THE CROSSING CHURCH · COSTA MESA

GRACE & PEACE

a book on ephesians

A SIX-WEEK DEVOTIONAL STUDY

Welcome to Grace & Peace

Our journey through the book of Ephesians.

At The Crossing, we believe God speaks through the Bible — not simply to give us more information, but to transform our lives. As we encounter God's Word, He shapes our hearts, renews our minds, and teaches us to live more like Jesus.

This devotional was created to accompany our Sunday message series and continue the conversation throughout the week. Whether you're reading on your own, with your family, or in a small group, our prayer is that these daily readings help you discover God's grace, experience His peace, and grow in following Jesus every day.

One question we often ask at The Crossing is:

How are you growing in your faith?

Jesus made clear what matters most. He calls us to love God, love everyone, and share Jesus everywhere we go. We call these “The Greats” because they come from Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission. They are the heartbeat of who we are becoming as a church. Living them out grows our faith.

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We believe we grow in The Greats by practicing four simple rhythms. Together they form the acronym GROW:

G - Gather Together

Growth happens best in community. Worship with your church in weekly services and join a small group. You'll build meaningful relationships and encourage others as they encourage you. We weren't created to follow Jesus alone.

R - Risk Our Comfort

Growth begins on the other side of obedience. We connect our hearts to God and our church when we give back. Volunteer on a service team and financially support the church. Following Jesus often requires risk, but He always meets us there.

O - Openly Share Our Stories

Growth multiplies when we share our God stories. In small groups, practice telling others where you've seen God show up. As you start to see God work, it is vital to your faith that you share with others what Jesus has done in your life.

W - Walk Every Day with Jesus

Growth is built one day at a time. Spend time in God's Word, pray, listen for His voice, and choose to follow Him in your everyday life. Small, faithful steps over time lead to lasting transformation. As you grow, invite others to walk with you.

These practices aren't a checklist or a way to earn God's love. They are simply responses to the grace we've already received. As we practice them, the Holy Spirit shapes us to look more and more like Jesus.

That's our prayer for this study - that you wouldn't just read the book of Ephesians, but that the book of Ephesians would shape you. The Ephesians were on the same journey we are now: Growing in the Greats.

May you discover more of God's grace, experience more of His peace, and take your next step in following Jesus.

Welcome to the journey.

An Intro to Ephesians

Before we begin our journey through Ephesians, it helps to understand where this letter came from and who wrote it. The author is Paul.

Paul was one of the most influential leaders in the early church, but his story did not begin that way. Before he became a follower of Jesus, Paul was a religious leader who opposed the very people he would later serve. He was convinced that Jesus was not the Messiah and that the early Christians were a threat to God's work. Paul actively tried to have them all imprisoned or killed.

But everything changed when Paul encountered Jesus.

On the road to Damascus, Jesus met Paul in a vision, transformed his heart, and gave him a new purpose: to tell people everywhere about the good news of Jesus. The man who once tried to destroy the church became one of its greatest builders.

Paul traveled throughout the Roman world, planting churches and helping people discover who they were because of Jesus. Eventually, Paul was imprisoned because of his faith. And while sitting in prison, he wrote this letter to a group of believers in Ephesus - a city known for its wealth, influence, and worship of many different gods.

You might think a person in prison would write words filled with frustration or fear.

But Paul begins with something different.

Grace and peace.

> **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 1:1-2

This was not just a nice greeting. It was the foundation of everything Paul wanted them to understand.

In fact, when you read Paul's letters throughout the New Testament, you will notice something similar. He regularly begins with this blessing: Grace and peace.

Why? Because these two words summarize the heart of the gospel.

Grace means we receive what we could never earn. It is God's undeserved kindness toward us. Before we ever reached for God, God reached for us. He still does.

Peace means we are brought into a restored relationship with God. Because of Jesus, what was broken can be made whole. We don't have to live separated from God, controlled by fear, or constantly trying to prove ourselves. We can be whole.

Grace is the gift. Peace is the result.

And together, they tell the story of what Jesus came to do.

