

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

Welcome to the JFM study through the book of Ephesians! The devotions contained in this packet were written by 18 different people—many of whom had never written a devotion before. They are beautiful and heartfelt! I trust your understanding of God's Word will grow because of the words your brothers and sisters in Christ have written here. I added the Side Note to give you an extra point to ponder for each section.

The letter Paul pens to the people of Ephesus was meant to be read by the church and then circulated to other churches in that region. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome for preaching the gospel of Jesus. When he writes that he is a prisoner in chains, this is not metaphorical, it is literal. This letter was written around A.D. 60. The city of Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor which is located in present day Turkey. It boasted a thriving seaport and a mighty military. It was a center of commerce and wielded a vast amount of political power. The letter to the church in Ephesus did not address a series of issues like many of Paul's other letters, instead it served to help Christians understand God's grace and His purpose for His followers in the present world. The graphic at the top of each page of this devotional is of the Jackson skyline. The purpose for this is to remind us to take what God reveals to us in this study and to apply it in our present context in Jackson County.

Paul begins this letter by identifying himself as an **apostle of Christ Jesus**. An apostle is one chosen and sent by God to deliver His message of hope and reconciliation to the world. Paul is **sent by the will of God**—and what we will soon discover is that following the will of God rarely equates with an easy life, but it does give us the best life. Paul is writing to the **saints**—those persons set apart for the purposes of God. In other words, anyone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus. He calls his readers **faithful**! This means they have faith and they are being faithful to all God is calling them to do.

Most importantly, **this letter is all about Jesus**. In these first two verses, we see the words: of Christ Jesus, in Christ Jesus and from...the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is foreshadowing the dual theme that runs throughout this book that life is only possible because of Jesus sacrifice on the cross and we can only carry out the purposes of God when we rely on the power of God.

This is a book about inheritance, redemption, mystery, power, the battle between good and evil, unity, relationships and so much more. I pray you will attend church every Sunday and hear the sermon that will kick off each chapter. I pray you will engage with the devotions. Read each word of the Scripture they are addressing slowly and carefully knowing that the Bible is multi-layered and not meant to be fully understood on the first read through. We need the Lord to reveal its mysteries! I pray your love for Jesus and all of His creation will grow immensely and that you will KNOW the wide, long, high and deep love that Jesus wants to lavish upon you!

~ Pastor Angel Kono



EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Chosen by Christ

Jessie Holbrook

SIDE NOTE

In the original Greek text, verses 3-14 were one single sentence—the Bible’s longest and most complex sentence! Try reading it out loud as one sentence and try to catch the passion in Paul’s writing as he shares with the Ephesians all the blessings they now possess because they are “in Christ.” Circle all the in Christ or in Him phrases in these verses.

This passage describes how we have been chosen by Christ. He chose you and me before the creation of the world. God has chosen each one of us for a plan and purpose to do His will. Ephesians 1: 13 states, “and you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit”..... I love this! Once we accept that Christ paid a debt for us, God then deposits a spiritual guide in our souls that lives within us and instructs us in the way to go. So...we didn’t have to pay the debt AND we received a credit on our account.

I will never forget when I first experienced the Holy Spirit. I had been in an unhealthy relationship for about four years throughout high school and, once I graduated, I remained in that same relationship. During this time, I was working at a tanning salon and some of the girls I worked with talked to me about the prayer of salvation. Sceptically, I began to pray every day for weeks. One evening, after trying to break up with my boyfriend over the phone, I went to his house where he tried to convince me to give it another shot. After giving in, I remember feeling like someone was lifting me by the shirt collar and leading me to the door. I said, “I can’t do this anymore” and we did not engage in our typical yelling match. I remember he just watched me drive away, and as I was leaving, I was in awe of how peaceful the breakup went this time. Driving home, I will never forget where I was when I recognized, “That Was God! That Was the Holy Spirit!” I realized I had never before had strength to stand up for myself and never before had I escaped so peacefully. I was completely awestruck. It was then and there I knew the Spirit was living in me. Thank you, Jesus! What a game changer! Although I was so skeptical, Christ still showed himself to me that night and I was forever changed.



Do you recognize the Spirit is living in you?

