Ephesians
The Bible tells us that before faith in Christ, we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). This is true of the whole of humanity. Regardless of how moral and upright a person might appear, he or she cannot escape this indictment of deadness. Apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins—not sick, not dying, but dead. But God, because of His love for us, makes us alive with Christ. Salvation is by God’s grace apart from our good works, “it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

To the Galatians, Paul wrote that “a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16), and “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (2:21).

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.
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## SESSIONS

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Writers

JAKE DUNLOW wrote the Key Words and Digging Deeper elements for Ephesians. He is senior pastor of Vassar Road Baptist Church in Poughkeepsie, New York. Jake is a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (Ed.D, M.Div.) and Old Dominion University (BS). Jake and his wife Laura have two children, Elijah and Marcy. He also serves on faculty at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary (Northeast) and Liberty University.

AMY TUCKER SUMMERS wrote the Discussion Plans and Object Lessons. She is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Amy and her husband, Stephen, are parents of three young adult children. They worship and serve at Exodus Church in Belmont, North Carolina. Amy has written numerous adult Bible studies for LifeWay.
Often people will say to us, “Good luck!” You don't have to be around me for very long to discover that I don't believe in luck. I only believe in luck if it stands for Living Under Christ's Knowledge! As followers of Jesus, we have something so much better than luck; we enjoy the blessings of Almighty God. In Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, we discover some of the richest blessings that are ours as saints—we discover what it means to be “in Christ.”

Even though the apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote the Letter of Ephesians, he knew and we know that the Word of God cannot be bound. The decrees of ancient rulers of Paul’s day and time are forgotten today. The laws of the mighty Roman Empire are disregarded today. But a letter written from a prison cell almost two thousand years ago is being read and studied by millions of people around the world in the 21st century.

Of course, this isn't just true of the Ephesians. The Bible is still the world’s most-read book. Although it was written by over forty men spanning more than 1,600 years writing in three languages, it has one central theme: God’s loving redemption of fallen humanity. This theme is reflected in Ephesians.

As you study this letter, I pray that God will revitalize you and bring revival to you and to your church.

David Orlo Dykes has been pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas since 1991. He is a graduate of Samford University, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and completed post-doctoral study at Cambridge University, Cambridge, England. He has written sixteen Christian living books including Handling Life’s Disappointments, No, That's NOT in the Bible, Finding Peace in Your Pain, and Pastor's David’s Travel Guide to Heaven. In addition, he is completing a trilogy of novels that are set in Israel. Writing as David Orlo, he has published The Cloud Strike Prophecy, and The Jerusalem Protocol. The Masada Proposal is scheduled for publication in late 2019.
TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the Explore the Bible Leader Guide, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.

2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in QuickSource. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional helps.

AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

1. Read and study the core passage.
   Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible and a Bible commentary like the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary (available at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).
   Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use QuickSource again in the future.

3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).
   Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.
4. **Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).**
   
   Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

5. **Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).**
   
   Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

6. **Use the Personal Study Guide (PSG).**
   
   Review a copy of the Personal Study Guide (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

7. **Review and refine.**
   
   Consult Explore the Bible Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) or the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas. Be sure to look at the “Weekly Adult Extra” teaching ideas under the Resources tab on the blog.

8. **Arrive early.**
   
   The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

9. **Lead the group in a time of Bible study.**
   
   Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.
INTRODUCTION TO Ephesians

**Writer**

Paul referred to himself as the writer of Ephesians in two places (1:1; 3:1). He also revealed personal information about his imprisonment and his desire to continue speaking boldly the gospel to those who held him in chains (Eph. 6:19-20). The early church recognized the letter as a part of the Pauline literature from the time that the books were being assembled in the second century. The letter has a solid foundation as an authentic letter of the apostle Paul.

**First Audience and Destination**

Many have suggested that Paul wrote this letter not only to the church at Ephesus, but also intended it to be a circular letter that would read by other churches in the province of Asia. It is widely believed that Paul wrote the letter from Roman imprisonment around AD 60–61. This imprisonment is described at the end of the Book of Acts.

Paul's arrival in Ephesus is detailed in Acts 19. He had left Corinth and traveled to Ephesus. He found there some disciples who were followers of John the Baptist, but they had not yet trusted Jesus and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). He preached the gospel and they came to Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, he preached in the Jewish synagogue in Ephesus. He did this over a period of three months, but opposition forced him out of the synagogue. He did not go far, carrying his discussion to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where Jews and Gentiles came to hear him preach (19:8-10). While in Ephesus, he performed an exorcism that caused the people to turn from their evil practices and burned their religious texts, turning from their idolatry (19:11-20). This infuriated some officials, leading to a riot in the city. Large numbers of people turning to Christ would hurt the worship of Artemis, the principle god of Ephesus with a temple that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul was forced to leave town (19:21-41). But Christianity continued to grow there, and Paul would later stop and address the Ephesian elders on his way to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be arrested (20:17-38). He loved the Ephesian church and desired to see the work of Christ there thriving.

**Purpose and Themes**

The purpose of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians can be seen in the structure of the letter. In chapters 1–3, Paul discussed the new life they had experienced in Christ. These chapters set a theological foundation for salvation and defended the right
of both Jews and Gentiles to be incorporated into the body of Christ. Paul wrote a theological treatise about salvation so that everyone would understand the gospel. He began with a focus on the purpose of Christ (1:3-14) and a prayer for the church (Eph. 1:15-23). Then, he gave a clear presentation of salvation and how it impacts one’s life (2:1-10). This led to a discussion about how Christ has torn down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, incorporating them into one new body through Christ (2:11-22). He explained that this was a mystery revealed by Christ. It was not a new plan but the fulfillment of God’s age-old plan to save the nations as well as the Jews (3:1-13). Paul ended the first half of the letter by praying a second time for the church in Ephesus, this time asking God to do even above what they imagined (3:14-21).

In chapters 4–6, Paul encouraged the believers in Ephesus to display their new walk. They were to walk in a way that was worthy of their new relationship with Christ (4:1-16). This involved putting off the old nature and putting on the new nature that was created in the image of Christ (4:17-32). Paul also encouraged the Ephesians to become imitators of God by letting the gospel change their speech, their behavior, and their habits. Rather than yielding to the flesh, they needed to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit (5:1-21). Paul reminded them that the gospel also changes family relationships (5:22-6:9). He encouraged families to live in ways that would portray the gospel of Christ.

At the end of Ephesians, Paul reminded the Ephesians that even though God had already defeated Satan, they still had some battles to fight. He encouraged them to ready themselves for warfare and stand in the weapons and armor that God had provided for them. God had won the war as the ultimate warrior, but they still had battles to fight (Eph. 6:10-20). These battles would be fought with much support through prayer and preaching the gospel. Paul closed his letter by greeting the saints and by endorsing Tychicus, who would deliver the letter and inform the Ephesians of his current situation of imprisonment.

The tone of Paul’s letter is pastoral, and the themes revolve around his desire to see God at work in the lives of His church. The prominent themes in Ephesus that keep reappearing in the letter include grace, the Lordship of Christ, the mystery of the gospel, and the church. Throughout the letter he keeps returning to these themes. Paul loved the church in Ephesus, and he hoped that they would live “to the praise of His glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6).
OUTLINE OF Ephesians

I. A New Life (1:1–3:21)
   a. Greeting (1:1-2)
   b. The Purpose of Christ (1:3-14)
   c. Paul’s First Prayer (1:15-23)
   d. Salvation through Grace (2:1-10)
   e. Unity Restored (2:11-22)
   f. Mystery Revealed (3:1-13)
   g. Paul’s Second Prayer (3:14-21)

II. A New Walk (4:1–6:24)
   a. Walk Worthy (4:1-16)
   b. A New Self (4:17-32)
   c. Imitators of God (5:1-21)
   d. Right Relationships (5:22–6:9)
   e. Readied for Warfare (6:10-20)
   f. Closing (6:21-24)
SESSION 1

REJOICE

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

3 ο Blessed is the God and Father of our ο Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. 4 For he ο chose us in him, before the ο foundation of the world, to be ο holy and blameless in ο love before him. 5 He ο predestined us to be ο adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the ο Beloved One. 7 In him we have ο redemption through his blood, the ο forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding.

9 He made known to us the ο mystery of his ο will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ 10 as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him. 11 In him we have also received an ο inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, 12 so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory. 13 In him you also were sealed with the promised ο Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. 14 The Holy Spirit is the ο down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A The writer calls us to worship and adore God for who He is and what He has done for us (Ps. 18:46).

B Jesus has “all authority” over us (Matt. 28:18) and is equal in divinity to God the Father.

C ”He had us in mind” (The Message).

D ”Creation” (NIV)

E ”Without fault in his eyes” (NLT). We’re made holy through belief in Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf.

F God’s act of salvation is a result of His love for us.

G ”Already decided” (GNT). God planned to bring us to Himself before time began.

H ”Make us his children” (GNT)

I ”The One he loves” (NIV), referring to the Messiah

J ”He took away all our sins” (TLB). Jesus’ blood paid the price to redeem God’s people.

K God extends us forgiveness because of His grace, and it’s only available through Christ’s shed blood.

L ”His secret reason for sending Christ” (TLB).

M “Good pleasure” (KJV). God will work out all things for those He has predestined (Rom. 8:28-30).

N ”Who we are and what we are living for” (The Message); the blessings God promises His people both now and in heaven

O The Third Person of the Trinity (John 14:15-17)

P ”Guarantee” (ESV)
1. **CHOSEN** (Eph. 1:3-6)
   - Paul reminded his readers that believers are recipients of God’s gracious blessings.
   - One of these blessings is God the Father choosing to adopt us as His spiritual children.
   - Focus on God taking the initiative in offering salvation out of His sovereignty.
   - Highlight God having a plan for our salvation prior to creation.

2. **REDEEMED** (Eph. 1:7-12)
   - Another blessing Paul identified was the believer’s redemption through Christ.
   - This redemption grants the believer forgiveness, spiritual enlightenment, and an inheritance.

3. **SEALED** (Eph. 1:13-14)
   - Paul pointed to the Holy Spirit as sealing believers at their conversion.
   - This sealing provides for a secure salvation for eternity.
   - Emphasize the role of the Trinity in the believer’s salvation.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

God chose to provide the blessings of salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice.

- Since God the Father chose believers to be His children as an act of grace, there’s no room for spiritual pride or boasting.
- Jesus redeems all believers through His death and resurrection, giving them forgiveness, spiritual understanding, and an eternal inheritance.
- The Holy Spirit guarantees the salvation of all believers, marking them with confidence as God’s children.
FOCUS ATTENTION

What are you more likely to do each morning: list everything you’ve got to do, review your problems, or count your blessings? Why?

- One of the reasons Paul wrote Ephesians was to give believers specific ways to live out their salvation.
- Before Paul addressed matters of unity and ethics, he recounted the marvelous blessings of salvation.
- Understanding what we have in Christ paves the way for us to live like who we are in Christ.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

What’s significant about how Paul described God’s blessings?

- Christ is the channel of God’s blessings. Note the prepositional phrases: “in Christ” (v. 3); “in Him” (v. 4); “in the Beloved One” (v. 6).
- God holds nothing back from His followers. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.
- Material blessings don’t last. Spiritual blessings are infinite.

When and why did God choose to bless those who trust in His Son?

- In His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, God had a plan to save humanity before He created the universe.
- God takes the initiative in salvation. He predestined—marked out beforehand—that people separated from Him by sin would be reconciled to Him through His Son’s sacrifice.

EPHESIANS 1:7-12

What makes redemption such an incredible blessing?

- Redemption—the ransom paid to liberate us from sin and death—cost the life of God’s Son.
- Redemption grants forgiveness. Our sins are literally washed away and forgotten upon receiving Christ Jesus.
- Redemption lets us in on what God is doing, giving us spiritual enlightenment.

What’s God’s ultimate purpose for creation? Why is knowing this a blessing?

- God administers world events, gathering all the pieces into a cohesive whole and bringing everything into fulfillment in Christ.
- Knowing God is summing up all things in Jesus gives life purpose even when circumstances don’t seem to add up. That may not take away today’s heartache, but it gives us hope for the future.

How is redemption a blessing that goes beyond this life?

- Believers have a glorious inheritance awaiting us in a new heaven and earth where Jesus reigns as Head.
- In heaven we will live in perfect relationship with God and others.
- John describes our inheritance in Revelation 21–22.

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

How is this inheritance received?

- This inheritance is for all who receive the Spirit—meaning they hear the gospel and believe in Jesus as Savior.
- Each person of the Trinity plays a role in salvation. God the Father chooses and adopts; God the Son redeems and forgives; God the Spirit seals and secures.

How can we be certain we will obtain our inheritance?

- A seal indicates ownership, authenticity, authority, and security.
- God gives each believer the Holy Spirit at conversion.
- His presence in our lives signifies we belong to God and guarantees we will finally and fully enjoy every spiritual blessing Christ has given us.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What are logical responses to God’s blessings of salvation?

- Out of His infinite grace and sovereignty, God chose to provide salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice.
- Respond with humility. God chose us to be His, not because of who we are or what we’ve done, but because of who He is.
- Adoption gives us privileges and duties as God’s children.
- Ephesians teaches us how to lead lifestyles that reflect our spiritual blessings.
- The last verse of each section (vv. 6, 12, 14) indicates that a faithful response to God’s blessings is to rejoice and give God praise.

Personal Challenge: What are you doing with God’s blessings? Do you think on them? Take them for granted? Think you’re superior because you have them? Marvel and rejoice at what God has graciously chosen to bless you with in Christ? Begin each day recounting your blessings of salvation in Christ, and go out in the world rejoicing in your gracious God.
PICTURES OF MARRIAGE PROPOSALS

Secure photos of marriage proposals. As the group arrives, call attention to the photos and invite them to share stories about unique marriage proposals. Ask: What makes a marriage proposal story compelling or interesting? When you see a man proposing to a woman, what thoughts run through your mind? Highlight any responses that point to life change.

Explain that Paul’s opening doxology in Ephesians 1:3-14 is filled with life-changing exclamations. Call for the group to site examples, such as “We have redemption in Him!” or “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit!”

Call attention to the marriage proposal photos, and comment that when a man proposes to a woman, he is declaring his intentions. Explore what God revealed about His intentions for the world through the gospel. Point out these divine intentions were in place before God created the world.

State: We need to know what’s going on in the world so we can pray, give, serve, and lead as God guides us. However, we would do well to spend as much time focusing on the eternal, life-transforming news of the gospel as we do marriage announcements. Marriage proposals usually give a reason to rejoice. In Ephesians Paul declared cause for us to rejoice. The gospel changes everything, and it’s all for our good and God’s glory.

