

A LifeGuide® Bible Study

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

11 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS

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Getting the Most Out of *Ephesians*

Let's face it. Most of us are problem-centered. How will I get all my work done on time? What can I do to be a better witness? Why isn't my ministry more effective?

Solving all these problems is good. But so often we lack a broader perspective. We put Band-Aids over gaping wounds instead of looking for long-term solutions. We lack vision so we fail to ask why we are involved in these activities at all.

Some believe the letter has this quality because it was not written solely for the church at Ephesus. Rather it was probably a circular letter sent to the Christian communities of Asia and other provinces, especially where Paul was not personally known. While most of his letters are full of personal greetings, no individuals are mentioned here or greeted by name. In fact the oldest and best manuscripts even lack the words *in Ephesus* (1:1). They are addressed generally "to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus." But at an early date the letter became associated with the Ephesian church, so most later manuscripts have "to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Ultimately, however, this letter is written to us, whoever the original readers were. It enables us to see the full sweep of God's program from before creation to the ultimate union of everyone and everything in Jesus Christ. It puts our problems and our entire lives in the context of eternity.

This guide offers you the opportunity to capture God's vision for all of history by studying Ephesians. It comes in the form of eleven studies. Each study covers about half a chapter. But they are not isolated, independent discussions but rather build on each other.

May Ephesians expand your vision of what God is doing in history and give you wholeness in this broken world.

Suggestions for Members of a Group Study

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.
2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this guide.
3. Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.
4. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.
When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.
6. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.
7. Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

1

“The Purpose of God”

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

We have a love-hate relationship with God’s will. We dearly want to discover it and obey it, to be secure in knowing we are following the path he desires. On the other hand, we definitely don’t want to find out what he wants because deep down we suspect it may not be to our liking.

GROUP DISCUSSION. On a piece of paper complete the following statement. I feel God’s will is:

- (a) a ball and chain around my neck,
- (b) a goal to reach,

- (c) reassuring,
- (d) unknowable,
- (e) something to rejoice in,
- (f) something to fear,
- (g) something to discover and then do, or
- (h) other: _____.

Write down a brief explanation for your answer. Now, fold up the papers and have each person choose one. Read each response and try to guess who wrote it. Talk about why you think that response characterizes that person.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Recall ways that God has revealed his will to you over the course of your life. What patterns do you see? Thank God for his guidance.

In this study we'll see what Paul says about God's will. *Read Ephesians 1:1–14.*

1. According to verses 3–6, what blessings are ours from the Father?

What other blessings, according to verses 7–12, do we have in Jesus Christ?

What blessings do we receive through the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14)?

2. Which of these is most significant to you? Explain.

3. What strong words and phrases throughout the passage describe God's actions toward us? (For example, “chose” in v. 4.)

4. The notion of being “chosen” and “predestined” is strong here. What is Paul's emotional reaction to being chosen and predestined?

What is yours?

5. From the information given in 1:1–14 alone, try to formulate a clear statement of what it means to be chosen by God.

6. According to verses 9–10, God has blessed us by revealing that the ultimate goal of history is to bring all things under Christ. What does this mean?
7. Summarize God's redeeming purpose from eternity past to eternity future as described in 1:3–14.
8. What do you discover in these verses about God's attitude toward us (note especially vv. 5, 9)?
9. What does it mean to live “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14)?

How can we do this?

10. How has this passage increased your sense of participation in God's total purpose for the universe? Explain.

Spend time in praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Now or Later

Go back through the passage again noting what God has done, is doing and will do for you. Be sure to note God's attitude toward you in all that he is doing. Write a letter of thanks to God.

