Paul uses as a command. Underline the reason we should obey that command.

The word "submit" has been misused, misunderstood, and abused. Let's start by digging into the dictionary definition for the Greek word *hypotasso*, which is translated as "submit" in English.

According to *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*, the verb "submit," - found in 5:21, 22, and 24 - is a Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader". In general use, it means to put things in an orderly fashion under something else. It communicates the idea of *voluntarily* yielding to an established hierarchy.

Disorder produces only chaos. Therefore, God has established an order for all our relationships. His proper order brings about our good and results in His glory and honor.

In 5:21, Paul begins his discussion of God's order with a blanket statement of mutual submission. All Christians are to voluntarily "submit" themselves to other Christians (5:21). This

attitude of reciprocal yielding requires humility and selflessness. The basis of this position is our love for Christ and our desire to please and serve Him. The outcome is the edification of the church.

Read Philippians 2:1-5. How does this passage help us understand what it means to “submit to one another?” Who do we imitate when we do this?

Husbands and Wives

One specific relationship in which submission is needed for order to reign is marriage. Imagine the chaos – perhaps you’ve even seen it – when both husband and wife strive for their own will and way without consideration for the other person. Paul’s prescription for marriage, although radical to first-century ears, takes Christians back to God’s original design.

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day, wives had obligations to their husbands, but nothing was expected from the men. God’s standards for the marriage relationship were revolutionary. Yes, women should respect and follow their husbands’ leadership. But the husbands must love and care for their wives like they do themselves.

This kind of *mutual* relationship had its roots in Genesis. A husband and wife are one flesh, a union forged by God (Genesis 2:20-25). A relationship created with a specific chain of authority to produce order and glorify God.

Reread Ephesians 5:22-24. List the God-ordained lines of authority you find.

I readily admit that my sin nature rears its ugly head when I read “the husband is the head of the wife.” But of course I nod my head approvingly just two sentences later: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...” Oh yeah, I want my husband to fulfill His God-given role without me fulfilling mine. But without both of us following God’s design there will be chaos and need within the marriage.

The Greek word translated as “love” in this passage is *agape*, which we explored two lessons ago. It’s the same kind of intentional, selfless love God has for us. Husbands are to deliberately choose to act in love towards their wives with their welfare in mind.

Before we move on to the other relationships Paul explores, I want to share a quote with you from *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*. Commentator Klyne Snodgrass explains this difficult passage of Scripture far better than I ever could:

Ephesians 5:23 does not focus on authority, but on the self-giving love of both Christ and the husband. “Head” in this context suggests “responsibility for”. The husband has a leadership role, though not in order to boss his wife or use his position as privilege. Just as Jesus redefined greatness as being a servant (Matthew 20:26-27), Paul redefines being head as having a responsibility to love, to give oneself, and to nurture. A priority is placed on the husband, but contrary to ancient society, it is for the benefit of the wife. The activity of both wife and husband is based in their relationship to Christ and in his giving himself for the church.

Although the roles of husband and wife are unique and different, this passage assumes the unity and equality of the marriage partners. Husbands are to love their wives *as their own bodies*. And the two will become one flesh.

Paul boils our marriage roles down to their essence in 5:33. What is the primary task for the wife? For the husband?

Note: For a wonderful exposition on these roles, check out “Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs” by Emerson Eggerichs.

Children and Parents

We’ve all seen unruly, disobedient children whose parents allow them to run all over them and others too. This situation not only hurts the children in the long run, it also dishonors God. God has established a pattern for parents and children that benefits the children, the family as a whole, and brings glory to God. Like marriage, this is a relationship with mutual responsibility.

Read Ephesians 6:1-4. What are God’s expectations for children?

What are God’s expectations for fathers (parents)?

“Obey” in 6:1 means to do as you are told. God makes it clear: children are to do what their parents tell them to do. And God promised to bless their obedience.

However, God has also established some boundaries for parents. The stronger parent has an obligation to the weaker child. We are not to be demanding, harsh, or unreasonable.

Read Colossians 3:20-21. What reason does Paul give here for parents to not act in a way that creates bitterness in their children?

A parent's concern should be the welfare of the child. We discipline, train, and teach them for their good, not for some kind of self-satisfaction.

According to verse 4, what is the parenting goal?

What are some ways you can – or have – help your child to love God more and know Him better?

Masters and Slaves

Read Ephesians 6:5-9.

Once again, Paul writes to apply God's expectations to a primary relationship. It's estimated that there were more than 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire during Paul's time. That would have been 1/3 of the entire population! And the majority of these were employed in the home. Although slavery is no longer a part of our culture, the principles in this passage apply to any authority/subordinate relationship like employer and employee.

Based on the passage you just read, mark the following statements as true or false:

___ ***We should obey our employer just like we should obey Christ.***

___ ***We only have to obey them when they are watching us – just enough to look good.***

___ ***My service and obedience is based on my devotion to God.***

How does Paul apply the idea of “mutual responsibility” to the slave/master relationship?

Did you notice the common principles found in each kind of relationship?

- All relationships should be based on our relationship with God.
- There is a mutual responsibility in all relationships.
- God's design for relationship brings us peace and joy and Him glory!

As we close today's lesson, reflect on the relationships in your life: church family, parents, children, spouse, and "master/slave." Are you finding joy and peace? Do they bring honor to God? Where do you need to allow God to work?

Weekly Challenge

Read Colossians 3:18-25 and 4:1. Compare it to this week's passage in Ephesians. What additional insight did you gain about God's design for relationships?