ADOPTION IN THE FIRST CENTURY

In Ephesians 1:5, Paul told the church that God “predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” What exactly did this image of adoption mean to the first-century hearer, and why was it so powerful to the reader of this letter?

By the first century, the Greek and Roman cultures had in place a legal process of adoption by which a father could adopt a son for purposes of inheritance and to aid in taking care of the family when the father died. As noted by Timothy Boyd,

Adoption meant that you became an heir of your adoptive father … adoption brought equal rights for the adopted heir as any natural children held.

Adoption meant that a child who had no previous hope of an inheritance or a secure future then had that opportunity because they were legally made a part of the family. In Roman adoptions, the adopted son was immediately and legally considered an heir, and it could happen even into adulthood. (For instance, future Emperor Augustus was adopted by his great-uncle Julius Caesar when he was eighteen.)

When God adopts us, He makes us His own children. We become “heirs of God and coheirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Our adoption, predestined by God, goes into effect upon conversion and lasts for eternity: “And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).

We must also never think one is too old or too lost to receive God’s adoption. God can make anyone His child at any point, and it brings Him “good pleasure” to do so (Eph. 1:5).

SESSION 2
REMEMBERED

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

15 This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 16 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. 17 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 18 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength. 19 He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 20 And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, 21 which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A News had made it to Paul in prison about the status of the church in Asia Minor.
B One of the three important characteristics of Christians, each are mentioned in this passage: faith, love, and hope.
C Christ has made those who are in Him holy and set apart for God (1 Pet. 1:15-16).
D “Do not cease” (ESV, NASB, NRSV).
E Paul had genuine gratefulness for their faith in Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:4).
F Paul’s prayer reflected a deep understanding of how the Trinity works in the lives of believers.
G Paul’s prayer was for God to open our hearts—the center of our spiritual lives (Ezek. 11:19)—to know God and what He has done for us.
H “Flooded with light” (TLB) or understanding. Paul’s prayer was for the Holy Spirit to work in the Ephesians’ hearts that they would grow in their knowledge and love of God.
I Christ’s resurrection demonstrated God’s “surpassing greatness” (v. 19, NASB).
J “Set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe ... no name and no power exempt from his rule” (The Message).
K An Old Testament promise (Ps. 8:4-6; 110:1)
L Christ is “chief Shepherd” of His church (1 Pet. 5:4).
M This was a metaphor for the church that Paul used often (Eph. 5:30; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:24).
1. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (Eph. 1:15-17)
   • Paul expressed his sincere prayer for his readers, explaining that he was praying constantly for them to know God better in their salvation.

2. HOPE OF GOD (Eph. 1:18-19)
   • Paul stated that he prayed for his readers to understand more deeply the hope found in Christ, the value of their inheritance of salvation, and the demonstration of God’s power.

3. POWER OF GOD (Eph. 1:20-23)
   • Paul emphasized that the power seen in Christ’s resurrection and exaltation is the same power that secures a believer’s salvation.
   • There are various understandings of verse 23. Avoid disparaging views that differ from your own.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives.
• Believers do well to pray for themselves and others to grow in their relationships with God.
• Believers can grow in hope and power as they more fully understand their callings in Christ.
• Believers can live with confidence in the power of Jesus’ resurrection.
FOCUS ATTENTION
What things hinder our ability to be content—continually thankful for what we have?
• We stagnate in our Christian walks when we disregard the blessings we have in Christ.
• Spiritual growth occurs when we’re aware of, appreciate, and access what is ours in Christ.
• After Paul praised God for His blessings to believers in Christ, he prayed God would help believers see and appreciate the enormity of those blessings.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 1:15-17
What did Paul desire for the Ephesians?
• The believers were doing well spiritually. Their love for other believers demonstrated the genuineness of their faith in Christ.
• Paul wanted them to continually grow deeper in their relationships with God.
• God chose believers for Himself and wants us to know Him.
• Paul prayed believers would grow into that divine purpose.

Why is it vital that Christians grow in their knowledge of God? How can we grow in that knowledge?
• God is infinite. We can never know all there is to know about Him.
• When we assume we know all we need to know, we stagnate.

How can we grow in the knowledge of God?
• Experiential knowledge of God, knowing Him intimately and personally, requires spiritual wisdom and revelation. We can ask God for that, being confident that He’s pleased to answer our prayers.
• God has revealed Himself in Scripture. We gain deeper knowledge of Him by prayerfully studying, trusting, and obeying His Word.

EPHESIANS 1:18-19
What else did Paul pray God would do for the Ephesians? For what purpose?
• Paul asked God to turn on the light in the Ephesians’ hearts and minds so they could see the reality of what was theirs in Christ.
• Spiritual realities require spiritual eyes and minds to see and understand.
• Believers can intimately know the God who has called us to a specific hope, promised us a glorious future, and has the power to make it happen.

How can understanding the hope we have in Christ, the value of our inheritance, and the scope of God’s power impact the way we live?
• When we focus on our problems and selfish desires, we can’t see our way to move forward.
• When God enlightens our minds, we want to grow closer to Christ. We rejoice in troubles as tools for transformation.
• Our certain hope that God’s great power has secured our glorious future gives us the motivation and courage to live obediently in the present.

EPHESIANS 1:20-23
Describe the power that Paul prayed believers would come to know.
• God demonstrated His power over sin and death in Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation. Believers can experience that resurrection power.
• Nothing, not even evil powers, lies outside the scope of Christ’s powerful reign. Nothing can “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).
• God’s power demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection, exaltation, and headship over the church changed everything in the cosmos.

What are the implications for believers of God’s demonstration of power in Jesus’ resurrection?
• God wields His great power to bring about every spiritual blessing in our lives and to give us an unshakable assurance of our salvation.
• God’s immeasurably great power means transformation is possible.
• We defeat ourselves thinking of what we can’t do: I can’t forgive that person. I’m not good at witnessing. I don’t have enough to give generously. Paul prayed we would grasp what we can do because of God’s power that is active in us and for us.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
How is Paul’s prayer urgently needed in today’s church?
• Believers live stagnant lives when we maintain a dim view of what we have in Christ. We must pray for spiritual enlightenment so we can experience the joy of spiritual growth.
• Believers need to pray for one another’s physical and spiritual needs. Paul provided us a great model to pray for the spiritual growth of ourselves, our loved ones, and our church families.
• Personal Challenge: Are you stagnating or moving forward in your faith? What will you do to know God better? This week focus on praying for spiritual growth for yourself, your family, and those in your Bible study group.
A CHILD’S COLORING BOOK AND IMAGES OF A VIEW-MASTER® TOY

Display the objects or photos of each. Ask how many adults enjoyed coloring in coloring books as children. Then ask how many played with a View-Master toy. Ask: How are View-Master images superior to coloring book pictures? Explain that the View-Master exploded in popularity in the 1950s when it provided 3-D images of children’s TV shows and movies. Children could move beyond adding color to a one-dimensional rendering of their favorite cartoon character to actually viewing that character in a 3-D world.

Read Ephesians 1:15-23. Explain that in his prayer, Paul asked God to give believers the spiritual ability and sight to move beyond a one-dimensional understanding of their faith to a richer multi-dimensional grasp of their blessings in Christ. He desired for believers to have a fuller mind, soul, and body as a result of salvation.

Our image of God shapes how we live. So Paul prayed we would know God more as He really is, not how we perceive Him to be. Ask: What are resources God has provided for us to know Him? What spiritual realities can we experience more and more as our relationship with God grows deeper?

Close by emphasizing: One day we’ll experience our salvation completely and fully, but that doesn’t mean we have to live with one-dimensional faith now. We can ask God to empower us to grow spiritually, consistently moving further into a fuller appreciation and experience of the realities that are ours for now and all eternity.

PRAYING FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

The Scriptures encourage Christians to pray often and for many things. Jesus taught that we should pray for our daily needs (Matt. 6:11), for forgiveness for our sins (Matt. 6:12), for protection from evil (Matt. 6:13), for God to send more people to spread the gospel (Luke 10:2), for God’s will to be done (Matt. 6:10), to “produce fruit” (John 15:16), and in His name (John 15:16), to name a handful of instances. In the Book of Acts, prayer played a central role in the church’s ministry (Acts 2:42), and in the New Testament Epistles, we see that the church is to “pray constantly” (1 Thess. 5:17), for their leaders (1 Thess. 5:25), and for each other (Jas. 5:16).

One of the more overlooked subjects of prayer may be a prayer to grow in our understanding of the things of God, which Paul encouraged in Ephesians 1:18. While we may quickly pray for our health needs, financial needs, praying for spiritual growth may not come to mind quickly nor appear on many church prayer lists. But, as James reminded us, God wants us to grow in our spiritual wisdom, and the way to do so is to ask Him for it in prayer (Jas. 1:5).

As Christians, it’s not only possible but expected that we will grow in our understanding of the things of God. There are many reasons why we can expect to grow when we seek wisdom from God, but here are two. First, is the priesthood of the believer. When we are in Christ we have direct access to God and can know Him personally and intimately (Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5,9). Second, as believers, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, who enables us to understand spiritual truths more deeply and intimately (1 Cor. 2:6-16). These two truths can give us confidence to approach God in prayer and to seek growth in our understanding and knowledge of Him.

SESSION 3
RESURRECTED

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you previously lived according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A All mankind is spiritually dead because of their sins. This is the state of every person everywhere prior to coming to Christ by faith.

B “Formerly walked” (NASB)

C Refers to Satan, who encourages, tempts, and enjoys the world disobeying God in all things

D Desires contrary to God and His law (Gal. 5:16-21)

E All humans are sinners (Rom. 3:23; 5:19).

F While all are deserving God’s wrath, God Himself came to our rescue.

G God’s mercy and love were motivating factors for His act of salvation on behalf of believers (John 3:16).

H “He gave us back our lives again” (TLB).

I “We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it” (The Message).

J “Lifted us up from the grave” (TLB), or moved from spiritual death to life as a result of Christ.

K As Christ is in heaven (Acts 1:9-11), the Christians’ future presence there is guaranteed as well.

L A reference to God’s eternal kingdom.

M The depth of God’s kindness toward us is shown to us in Christ (Titus 3:4-6).

N Grace and our faith are gifts from God (Phil. 1:29).

O No matter how damaged or broken you were, when you come to Christ He transforms you into His “masterpiece” (NLT).
1. **ONCE DEAD** (Eph. 2:1-3)
   - Paul reminded his readers that prior to their salvation in Christ, they were spiritually dead.
   - They were also bound by Satan, living a life of sin and rebellion against God, and deserving God’s wrath.
   - Emphasize the urgency believers need to have in sharing with others.

2. **NOW ALIVE** (Eph. 2:4-7)
   - Paul declared that believers are made alive as an act of God’s grace.
   - This salvation is offered because of God’s love for us.
   - Believers will be granted positions in heaven based on Jesus’ exalted position.

3. **THROUGH GRACE ALONE** (Eph. 2:8-10)
   - Paul emphasized that God’s salvation comes only through faith and is an act of His grace to humanity.
   - Salvation can’t be earned but only received as a gift.
   - Our salvation frees us to live a life of good works.
   - Emphasize that works are the result of salvation, not the means of salvation. Interpret salvation in terms of past, present, and future.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

God provides salvation by grace through faith apart from our good works.

- Apart from Christ, all people are separated from God and subject to His judgment.
- Believers find life and purpose though faith in Jesus.
- Salvation is granted through faith alone in Jesus, removing all grounds for personal boasting.
DISCUSSION PLAN

FOCUS ATTENTION

Describe a time in your life when before and after photos would be drastically different.
• The popularity of television makeover shows indicate people enjoy seeing dramatic before and after differences.
• To fully appreciate the after picture we must see the before picture.
• Paul reminded believers their condition before salvation and explained how that transformation occurred.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

Complete this statement: “Before God saved me in Christ I …”
• Our before picture was dire and hopeless. We were corpses rotting in a cesspool of sin.
• We were powerless to break free of this worldly system, Satan, and our sinful natures that controlled us and incurred God’s wrath.
• Because God is holy, pure, and just, His wrath must be against all that is impure and sinful.

How could Paul call breathing people dead?
• Paul was not referring to the cessation of existing but to the tragedy of existing estranged from God.
• Every person gets their sin nature from Adam. The instant Adam and Eve rebelled, their bodies began to decay and their spirits were separated from God.
• Lost people have no ability to know or experience God.

EPHESIANS 2:4-7

Why are the words “but God” (v. 4) two of the most beautiful in the Bible?
• “But God” is a hinge of hope. God had a solution to humanity’s situation. He gives life and freedom to those who are dead and enslaved.
• There’s no “after” picture without “but God.” We were dead, but God made us alive. We rejected God, but He accepted us. We were under wrath, but now we’ll be seated in the heavens.

What’s the key to this before and after transformation?
• God’s grace shown to us through Christ changes everything.
• Transformations are costly. Jesus paid that cost. He willingly came down into this cesspool and died for the very people who rejected Him.
• When we’re in Christ, we share in the power of His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. Sin isn’t the boss of us anymore; we don’t have to do what it says.

Why would God work this transformation in such undeserving people?
• Dead people can do nothing to convince God to save them.
• God was motivated by His mercy, love, grace, and kindness for His creation.
• God’s purpose in making believers alive in Christ is so He can display the immensity of His great grace. Believers will spend all eternity with God’s kindness directed toward us.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Why can’t believers brag about their “after” condition?
• Salvation can’t be earned, only received as a gift.
• Faith symbolizes our empty hands reaching up to God’s hand that is filled with grace. Even that reaching-out hand is a gift from God. We can’t take credit for any part of our salvation.
• Faith is the channel, not the cause, of salvation. The object of our faith—Christ—is what matters, not the size of our faith.

Some renovated buildings are repurposed to fulfill a specific new objective. How have believers been repurposed in Christ?
• Because believers are alive in Christ, we’re free to live out God’s original design for us.
• We make a difference in this world by doing what God has prepared for us to do.
• Good works are the result, not the means, of salvation.
• Jesus does good works through us as we faithfully obey Him.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What are logical responses to Paul’s before and after depictions?
• An imperative response is to accept God’s gift of grace by putting our faith in Christ.
• Remembering what it’s like to be lost should fill us with compassion for unbelievers and a sense of urgency to share the gospel with them.
• Recognizing we did nothing to earn our salvation should fill us with humble gratitude to God.
• We can be purposeful about finding and fulfilling the works God created us to do.

Personal Challenge: If you’re dead in your sin, accept God’s gift of grace today. If you’re alive in Christ, ask God to empower you to live compassionately, urgently, humbly, gratefully, and purposefully.