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2

"I Keep Asking"

Ephesians 1:15–23

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Sometimes prayer can be as difficult as pushing a full wheelbarrow—with no wheel. At other times the flow of prayer takes over—like rushing down the rapids of a mountain river. It can be especially difficult to pray for those we are deeply concerned about when we are confused about their needs and what might be best for them. It can also feel very natural to pray for those we love as we bring them before God and express our love.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Today's study is about the things we ask God to do for one another. Before you get serious about prayer, have some fun talking about three wishes. If a genie were to pop out of a bottle, what would you ask for?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Talk to God about times prayer for others has been hard for you. Perhaps you feel guilty about being inconsistent in your commitment to pray for someone. Describe your disappointment or pain. Take time to allow him to listen to you fully.

Paul's prayers for the Ephesians overflowed with praise and thanksgiving. *Read Ephesians 1:15–23.*

1. How do Paul's prayers for his readers cover the past, the present and the future?
2. In verses 15–16 Paul says, "For this reason ... I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." Why is Paul so thankful in his prayers for the Ephesians?

3. Describe the qualities that Paul's prayers for the Ephesians focus on.

Why do you think he focuses his prayer in this way?

4. What can you learn about praying for others from Paul's prayers?

5. What experiences of the power described in verse 19 have you had?

6. According to verses 22–23, how is the church, the body of believers, central to God's plans for the universe?

7. What role does the church play in your life?

8. How do verses 20–23 expand on Paul's discussion of Christ's headship that began in verses 9–10?

9. What is the connection between the content of verses 1–14 and the prayers of verses 15–23?

What can you learn from this for your own prayer life?

Pray for Christ's church and individuals in your church, following Paul's example.

Now or Later

We can learn a great deal about praying for others from Paul's letters. *Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12. What do you learn about praying for others from these verses?*

If someone were to pray for you as Paul did in verses 11–12, what is one specific way you would want God to change your life?

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3

“Amazing Grace”

Ephesians 2:1–10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

One of the best-known verses in the book of Ephesians is 2:8: “By grace you have been saved, through faith.” Grace has often been defined by the acrostic God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How might your life be different if God ceased to be gracious to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Focus on God’s graciousness to you in the past days, weeks and months. Allow yourself to experience the depth of his goodness. Respond to him in prayer and praise.

In this study we’ll consider some of the riches we have been given in Christ. *Read Ephesians 2:1–10.*

1. According to this passage, what are the effects of being dead in transgressions and sins?
2. How have you seen sin kill?
3. According to verses 4–7, what motivated God to save us?
4. How do you respond to these motives as you consider our condition without Christ?

5. Glance back at 1:19–20. What parallels do you see between 1:19–20 and 2:4–6?
6. What does Paul mean when he says we have been “made alive,” “raised” and “seated” with Christ (vv. 5–6)?
7. How does our union with Christ relate to the fulfillment of God’s purpose stated in 2:7?
8. What difference does the reality of your union in Christ make in your everyday life?
9. What do we learn about God’s grace from 2:8–10?
10. When Paul says that our salvation is not from ourselves (vv. 8–9), is he saying that we play no role in our salvation? Explain.
11. Does verse 10 contradict verses 8–9? Explain.
12. What good works has God prepared for you to do?
13. What has hindered you from doing these?

Thank God specifically for some of the many ways he has been gracious to you. Ask him to remove the barriers to the good works he has created for you to do.

Now or Later

Reflect on how or when it is difficult for you to be a recipient of God’s grace. Journal on each of the areas that come to mind. Comment on why you think receiving God’s grace might be difficult for you.

Talk to God about what you have journaled.

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4

“We Are One”

Ephesians 2:11–22

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Many of us have sung, “We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord.” But we also continue to find ourselves at odds with Christians who believe or live differently than we do. Such problems were just as common in Paul’s day as in ours.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Find as many things as possible that you all have in common.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Take time to feel and reflect upon the negative feelings that you have toward certain individuals or groups. In a journal describe the situation, your feelings and the reason for these feelings as honestly as you can. Commit each situation to God in prayer. Ask him to open your mind and your heart so that you can develop understanding about yourself and him as well as the situation and that you would be changed by him.