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

The Power of Prayer

Joan Hofer

How is your prayer life? What are the top things you are praying about right now? Maybe you are praying for salvation for a friend or loved one, or praying for comfort or healing during a difficult time. You might be praying for the Lord's blessings and protection for yourself or someone you care about. These are all good things to pray about. But Paul indicates that our prayers can do so much more.

Paul states in verses 15-17 that he never stops thanking God for the people in the church in Ephesus. He has heard from others of their strong faith in the Lord and their love for God's people. What a wonderful thing to be known for! He goes on to say that he prays for them *constantly*, and asks the Lord to give them spiritual wisdom, so that they will grow in their knowledge of God.

We will grow in our understanding of God as we get to know Him better. How can we know God better? We have to spend time with Him. We need to study His Word, read the Gospels to see what Jesus was like while He was on earth, and spend time in prayer.

In verses 19-21, Paul states his desire that the church will understand the mighty power of God for those that believe Him. It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and placed Him as ruler, not only of this world, but also of the world to come.

What an amazing idea! God's amazing, transformative power is available to those of us who believe and follow Him. There is literally nothing that He cannot do for us and through us. My hope is that this realization of God's power will transform our prayer life. Let us pray without putting limits on what God can do. Let us pray, believing, *truly* believing that anything is possible if the Lord wills it. And let us pray, as Paul instructs, *constantly* in faith, striving to know God better.

➡ **How could you learn to know God better this week? And knowing God better, how could your prayers tap into His mighty power?**

SIDE NOTE

This is the first of two prayers Paul prays in his letter to the Ephesians who are known for their:

- Faith in the Lord
- Love toward all the saints

They are living out the two greatest commandments to love God and love others. May this be the same for all of us who call JFM our church home!

EPHESIANS 2:1-7

But God...

Pastor Jason Engle

SIDE NOTE

In Christian theology, the world, the flesh and the devil (the ruler of the power of the air) are regarded as the three great enemies of the soul. They are in direct opposition to the Trinity. This triad is represented in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11. Read through this passage and see if you can spot them.

One of the many things I love about the words of the Apostle Paul is that his writings reflect his journey. As you look at the honesty and sincerity of Paul's life, what you will notice is that he had a deep appreciation for the grace of Jesus. And in this passage of scripture, Paul reflects on his personal journey, but reminds the church of theirs as well. And the big idea here is everything changes when God intervenes in our lives!

For those of us who have experienced the transforming grace of Jesus, we understand the beauty of Paul's words. As "Christ's ones," we embrace this truth: We were dead in our sin, BUT God made us alive with Christ. We remember that we were once enslaved by our transgressions, BUT God freed us and raised us to new life in Christ. We know that we were condemned and destined for eternal separation from God, BUT God saved us and seated us with Christ.

Do you have a firm grasp of what God has done for you? Do you understand why God did it? The heart of the gospel is this: We are more flawed than we would ever want to admit; but we are more deeply loved than we could ever imagine!

As you go throughout your day today, remember, that you are loved by God! Don't just glance over that statement, but embrace it! Don't just rush through this thought, but let it marinate in your mind! You are loved by God!

If this is your story, let me challenge you to this one thing. Often when we share the story of grace, we spend most of the time talking about what our lives were like before we understood and embraced the grace of Jesus. I want to encourage you to flip that around. What if we made our story less about us, and more about Jesus? Isn't this what Paul did here? Three verses about him; seven verses about God and his great grace!

➡ **So let me leave you with this challenge: What has changed since you embraced the grace of Jesus? Let that be your focus today. Because the reality is, everything changes when Jesus makes an entrance!**

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

God's Great Gift of Grace

Jen DeBiasi

SIDE NOTE

Verse 10 in the NRSV says, "For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our **way of life**." That phrase 'way of life' reminds me of an ancient practice called the Rule of Life—a set of behaviors that mark out how we will live. Check out a how to guide to develop your own at <https://practicingth-eway.org/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/workbook>

Imagine the greatest gift that you could ever receive, if you could ask for anything you wanted and your greatest wish was granted and came true. What would it be? Do you imagine a dream home, or complete health? What about endless wealth, or a permanent vacation? Ephesians 2:8 tells us that when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, God gives you the greatest gift you could ever ask for. God gives you the gift of Salvation, which results in perfect, eternal life. That means the perfect eternal dwelling place, in perfect health and with everything you could ever need, in a land of eternal rest and peace.