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OBJECT LESSON

A PIECE OF DIAMOND JEWELRY AND BLACK PAPER OR FABRIC

Invite participants who are wearing diamond jewelry to look at the stone carefully and allow others to as well. Then pass around a sheet of black paper or fabric and request participants view the diamond against that dark background. State: As jewelers know, if you want to highlight something beautiful and expensive, put it against a dark background. The blacker the backdrop, the more stunning the stone.

Explain that in order to highlight the precious treasure that believers have in salvation, Paul first laid the backdrop of life without Christ. There’s nothing darker than a life without God. Unbelievers wander aimlessly, controlled by their desires to satisfy their appetites, and are completely powerless to get themselves out of that state. Paul wanted believers to realize we used to be like that. He didn’t bring up our past to condemn us (that’s what Satan does), but to renew our awe at what God did for us in Christ.

When laid against that dark backdrop of sin, enslavement, and hopelessness, the facets of God’s grace shine brightly. Ask: What is rare and costly about God’s grace? Explain that most people don’t purchase diamonds for themselves but receive them as gifts. That gift often signifies love, commitment, and devotion for a lifetime. Ask: Why can’t we purchase salvation for ourselves? How can we receive salvation? How does seeing the blackness of our lives without Christ help us treasure the jewel of salvation God has graciously given us?

DIG DEEPER

GOD’S WORKMANSHIP

One of the most obvious ways in which God relates to us is as Creator. We are introduced to God as Creator at the very beginning of Scripture (Gen. 1). The Psalms also regularly look back to it (Ps. 33; 90:1-2), and God also pointed us there in His discussion with Job (Job 38). As humans, the Bible also affirms that we aren’t just created by God, but are created “in his own image ... in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27).

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told us we are “his workmanship.” Think less about the pottery mug you made in fifth grade art class and more about an incredibly valuable work of art. The term, in the original language is poiema, a term for which we get the English term poem. This helps us have a more robust understanding of what Paul had in mind by “workmanship.” As God’s creation, we are highly valued. At the same time, it also means we have a specific purpose. All authors and artists have reasons for their masterpieces. A painting is to be viewed, a poem is to be read, and a 1968 Dodge Charger R/T with a 426 Hemi is to be driven.

We too are created for a purpose—to glorify God (Isa. 43:7). One of the ways we glorify God is through doing the good works God “prepared ahead of time for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). In other words, we are created, as a masterpiece, to do good works, all for God’s glory in this world.

When Christ redeems us, He enables us to live out this purpose of doing good. As The Baptist Faith and Message says: “Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.” Thus, as God’s workmanship, we’re each (1) specially created by Him, (2) valuable to Him, (3) have a purpose to fulfill from Him, and (4) that purpose is ultimately to do good for His glory.

SESSION 4
RECONCILED

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh — called “the uncircumcised” by those called the circumcised, which is done in the flesh by human hands. 12 At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. 16 He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. 17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 20 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 21 In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Those who aren’t ethnic Jews, or pagans who didn’t worship God. Christ desired that the gospel go to “all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20).
B A term to describe Jewish peoples (Gen. 17)
C “Only their bodies and not their hearts” (NLT)
D One was officially recognized as part of a nation. Gentiles weren’t part of God’s people.
E The covenants God made with His people: Abrahamic (Gen. 12), with Israel (Ex. 19–34), and with David (2 Sam. 7)
F Jesus’ death on the cross is what made humankind’s reconciliation and redemption possible.
G Barriers of “contempt” (TLB) separated the Jews and the Gentiles.
H In Christ, Gentiles and Jews are now one body, the church.
I Our reconciliation came through Jesus’ death on the cross (2 Cor. 5:11-21).
J “To you Gentiles, who were far away from God” (GNT). All—Jews and Gentiles—need the gospel.
K “Come to the Father” (NLT). There’s no need for rituals or priests. If you’re in Jesus, you have access to God through the Holy Spirit.
L “You belong here” (The Message). Paul’s analogy demonstrates the church as a family (1 Tim. 3:15).
M “He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he’s using you, fitting you in brick by brick” (The Message).
1. BROUGHT NEAR (Eph. 2:11-13)
• Paul reminded his Gentile readers that prior to believing in Christ, they were without hope and separated from God.
• However, they were brought near to God through Christ.

2. PEACE DECLARED (Eph. 2:14-18)
• Paul explained that Christ alone brings reconciliation and peace to all people.
• Through His death on the cross, God reconciled all believers to Himself and one another.

3. CITIZENSHIP GRANTED (Eph. 2:19-22)
• Paul declared that all who believe in Christ are granted citizenship in God’s family.
• With Christ as the foundation, believers are being built into a single building (unit) in which God dwells.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God reconciles us to Himself in Christ, removing barriers of hostility between believers.
• Because salvation is offered to all people and all believers are made one in Christ, we must work to break down walls of prejudice.
• Only through faith in Christ can we have genuine peace.
• All believers are included in God’s family, having a place in His kingdom.
FOCUS ATTENTION
What do we lack most in our world today?
• Around the world, potable water, jobs, a skilled work force, and human rights are in short supply.
• Wars, riots, church splits, divorce, and anxiety are a few symptoms of the world’s severe lack of peace.
• Paul described the condition of individual believers before and after salvation (2:1-10). Then he addressed our corporate condition that is dramatically changed by the peace Jesus brings.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 2:11-13
What did Paul remind Gentile believers they lacked before salvation?
• Gentiles lacked respect from, and a relationship with, the Jewish people. “Uncircumcised” was a derisive term.
• Ethnically and morally, Gentiles had none of the Jewish privileges—no expectation of a Messiah, citizenship in God’s kingdom, or covenant with God.
• Gentiles had many gods but no hope, because they had no relationship with the one true God.

What changed everything for the Gentile believers?
• In Ephesians 2:4, we see the hinge of hope: “But now …” (v. 13). The gospel changes everything for all who believe.
• The Gentiles were as far from God as they could get. Christ’s blood brought them near to Him, where they could experience all His covenant blessings.
• Sin alienates. Jesus reconciles.

How do Paul’s words speak to a Christian’s responsibility about society’s lack of peace?
• There is no room for prejudice in God’s kingdom. Salvation is offered to all people. Believers must view each person as valuable enough to warrant the sacrifice of God’s Son.
• Followers of Christ should work to break down walls of prejudice in their own hearts, churches, and communities.
• The only name-calling that should be happening in Christ’s church is “Brother, Sister, Friend.”

EPHESIANS 2:14-18
What two reconciliations did Christ bring about and how did He do so?
• Christ’s reconciling work is vertical and horizontal. All who trust in Jesus can have peace with God, others, and themselves.
• The hostility between Jews and Gentiles was intensely deep. Both viewed the other with contempt.
• Jesus’ death satisfied the righteous standards of the law, eliminating the barrier.

Everything that causes disunity was destroyed at the cross. Only Jesus can mend hostile relationships and make enemies beloved friends of God and each other.

How does Jesus’ reconciliation create unity?
• Christ created a new, undivided humanity. Jews are no longer Jews, and Gentiles no longer Gentiles. They’re all one in Christ. Union with Christ logically means unity with one another.
• Ephesians 2:17 quotes the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 57:19. Reconciling people to Himself and one another has always been God’s plan.
• This new humanity no longer has to hide from God. Through His Spirit, Christ ushers all believers into God’s gracious, loving presence.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22
How do Paul’s metaphors convey the peace Christ accomplished?
• All believers are citizens of God’s kingdom, where there are no castes or classes. All have equal value, privileges, and responsibilities.
• The church has no orphans. All believers are members of God’s family, where we’re treasured, nurtured, disciplined, encouraged, and sent out into the world with purpose and confidence.
• The church has no outliers. All believers are stones in God’s single building, where He dwells. We each have a specific place, fitted and bonded together perfectly, founded on the gospel, and held in alignment by focusing on Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
What’s the only lasting solution to society’s lack of peace? How can we live in the reality of Jesus’ reconciling work?
• No matter how many treaties negotiated and laws passed, there is no real, lasting peace apart from Jesus. Jesus is peace. He signed a peace treaty with His blood and proclaims peace to all.
• The only way to have genuine peace with God, others, and ourselves is to place our faith in Christ.
• The church is to reflect the reconciliation Jesus accomplished. We must strive for unity in our diversity and seek to be at peace with all people.
• Personal Challenge: Do you function as one who is reconciled, or do you keep up barriers? How will you be an agent of Christ’s peace at home, church, work, and the world?
PAPER PLATES, ONE WITH DIVIDERS

Call attention to two paper plates, one that has dividers and one that does not. Lead the group in listing the pros and cons of each type of plate. Emphasize that while dividers may need to exist on plates, we need to guard against creating dividers within the church.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Call attention to the divided plate. Explain that dividers existed between the Court of Gentiles and Jewish areas of the temple in Jerusalem, symbolizing the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Highlight that the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was intensely deep. Both viewed the other with contempt.

Note that Jesus didn’t demand someone else tear down that wall between the Jews and Gentiles; He destroyed it Himself with His death on the cross. The things that divided people were gone; their differences were erased by their common faith in Christ.

Call attention to the paper plate without dividers. Explain that now Jesus is assembling a people who live in peace with God and one another.

Ask: What dividers might we place in our churches and lives that we need to work with Jesus to remove? How can we build up Christ’s church as a place where people can experience peace with God and others?

Close in prayer that we will identify others in the church by our common faith in Jesus for the sake of unity and for God’s ultimate glory.

RECONCILIATION

A great problem that has faced mankind since the fall has been conflict. From Adam blaming Eve for his sin, to Cain murdering Abel, humanity has been in conflict and needs reconciliation. The work of Jesus is the way God has provided for our reconciliation, both among humanity and most importantly, between humanity and God.

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary explains reconciliation this way:

Bringing together of two parties that are estranged or in dispute. Jesus Christ is the one who brings together God and man, with salvation as the result of the union. Reconciliation basically means “change” or “exchange.” The idea is of a change of relationship, an exchange of antagonism for goodwill, enmity for friendship. Attitudes are transformed and hostility ceases.1

Reconciliation, a positive change or relationship, is one of the blessings and outcomes of the gospel.

In the ancient world, reconciliation started through one of two paths. Either a third party would get involved or one of the alienated parties would take the first step.

Jesus urged us to do the latter in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:23-24). Paul portrayed the Christian as a type of third party—calling people to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). As those who have been reconciled, we desire others to experience this blessing and joy as well.

The stark difference though, between our reconciliation with God and the processes of the ancient world, is that God, the offended party, is the one who takes not just the first step, but every step that makes reconciliation possible as He makes the path to peace for us in Christ. For reconciliation to take place, we, the offenders against God, need only to come to Him in faith and repentance. An even further striking difference is that God is the one who uses us to bring others to Him, through the sharing of the gospel. As the church preaches the gospel, we’re agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

1 For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles —

2 you have heard, haven't you, about the administration of God's grace that he gave to me for you? The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above.

3 By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

4 The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

5 I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.

6 This grace was given to me — the least of all the saints — to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.

7 This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

8 In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him.

9 So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A “Servant of Christ” (TLB). Paul’s obedience to Christ’s call on his life led him to be incarcerated.

B “Stewardship” (NASB); “special responsibility” (NLT)

C The gospel is no longer a mystery because God made salvation available through His Son.

D “God himself showed me this secret plan of his” (TLB). This refers to special revelation of God’s will and Word through direct communication or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

E “You’ll be able to see for yourselves” (The Message). All who are in Christ are equally in Christ, no matter their ethnicity, and will all inherit eternal life (Rom. 8:16-17).

F Paul also used this analogy in Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 5:30.

G The promise of salvation is “given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:22).

H “Minister” (ESV); “helping people understand and respond to this Message” (The Message)

I Paul viewed himself this way because of his previous persecution of the church (1 Cor. 15:9).

J “Make plain” (NIV); “bring to light” (ESV)

K The church is God’s vehicle for proclaiming and spreading the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

L Jesus’ sacrifice means we can go to the Father and know He cares for us (Heb. 10:19-24).

M “Suffering” (ESV, NLT); “momentary light affliction” (2 Cor. 4:17).
1. THE MYSTERY (Eph. 3:1-6)
• Paul characterized himself as a prisoner because of God’s revelation of the gospel.
• All people, including Gentiles, are recipients of God’s salvation through faith in Jesus.
• Emphasize the mystery as including the creation of a new community, the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

2. THE PROCLAMATION (Eph. 3:7-9)
• Paul explained that God made him a servant of the gospel for the purpose of proclaiming Christ to all people, especially the Gentiles.
• Our sharing of the gospel is in response to God’s grace demonstrated to us and our understanding the depth of God’s richness.

3. THE PURPOSE (Eph. 3:10-13)
• Paul described the purpose of his proclamation in terms of making God’s wisdom known in accordance with God’s redemptive plan.
• Faith in Christ makes it possible for people to approach the Father confidently.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God invites believers to proclaim the revealed mystery of the church.
• God offers salvation to all people, providing them each a place in His church.
• Believers can tell others about the grace and richness of God that they have received in Christ.
• Believers find purpose in sharing the gospel with others.
FOCUS ATTENTION
How good are you at keeping secrets? Is it good or bad to keep secrets?
• Some secrets should be kept, others shared, for the good of others.
• Secret-keepers know the anticipation and satisfaction of revealing something that’s unknown at just the right time.
• God kept a secret hidden until the right time. He revealed it to Paul and commissioned him to proclaim it to the world.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE EPHESIANS 3:1-6
How did Paul describe himself and why?
• Paul regarded himself a prisoner of Christ, not Rome, and a steward of God’s grace to the Gentiles.
• Paul was about to pray for the Ephesians. His mention of the Gentiles made him think of God’s revealed mystery. He took a divinely-ordained rabbit trail, not returning to his original thought until verse 14.

What mystery did God reveal to Paul?
• A biblical mystery isn’t a puzzle to be solved, but a previously hidden truth to be revealed.
• To know God’s secret, look to the Savior.
• God offers all people salvation and a place in His church, where all equally share every spiritual blessing.

Why was this revelation radical?
• The Old Testament speaks of all nations being blessed through Abraham. God’s revealed secret is that His covenant people are a multi-ethnic body in Christ.
• Think how radical it would be for someone to say the most divided groups in our world today are now loving members of one family.

EPHESIANS 3:7-9
Why was Paul so passionate about his mission?
• Paul regarded it a privilege to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles and shed light on the miracle God is working in His church.
• Paul was overwhelmed by the gospel. He never ceased to be amazed at what God accomplished in Jesus.
• Paul was convinced that all who put their trust in Jesus will never be impoverished, only enriched.
• Only a radical transformation could have compelled a legalistic Jew like Paul to embrace and proclaim God’s mystery revealed in Jesus.