Paul longed for the Gentile Christians to know how they had been brought near to God through the blood of Christ and were one with their Jewish brothers and sisters. *Read Ephesians 2:11–22.*

1. Paul uses vivid imagery in this passage. What are some of these images?

What are they intended to communicate?

2. Verse 11 emphasizes the distinction between those who are circumcised and those who are uncircumcised—the Jews and the Gentiles. What name-calling do Christians engage in today—perhaps even using biblical terms?

3. Besides some superficial differences between Jews and Gentiles, there were also some very real divisions. What are some of the things that divided Gentiles from Jews (v. 12)?

4. How does the bond we have in the blood (death) of Christ supersede all that divides us from other Christians (v. 13)?

5. According to 2:14–18, what two reconciliations does Christ achieve?

6. How have you found that being reconciled to God through Christ affects your being reconciled to others?

7. Paul says Christ destroyed the dividing wall “by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (v. 15). In what sense did the cross abolish the law?

8. What rules, written or otherwise, and requirements do we enforce which might hinder people from coming into the kingdom?

9. We still see divisions among Christians today even though Christ himself is our peace (vv. 14–18). How can those who are united in Christ still be divided?

10. How do the images Paul uses in 2:19–22 emphasize the unity Christians have with one another?

11. How is the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God (2:11–22) one fulfillment of God’s will and purpose in Christ (1:9–10)?

12. How can you learn more about the views of others so that you can work toward unity?

13. What practical first step toward unity can you take in the next week with Christians you differ with?

Commit to God those relationships in your life where you need to be reconciled to other Christians. Ask God to break down the walls that separate you from your brothers and sisters.

Now or Later

Think about one broken relationship in your life. Ask God for compassion for and understanding of that person. Make a plan for the steps that you will take to attempt to make the relationship right.

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5

"Prisoner & Preacher"

Ephesians 3

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

What do you think of when you hear the word *church*? A building on the corner? A stuffy group of religious hypocrites? A vibrant fellowship?

GROUP DISCUSSION. When have you had a particularly powerful experience in the church?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Think of two or three adjectives which summarize your attitude and experience of the church. Reflect on what has made church difficult and what has made it special. Pray for your church and thank God for it.

Paul's special ministry enables him to enlarge our conception of the church. In this passage Paul clarifies and exalts the place of the church in God's plan. *Read Ephesians 3.*

1. What themes do you see throughout this chapter?
2. Paul says that he has been a recipient of God's grace in two ways. God revealed to him a mystery, and he was given the privilege of preaching to the Gentiles the riches of Christ. Explain the meaning of the mystery revealed to Paul (vv. 2–6).
3. What purpose does God have for the church (vv. 10–11)?
4. How does your attitude toward the church compare and contrast with Paul's?
5. How does this purpose for the church mesh with God's overall purpose in Christ described in 1:9–10?
6. Paul was in prison "for the sake of you Gentiles" (v. 1). How then was Paul's imprisonment to the glory of his readers (3:13)?
7. Paul now turns from instruction to prayer. Three times in verses 14–21 Paul mentions "love" and "power." What do we learn about power and love in these verses?
8. In what specific ways do you see God's love and power in your life and in the life of your church?
9. Verses 10–11 state that the church is to make known God's wisdom. How is Paul's prayer directed toward fulfilling that purpose?
10. How is God's wisdom being made known through your local body of believers?

11. To what extent has his prayer been answered in your life or in the life of your church?
12. In what specific ways are you encouraged and motivated by the benediction in verses 20–21?

Using Paul's prayer as a guide, pray for yourself and your church.

Now or Later

In your journal describe what it would look like to have each of the requests in Paul's prayer answered in your life and church.

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6

“Unity & Uniqueness”

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

While Ephesians 1–3 provides a doctrinal foundation, Ephesians 4–6 shows in practical detail how to give glory to God in the church. Paul now considers the quality of life that is demanded of believers individually and in the fellowship of Christ’s church.