This gift is given to us out of God's perfect grace. We don't deserve it, and we didn't earn it. Ephesians 2:9 says, it is "not a result of works, so that no one may boast." It is God's free gift to us for putting our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. There is nothing you can do to earn eternal life, except believe in His Word and put your faith in His Son.

Although there is nothing that we can do to earn God's gift of Salvation, once we put our faith in His Son, we fulfill our destiny as God's child. He gives us Salvation, and Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." When we fully realize the enormity of the free gift of salvation that God has given us, we want to share it with everyone. The best way to share this gift with others is to set an example by completing the good works that God prepared in advance for us to do.

➡ **Having been given this great gift of eternal salvation, which can never be paralleled, what will you do with your gift? Will you keep it to yourself, or will you complete the good works which God prepared for you, so that others may share in this greatest gift of all?**

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

In Christ We are One

Jan Tjepkema

SIDE NOTE

In the ancient Jewish world, the dividing wall was a three-meter (approximately 9ft.) barrier that kept the Gentiles from entering the inner courts of the Jewish temple. It marked a clear line of who was “in” and who was “out.” Jesus abolished this wall! Part of our call as Christ-followers is to bring walls crashing down. What walls around us do we need to eliminate so ALL are welcome into our community?

In this section, Paul continues his letter to the Ephesian believers by reminding them that they used to be “outsiders, called ‘uncircumcised heathens’ by the Jews”. They were far away from God, as each of us were before we came to Jesus for salvation. It’s only through Christ’s blood that they, and we, are brought near to God. Do you remember when you realized the truth of these words? I was about 10 or 11 years old when I realized that I needed Jesus in my life. I don’t remember exactly the Bible School lesson content, but I do remember the leading of the Holy Spirit in my decision to become a Christian. Who was instrumental in your decision to receive the gift of forgiveness through Jesus so that you would no longer be separated from God? I don’t know the name of the woman who led me to Jesus, but I am forever grateful for her willingness to serve kids and help them find salvation.

Paul reminds his readers (or listeners) that God broke down the things that separated Jews and Gentiles when He died on the cross to bring peace to both groups. The “wall of hostility” was broken down through His sacrifice for them to create a new people united in Him. Because of Jesus, both groups were given the gift of peace and were united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. God continues to unite people in Himself if we will allow Him to. The recent racial unrest reminds us that God sees us all as His children and each one is worthy of His love and forgiveness. This is a good time for each of us to examine our hearts and attitudes in this area and ask God to help us love as He loves.

In verses 19-22 of this chapter, Paul tells us that we, as believers, are part of God’s family. What a privilege it is to be part of the “holy temple for the Lord.”



Have you accepted the invitation to God’s family, and are you, like my Bible School teacher, helping others to know the love of Jesus?

EPHESIANS 3:1-6

Plan Revealed

Brent Hall

I grew up on a 40-acre horse farm. I would join my dad each evening in our barn doing whatever job he needed help with. During those times he played the radio, and I would listen to news, weather, and a lot of sports.

I would always enjoy when broadcaster Paul Harvey would come on and would tell us a story that we would know, but he would share a behind the scenes moment of which I was not aware. It would give great context and encouragement to a story that was already enjoyable. He called it “The Rest of the Story”.

As we begin working through the third chapter of Ephesians, I wonder if I would not feel the same way if I were a person reading the Apostle Paul’s letter. I would have heard the story of how God had done a great thing for the Jewish people. I would know they believe the one true God had chosen them, but I might feel like I am not part of this great plan.

Here Paul is saying wait; let me tell you “The Rest of the Story”. While things have been hidden they are now revealed! God’s grace is extended to you and me. God’s plan is no longer a mystery and WE are a part of it. We are all a part of the same family and share in the Promise of Jesus. The plan is no longer a secret!

➡ So, what is God’s plan for me, and what is the rest of my story?