What transforms any believer into a passionate proclaimer of the gospel?
• When we become overwhelmed by the depth of God’s grace to us in Christ, we won’t be able to keep quiet about it.
• We don’t proclaim an oppressive religion of dos and don’ts but a liberating relationship with a Messiah of incalculable riches.

Analyze the relationship between God’s purpose and Paul’s purpose.
• Paul’s purpose was to make known God’s purpose of creating a church from all nations.
• God’s multifaceted wisdom in fulfilling His plan is so amazing that heavenly authorities sit up and take notice. They watch in fascination as once-divided people become one new humanity, loving and serving as equals.

What does God’s revealed purpose mean for us individually and corporately?
• An individual’s confident access to God is another purpose He accomplished in Christ.
• Faith in Christ is personal but not private. The gospel is good news of a new life and new society. The church is central to God’s eternal plan.
• As believers live in fellowship with God and each other, we display to the world God’s power and purpose to bring about true reconciliation and restoration.
• Many people search for purpose in life. One purpose for being on this earth is to share the gospel with others.
• Paul asserted that any hardships we encounter in living out and sharing our faith are worth it.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
How can believers today share God’s revealed mysteries?
• The gospel is not a secret to be selfishly hoarded but great news to be generously shared. That occurs when we’re overwhelmed by the gospel.
• Believers reveal God’s truths by living in community with diverse believers in the church.
• We’ll never come to the end of the riches Jesus has in Himself. He gives us what we need to share the gospel and live in unity.
• Personal Challenge: Are you hoarding or sharing salvation? Deep-down, do you think a place in Christ’s church is only for people like you? Determine ways you’ll share God’s secret this week.

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Display several types of books, including a mystery novel. Encourage adults to identify genres of literature people enjoy reading. Ask: Which of these genres can be used to describe the Bible? State: Unlike novels, the Bible is true and not fiction, but it’s also a book that includes romance, war, history, and mystery.

Explain that Paul referred to mystery three times in Ephesians 3:1-13. Invite adults to lookup the definition of mystery. Explain that the Greek word mysterion Paul used refers to a truth previously hidden but now known. Ask: How was God’s mystery made known to Paul? Call for someone to lookup revelation. Emphasize that when God hides something, people can’t discover it on their own. Only God can reveal what He has hidden.

Ask: What mystery did God reveal to Paul? The mystery of the gospel is that individuals can become reconciled to God and one another through Christ. As God’s mystery unfolds, He sums up all things in His Son and is uniting diverse people into a loving family.

Ask: What was Paul supposed to do with this mystery? Unlike literary detectives like Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple, Paul’s calling was to proclaim the mystery God had revealed to him. Ask: What might you feel compelled to do after reading a great mystery novel or seeing a great mystery movie? Close by highlighting that all believers should feel compelled to reveal God’s great mystery—God can save anyone and make them part of His church.

In first-century Ephesus, there was a popular cult movement identified as mystery cults. The Ephesian church would no doubt have encountered them and would have had to counter their teachings with the truth of the gospel. The mystery of Christianity, Paul explained, is not like the mystery of their cults.

Tony Merida, professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote, “This “mystery” was not like Ephesian mystery cults. It was not a mystery of esoteric knowledge, reserved for a secret few. This mystery, this message about Christ, is for all nations. … This mystery was “hidden” or “not made known to people in other generations” (v. 5); but now, at this point in history, it can be understood. While the plan of God was present in the Old Testament, parts were unclear or “hidden” in a sense (v. 9).”

It was Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that made God’s plan and purpose clear, as Jesus said following His resurrection: “Wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:26-27). Jesus’ explanation of all these things resulted in the disciples “hearts burning within [them]” (Luke 24:32), and later Jesus commanding, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).

The result of the gospel is that the way to have peace with God isn’t a mystery. God calls us to make it clear to all nations. God saves us and makes us righteous (Rom. 3:21-26). So instead of keeping the “mystery hidden” (Eph. 3:9), which was the goal of these cults, Christians should seek to make the knowledge of God known to all the world.

SESSION 6

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom
every family in heaven and on earth is named.

15 I pray that he may grant you, according to the
riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your
inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may
dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being
rooted and firmly established in love,

16 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length
and width, height and depth of God’s love,

17 and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may
be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think
according to the power that works in us—

21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all
generations, forever and ever. Amen.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A All of humanity share God as their Creator and bear His image (Gen. 1:26-28).

B Paul’s prayer to strengthen the believers in Ephesus demonstrated the work of the three Persons of the Trinity in our lives.

C “Glorious, unlimited resources” (NLT, TLB)

D As Paul told the Corinthians, “we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). Our spiritual health is vital, and that strengthening comes from God.

E “Make his home” (GNT, NLT); Christ is not just a visitor in the lives of Christians but should both live and rule as the Lord of their lives.

F Christ’s love feeds our souls and anchors us in life’s troubles.

G We aren’t meant to live the Christian life in isolation but in community (Heb. 10:24-25).

H “Fullness of life and power that comes from God” (NLT); experiencing God’s presence and power in our lives

I “More than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dream” (The Message)

J The same God who is abundantly powerful is also at work in our lives, equipping us for service and fruitfulness for His glory.

K All we do should be done for God’s glory.

L Paul wasn’t speaking of a building but was referring to God’s people who make up the church.
1. PETITIONED (Eph. 3:14-15)
- Paul resumed his thought from Ephesians 3:1, declaring his humble prayer for his readers.
- He made his request to the Father, the One from whom all other families receive their name.

2. INDWELLED (Eph. 3:16-19)
- Paul revealed the contents of his prayer for his readers: that they would possess inner spiritual strength, deeper faith, abundant love, and God’s fullness.
- All of Paul’s requests point to Christ indwelling His followers.
- Emphasize that the three requests are manifestations of Christ’s indwelling the believer.

3. HONORED (Eph. 3:20-21)
- Paul ended his prayer with a doxology, declaring God’s majesty and the demonstration of that majesty in the church and in Christ.
- The church will bring glory to God.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God offers believers strength by Christ dwelling in us.
- Believers can strengthen others by praying for their spiritual growth.
- Believers are changed from the inside out by the indwelling Christ.
- Believers should honor God for demonstrating His majesty.
DISCUSSION PLAN

FOCUS ATTENTION

What reveals people’s priorities?

• Credit card statements, calendars, interactions, and interruptions all provide a glimpse into what’s important to people.
• Prayers reveal priorities. The content, frequency, and intensity of prayers indicate what matters most to us.
• We learn a great deal about Paul’s priorities, and consequently God’s priorities, from his prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 3:14-15

What compelled Paul to pray at this point in his letter?

• Paul returned to his original thought from Ephesians 3:1. He wanted God’s revealed mystery of reconciliation in the gospel to be proclaimed to unbelievers and realized in believers.
• Standing was the normal Jewish prayer posture. Kneeling indicated exceptional intensity. Paul felt strongly about what he was asking.

What’s significant about how Paul described God?

• Since God created all people for Himself, any person from any race can be part of God’s family. No one people group can exclusively claim God as theirs alone.
• Paul’s prayer wasn’t based on his own desires but on his knowledge of God’s purposes. He was praying according to God’s will.
• We must not arrogantly pray like entitled members of some exclusive club we paid to enter. We must humbly pray as broken people who have been graciously given places in God’s family.

EPHESIANS 3:16-19

What priorities do Paul’s prayer requests reveal?

• Paul desired that God’s Spirit permeate believers’ entire beings with power.
• One of Paul’s main priorities was that believers be transformed from the inside-out. This happens when Jesus resides and reigns within us.
• Paul wanted Jesus to indwell believers so that we’re empowered to comprehend, experience, and live out the magnitude of His incomprehensible love.

Why did Paul put such priority on believers comprehending God’s love?

• Knowing Christ’s deep love provides the fruitfulness and stability of a well-rooted tree and solidly-built house.
• We can’t know love in isolation. We can only comprehend it “with all the saints” (v. 18).
• We begin to grasp the immensity of Christ’s love when we accept the challenge of loving others in the church. When believers share their stories of God’s love, all gain a deeper appreciation of the vast dimensions of that love.
• Paul’s requests build on one another. When Christ resides and reigns in believers’ lives, we know and express God’s love. This results in experiencing the fullness of His presence and power in our lives and churches.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What valuable lessons can we learn and apply about our prayers and priorities from Paul’s prayer for believers?

• The top priority in our lives and prayers should be honoring God rather than indulging ourselves.
• When Jesus resides and reigns in believers, we glorify God in our lives and in His church. We need to make it a priority to pray for spiritual transformation for ourselves and others.
• Boldly ask God to do far more in our lives, families, and churches than we can begin to imagine.
• Scripture is a powerful way to pray according to God’s will. Regularly pray Ephesians 3:14-21 for yourself and others.

Personal Challenge: Evaluate your prayers and priorities. Is your focus on helping yourself or honoring God? What can you do in your prayers to focus more on God’s glory? What priorities might you need to rearrange so Jesus resides and reigns in your inner being?
AN AIR MATTRESS ON THE FLOOR OR A PHOTO OF A HOUSE

Ask group members if they’ve ever stayed in an Airbnb®. If they’re unfamiliar with it, explain that Airbnb is an online marketplace where hosts list, and guests book, entire homes or just a bedroom in the host’s house. The name refers to air mattresses the company’s founders rented out in their apartment to make extra cash. Ask: How would hosting a stranger in your home be different than welcoming a loved one in to live with you? Explain that when Paul prayed “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17), he was praying that Jesus that Jesus would permanently make His home in us.

Ask: How do we make others feel at home? Highlight that welcoming Jesus to dwell in our lives doesn’t mean we clean ourselves up for Jesus, but instead invite Him to clean out every corner of our entire being. We don’t confine Jesus’ presence to a few rooms but give Him access to work on every aspect of our lives until there’s no place we’re uncomfortable for Jesus to be and see. Above all, we make sure we’re not nonchalantly offering the Lord the equivalent of an air mattress in our hearts when He should be sitting on a throne.

Ask: What happens when Jesus is an honored permanent resident in our lives? The result of Jesus taking up residence in our lives, seated on a throne rather than sleeping on an air mattress, is that He fills us with inner strength, deeper faith, incomprehensible love, and full satisfaction in Him—and God receives all the glory. Ask: What can we do to make Jesus more at home in our lives?

AMEN

Since many of us were children, we were taught to end our prayers with the word, amen. You’ve likely also experienced the spontaneous amen during a riveting sermon or following the baptism of a new believer. While this is a churchy word that’s said all of the time, why do we say it, and where does it come from?

We first come across the term in Numbers 5:22 and then several times in Deuteronomy (Deut. 27:15-26) and then throughout the Old Testament. According to the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, amen is a transliteration of a Hebrew word signifying something as certain, sure and valid, truthful and faithful. It is sometimes translated “so be it.” In the Old Testament it is used to show the acceptance of the validity of a curse or an oath (Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15-26; Jer. 11:5), to indicate acceptance of a good message (Jer. 28:6), and to join in a doxology in a worship setting to affirm what has been said or prayed (1 Chron. 16:36; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 106:48). “Amen” may confirm what already is, or it may indicate a hope for something desired. In Jewish prayer, “amen” comes at the end as an affirmative response to a statement or wish made by others, and is so used in the New Testament epistles (Rom. 1:25; 11:36; 15:33; 1 Cor. 16:24; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20).1

In the New Testament, amen occurs often. We see Jesus say it often in the Gospels. As the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary continues,

In the Gospels, Jesus used “amen” to affirm the truth of His own statements. English translations often use “verily,” “truly,” “I tell you the truth” to translate Jesus’ amen. He never said it at the end of a statement but always at the beginning: “Amen, I say to you” (Matt. 5:18; 16:28; Mark 8:12; 11:23; Luke 4:24; 21:32; John 1:51; 5:19). In John’s Gospel, Jesus said “Amen, amen.” That Jesus prefaced His own words with “amen” is especially important, for He affirmed that the kingdom of God is bound up with His own person and emphasized the authority of what He said.2

Later in the New Testament, Paul (Rom. 15:33), Peter (1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11), and Jude (1:25) used the word. In their writings, amen is used as a way to affirm the truth of a statement, which is how it’s used in Ephesians 3:21.

SESSION 7
WALKING TOGETHER

EPHESIANS 4:1-10

1 Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making 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 at your calling— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. 9 But what does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Paul communicated his honor, not shame.
B “Live and act in a way worthy of those who have been chosen” (TLB). Paul urged us to live our lives in accordance with our kingdom citizenship (Phil. 3:20).
C They have responded to the gospel call by faith and are now in Christ (Rom. 8:28-30).
D A fundamental Christian virtue, Jesus called us to be humble (Matt. 18:4). James promised that God “gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). Micah reminded us that God desires we “walk humbly” with God (Mic. 6:8). Jesus was the perfect embodiment of humility (Phil. 2:7-8).
E Christ perfectly exercised a mild spirit and self-control at His crucifixion (Isa. 53:7; 1 Pet. 2:23).
F “Eager to maintain” (ESV); “diligent” (NASB)
G Christians are able to live at peace with one another because Christ “is our peace” and “tore down the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).
H The church is to be of one accord, not divided or divisive. Jesus prayed for this in John 17.
I Each Christian has been given gifts to use for God’s glory and the building up of the church. God expects faithfulness with our gifts (Matt. 25:14-30).
J A quote of Psalm 68:18, “You ascended to the heights ... so that the Lord God might dwell there.”
K “The same one who came down is the one who went back up” (TLB)—Christ’s incarnation.
L Christ provides churches in all places with what they need for their ministries.
1. WALKING WORTHY (Eph. 4:1-3)
   • Paul called on his readers to demonstrate Christian attitudes and character.
   • Explain that Christian living takes place after conversion and is a result of salvation, not a means for gaining salvation.

2. LIVING UNIFIED (Eph. 4:4-6)
   • Paul explained that since every believer shares in the same hope found in Jesus, they should live in unity.
   • The relationship within the Trinity is the standard for how believers are to relate to each other.
   • Highlight how the Trinity is involved in the seven actions Paul identified.

3. ENJOYING VICTORY (Eph. 4:7-10)
   • Paul used an illustration from a military victory parade to introduce the idea of believers receiving gifts.
   • He summarized Psalm 68 as well, reminding his readers of a victory parade to Mount Zion.
   • Jesus is the conquering King who distributes gifts to His followers.
   • Focus on the ascent of Jesus as opposed to the descent. Interpret Jesus’ descent in terms of His incarnation.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Believers demonstrate the truth of the gospel by being unified in their actions.
   • Believers are expected to demonstrate godly attitudes and character.
   • Believers demonstrate their faith by living in unity with each other.
   • Believers should live in celebration of the victory Jesus won for us.
FOCUS ATTENTION

What are benefits of exercising with other people?
• Although physical fitness is a personal responsibility and some people prefer to exercise alone, studies have revealed there are benefits to exercising with a group.
• Exercising with others provides motivation and accountability, and increases commitment and duration.
• As Paul transitioned from doctrine to application in his letter, he urged believers to exercise their personal faith in Christ by walking together.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

Why does walking worthy require walking together?
• All the qualities Paul listed are relational words. There’s no need for them in isolation.
• An accurate self-concept and controlling our strength means we don’t push to defend our rights or advance our agenda.
• Disagreements in God’s family are inevitable. Living in community requires a long fuse and bearing with others’ quirks and shortcomings.
• When these Christlike qualities characterize believers’ behavior, the result is God-glorifying unity.