GROUP DISCUSSION. “To have unity we must all be uniform.” Explain why you do or do not agree with this statement.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Ephesians 4:2 says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Reflect on these words. Measure your recent behavior against them. Talk to God about what you discover.

Paul is so concerned for these Christians that he *begs* them to lead a life worthy of their calling.

1. According to Ephesians 1–3, what is our calling?
2. *Read Ephesians 4:1–16.* What are the characteristics of a life which is worthy of our calling (vv. 1–3)?
3. Why are these virtues so important for maintaining unity?
4. Which qualities help you foster unity with others, and which do you still need to work on?
5. We are commanded to keep the unity of the Spirit. But Paul also says we already have one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all. How do these seven “ones” contribute to actually living out true unity?
6. In verses 8–10 Christ is compared to a conquering hero whose triumphal procession fills “the whole universe,” from the highest heaven to the lowest earth. He then generously distributes gifts (the spoils of victory) to his loyal followers. What is the nature and purpose of these gifts (vv. 11–13)?
7. What spiritual gifts do you think you might have?
8. How do they fulfill the purposes described in 4:11–13?
9. How does spiritual infancy differ from spiritual maturity (vv. 14–16)?
10. What winds and waves are blowing and tossing the church today?
11. While 4:16 sets forth the unity we have as believers, 4:7–11 describes our uniqueness through the individual gifts we have received. How does Paul’s explanation of the proper function and goal of these gifts bring us right back to the opening theme of Ephesians 4?
12. In verse 16 Paul says that the body “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” What steps do you need to take to more fully work toward this goal?

Pray that your spiritual gifts will be used to help others grow in Christ and to build the church.

Now or Later

Even as our spiritual gifts are used for building up the body of Christ, so members of the body of Christ help us identify what our gifts are. Meet with a Christian friend or two who know you well and consider together what spiritual gifts you may each possess.

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7

“Something Old, Something New”

Ephesians 4:17–32

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Already and not yet. That's how we experience Christ. Already we have come out of spiritual darkness and into his light. Already we have received his grace and come to know him. But not yet do we live completely the way God wants. We have not yet arrived. Still, Jesus is right beside us on this journey.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Do Christians necessarily live better lives than non-Christians? Explain.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When have you felt that you were lost in darkness? What brought you into the light? Spend time praising God for his redemption.

Paul continues to flesh out what it means for his readers to live a life worthy of their calling (4:1). *Read Ephesians 4:17–32.*

1. How does Paul contrast the life of the Gentile (unbeliever) with that of a true believer throughout these verses?
2. Paul says the Gentiles are afflicted with a spiritual condition known as hardness of heart (v. 18). What are the effects of this condition (vv. 17–19)?
3. What steps in our lives might indicate movement toward a hard heart?
4. What do you think it means to put off the old self (v. 22)?
5. How do your attitudes affect the way you live (v. 23)?
6. In verses 25–32 what does Paul tell us to put off, what does he say to put on, and what reason does he give for doing these things? (If he doesn't explicitly state each of the three parts for a given topic, fill in what is implied.)

Put Off -

Put On -

Reason -

7. How do these instructions show the importance of healthy communication in promoting unity?
8. Which of the commands in verses 25–32 do you have difficulty following? Explain.
9. What practical steps could you take this week to improve your relationships with others in an area of difficulty?
10. Which of the commands in verses 25–32 have you seen God strengthen you to obey?

Spend time praising God for his work in your life, and pray that he will give you grace in the areas needing improvement.

Now or Later

Take some time to journal on some of what you have learned from this passage. Consider again what we are to put off and put on according to verses 25–32. Write out both negative and positive examples of these from your life. Use them as a guide for prayer.

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

8

“Live in Love, Live in Light”

Ephesians 5:1-20

¹ Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are always grateful to find out that our kids haven’t taken part when their friends are ridiculing someone. However, we are thrilled when they defend the person being teased and let their friends know that humiliating a person is unacceptable.