SIDE NOTE

Paul says that the “mystery was made known to” him. Paul’s use of the word mystery means a sacred secret that is revealed to a believer by God, but is unknown until it is revealed. God’s plan was always to include the Gentiles in His gift of salvation. Paul is the one through whom God revealed this mystery to the whole world and it was Paul’s responsibility to share it with the world. He paid a great price to steward this mystery and we are the beneficiaries of it!

EPHESIANS 3:7-13

All of Us Together

Sarah Lantis

SIDE NOTE

The definitions of two words help this passage come to life:

Boundless riches (v. 8)
—boundless can also be translated unfathomable or untraceable. This means too vast to discover a beginning or end. Riches without beginning or end is what Christ wants to lavish on us!

Manifold wisdom (v. 10)
—manifold means rich in variety or many-colored. The wisdom we have in Jesus provides us with just what we need for each different situation we face.

Up until this point, it is pretty clear that in Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus, he is putting a lot of importance on the unity and holiness of the Church, that is the body of believers. As I was reading this passage and reflecting on thoughts to write to our own church, there were a few things that stood out to me and I hope you will be receptive to what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you through these words.

I love when the Bible talks about the Mystery of the gospel. It feels like there is space for me not to have all the answers, and yet sometimes that can also come across as getting left out of a secret. I want to remind you wherever you are at today, that the intent of God's heart is not to hide Himself from you. He wants to be abundantly clear and give you wisdom for whatever you are facing. Verse 10 (NIV) says, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..." and in verse 12 it goes on to remind us that as believers we have access to the throne of God and we "may approach God with freedom and confidence." Freedom and confidence feel like the opposite of being left out of a secret to me. I wonder what it would look like for you specifically to approach the throne of God boldly today. You have endless access to the King of Kings and all I know how to do is to urge you, with everything in me, to use that access!

Paul also writes about wisdom and sufferings in this passage. I can't help but notice parallel themes to our study of James. Let me draw your attention back to that study. James 1 talks both about wisdom and suffering.

First, James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." Again friends, I point out that you have access, and I urge you to use it.

Second, James 1 talks about persevering under trials. God is near to you in suffering (Matthew 5:3-12). Think about the opportunity you have to experience the nearness of God when going through a trial that is different than on the "mountain tops" of life.

I want to wrap this up continuing to run in the same lane as Paul as he writes with passion about unifying the church. So many times the Bible says that God is near to us all. This can mean all of us individually but what if it also meant He is more with us when we are a unified corporate body.

➔ **What would it look like to unify the body around each other in present sufferings, while holding onto the promise that the presence of the Lord is more with ALL OF US TOGETHER as it glorifies Him?**

I hope this finds you well, that you know you are loved, and that you know the Lord is walking closely with you through whatever today brings. - Sarah Lantis

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

God's Immeasurable Love

Karen Johnson

SIDE NOTE

This is Paul's second prayer for his readers and one of the best-known prayers in all of Scripture. Three times Paul refers to power:

1) power that gives us strength in our inner beings;
2) power to comprehend the love of Christ so that we may be filled to the fullness of God;
and 3) power to accomplish abundantly more than we can imagine. Pray for power to BE, KNOW and DO!

On a Sunday a few weeks ago, my heart and eyes heavy, I made my way across the church parking lot. The night before and so far that morning, I had been fighting tears, and losing every time. There were so many different prayer needs weighing on my mind. What I really wanted to do was turn around, go back home and watch the service from my couch with a box of Kleenex nearby. Yet, the pull of God and His community drew me to the doors. I knew I needed to be there. Not just for me, but as I have told my kids over the years... "Maybe God will put someone in your path today who needs your smile, your friendship or words of encouragement."

About 10' from the door, down in a crack in the parking lot, I noticed a feather. I picked it up, carried it to my office and sat down. The feather was small and perfect. As I stared at its intricate design, God brought to mind Matthew 6:25-30. My heart wasn't heavy about provisions, clothing or my next meal. But, I was worrying. Fretting about the hurt and pain in our world, the burden of health concerns, struggles, loss, disappointments... for friends, family and for myself. One small question tucked within that passage caught my attention, "Are you not much more valuable than they?" Yes. I am. So are those I was burdened for. So are you.