How can we develop and display these qualities of a worthy walk?
• We don’t earn salvation by displaying these qualities. These attitudes in our lives demonstrate conversion has occurred and transformation is ongoing.
• None of these come naturally. We must determine to develop and display them through the power of the Spirit.
• Jesus has already created spiritual unity; our responsibility is to maintain it.
• We cannot be passive about preserving peace. It requires diligent, consistent effort.

EPHESIANS 4:4-6

Why is it so important that God’s people live in unity?
• Our end goal is to glorify God, to shine the spotlight on who He is in all His greatness. Unity among believers reveals the unity of the Triune-God.
• The church is one body—taught, empowered, guided, and held together by one indwelling Spirit.
• One Lord is the object of our faith. We were all baptized in Jesus’ name and expectantly hope for His return.
• There’s one Christian family because there’s one God the Father.
• When Christians are divided, the world doubts the reality of the gospel. Walking together in loving unity is how believers express the authenticity of God’s revealed mystery of the gospel.

EPHESIANS 4:7-10

How can believers live unified when we are so diverse?
• By God’s grace we’ve been saved, and by God’s grace we walk together in unity.
• Every believer has been given a portion of God’s multifaceted grace to build up the church and help others mature in their faith.
• Our unity is enhanced, not watered-down, by our diversity.
• We are united in our celebration of Christ’s victory. Paul drew on Psalm 68 to describe a military victory parade. As the king marched into the city with prisoners of war behind him he dispensed gifts to his cheering people.
• Jesus victoriously ascended into heaven because He voluntarily descended to earth to die for us.

How can we celebrate Christ’s victory while living in a world where victory is so elusive?
• We enjoy Christ’s victory when we walk worthy of our calling by walking in unity with other believers. When we exercise our faith together, supporting and celebrating one another’s spiritual victories, we enjoy Christ’s ultimate victory.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers walk worthy of their calling?
• The call to follow Christ is a call to walk together with other believers in loving relationships. Our attitudes and actions should reflect the excellency of that calling.
• We can walk together because we have so many fundamentals in common—the same Lord, Spirit, and Father.
• Focus on what we have in Christ (all the spiritual blessings Paul enumerated) rather than what irritates or angers us in other Christians.
• Personal Challenge: If the unity and peace of our church were dependent upon your attitudes and behavior, how much unity and peace would we have? What steps will you take this week to walk together in unity with Christ’s body?
A RACING BIB OR PHOTO OF A RACE

Ask adults if they’ve ever participated in a 5K, and if so, to identify the race. There are many “fun runs” these days. Ask: Why do you think these races are so popular? Part of their popularity is due to an interest in physical fitness, but also because people enjoy walking or running together with diverse people. Most 5Ks have a distinctiveness that sets them apart, whether that be raising money for a charity or participants getting messy or dressing up in costumes.

Highlight that in Ephesians 4 Paul described a Christian race that we could name the Worthy Walk. This Worthy Walk isn’t just a fun hobby we participate in on the weekends; it should be a consuming passion that encompasses all of our existence. And it’s not a sprint to a finish line, but a lifelong journey. Ask: What is distinctive of the Worthy Walk? A worthy walk focuses on putting other people first, overcoming obstacles of disagreements, and walking together with others rather than running ahead in personal strengths and preferences. A worthy walker stops and serves along the way.

Display the number one. Note many race participants wear a running bib with an identification number. Ask: Why should all believers participating in the Worthy Walk wear the number one? We’re not proudly declaring we are number one, but that we’re striving to be like the One. Our unity reflects the unity of the Trinity, who sponsors, empowers, and runs this race before us. Note that most 5Ks have a closing ceremony where diverse people unite in celebration. Ask: What kind of celebration unites believers on this Worthy Walk?

THE ESSENCE OF TRUE HUMILITY

A key part of what Paul meant by walking in Christ is that we’re to live by certain virtues that reflect our new lives in Christ. One of these virtues that Paul called us to live by in Ephesians 4:2 is “all humility.”

In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s people are called to be humble (Ps. 25:9; Prov. 3:34; Isa. 66:2; Matt. 18:4; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:6). Similarly, God warns His people against the opposite attitude, the sin of pride (Prov. 8:13; Mark 7:22; 1 Pet. 5:5). What exactly is humility, and why is it important that we pursue humility?

Humility is defined as “a personal quality in which an individual shows dependence on God and respect for other persons.” 1 Throughout the Bible God reveals how dependent upon Him we are, from our very existence to our daily provisions. This reality leads us to a position of humility when it comes to our relationship with God. And, as our definition shows, humility also extends to how we treat others, which Jesus made clear in Luke 14:7-11.

Why is it important to pursue humility? Because Christ is the perfect example of humility—in His life and in the cross. As Christians, we pursue these Christlike virtues because we’re to imitate Christ in our own lives: “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

C. S. Lewis summed up well the attitude of someone who is living humbly: “He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”2 Instead, our focus is on loving God and loving others, not on making ourselves important.

Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:8).

DIG DEEPER

SESSION 8
WALKING FORWARD

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Prophets told God’s Word to His people. Along with apostles, some believe these roles ended when the original apostles and prophets died (1 Cor. 12:28).

B Those who specifically share the good news of the gospel with unbelievers.

C Paul listed qualifications for church officers and leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

D God has gifted church leaders to help train and disciple the church, so they can be effective in ministry. Ultimately, this equipping comes from God Himself (Heb. 13:20-21).

E God calls all Christians to be discipled and trained for ministry (Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1).

F The church becomes healthier and stronger when it ministers to people.

G “Manifesting His spiritual completeness and exercising our spiritual gifts in unity” (AMP)—not staying as spiritual infants (Heb. 5:12).

H “Forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different” (TLB). Lacking spiritual maturity leaves the Christian open to falling into error.

I “In all things—both our speech and our lives expressing His truth” (AMP). Paul didn’t separate the truth from love; both are always required.

J “Grow up in all aspects into Him” (NASB). The goal of Christian maturity is Christlikeness.

K The church needs all Christians serving and healthily growing (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

Date of My Bible Study: __________
1. EQUIPPERS GIVEN (Eph. 4:11)
   • Paul listed four types of gifted leaders Christ gave to His church.
   • Explain that God gives His gifts of grace to every believer (4:7) and that each type of leader listed exercises one or more spiritual gifts.
   • Focus on the type of spiritual leadership each leader provides.
   • Paul linked pastors and teachers as having similar responsibilities.
   • Affirm all spiritual gifts as necessary and important.

2. TO MOVE BELIEVERS FORWARD (Eph. 4:12-14)
   • Paul explained that the purpose of the gifted leaders listed in verse 11 was for equipping and building up the church with a goal of its believers reaching maturity while doing the work of ministry.

3. AS A BODY (Eph. 4:15-16)
   • Paul reminded his readers that confident faith in Christ is a testimony to spiritual maturity.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Christ gives the church gifted leaders to help believers mature and minister.
• Christ gives leaders to equip His church for ministry.
• With the help of godly leaders, believers can grow in their belief in and understanding of the gospel and participate more fully in the church’s mission.
• All believers are to grow in Christlikeness and strengthen the church by doing their part.
FOCUS ATTENTION

When is “I’ve arrived” a positive and negative statement to make?
• It’s gratifying to arrive at a destination after a long trip.
• Until believers reach heaven, we won’t arrive on our Christian journey. Christians must never become spiritually complacent; they must continue walking forward.
• Jesus gives His followers what we need to mature.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 4:11

What has God done to ensure believers keep walking forward?
• God takes our spiritual maturity personally. He gives us leaders with specific roles and functions to equip the church to fulfill its mission.
• Apostles are people sent with a divine task. Prophets are spokespersons for God.
• Evangelists are gifted at spreading the gospel and training others to share their faith.
• Pastors care for the congregation, providing oversight, comfort, guidance, and discipline. Teachers instruct believers in the truth of God’s Word and help them apply it to their lives. All pastors are teachers; not all teachers are pastors.
• Some believe apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the gospel and no longer exist, and now God uses pastors and teachers to equip His followers. The point is God wants His church to grow and has given leaders to make that happen.

EPHESIANS 4:12-14

How does Paul’s statement compete with a “we pay a pastor to do that” attitude?
• A common and dangerous misconception is that church leaders do all the work while members pay the bills and reap the benefits.
• In reality, God gifts the church with leaders whose responsibility isn’t to do all the work of ministry but to help believers discover, develop, and deploy their own gifts for service.

What goals are believers to walk toward in their work of ministry?
• All ministry should focus on building up the church. This includes adding new members and helping all members develop spiritual maturity so that they are committed to unity, progressively transformed to be more like Jesus, and spiritually stable.
• Believers are to have a childlike innocence and dependence, but not naïve vulnerability.
• Every church leader and member should focus on helping every other believer be grounded in Scripture so that self-serving spiritual fads will not sway them.

When can the church say it’s arrived? What does that say about how long we need to continue to minister?
• Believers need to persevere in the work of ministry until every believer reaches full maturity and is transformed into the image of Jesus. That won’t happen until the Lord takes us all to glory.
• Parents of grown children know the methods of helping others mature may change, but the training never ends.

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

How do love and speaking the truth work together?
• Truth without love is harsh. Love without truth is weak.
• Mature believers share truth with compassion, understanding, and forgiveness when others don’t live out that truth perfectly.
• People will hear and receive almost anything from those who demonstrate they love them. Growth occurs when people feel secure.

What does a church of maturing believers look like?
• Scripture often uses the human body to illustrate the church.
• As our head, Jesus is concerned with the total body, not just the more noticeable parts.
• Since there are no insignificant functions in the body, leaders and members focus on a full-body workout. The entire body benefits when every cell is properly nourished and exercised to its full capacity.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What’s the take-away from this lesson for church leaders and members?
• Church leaders shouldn’t do all the work of the church; they equip members to do so.
• Church members should appreciate and learn from their leaders, contributing to the health of the entire church body by doing the work of ministry.
• When we all contribute in the unique ways God has gifted us, we all walk forward to maturity in Christ and together display Jesus to the world.

Personal Challenge: In what areas do you need to move forward spiritually? Don’t settle where you are, but use the gifts Christ has given you to help you and others walk forward into new dimensions of faith and service.
SEVERAL KINDS OF GIFT PACKAGES

Before the session, prepare several different kinds of gifts (beautifully-wrapped, a gift card, a plastic bag, and so forth). Arrange the gifts around your meeting space and label them with various titles, such as Purposeful, Practical, Personal, Procrastinator, Regifter, or Reluctant. As adults arrive, request they stand near the labeled gift that best describes the kind of gift giver they are. Invite volunteers to share why they chose that label.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Determine the displayed labels that best describe the kind of giver God is to His church. Ask: What does God personally give to the church according to verse 11? How should recognizing church leaders are a gift from God impact how we relate and respond to our leaders? Emphasize that God expects leaders to fulfill their roles of equipping church members and church members to respect their leadership and do the work of ministry.

Ask: How can we know God is a purposeful gift giver? What’s the purpose of God giving leaders to the church and giving church members tasks and the spiritual gifts to fulfill them? The purpose God has in giving individual believers gifts isn’t for personal fulfillment, but it’s so the entire church can experience the fullness of Christ. This happens when every believer is maturing in faith, unity, service, and knowledge of Christ and God’s Word.

We should regularly evaluate our gift giving and receiving. Ask: How can we best receive the gifts of leaders God has given our church? How about the ministry gifts He has given us individually?

DIG DEEPER

EQUIPPING

The work of a pastor can take various forms. He teaches the congregation (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2), he evangelizes the lost (Matt. 28:19-20), he prays for his flock (Jas. 5:14), he provides spiritual leadership and oversight (1 Tim. 3:1-2), disciplines those new in the faith (Titus 2:6), and is an example of godliness to the church (Titus 2:7). Each task is important, and yet God has designed each to serve a unifying purpose. God uses the gifts and talents of church leaders for “equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

The term equipping that Paul used in this verse, carries the idea of furnishing someone with something they needed to complete a task at hand. If they aren’t furnished this equipment, then they’ll be hampered in completing the task. It would be like trying to install a new roof without a hammer or a nail gun.

This furnishing assumes one provides the proper equipment. Think of it in terms of showing up to play golf but to find that, instead of clubs, your kids have replaced them with rakes and shovels (although for some like myself, these may come in handy with how often I find myself in a sand-trap).

There’s another level to consider, and that’s being appropriately furnished in regard to the right training. If I’m to work in an Information Technology department, I need to be taught how to work with computers. If I’m to take a job as a mechanic, I need to know how to replace a catalytic converter or repair a faulty thermostat. Not being trained well in my field sets me up for failure.

Church leaders must be constantly concerned with equipping their church members. They must give them the tools and training they need to do what God has called them to do. In this divinely orchestrated order, if the church leader doesn’t equip the church member, he isn’t fulfilling the God-ordained reason for his ministry. And at the same time, if the church member doesn’t take that equipping and minister, he or she isn’t fulfilling his or her God-ordained role as a church member.
SESSION 9
WALKING DIFFERENTLY

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

17 Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. 19 They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more. 20 But that is not how you came to know Christ, assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, 21 to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 22 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 23 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth. 24 Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. 25 Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, 26 Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and don't give the devil an opportunity. 28 Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. 29 No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. 30 And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Paul used Gentile here to speak not of ethnicity, but of religion and morality. He was contrasting Christian against Gentile.
B “Far away from the life of God” (TLB)
C A refusal to repent and have faith (Ex. 8:32)
D When we come to Christ we’ve been born again and made new (John 3:1-13; 2 Cor. 5:17).
E Christians reflect God’s character: “a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you” (The Message).
F “At sin—at immorality, at injustice, at ungodly behavior” (AMP)
G Quickly reconcile with others (Matt. 5:22-26).
H The “adversary” (1 Pet. 5:8), the “ancient serpent” (Rev. 20:2), and “the father of lies” (John 8:44)
I Generosity is a driving force behind our call to work. It’s part of loving our neighbors and living out our faith (Prov. 3:27; Matt. 10:42).
J “Let everything you say be good and helpful” (NLT).
K Israel had done this (Isa. 63:10). When we live contrary to Christ, we grieve the Holy Spirit, who resides in us (1 Thess. 5:19).
L “Proof that you belong to him” (NCV)
M “Should have no place in your lives” (TLB)
N A spirit of forgiveness is evidence of one who has truly been forgiven (Matt. 6:12-15).
1. **THE OLD** (Eph. 4:17-19)
   - Paul reminded his readers of their lives before believing in Christ, searching for fulfillment through sin but unable to be satisfied.
   - Sin breeds a desire for more sin.