Not doing what is wrong is one thing. But sometimes it can be even more difficult to do what is right.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How do children imitate? (Give some examples from your own observations of small children.)

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Think about people you have or would like to imitate. What makes you want to imitate them?

In Ephesians 5 Paul continues to outline what it means “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (4:1). He does this by considering ways we shouldn’t act and ways we should. Just as children imitate their parents, so we are to imitate God. *Read Ephesians 5:1–20.*

- 1.** What would it be like to imitate God in some way?
- 2.** According to verse 2 Christ is the perfect example of imitating God by living a life of love. What difference does it make to you that Christ has gone before you in living this life of love?
- 3.** What behaviors does Paul condemn (vv. 3–4)?
- 4.** How is thanksgiving an appropriate replacement for the behavior Paul condemns in verses 3–4?
- 5.** How can you use thanksgiving to replace improper behavior in your life?
- 6.** Why will immoral, impure or greedy people be unable to inherit the kingdom (vv. 5–7)?
- 7.** Why are such people considered idolaters?
- 8.** In verses 8–14 Paul contrasts light and darkness to say more about holy living. According to these verses, what does it mean to “live as children of light”?
- 9.** In what ways do you struggle with living as a child of light?
- 10.** Often we equate wisdom with intelligence. What characterizes wise people according to verses 15–17?
- 11.** How can you live more wisely then?
- 12.** In your own words, explain the characteristics of those who are filled with the Spirit (vv. 18–20).

13. According to Paul's definition of filling, in what area do you most need to be filled with the Spirit?

Talk to God as a child to a father. Tell him how you would like to imitate him.

Now or Later

Spend some time singing and making music in your heart to the Lord with “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19). Write a psalm of your own expressing to God your gratitude to him for the life he has called you to live.

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

9

“Love & Respect”

Ephesians 5:21–33

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

A lot of emotion and misunderstanding surround the word *submit*. So try to come to this text as if you had never seen it before. Try to set aside your own biases and see what Paul really has to say on the subject of submission.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How do you react to the idea of being told to submit to someone?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How has God shown you that he is faithful and trustworthy? Express your thanksgiving for his care.

In this passage Paul considers how the relationship between Christ and the church can be a model for wives and husbands. *Read Ephesians 5:21–33.*

1. How does verse 21 set the tone for this entire passage?

2. How is your willingness to submit to others affected by your reverence for Christ?

3. Paul says wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord (v. 22). What does it mean to submit to the Lord?

4. Why is the church's submission to the Lord a helpful illustration of a wife's submission to her husband?

5. If you are a wife, how could your submission to your husband grow more like your submission to Christ? (Or if you are single, how can you grow in your submission to Christ?)

6. Does submission mean putting your mind in neutral? Explain.

7. In verse 25 Paul instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How has Christ shown his love for the church?

8. The word *love* in 5:25 and 28 is used to translate the Greek word *agapaō*, meaning "totally unselfish, sacrificial love." How are husbands to show love for their wives (vv. 25–30)?

9. If you are a husband, how could your love for your wife grow more like Christ's love for the church?

10. In verse 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 to root his arguments about the unity of husband and wife in creation itself. How do verses 31–33 summarize his teaching on the unity that is to exist between wives and husbands?

11. Why do you think Paul calls on wives to respect their husbands while he calls on husbands to love their wives (v. 33)?

12. How can you show more love and respect to others?

Tell Christ in prayer how you would like to more fully submit your life to him. If you are married, talk to God about the ways he wants to change the ways you respond to your spouse.

Now or Later

Paraphrase the verses which describe how Christ loves the church and all that he has done for her. Reread your paraphrase and respond to God, telling him what this means to you.

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

10

Honor & Obey

Ephesians 6:1–9

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

How much our parents mean to us—yet they can be difficult! How much we love our children—yet they are exasperating at times!

GROUP DISCUSSION. How would you characterize the relationship you have had with your parents?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Reflect on the finest qualities of your parents (or of parenting in general). Consider which of these you have experienced in your relationship with God. Take time to thank him.