With a prayer and renewed spirit, I joined my church family and friends. The service closed with a song called, *The Blessing*, taken from Numbers 6:24-26. Perfect for my day. Timely for so many in this season. Timeless.

¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is... ²⁰Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.
Ephesians 3:18 & 20 (NLT)

Wow! Infinitely more than we might ask or think. We don't have to "just settle". We can have a faith that still believes in miracles, a faith that God still moves mountains, a faith that even when we are stalled or fall down, He still loves us immeasurably and will help us get back up and keep moving forward.



Like a bird's feather, what can you use as a reminder of your value, God's immeasurable love and that He has a purpose and a plan just for you? Place this reminder where you will see it daily.

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Called to Be One United Body

Cindy Hawthorne

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future." Ephesians 4:4 (NLT)

Ephesians 4 begins with Paul urging us to "lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God". "Called by God"? That is a privilege. "Called by God"? That is an honor and joy. "Called by God"? That is an awesome opportunity and a responsibility. But what exactly is this calling?

Paul goes on to explain that we are called to be a part of the body of Christ. Jesus' work on earth as a man was completed, but now the church is declared to be the body of Christ, with Jesus as the head.

Let's look at verses 2 - 3 and note the attitudes we are to have as part of the body:

- ▶ Always be humble and gentle
- ▶ Be patient
- ▶ Make allowance for each other's faults because of your love
- ▶ Keep yourselves united in the Spirit
- ▶ Bind yourselves together with peace

Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it? His plan for us is to be like him, so we can represent him well. He has given each of us gifts to serve and build up the body so we can grow to maturity in faith, knowledge, and love. *"We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church...As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."* Eph 4: 15-16 NLT.

One evening our precious little daughter and I finished our regular bedtime routine of story time, song, prayer, hugs and kisses, yet she resisted letting me go. I spent a brief moment assuring her, "You are not alone - Jesus is with you." "I know," she replied, "But I need somebody with skin!"

Twenty-five years later I still smile when I recall her cute yet profound response. We all need "somebody with skin". I think that is what God had in mind when He told us that we are the body of Christ. As we each do our part, we become His hands, His feet, His heart to our hurting world.



Will you give God your "yes" to his call today to take your part in the body of Christ?

SIDE NOTE

The Life with God Bible says, "Calling presupposes a God who graciously speaks (the doctrine of revelation) and a people who willingly listen (the doctrine of sanctification). Listening is a primary spiritual formation practice" (p. 341). God is graciously speaking. Let us be willing to listen and ready to act.

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

The New Life

Rusty Kalmbach

SIDE NOTE

Verse 21 says, "For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus." As Christians, we desire to live right and we must understand that right living begins with right beliefs that are taught to us by Jesus who declared three times in John that He is The Truth. Jesus wants to give you wisdom for your day to day life—let Him be your teacher!

Recently while travelling out west for some needed time away (by the way this was a 3,000 mile road trip to Colorado), I encountered several situations where other cars would drive past me consistently going 5-10+ mph over the posted speed limits. As I watched these drivers speed past me, I thought, "Why is that person driving that fast?" By speeding and driving recklessly, these other drivers were increasing the risk of having a serious accident.

Each day we make similar decisions that have an impact on our lives and the lives of others. And each day we are impacted by the decisions that others make. These decisions can be anything from our driving habits, what we say to others, holding grudges, displaying hatred towards something or someone, overeating, gambling, drinking, and so forth. The list really is endless! Many times these behaviors are contrary to Christian living. Some are bigger than others and some are smaller in terms of the impact to ourselves, others around us, friends and family, and even our relationship with Christ. These decisions tell us a lot about how we manage our lives and they tell us about where our heart is.

This is exactly the lifestyle that Paul cautions us about in Ephesians 4:17-19 when he says that we must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. They are darkened in understanding and alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart, they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Paul goes on to say in verse 20, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!"