2. **THE CHANGE** (Eph. 4:20-24)
   - Paul compared salvation to taking off an old, dirty garment and replacing it with a new, clean garment.

3. **THE NEW** (Eph. 4:25-32)
   - Paul identified characteristics of the new lives we’re called to live once we’re believers.
   - Paul wasn’t commanding believers to be angry, but he was calling them to control their anger (v. 26).

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

Believers are to live a life that’s different from those who reject Christ.
- We must notforget the futility of living in bondage to sin.
- Believers are given a fresh start through faith in Christ, so we can live without guilt.
- Believers are to live Christlike lives as a result of their salvation.
DISCUSSION PLAN

FOCUS ATTENTION
What might we be able to determine about people based on how they walk?

• The way we walk speaks volumes about us. Gait is a strong indicator of health, age, and personality.
• A person’s stride can reveal confidence, pain, insecurity, anger, extroversion, or introversion.
• Paul had already urged believers to walk worthy by walking forward together. Now he urged Christians to walk worthy by walking differently.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 4:17-19
Complete this sentence: “Believers need to walk differently than …”

• Calling on the Lord’s authority, Paul insisted believers avoid the typical lifestyle of unbelievers.
• Believers shouldn’t continue to live the way they did before they were saved by God’s grace.

Why did Paul start with unbelievers’ thoughts before describing their walk?

• How we think determines how we behave. Futile thinking results in faulty living.
• Ignorance of God leads people to seek fulfillment in things that only ensnare and never satisfy.

What marks the walk of an unbeliever?

• When people have no sensitivity to God, their lives are often marked by a me-first mentality, sexual promiscuity, lack of self-control, and no regard for consequences.
• Those without Christ seek satisfaction in self, stuff, and pleasure.
• A continual rejection of Jesus causes hearts to harden. Callused hearts can’t feel anything, so unbelievers descend into more and more sin, trying to gain an ever-elusive sense of satisfaction.

EPHESIANS 4:20-24
How did believers transition from futile thinking to a right way of thinking?

• Salvation produces new thinking. Jesus is the subject matter, teacher, and environment in which a believer’s learning takes place.
• When, by God’s grace, believers respond to God’s call to salvation, Jesus renews our minds. Our thinking is no longer futile, but fruitful. Our understanding isn’t darkened, it’s enlightened. We’re not ignorant—we know the truth and it sets us free.

What transformation occurs as believers are being renewed in the attitude of our minds?

• Out of that new understanding comes a different way of walking that seeks Jesus, not self.
• We can’t make ourselves new. That’s God’s work through the Holy Spirit. Our task is to cooperate with God and consciously work toward change each day.
• Through faith in Christ, we put off our old nature, stripping off the filthy attitudes and actions of that old self and putting on attitudes and actions of the new self.

EPHESIANS 4:25-32
Identify the old that believers should put off, the new we should put on, and reasons why we should do both.

• Notice the contrast from verse 31 and verse 32. Christians should be noticeably different in how we treat others.
• Christians should be honest, reliable people because we’re to live in unity; relationships are founded on trust.
• Believers must positively deal with anger, not nurse it. Unresolved anger leaves an open door for Satan to enter and wreak havoc.
• Believers put off greed and put on generosity because sharing is the new norm in God’s community.

What grieves and pleases the Holy Spirit?

• Disunity and impurity grieve the Spirit, so we must make sure our words and actions work for unity and purity.
• The Spirit is pleased when we handle frustrating relationships differently than the world. Rather than holding on to bitterness, flaring up in anger, asserting ourselves with shouting, talking bad about people or even wishing harm on them, we treat them with the grace and mercy Christ has shown to us.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
How can Christians walk differently in a world that expects us to be like them?

• When we remember the futility of living in bondage to sin, we’ll be intent on living a radically different way.
• Seek satisfaction in Jesus alone.
• Strip away self and put on Jesus.
• Walking and talking differently is a daily lifestyle commitment to unity and purity.

Personal Challenge: Pay attention to how you walk physically and spiritually. Make it your goal and prayer that people will notice you’re different.
A WEDDING INVITATION

Display a wedding invitation. Ask: What kind of information does the invitation provide? Aside from basic information about who’s getting married, where, and when, invitations often provide information on dress code. Ask: Why is it helpful for invitations to provide this detail? Sometimes we don’t know how to dress for a specific situation, and most of us dislike showing up at an event dressed inappropriately.

Believers have received an invitation to “the marriage feast of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9), where we’re not just guests, we’re the bride. In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul gave us specific instructions on how to dress for this wedding. Ask: If you’d been outside working in the yard, what’s the first thing you would do to get ready for a wedding? Paul tells believers to strip off our former, unredeemed way of life just as we would strip off a filthy T-shirt. Then, as we would take a shower before putting on clean clothes, we repent of anything we’ve said or done that’s ungodly. Finally, we put on our new clean clothes that conform to the invitation’s dress code stipulating Christlikeness.

Ask adults to decipher wedding dress codes like Black Tie, Country Chic, Dressy Casual, Garden Party, or Semi-Formal.

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of most terrifying passages in the Bible is Jesus’ warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). Many people who read that passage, might wonder if they’ve committed such a sin, and if so, will God accept them, even if they’ve come to Christ. We can be assured, “People could only knowingly give Satan the credit for the working of the Holy Spirit if their hearts were so hardened that they had already irrevocably rejected God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. A genuine believer in Christ could never commit this sin.”1 This should bring believers much comfort.

At the same time, here in Ephesians 4:30, Paul strongly cautioned us against another type of offense involving the Holy Spirit—grieving him. To grieve the Holy Spirit brings unhealthiness into our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit dwells within the believer, and when we sin, we sin against God. These sins include “foul language” toward another person (v. 29), “bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander ... along with all malice” (v. 31).

Each of these are sins we commit against others who are created in God’s image, and they oppose the attitudes believers are called to exhibit (v. 32): kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Failure to live in a God-honoring way toward others saddens the Holy Spirit.

One of the reasons the Spirit is grieved is because, as Charles Spurgeon notes: “He sorrows in his soul because he knows what sorrow these things must bring to our souls.”2 That is, the Holy Spirit is grieved because He knows these sinful thoughts, actions, and words do great harm to our souls and our Christian walk. Our born-again hearts desire holiness, and sin goes against our new identity in Christ. Paul knew well the torturous feeling this can bring about (Rom. 7:14-25).

Yet there is hope when we grieve the Spirit. The way to do this is through repentance. As Jesus said: “I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance” (Luke 15:7). Joy comes when we repent of our sin.

The indwelling Holy Spirit is a great blessing from God. Having Him is a promise of our eternal salvation and a guide so that we can live in the truth of the gospel (John 16:13). His grieving should serve as a helpful corrective, so we might repent of sin and live as Christ has called us to live.

SESSION 10
WALKING IN LOVE

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

1 Therefore, be **imitators of God**, as dearly loved **children**, and **walk in love**, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a **sacrificial and fragrant offering** to God. **But sexual immorality** and any impurity or **greed** should not even be heard of among you, as is **proper for saints**. Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are **not suitable**, but rather giving thanks. **For known and recognized this**: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an **idolater**, does not have an inheritance in the **kingdom** of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with **empty arguments**, for God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. Therefore, do not become their partners. **For you were once darkness**, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as **children of light**— for the **fruit of the light** consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth — **testing** what is pleasing to the Lord. **Don’t participate in** the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. Everything exposed by the light is made visible, for **what makes everything visible is light**. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will **shine** on you.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A To model our lives after God and His character (Lev. 19:2; 1 Cor. 11:1).
B Since Christians are sons and daughters of God through Jesus, we’re to live like our Father.
C “Value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others” (AMP); “Live a life of love” (NCV).
D Christ’s willingness to offer Himself for our sins honored the Father (Matt. 26:42).
E Refers to any sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19)
F “Covetousness” (ESV)
G Paul called the church to live in line with their status before God.
H Sins of the tongue; Jesus told us what comes out of our mouths reveals our hearts (Matt. 12:34).
I Those who are living the sins in verse 3 are at their hearts idolaters and “cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).
J As a result of their unrepentant sin, they can’t inherit eternal life (Rom. 2:5).
K Referring to those who claimed God won’t punish those living in unrepentant sin (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
L The outcome and proof of being in the light will be a life that reflects Christ (Matt. 12:33-37).
M “Try to learn what pleases the Lord” (NCV)
N A call for repentance: “Christ will show you the light” (The Message; also see Isa. 60:1).
1. IMITATE (Eph. 5:1-2)
- Paul called for his readers to be imitators of God, just like a child imitates his or her father.
- This imitation includes expressing God’s sacrificial love to all people.

2. ISOLATE (Eph. 5:3-7)
- Paul counseled his readers to remove themselves from any activity or group that displays behavior contrary to God’s character.
- Emphasize the importance of Christian partnerships.

3. ILLUMINATE (Eph. 5:8-14)
- Paul challenged his readers to live as light in a dark world, producing actions that please God and that expose ungodly actions.
- Emphasize the importance of humbly and lovingly confronting others about their sinful choices.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.
- Believers are to be imitators of God, expressing His love to all.
- Believers are to separate themselves from ungodly behavior.
- Believers are to humbly expose sin in this world through action and deed in love.
FOCUS ATTENTION

Who has been a great example for you? Why?
• Examples are incredible gifts. We can imitate godly parents, grandparents, and mentors.
• Christ is our only perfect example. When we imitate Christ by walking in love, we become worthy examples for others to follow.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

What’s a believer’s motive for imitating God?
• God loves us dearly. Children who are secure in their parents’ love want to be like them.
• When we behave according to our nature as God’s children, we imitate Him.

What’s our method of imitating God?
• We follow God’s example when we love sacrificially.
• Jesus shows us what the Father is like. We see in Scripture how Jesus responded to situations and people, and we model Him.

EPHESIANS 5:3-7

What’s the opposite of walking in love?
• In total contrast to God’s way of self-sacrificial love is the world’s way of self-indulgent lust.
• The terms Paul used for sexual sins cover every kind of intimacy outside of a marriage between one man and one woman.
• Sexual immorality and innuendos might be culturally acceptable, but they aren’t acceptable for Christians. God’s standard for moral purity is absolute, not relative or debatable.

What kind of talk accompanies a loving walk?
• Believers must avoid crude or vulgar talk. Joking about sexual intimacy degrades what God intended for good. Thanksgiving elevates the worth of all God’s gifts.
• Believers bring glory to God with respectful, positive, uplifting words.

How do people who engage in ungodly behavior try to deceive themselves and others?
• Some say it doesn’t matter what you do with your body, that there’s no accountability or consequences for impure behavior.
• Christians must not be taken in by that deception. God will judge all who lead unholy, self-indulgent lifestyles.
• Paul wasn’t speaking of believers who have a moral lapse and repent, but of unbelievers who revel in immorality with no remorse.

How can believers stay pure in an impure world?
• We imitate how Christ responded to immorality. He was friends with sinners, but He didn’t participate in behavior contrary to God’s character.
• We aren’t to isolate ourselves from the world because God calls us to be salt in it. However, we must isolate ourselves from impure thoughts and behavior.
• We must not partner with people who engage in self-indulgent behavior and speech.
• Believers need to form close partnerships with one another, and provide support and accountability to live by God’s good and holy standards.

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

What was Paul’s rationale for believers avoiding any hint of immorality?
• Believers shouldn’t engage in the world’s immoral practices because we aren’t part of this dark world anymore. Our behavior should reflect our new identity as light in the Lord.
• When we display love “as children of light” (v. 8), we please God with good, right, and true actions and words.
• Since light makes everything visible, believers should live above reproach. When we walk as children of light we have nothing to fear or hide.
• Believers aren’t to engage in sinful practices, but expose them.

How can believers expose sin without being self-righteous or judgmental?
• It’s not easy or comfortable, but there are times we must humbly and lovingly confront others about their sinful choices.
• When we imitate Jesus, we expose sin simply by the contrast of our actions and words to society’s norms.
• Our task is to shine Jesus in this dark world; His Spirit does the convicting.
• We don’t expose sin to denounce people for how bad they are but to show them how much they need Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can we be worthy examples for others to follow?
• Make Christ our standard and model our lives after His example.
• Let love and purity be the guiding principles for all our actions and words.
• Separate from any activity or group, even a “Christian” group, that behaves contrary to Christ’s character.
• Find joy in discerning and doing what pleases God.
• Stay in community with other believers whose goal is to imitate God.
• Personal Challenge: As you walk through this week ask yourself, Who am I imitating? From what am I isolating myself? How am I illuminating Jesus?
REAL AND ImitATION PRODUCTS
Create a display that shows some items that are real and some that are imitation (ex: real lemons and imitation lemon juice, sugar and artificial sweetener, leather and imitation leather, a name-brand handbag and an imitation handbag).

Ask: **If you had a choice, which one would you select? Explain.** Emphasize that Paul called on believers to imitate Christ.

Ask: **What might happen if we choose to imitate an imitation?** Point out that we put ourselves at risk when we pattern our lives after cultural icons who are imitations themselves.

Ask: **What kind of life might these cultural icons lead us into when we pattern our lifestyle after them? How can we guard ourselves from imitating an imitation?**

Call attention to the originals included in the display. Highlight Jesus as the only One worth imitating. Read Ephesians 5:1-2. Ask: **What kind of life will Jesus lead us into if we imitate Him?** Explain that imitators of God lead a life of sacrificial love that’s expressed in big and small ways. We become godly people by focusing on the daily gestures of being faithful, true, and good. We become like what we choose to worship. Our lives can have an incredible influence when we worship and imitate our incredible Lord.

Close in prayer that believers would faithfully demonstrate Christ’s love and character to the world as we seek to imitate Him.

IMITATE
It’s said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. This statement is often used in a rather derisive way, usually of someone who is ripping off the talents or techniques of another. To copy, in our culture of originality (or at least the desire for it) is a negative. Yet, Paul called the church to imitation.

Two different times Paul implored us to imitate. The first time we see it is in 1 Corinthians 11:1, when he wrote, “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.” Paul’s desire was for the church to follow him, not because he considered himself perfect or because he wanted to make disciples of himself, but because he was wholeheartedly following Christ. The verse was a call to join other believers, so together we’ll all walk with Christ.