In nine packed verses Paul not only delves into the important relationships between parents and children but those of the work world as well. *Read Ephesians 6:1–9.*

1. How does this passage continue the theme of mutual submission that began in 5:21?

2. What reasons are given for obeying and honoring parents (vv. 1–3)?

3. In your own life (or in the lives of others), how have you seen the promise given to those who honor their parents fulfilled?
4. Is it possible to obey parents without honoring them? Explain.
5. What are some practical ways you can obey or honor your parents?
6. How can fathers (and mothers) exasperate their children (v. 4)?
7. Why does Paul contrast exasperating children with bringing “them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4)?
8. If you are a parent, what can you do this week to follow verse 4 more closely? (If you are not a parent, how have you seen verse 4 in action?)
9. What is implied about the way slaves normally worked for their masters (vv. 5–8)?
10. How and why were Christian slaves to be different?
11. How could the principles Paul outlines in verses 5–8 be lived out in situations you have been in or are in?
12. Paul says masters should treat slaves the way he wants slaves to treat masters because both have the same Master in heaven. Why should this make a difference in how slaves are treated?
13. What implications does this have for how employers treat employees?
14. How does this passage contribute to the theme of the church glorifying God through visible unity?

Pray that in all you do you would serve “wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord.”

Now or Later

Write a letter to your parents expressing your thanks to them for all that they have been to you and have done for you. If your parents are not alive, write that letter to God.

Write a letter to your parents expressing all that you forgive them for. Write this even if they are not alive. Do not send the letter but use it in prayer as you ask God for the ability to forgive and for healing where you have been wounded by your parents.

EPHESIANS

Wholeness for a Broken World

11

“Prayer Wars”

Ephesians 6:10–24

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

²¹ Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

In a war of bullets, careful aim and heavy armor win battles. In a war of words, eloquent speech and sharp pens overcome the opposition. But if the fight is outside the realm of sight, sound and touch, how are victories won?

GROUP DISCUSSION. How do you respond to the idea that there are spiritual forces in the universe that are working against God’s will?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How have you recently seen God protecting you as you face spiritual battles?

In this study we will look at how the ultimate battle is fought and how it can be won. *Read Ephesians 6:10–24.*

1. In 6:10–12 Paul emphasizes that our struggle is not with flesh and blood. How has he emphasized this same point elsewhere in his letter?
2. How do you sense a battle around you with more than physical forces and foes?
3. Four times in verses 11–14 Paul urges his readers to stand firm in the battle against the devil. How are we susceptible to instability as Christians?
4. When Paul wrote Ephesians, he may have been chained to a Roman soldier (v. 20). This could easily have inspired his analogy of 6:13–17. How does the “armor of God” prepare us for spiritual battle?
5. Which piece of armor do you need most to fight your spiritual battles? Explain.
6. In 6:10–12 Paul identifies our ally and enemies in battle. In 6:13–17 he considers our preparation and tactics. Now, according to verses 18–20, how is the battle itself fought? Explain your answer.
7. In 6:18–20 Paul urges all kinds of prayers. How has he been a model of a prayer warrior throughout this letter?
8. What main obstacle do you face in fighting the battle of prayer more effectively?
9. What step might you take to stand firmly against your spiritual opponents?
10. How has your awareness of spiritual realms been expanded through this letter?
11. Throughout this study of the book of Ephesians we have referred to 1:9–10 often. How has your vision of God’s plan and purpose for the universe been expanded?

Now or Later

Participating in war is not fun. What fears do you have as you think about what it means to face spiritual warfare? What doubts do you entertain about the reality of spiritual battle and unseen enemies? Talk to God about the battle and thank him for the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹

¹ Le Peau, Andrew T., and Phyllis J. Le Peau. *Ephesians: Wholeness for a Broken World: 11 Studies for Individuals or Groups: With Notes for Leaders*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2000. Print. A LifeGuide Bible Study.