Instead, living as Christ followers, we are encouraged to cast off the old and put on the new. You see, your old self belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. Not my words here, but rather Paul's: Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and to put on a new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The secret to a healthy and fresh daily Christian lifestyle is based on the same decision that we made when we opened our hearts, accepted Christ, and asked Him to come in. We set aside the old ways of our past life, a life without Christ, and then we put on the new life, or a life that is Christ centered. This new life is transforming because it begins with the little choices that we make daily. The small decisions consistently made at each decision point cause the shift in our heart to obedience in Christ, or in other words, a shift to the side of holiness.



If you know Christ, do you stop to consider how your heart is transformed by the decisions that you make every day? If you don't know Christ, open your heart and accept him into your life, he will become part of the decisions that you make daily. Would you like to have Christ help you with making these daily decisions?

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

Which Will You Choose?

Kelly McCloughan

Truth or Lies? Anger or Peace? Stealing or Honest Work? Foul Words or Helpful/Kind Words?

Everyday we have to make choices, and if we are all being honest, some days are easier than others to make choices that are pleasing to God. In Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul reminds the Church that we need to be one unified body and we should live in a way which keeps us, as Christians, from falling into the practices of the world.

SIDE NOTE

Paul implores us to “speak the truth” and to speak “only what is useful for building others up.” In *God Came Near*, Max Lucado said, “God’s Word has strong medicine for those who carelessly wag their tongues. The message is clear: He who dares to call himself God’s ambassador is not afforded the luxury of idle words.” May ALL of our words be kind and tenderhearted!

Paul gets very specific with the fact that Christians need to speak truth to their neighbors - do you speak truthfully? He says that we need to keep our anger in check and, if we don’t, we are giving into the devil - do you keep control of your anger? He warns believers against stealing and he urges us to use our hands to work in order to share with others - are your hands doing good? Paul goes on to tell us that we are to use our words to build others up - do your words encourage or discourage?

Paul doesn’t beat around the bush. He is very specific with how Christians are to live. We are called to work and to walk in love.



Everyday you have choices to make - will you walk in the love of Christ or with the world? The choice is yours!

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Love Others the Way God Loves You

Pastor Mark Murphy

SIDE NOTE

The “Therefore” at the beginning of verse 1 references all that Paul teaches us in 4:17-32. In essence, Paul is saying Jesus will teach us how to put away the old and put on the new because He wants us to be like Him, specifically He wants us to love like He does. God loves sacrificially and we get the privilege of loving like He did—in His power and in His way!

Doctor Albert Schweitzer, famous missionary, medical doctor and musician, was asked one time, “What is the best way to raise a child?” He replied, “There are three ways: (1) By example, (2) By example, and (3) By example.” He was certainly right! By your actions, your words and your attitudes in the home, your children learn to follow in your footsteps.

The apostle Paul knew the importance of example in teaching others. He writes in Ephesians 5:1-2, “Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that” (*The Message*).

The same love God gives to you, he wants you to offer to everyone with whom you come into contact. It’s not an option or suggestion. It’s a command from Jesus Himself: “Now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other” (John 13:34 NLT).

If you are a follower of Jesus, you must love everybody—whether they are lovable or not. You must love them in the same way Christ loves you. Ponder for just a few moments the various ways in which the Lord loves us. They are summarized in 1st Corinthians 13:7. “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” God never gives up on you. God never stops believing in you. God never stops hoping for the best in your life. God never gives up on you.

That’s what God wants you to do for everybody else. Accept them completely, love them unconditionally, forgive them totally, and consider them extremely valuable. Such Christ-like love will literally transform all your relationships.



What is one area of your life where you need to show more grace?

EPHESIANS 5:3-20

SIDE NOTE

Two quotes about light: “We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won’t need to tell anyone it does. Lighthouses don’t fire cannons to call attention to their shining—they just shine.”

~D.L. Moody
“If when I am able to discover something which has baffled others, I forget Him who revealeth the deep and secret things, and knoweth what is in the darkness and showeth it to us; if I forget that it was He who granted that ray of light to His most unworthy servant, then I know nothing of Calvary love.”

~Amy Carmichael

Now you are the Light!