PREPARED FOR BATTLE

Lesson Nine – Ephesians 6:10-24

We are fighting a battle right now at my house. It's me and my husband against a massive army of Leaf Cutter Ants. They have stripped the leaves off numerous bushes in our yard. Thousands of them follow their tiny ant paths long distances across the grass. We've watched them work. The "empty-handed" ones leave the hole, following the one in front of them. When they arrive at their destination, they deftly snip out a big semi-circle of green foliage. Then weighed down with the fruit of their labor, they return to their hole.

We have a large yard, a long growing season, and the desire to enjoy the beauty of God's creation in our own space. Yet, as we work to realize this summer dream, the persistent cutter ant works to destroy it all. So, I just finished doing some online research to find out how we can defeat this enemy. Armed with a list of tactics, I'm now ready to do battle!

God has prepared us, equipped us, and provided everything we need to realize His purposes for us as individuals and as the local church. Meanwhile, the enemy constantly works to derail, discourage, and defeat us. But that won't happen unless we allow it. We must be prepared to battle the scheming ways of Satan and our own sinful desires.

Wrapping things up

Before we consider how we can equip ourselves to stand firm, let's do a brief review. This is our last lesson together in Ephesians. God has taught us many wonderful truths through the study of His Word. Here are some of the things we've considered:

- God has given us every spiritual blessing we need to reach our full potential in Christ.
- The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is living and working in us in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Our salvation is an eternal demonstration of God's marvelous grace.
- God has a purpose for your life and He fashioned you to fulfill it.
- God strengthens us for trials and works through them for His purposes.
- God calls us to love, unity, and spiritual maturity within the church family.
- We have a unique place of service in the church that God designed us to fill.
- Conforming our thinking to God's thinking will produce Christ-like behavior.
- When we follow God's design for our relationships we will find joy, peace, and fulfillment.

Which of these truths above have impacted you the most? Why?

Know Your Enemy

Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Paul begins the conclusion of Ephesians with a call to arms. In his letter, Paul has beautifully shown God's glorious purpose for His church and for us as individual believers. God has given us everything we need to fulfill His purposes but we must be prepared to meet the opposition. We can "be strong" in God's purposes for us by "putting on His full armor" so we can "stand against the devil's schemes."

Based on verse 12, write a description of our enemy.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14. Will Satan and his activity always immediately appear to be evil? Explain.

Sin (and Satan) is attractive and enticing. At least at first. He baits us, draws us in, tempts us with things that *seem* fun, harmless, and even fulfilling. That's why we must "suit up" for protection. Twice Paul uses the term "full armor of God." This phrase is translated from one Greek word, *panoplia*. According to *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the *panoplia* was the complete equipment used by heavily armed Roman infantry.

Paul's audience would have been familiar with the *panoplia*. His description of God's armor would have conjured up a picture of every offensive and defensive piece – even the ones Paul did not mention. While Paul gives his readers a sampling of the spiritual weapons we have at our

disposal, his intention is that we employ “every spiritual blessing” in our struggle against the devil. God’s “incomparable great power” is available to us who believe. Let’s not leave any weapon in its sheath. Like the Roman soldiers, let’s cover everything. Leave no part of the body vulnerable to attack.

What have you learned about these pieces of armor from our larger study of Ephesians?

- ***Truth (see 4:21):***

- ***Righteousness (5:8-9):***

- ***Gospel of Peace (2:14-18):***

- ***Faith (1:15, 2:8):***

- ***Salvation (1:13-14):***

- ***Sword of the Spirit/Word of God (1:17, 3:16, 5:18-19):***

- ***Prayer (1:15-21, 3:14-21):***

Arm Yourself, Together

Paul’s imperatives in this section are plural. Although also relevant for us as individuals, God’s call to arm ourselves for battle is communal, to the church. Like Roman soldiers who were considered virtually invincible when they stood together in full armor on the battlefield, the Christian “whole” is stronger than the individual parts.

Also, our call to battle preparation closely reflects God’s own in Isaiah 59:17. Just as we are to “be imitators of God” (Eph 5:1) by living a life of love we should also imitate Christ when we “stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Read the following passages and draw a line to the corresponding way that Jesus fought Satan's temptations.

Matthew 4:1-11

Pray, watch for God's activity, guard against Satan

Matthew 16:21-25

Rebuke, Submit our will to God's will

Matthew 26:36-41

Know the truth of God's Word and stand on it

Reread Ephesians 1:19-23. How can we be certain that victory is ours?

Closing Request & Remarks

Paul has been praying for the believers in Ephesus "ever since he heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus." Paul battled in prayer for his fellow believers. Now he asks them to do battle on his behalf.

Read Ephesians 6:19-20. List the specific ways Paul asked them to pray for him.

God calls us to pray for each other. My fellow Christians need me to pray for them. I need them to pray for me.

Do you have one or more Christians who pray for you on a regular basis? If so, do you give them very specific requests? List some ways you can ask others to pray for you:

Read Eph 6:21-23. Compare verse 21 with Colossians 4:7-9. What similarities do you find?

This is some of the evidence that shows Paul wrote both letters from prison very close together. Tychicus was Paul's representative to these two churches and delivered both letters. I would love to hear the additional news Tychicus shared about Paul and their ministry with the churches. Wouldn't you?

As we close our study together I would like to say Paul's benediction to the Ephesians over you – my fellow sojourners of God's Word.

Good-bye, friends. Love mixed with faith be yours from God the Father and from the Master, Jesus Christ. Pure grace and nothing but grace be with all who love our Master, Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 6:23-24, The Message

Weekly Challenge

Find a prayer partner. Share specific requests with them. Ask them for specific requests. Meet regularly. Be real!