The second time we see the call to imitate is in Ephesians 5:1-2, as we’re challenged to be imitators of God. Believers are to reflect God’s character and righteousness, to “be holy” as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; see also Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).

The word *imitate* has a long history in both Greek and Jewish contexts of describing a deeply personal relationship. “As an expression of the relationship both between teachers and pupils and between a worshiper and his deity, this word has a long history in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.”

In fact, “ancient ethical and pedagogical theory assumes that learning takes place by imitation of exemplary figures.”

To imitate doesn’t mean to ritualistically copy or blindly mimic. Instead it refers to someone “who actually internalizes and lives out the model that has been set before them.” For Paul, it was clearly the responsibility of Christians to follow Christ. In fact, “follow me” is the very call of Christ to His first disciples (Matt. 4:19) and His last (Matt. 28:18-20).

The reason why Paul’s call to imitate God is so different from the call to imitate other religious figures is the character of whom we’re called to follow. We imitate God because He alone is worthy of it. And we’ve seen exactly what that should look like for Christians in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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SESSION 11
WALKING WISELY

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

15 **Pay careful attention**, then, to how you live — not as unwise people but as **wise** — 16 making the most of the **time**, because the days are **evil**. 17 So don’t be **foolish**, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 And don’t get **drunk** with wine, which leads to **reckless living**, but be **filled by the Spirit**: 19 speaking to **one another** in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making **music** with your heart to the Lord, 20 **giving thanks** always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the **fear of Christ**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A “Walk carefully [living life with honor, purpose, and courage; shunning those who tolerate and enable evil]” (AMP).

B “Use your head” (The Message). Jesus called us to be as “shrewd as serpents” (Matt. 10:16).

C “Use every chance” (NCV). How we conduct ourselves is important for glorifying God (1 Cor. 6:20).

D “Difficult days” (TLB). Paul mentioned the same in Galatians 1:3-4. Each day, we must be on guard and active in our evangelism and sanctification.

E “Live carelessly, unthinkingly” (The Message).

F The Bible clearly considers drunkenness a sin and against God’s will for the believer.

G “Many evils lie along that path” (TLB). The result of the sin of drunkenness is that one’s life will resemble pagans more than Christ.

H “And constantly guided by Him” (AMP). On Pentecost, the disciples were accused of drunkenness but responded that they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2), leading to furthering the kingdom.

I Christian worship is corporate at its nature.

J Singing is an important part of the worship life of God’s people (Col. 3:16; Ps. 100:1-2).

K Thankfulness should be the default of the Christian heart (1 Thess. 5:18).

L Our motivation for gracious submission is “reverence for Christ” (AMP, ESV, NIV). Our relationship with Christ and His example should be our example for living (2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:3-8).
1. BE WISE (Eph. 5:15-17)
   • Paul warned his readers about the need to be wise and careful in all things, including how they invest their time.
   • Believers are to focus on living according to God’s will.

2. BE FILLED (Eph. 5:18)
   • Paul urged all believers to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not by things that lead to reckless living.
   • Explain that all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit and receive Him at conversion.
   • Interpret “being filled with the Spirit” in terms of being directed and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

3. BE GENUINE (Eph. 5:19-21)
   • Paul identified actions that resulted from being filled with the Spirit: singing and speaking God’s Word, having an attitude of thanksgiving, and submitting to other believers.
   • Characterize these actions as expected actions for all believers.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God calls believers to walk wisely, depending on the Holy Spirit for direction.
• God calls believers to live carefully in light of God’s wisdom.
• God calls believers to surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.
• Believer’s attitudes are impacted by the Holy Spirit living in them.
FOCUS ATTENTION
What advice would you give someone about walking in the dark?

• When you walk in the dark, shine a flashlight, and step carefully and deliberately. Don’t wander off alone; stay on the path with others.

• Paul told believers to walk as children of light in a dark world (Eph. 5:8), and then he gave instructions on how to walk wisely in the dark.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 5:15-17
Why must believers pay careful attention to how we live?

• As believers, we must pay careful attention to how we live. We’re not to wander aimlessly but to make wise choices that lead to glorifying God and becoming like Jesus.

• There’s much in this evil world that can trip us up. We need to be aware of what’s going on around us and seek God’s wisdom on how to respond.

What are wise ways to use time?

• Wise believers will make the limited time they’ve been given count for God’s purposes and glory.

• Making the most of the time doesn’t mean frantically filling up every minute. A wise use of time could be reading, resting, or running. It will at times be working, waiting, and witnessing.

• We should snatch up opportunities to know Christ better and shine His light in this dark world.

What’s the focus of a wise life?

• Wise believers pay careful attention to understanding and living according to God’s will.

• Although Paul was speaking of understanding God’s will of summing up all things in His Son, wise believers also invest effort into discerning and living out God’s specific will for their lives.

EPHESIANS 5:18
Compare and contrast being drunk with being filled by the Spirit.

• Drunk people are under the control of the alcohol in their bloodstream, potentially negatively influencing them to reckless actions.

• When believers are filled with the Spirit, He directs and influences them, giving them wisdom beyond natural human capabilities.

• Alcohol is a depressant; the Holy Spirit stimulates us to understand and do God’s will.

How should we understand the phrase “filled by the Spirit”?

• The verb Paul used carries the idea of continuing to be filled by yielding to the Spirit on a regular basis.

• Being Spirit-filled is for all believers, not an elite few.

• The verb is imperative. Being filled is a command, not an option. We aren’t commanded to be sealed with the Spirit—that’s a completed action God took at our conversion (Eph. 1:13).

• The verb is passive. Being filled by the Spirit isn’t something we work up ourselves. God fills us with His Spirit when we yield control to Him.

• The verb is present-tense, indicating a continuous action. Believers are to go on being filled, continually surrendering to the Spirit’s control.

EPHESIANS 5:19-21
List characteristics of Spirit-filled believers. What does each look like in daily living?

• Spirit-filled believers sing even if it’s just a “joyful noise.” Biblically-based lyrics teach theology and Christian living. When we sing Christian music in its various forms, we speak God’s truths to each other, and express praise and gratitude to God.

• Spirit-filled believers thank God for being victorious over evil, being with us in this dark world, and sovereignly working His purposes in the midst of sorrow and suffering.

• Since the Spirit of Christ is humble, all who are filled with Him are humble. In a spirit of mutual submission, we set aside our rights and serve one another in love.

• This is how wise believers live genuinely every day, not just at church and small group.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
Describe a wise walk “in the dark.”

• A wise walk is Spirit-led, Spirit-dependent, and Spirit-filled.

• A wise walk deliberately makes lifestyle choices that lead to spiritual transformation.

• We walk carefully by using time wisely, taking advantage of every opportunity to know God’s will, and working for His purposes.

• A wise walk is a joyful walk. We sing, give thanks continually, and build positive relationships through mutual submission.

• Personal Challenge: Is your walk best described as wandering or wise? How will you pay more careful attention to lining up your priorities with God’s purposes? In what ways will you make better use of your time? What steps will you take to yield control of your life to the Spirit?
A COMIC STRIP
Display two large poster boards side-by-side on a focal wall. Ask adults if they ever read “Goofus and Gallant” in Highlights for Children magazine. Invite volunteers to describe the premise of “Goofus and Gallant.” This comic strip consisted of two side-by-side panels with a drawing and brief description of each boy’s actions. It was intended to teach children moral lessons by contrasting the bad actions of Goofus with the good actions of Gallant.

Write Goofus and Gallant at the top of the two boards. Explain that Paul created his own positive and negative contrasts with some “not … but” commands. Invite adults to identify the first “not … but” command in Ephesians 5:15. Write “not unwise” on the Goofus poster and “but wise” on the Gallant poster. Guide the group to determine from verses 15-16 specific actions and attitudes of people who live unwisely and wisely. Record responses on the appropriate posters.

Request someone identify Paul’s second “not … but” command in verse 17. Write “don’t be foolish” under Goofus and “but understand the Lord’s will” under Gallant. Guide the group to contrast foolish and wise people, recording responses on the posters.

Ask the group to state Paul’s third “not … but” command from verse 18 and record them on the posters. Once more, guide the group to determine specific actions and attitudes of being drunk and also of being filled with the Spirit. Write responses on the appropriate posters.

Urge adults to silently consider which poster best describes their lives. Explore how each participant can become a wise “Gallant.”

DIG DEEPER
SINGING IN SCRIPTURE
One of the more unique elements today’s church has is congregational singing. As a pastor in the Northeast, those without a church background often mention this to me. Yet people aren’t put off by it, but they’re intrigued. Why do we sing corporately?

Paul told the church that instead of using our words for harmful things (Eph. 4:29), we should use our words for holy things that honor the Holy Spirit (v. 18). Particularly, we’re encouraged to speak “to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). In our singing in worship, there are two particular elements that Paul brought up: what we sing and to whom we sing.

For some, the topic of what to sing in church may cause discomfort or disagreements. However, it ought not be so, if we just follow Paul’s instructions. There are three specific musical elements mentioned in Ephesians 5 (also in Col. 3:16). These are “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Psalms refer to the Book of Psalms, which God’s people sung in worship both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. They also sang hymns, most famously after the last supper when Jesus and His disciples sung a hymn before heading “out to the Mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26). Hymns likely refer to songs that praise God, which have their roots in Scripture and biblical truth. Spiritual songs may refer to songs that are “voicing holy aspiration.”

Each of these three types of songs would have a dual audience: God and each other. Our primary audience is God when we gather for worship. As Colossians 3:16-17 tells us, “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

While of course we worship God when we gather, it should have the effect, similar to the sermon and the Lord’s Supper, of building each other up.

1. F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, TNICNT (Grand Rapids: Berrdmans, 1984), 159.
SESSION 12
WALKING AS FAMILY

EPHESIANS 5:22–6:4

5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body.
23 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.
31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.
32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
1. WIVES (Eph. 5:22-24)
- Paul addressed all Christian wives, calling them to submit to their own husbands. He pointed to the local church submitting to the leadership of Christ as the standard.
- Emphasize that the local church submits to Christ, knowing that His leadership is always in accordance with God’s will and in their best interest.

2. HUSBANDS (Eph. 5:25-33)
- Paul addressed all Christian husbands, calling for them to love their own wives.
- He pointed to Christ and His sacrifice on the cross as the standard for men.

3. CHILDREN (Eph. 6:1-3)
- Paul addressed children, calling on them to honor their parents.
- Paul reminded his readers of the Old Testament command, pointing out that God promises blessings on those who honor their parents.
- Explore ways adult children can continue to honor their parents.

4. PARENTS (Eph. 6:4)
- Paul addressed parents (fathers in particular), calling on them to demonstrate godly discipline and wisdom to their children.
- Parents are to train their children in God’s ways.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships.
- Godly wives submit to the leadership of their own husbands.
- Godly husbands sacrificially and unselfishly love their own wives.
- Godly children follow the direction provided by their parents.
- Godly parents lovingly provide direction and discipline to their children.
FOCUS ATTENTION

What topics does etiquette say to avoid in polite society?
• We know not to discuss politics or finances at a dinner party. In church settings we often want to avoid the topic of submission.
• Believers are to cultivate submission, not avoid it. We are to set aside ourselves for others so they can flourish and thrive.
• After Paul said Spirit-filled believers submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), he described how that plays out in the family: Submission is how families walk together the way God intends.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 5:22-24
What are the limitations and scope of Paul’s command to Christian wives?
• Wives submit to their husbands, not to all men. God gives godly husbands headship over wives for their good, just as He gave Christ headship over the church for her good.
• While husbands and wives are equal in dignity and value, they have different God-ordained roles in marriage.
• Paul called for a voluntary, not coerced, submission in everything.
• A wife is never to disobey God’s standards to comply with a husband’s ungodly demands, which includes many things, especially abuse of any kind.

What’s a Christian wife’s motive for submitting to her husband?
• Submission isn’t based on a husband’s qualities. Christian wives honor and love Jesus by respectfully submitting to their husbands.
• A marriage will almost certainly be happier and healthier when a wife is her husband’s greatest cheerleader, respecting him and yielding herself to help him flourish and thrive.

EPHESIANS 5:25-33
How does Paul’s command to Christian husbands call for submission as well?
• Being completely counter-cultural, Paul didn’t emphasize a husband’s authority but his responsibility to love his wife.
• Since God placed the husband as head of the family, he is to submit to the needs of those under his authority, so he can protect and care for them.

How does Christ serve as the model for husbands?
• The way a believing husband treats his wife proclaims to the world how Christ treats His bride.
• When a husband sacrificially loves his wife like Christ, he helps her flourish and thrive spiritually, physically, and emotionally.
• God intends a husband and wife’s relationship to have priority over every human relationship, even to self.
• Husbands do themselves a favor when they unselfishly love their wives, for it creates the positive home atmosphere God intends.

EPHESIANS 6:1-3
What responsibilities do Christian children of any age have toward their parents?
• Believers obey and honor Jesus when they submissively obey and honor their parents.
• It’s right for young children to obey their parents. It’s how they’re protected and prepared to face life as responsible adults.
• Adult children owe their parents honor and respect, and they should help their aging parents flourish and thrive.
• Adults who were abandoned or neglected by their parents should look to honor their parents in a healthy way, perhaps through healing steps such as praying for them, forgiving them, or seeking to understand them.

EPHESIANS 6:4
How does disciplining children require submission?
• Children have the responsibility to obey, and parents have the responsibility to teach obedience.
• There’s no such thing as godly remote-control parenting. Parents must submit what they’d like to do—sit, sleep, shout—to actively engage in consistently training their children, so they can flourish and thrive.
• Christians are to parent gently. Don’t embarrass, abuse, over-indulge, or have unreasonable expectations of children.
• Parents must bring into submission their desire to always be liked by their children and say “no” at times.
A DOORMAT

Place a doormat at the entrance of your meeting space so everyone walks on it when they enter. After everyone is seated, pick up the doormat and place it in front of you where everyone can see it. Ask: How does this doormat illustrate what people often think of when they hear the word submission? Why must we gain a more accurate view of biblical submission if we’re going to embrace and apply it, especially in our families?

Guide the group to list what submission isn’t (doesn’t mean being a doormat and allowing others to walk all over us; doesn’t imply inferiority; isn’t forced; doesn’t let people trample on biblical truth; doesn’t mean silence or passivity).

Open a door in your meeting space. Guide the group to explore how submission is better illustrated by an open door than a doormat. Submission voluntarily says, “After you,” putting others first. This creates an opening for families to walk into positive relationships with each other.

Ask: How can our submission to one another in our families fulfill our ultimate mission of glorifying God? When family members determine God’s mission is more important than personal desires, they put one another first. Wives respectfully submit to husbands, husbands unselfishly care for their families, and children obey their parents. That reflects God’s good nature and design.