Lisa Butterfield

As I was reading this section of Ephesians, my mind was pulled back to Genesis and the immediate distinction between light and darkness. God said, “There was light, He saw it was good”, and because of that, “He separated the light from the darkness.” God’s word is telling us that Light and Darkness are regarded as things independent of each other, they are both real agents. Paul is asking us as Christians, to choose, Light or Dark, there is no in between. In Ephesians 5: 3 Paul says, “for as believers our way of life, whether in public or in private, reflects the validity of our faith” (AMP). Paul reminds us, “for once you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so walk as children of the Light.”

We have to give up our dark ways, that can be ever so tempting, and choose behavior that shines light, and separates us from the world. A behavior that expresses gratitude to God for our salvation. John writes in 9:5 about Jesus, “But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.” Paul is encouraging us in Eph. 5:16, “to have the same goal by making the most of our time on earth, recognizing, and taking advantage of each opportunity.” In Isaiah 42:6 we hear God’s desire for us. “I the Lord, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness, I will take you by the hand and guard you... and you will be a light to guide the nations.” God is asking us to carry on His mission. I have to ask myself, why do I choose darkness? Is darkness easier? We are not asked to be the light on our own, but be filled with the Holy Spirit and guided by Him.

“So awake sleeper, and arise from the dead, And Christ will shine upon you and give you light” (Eph. 5:14). So, may we always be giving thanks to God, the Father of all things by choosing light over darkness and continually trying to learn by experience what is pleasing to the Lord.



What part of your life are you refusing to let Jesus shine His light on?

EPHESIANS 5:21-32

Submit to One Another Out of Reverence for Christ

Pastor Brian Kono

Today's passage is very familiar, but is often misunderstood. Before we dig in, let's establish two points to remember.

Number one: Ephesians 5:21, Paul introduces 'submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ' as the main point in verses 5:22-6:9 for the main relational categories (husband-wife, parents-children, worker-bosses).^{*} So when considering this passage, it's good to remember the concept of submitting to Christ through our relationships with other people.

Number two: Paul slides in and out of using the 'mystery' of marriage to describe the Church-Christ and reversing the metaphor to describe the husband-wife relationship. Sometimes Paul is very wordy, or he will start an idea and then start writing about a much larger concept related to the idea...like one doctor I had who would be describing a health concern but then slide into discussing the history of medicine!

With these in mind, we can draw out the principles Paul emphasizes for marriage. Principle one, wives submit to your own husbands. Paul says "your own" husbands instead of just saying submit to husbands. This points to some mistaken attitudes between men in general toward women in the early church. While the cultural norm was for men to 'rule over' women categorically, Paul prioritizes the unique relationship of submission of the wife toward her husband only.

Next Paul describes the husband's submission to the wife using the example of Christ loving the church. Paul's language here **REQUIRES** the husband's submission to and imitating the character of Christ and His word as what leads the activity of nourishing and cherishing his wife. Giving space for a wife to study the word and have her own relationship with Christ is subtly woven into Paul's argument. The wife is not dependent on the husband. There is clearly a mutuality required in this intimate relationship where they learn from one another in life and in faith. Paul seems to recognize the metaphor's breakdown (Christ-church, husband-wife) as he calls his readers back to the main point. First, his closing statement begins with "HOWEVER," saying 'while there is a mystery to the way we will be united with Christ as His bride, I have gotten off track with my discussion, let's remember the priority' which he describes with the next two words to note: "love" and "respect." While he uses love as a synonym for submit, respect is the same word from verse 21 translated as 'reverence.' Paul is telling husbands and wives that their relationship of love and respect comes from the love and respect they mutually have for Christ. Focusing their loving and respecting the character of Christ being revealed in one another best prepares them (or sanctifies them) in preparation for being united with Christ.

^{*} To get a more full picture of Paul's counter cultural attitude of 'submitting to one another' it would also be important to read what he writes about the full spectrum of social engagement see Colossians 3:18-4:1, Romans 13:1-7, and Philemon.

 **What is one way you can sacrificially love your spouse this week?**

END NOTE

I gave Brian more space as a way of submitting to my own husband 😊
-Pastor Angel

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

Pushing the Buttons

Pastor Josh Turner

SIDE NOTE

Children are commanded to obey their parents—that command disappears when they reach adulthood. But all ‘children,’ regardless of age, are told to honor their parents. This was first stated in the 10 commandments and reiterated here. Honor means to hold in esteem, care for and show respect for. What could you do this week to show honor to your parents?

I grew up the youngest of three boys in my family. My oldest brother and I were very much alike, while our middle brother was the odd man out. And somehow, it always seemed that my middle brother got stuck in the middle seat of our family station wagon, between my oldest brother and me. And boy, did we know how to push my middle brother’s buttons. All it took was one glance, one poke, sometimes even just one breath to set him off. I’m not proud of it, but in those instances, I was the button-pusher: the provoker.

In the NLT, verse 4 of our passage says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.”

Have you ever provoked your own children? I hate to admit it, but I’m sure there have been times I’ve provoked my three daughters. Sure, it might have been in the spirit of good fun, but sometimes I took the teasing a bit too far. Instead, I should focus my attention on teaching my kids how to Love God and Love Others! The best way to do that is to love them unconditionally and show them what it looks like to love others the way Jesus loves them. After all, I’ve always found that if I want my kids to be obedient, using love as a motivator usually works best.

➔ **Ask yourself a question: Have I recently provoked anyone (child or otherwise) toward anger? If so, seek to rectify the situation by contacting the person and asking forgiveness. You’ll realize a weight will be lifted off both the person you wronged and yourself as well.**

EPHESIANS 6:5-9

Work Well Even When No One is Watching

Paige Conat

Our Scripture passage today is Ephesians 6:5-9. It has to do with how slaves (21st century employees) do their work. It speaks of doing it wholeheartedly, following the direction of their masters (employers). Paul saw work as doing the will of God, following directions with respect and sincerity of heart.

There was a season in my work life when my work to-do list was a part of my morning devotions. I let the quiet inner voice of the Holy Spirit plan my day's work priorities. I then went about my work day with peace and joy as I watched everything dovetail together. Even interruptions fit into my day. God got the glory as I followed His priorities. And my superiors were pleased with what I accomplished.

SIDE NOTE

Perhaps it is foreign or offensive to talk about slaves, but in Paul's world, slavery was a way of life. Almost every household, except the poorest of the poor, had slaves. Paul is encouraging believers who are workers to work as though they are working for Jesus. He is encouraging bosses to treat those who work for them with respect by honoring the fact that all people are servants of Jesus and no one person is better than another.

➔ **A few good questions: Are we including God in our work routines? Can you honestly say you are giving your all? Do you see God's will in your work? God is ready to transform your will in your work life.**

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

SIDE NOTE

Power is a significant theme in this letter. Here Paul reminds his readers that our life in Jesus begins and ends with the power of God. He says, be strong, stand your ground and stand firm—and this can only be accomplished in the power of God. My brothers and sisters, put on the armor of God and prepare to do battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. We can do so fearlessly because Jesus is with us always!

Flex Some Muscle

Pastor Tim Flickinger

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (v. 10). Let’s wrap up Ephesians with this idea.

The command to be strong in the Lord is followed up with a description of the “full armor of God”. It can seem daunting, trying to remember all these pieces of armor. Add to that the 10 daily words to say to your family; the 8 keys to overcoming sin; the 9 principles of a happy heart; the 5 R’s for reaching your potential; the 32 principles of leadership; this acrostic; that prayer; the 6 things to pray for your neighborhood; etc. etc.

There is something I recently began to do to help me remember to put on the full armor of God: I write “peace” somewhere on my shoes, reminding me that everywhere I go I bring the peace of the gospel. On my hats I write “helmet”, to remind me to keep my mind and identity centered on my salvation in Christ. On the tags of my shirts, I write “breastplate;” on my belt (or waistband), “truth;” on my backpack, “shield” (it’s the only thing I really carry); and on the inside of my Bible, “sword.” These words remind me that I am always in this spiritual battle, and that I am strong in Christ.

A few things to grasp:

- ▶ Our battle isn’t with people. It is with evil spiritual forces.
- ▶ Most of the pieces of armor are designed for protection – to help you stand strong.
- ▶ The offensive piece involves the Spirit – the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) and praying in the Spirit.
- ▶ You need both a good offense and a good defense.



Peace, grace, and love to you, my friends. Be strong in His mighty power. Choose to put on the armor of God every single day!