As you consider submitting to your spouse, children, and parents, think of it as opening a door and saying, “You go before me.”

THE PROMISE OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

In Ephesians 5:22–6:4, Paul taught how the gospel should impact our relationships. One of the relationships he mentioned is between parents and children. To demonstrate how parents are to relate to their children, he used the fifth commandment, expressing it as the first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6:2). What’s the significance of the fifth commandment, and how is it the first commandment with a promise?

In Exodus 20 we have the Ten Commandments—words from God given to His people to show them how they, as God’s chosen people, are expected to live. In the fifth commandment God says, “Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (v. 12). The fifth commandment is the first one that doesn’t deal directly with how we’re to relate to God. That honoring our parents comes next “follows logically because it is concerned with honoring parents, who have the awesome role in the family of representing God to their children.”

The task of honoring your parents is linked to children fulfilling their God-given obligations of respecting and caring for them as they age. This commandment “requires children to honor their parents in all sorts of ways large and small, there can be little doubt that its most basic insistence from the point of view of establishing a responsibility that might otherwise be shirked is to demand that children take care of their parents in their parents’ old age, when they are no longer able to work for themselves.”

God expects that children will take the responsibility of being there for their parents, just as their parents were there for them. If Israel would live out this commandment, God gives them a promise: “so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land” (v. 3). In other words, if they fulfill their obligation to their parents, God will take care of them, making sure they’re cared for as well. At the same time, if they refuse to honor their parents, God doesn’t promise to provide for them or allow the people to stay in the land He has given them.

For the community of God’s people to have a fruitful life, they should strive for healthy family dynamics. Our situation is different, in that there isn’t land that geographically defines God’s people. Yet Paul said the commandment and the promise holds true. If God’s people neglect to care for and honor their families, they can’t expect it to “go well” (v. 3). Yet, if they honor their parents, God promises to honor that commitment of faithful children.

SESSION 13
WALKING TO BATTLE

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

10 Finally, **be strengthened** by the Lord and by his vast strength. 11 Put on the **full armor of God** so that you can stand against the **schemes of the devil.** 12 For our struggle is not against **flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. 13 For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having **prepared** everything, to take your stand. 14 Stand, therefore, with **truth like a belt** around your waist, **righteousness like armor** on your chest, 15 and your **feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.** 16 In every situation 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 **Pray at all times** in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. 20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

**A** Indicates action on our part and the reality that power comes from God (1 Cor. 16:13)

**B** Likened to the armor a Roman soldier wore into battle, God gives us this spiritual armor to withstand attacks from Satan.

**C** The devil tempts us (2 Cor. 11:3), seeking to destroy (1 Pet. 5:8) and deceive us (Rev. 12:9-10).

**D** “Human beings” (GNT) aren’t our enemies but we should seek to reconcile them to God (2 Cor. 5).

**E** “Having done everything, to stand firm” (NASB)

**F** Truth—“personal integrity, moral courage”—(AMP) helps hold everything in our lives together. Ephesians 4:21 says, “the truth is in Jesus.”

**G** Living with “an upright heart” (AMP) helps keep us protected from the great damage of sin.

**H** Like all-terrain sandals that enable us to cover long, hard distances, Christians should be ready to go anywhere, anytime to spread the gospel.

**I** Like a shield useful for hand-to-hand combat and aerial attacks, God is our “protective” (AMP) shield.

**J** Our salvation serves as a helmet that keeps us spiritually alive (Isa. 59:17). God secures salvation when a person puts faith in Christ (John 10:28-29).

**K** The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). The Word is “living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12).

**L** Christians are to have a posture of prayer “on all occasions” (NIV), both for themselves and others (Matt. 6:5-15; 1 Thess. 5:17).
1. AWARE (Eph. 6:10-13)
   • Paul summoned his readers to prepare to take a stand against the devil, realizing that the true battle on this earth is with him and his evil forces.
   • Paul explained that God provides spiritual armor for the believer to wear when taking this stand.
   • Emphasize the reality of the devil and of his working in this world. Remind readers that Jesus already defeated Satan on the cross.

2. PREPARED (Eph. 6:14-17)
   • Paul identified the armor God provided for His followers, including His Word and the truth of the gospel.
   • Emphasize that soldiers must wear armor for it to be valuable.

3. FIELD SUPPORT (Eph. 6:18-20)
   • Paul emphasized the importance of prayer for the person going into spiritual battle and for those already in the battle.
   • Prayer is the means by which the armor is put on and victory is won.
   • Remind the readers of the importance of prayer in battling against the devil and temptation.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God provides believers with all the resources needed to live Christlike lives.
• God equips believers for spiritual battles by providing all the needed resources.
• Believers must prepare themselves for spiritual battle.
• Believers must depend upon God through prayer for victory.
FOCUS ATTENTION

How do soldiers prepare for battle?
• Soldiers equip themselves with the proper uniform, strategic weapons, and a focused mind and heart.
• God is working His purpose to “bring everything together in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Satan is fighting furiously to try to keep that from happening. Believers live in the midst of that war zone.
• Paul ended his Letter to the Ephesians by telling believers how to walk confidently into battle.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 6:10-13

Why is it important for believers to identify the enemy accurately?
• People aren’t the real enemy. When we regard people as the problem, Satan wins.
• A myriad of evil spiritual forces rage against believers. They’re powerful, cunning, and fight dirty in their attempts to knock believers from their stand in Christ.
• Satan’s tactics are usually subtle. He lies, distracts, intimidates, and insinuates to try to get us to doubt God and rely on ourselves.

What do believers need to be aware of about ourselves?
• We can’t victoriously battle Satan with our own strength, goodness, or knowledge. We must rely on God’s might, which is far greater than Satan’s.
• Our best weapons against evil aren’t our right to vote, ability to debate, or admirable self-discipline. We win only when we put on the full armor of God.
• Our task isn’t to attack or defeat Satan—Jesus already did that—but to stand firm against his attacks.

EPHESIANS 6:14-17

Describe the resources God has provided to prepare believers for battle.
• We must not get so caught up in the physical illustrations that we neglect the spiritual realities that empower us to stand firm.
• Like a soldier’s belt, God’s truth holds everything together.
• The breastplate protected vital organs. A right standing with God protects against eternal death.
• Hobnailed sandals enabled a soldier to walk with sure footing. The gospel is our firm foundation, whether we’re staying or going to advance His kingdom.
• Water-soaked shields covered, deflected, and absorbed flaming arrows. Faith deflects Satan’s attempts to make us panic and run.
• Our certain hope of salvation is like a helmet that protects our minds from despairing thoughts and keeps us focused on eternity.
• “The word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword ...” (Heb. 4:12).

What does it look like practically to prepare ourselves for battle with these resources?
• Choose each day to live the truth of the gospel with integrity.
• Reflect our right standing with God by righteous character and deeds, and by repentance when we fall short.
• Live in constant readiness to promote the gospel.
• Counter Satan’s attacks by trusting in God’s character and promises.
• Read, study, memorize, and obey the Bible so we can speak specific Scriptures into specific situations. Satan cannot stand against the truth of God’s Word.

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

What’s the relationship between prayer and victory?
• Prayer isn’t the seventh piece of armor. It undergirds the whole process of spiritual warfare.
• Prayer keeps us connected with our commander. God alone has the strength, armor, and knowledge to lead us to victory.

Describe the kind of prayer that leads to victorious Christian living.
• The Holy Spirit must energize, empower, and direct our prayers.
• Prayer must be consistent and comprehensive. When we pray about everything, we humbly acknowledge we need God’s strength for everything.
• Be intentional, alert, and persevering in prayer.
• Victorious prayer is gospel-focused. Paul didn’t ask for prayers that life would get easier but for courage to share the gospel even when life was hard.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers walk bravely into battle?
• Be aware our enemy is strong, but our God is stronger.
• We cannot win by being passive. We must activate God’s available power and armor through intentional spiritual preparation and obedience.
• God doesn’t intend believers to battle alone but to stand together. Pray for spiritual victory for ourselves and others.
• Personal Challenge: What steps will you take to be better prepared to stand firm in the gospel in the middle of this war zone?
A BOTTLE OF SUNSCREEN

Display a bottle of sunscreen. Ask: Do you think most people wear sunscreen the way dermatologists say we should? Why? Dermatologists urge everyone to wear sunscreen every time they’re going to be outside and to reapply often when they’re out for extended periods of time because ultraviolet rays that cause skin damage and cancer are always present. Many people disregard this advice because they’re not convinced the sun can do that much damage, they don’t want to bother putting on sunscreen, or they want a tan, which our culture has deemed attractive.

In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul warned of the invisible enemy who can do great damage, and Paul urged us to cover ourselves with protection. Like the sun’s UV rays, Satan and his minions are invisible. They look for ways to sneak in on us and do us harm.

Ask: How much good can this bottle of sunscreen do you if you don’t put it on? God has provided us full-coverage protection against Satan’s tactics, but we must put it on every day. Often when we think of putting on the armor of God we envision putting it on one piece at a time. But we can also think of it as covering ourselves all over with Jesus. Ask: How do each of these pieces of armor point to Jesus? How can we cover ourselves with Jesus?

Ask: How do you get sunscreen on your back? When it comes to spiritual warfare, how can believers help cover one another? We need to pray for one another that we will stand firm against Satan and lead bold, gospel-centered lives.

AN AMBASSADOR IN CHAINS

In Ephesians 6:20, Paul informed us that he was “an ambassador in chains.” The use of this term was important in the Scripture and gives us great insight into how Paul viewed his ministry and calling from God. What does this term mean, how was it used in Scripture, and what implications did it have for Paul’s ministry?

To be an ambassador is to be a “representative of one royal court to another.” It’s a position that serves an important role in a nation or global affairs. The Bible speaks to the benefit of having good ambassadors, in that “faithful ambassadors bring health to a nation” (see Prov. 13:17).

In the Old Testament we see several examples of ambassadors being used. “The king of Babylon sent official ambassadors to learn of Hezekiah’s power (2 Chron. 32:31). Pharaoh Neco sent ambassadors to prevent King Josiah of Judah (640–609 BC) from joining in the battle at Megiddo, but Josiah persisted and died (2 Chron. 35:21-24). … Isaiah condemned Israel for sending ambassadors to Egypt seeking military aid rather than seeking God’s aid” (Isa. 30).

In the time of the New Testament, many cities and regions sent ambassadors to Rome. During Paul’s time, “various cities and provinces usually sent their ambassadors to Rome to plead their cases before the emperor or to offer tribute to gain some imperial favor. Philo describes participating in such a delegation to the emperor Gaius (Caligula) to make an appeal on behalf of Alexandrian Jews who were suffering brutal persecution at the hands of their fellow citizens.”

Paul’s identifying himself as “an ambassador” (Eph. 6:20) meant he was a representative, not of himself, but of the kingdom of God. He was acting under the authority of King Jesus, who sent him. We see from Garland, “in ancient times ambassadors were considered to be inviolate and were never to be imprisoned.” Yet Paul was “in chains” (v. 20). He had been imprisoned for fulfilling his ambassador responsibilities. At the same time, just because Paul was in chains, he didn’t refuse to stop acting on behalf of Christ, still proclaiming the truth of the gospel to Rome. His mission was critical for their good; they needed to believe in the true King and worship Him if they were to have His grace and mercy when they met King Jesus face-to-face.


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How We Treat Others

by Andy Cook

Look at the qualities Paul listed immediately in Ephesians 4:1-3, while his instruction to walk in a way that’s worthy of your calling are still echoing in the air. Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Bearing with one another. Loving people. Working hard to keep the unity among believers.

It’s pretty simple. When you make an effort to live in a Christ-honoring manner, it immediately affects the people around you. It’s like the foot washing in the upper room. It’s a way of living that goes against the grain. It shocks people ... all the humility and gentleness. It stuns people, at the strength they find in such a person.

If this is you, then it’s like this. The people around you go first. Other people get the best portion. People you live with, people you work with, people you study with, play with, hang out with ... they get more than you do. They get more honor. They get more prestige. They get more joy. They might even have more stuff, more money. It’s a lifestyle that says you will be the servant, and they will be the served. Why? Because you make sure it happens that way.

You know what’s really fun? When you fill a house with people who’ve all made the decision to live in a manner that’s worthy of the calling they’ve received. It’s incredible. In a marriage, you’ve got a husband and a wife trying to out-give each other all day long. And both of them can’t believe how good it is to be in that marriage. Wow! And when siblings try to take care of the other one? It’s overwhelming. It’s the stuff your favorite stories are made of.

When a church is filled with servant leaders, miracles happen. Look just one paragraph above this little passage in Ephesians 4 and you’ll get this incredible statement: “Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).

The only way a church has this harmony is that so many people are willing to play second fiddle. It’s truly amazing. But if you’ve ever heard orchestra discord, you know why harmony is worth the effort.

Andy Cook is the pastor of Shirley Hills Baptist Church, Warner Robins, Georgia. Learn more about Andy at www.experienceisraelnow.com.
The Word Is a Weapon

by Daniel Davis

I know from experience how easy it is to lay down my God-given weapon—“the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). I imagine you do too. I’ve even gone into battle without this weapon handy, just asking for a defeat. I’m not sure which is worse—to lay this weapon down in the midst of a fight or not have it out to begin with, sheathed and stored rather than wielded and ready—but both actions net the same result: surrender to temptation and the sting of sin.

The sword of the Spirit, God’s Word, can be a clumsy weapon for those not trained by it, but this is why we must let the Word dwell in us richly. In hand or in heart, this weapon is “living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). It can defend against attacks; it can drive back the enemy—but only if we use it!

“My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness” (Jas. 1:19-20).
I want to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, but more often I’m quick to anger, quick to speak, and slow to hear. The fury can rise in a split second (68 milliseconds, to be exact), generally when I’m not armed against the attack. But when I come to my senses, this Scripture comes to mind. I want to be like that because I also recall that my God is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex. 34:6).

I want to follow in the pattern of Job, who said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes. How then could I look at a young woman?” (Job 31:1). This isn’t a contract to renew every two years but a daily covenant to strive for purity and faithfulness in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Word is the weapon to fight off the foe.

Jesus is certainly the ultimate example of wielding the Word in war. In Matthew 4, Jesus met every temptation, every attack of Satan, with a quote from the Old Testament, and that without a scroll in hand. Like Jesus, we need to treasure the Word in our hearts that we may not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11).

How quickly we can forget the power of God’s Word. We might lay it aside; we might simply ignore it; we can even be guilty of mishandling it. But if we desire to consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11), if we make it “our aim to be pleasing to him” (2 Cor. 5:9), then we must let the Word dwell in us richly.

Daniel Davis is an editor at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee.
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