Everything we will discover in Ephesians flows from these two realities. Because of God's grace, we have a new identity. Because of God's peace, we can live differently - with confidence, unity, love, and hope.

Paul did not write Ephesians from a place of comfort. He wrote it from a place of dependence. He knew firsthand that God's grace was enough and that God's peace was stronger than his circumstances.

That same grace and peace are available to us today.

Before we talk about what we should do, Ephesians reminds us of what God has already done. Before we talk about how we should live, we begin by remembering who we are in Christ.

The questions to ask ourselves as we read are: "What does this passage teach me about who God is, who I am, and how I should live today?"

So as we walk through this letter together, allow the truth of who God is and what He has done shape every part of your life.

GRACE & PEACE

01

WEEK ONE

Who Am I Because of Jesus?

DAY 1	Ephesians 1: The Blessing God Offers
DAY 2	Ephesians 1: Know Him Better
DAY 3	Ephesians 1: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: The Holy Spirit

Sermon Notes

WEEK ONE

The Blessing God Offers

"Blessed" is a word we throw around often, especially in churches.

We say things like: "God blessed me with a new job, a raise, a healthy family…" "God blessed me with so much…"

And often when we say this, we are referring to the "stuff" we believe God gives us: financial security, health, prosperity, happiness, etc.

And while this is true, at the start of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul, our author, chooses to remind us of the primary blessing God bestows on his people. And this blessing is of greater value than any other single thing we may receive.

So today, as we jump into chapter one we are going to find three key phrases that describe the blessing God offers.

First, we are **chosen**: He predestined us for adoption through sonship (verse 5).

This word "predestined" can be intimating, but it carries the idea of being chosen or selected. Think back to elementary school gym class. Many of us will have memories of someone picking teams and us sitting on the sideline wondering and worrying "will anyone choose me?"

Ephesians begins with a blessing to calm that fear. You do not need to wonder or worry because from the very beginning God chose us - he *predestined* us to be part of his family. We are chosen. God wants you on the team.

We are not just chosen in a casual way. The phrase here "*adoption to sonship"* is very important because in the ancient world only sons inherited property and carried on the family name. But, the good news we find in Jesus is that **all** of us: men, women, children, all of us… are adopted to "sonship" meaning all of us are chosen to receive the inheritance, family name, and all the privileges and power that come from being God's heirs.

> **PREDESTINED**
>
> chosen, selected, never in doubt, meant to be

Second, we are **redeemed**: In him we have redemption through his blood (verse 7).

To “redeem” carries the idea of paying a costly bill on behalf of another. This would be like walking into your friend’s house, seeing an overdue cell phone bill for the past year, and choosing to pay it on their behalf. You take on their debt and pay it out of your own pocket. That’s what God did for us. God saw our sin and mistakes and chose to pay the price on our behalf. He redeemed us through the death of Jesus on the cross.

> **REDEEMED**
>
> bought back, recovered, saved from blame, debt, or sin

Third, we are **marked**: You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (verse 13).

We will talk more about the Holy Spirit on Day 4. For now, we will focus on this word “seal” which is a guarantee or promise that will never be broken. Back when this was written, kings would place their personal seal on a letter. It was a way to prove the authorship and authority behind their words. It was a way to communicate: “This has my full backing and support.” When you become a believer and say yes to following Jesus, you can trust that you belong to God.

We have this unbreakable blessing from God. Not only did he choose us, not only did he redeem us, but we have the Holy Spirit in us which provides proof of the authority and grace of God at work in our lives.

So today, as we read the first few verses of Ephesians I want to encourage you to take your time, read slowly, underline the words of phrases that stick out, and reflect on the promised blessing God gives us. **Chosen, Redeemed, Marked**.

READ EPHESIANS 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: [2]Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAISE FOR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

[3]Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [4]For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5]he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— [6]to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. [7]In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8]that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, [9]he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10]to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. [11]In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, [12]in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. [13]And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14]who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Reflection Questions

01 As we begin this study, take a moment and write about your experience reading the Bible? What if anything has made it hard for you to engage in the Bible? (Busyness, not understanding what you are reading, etc) Write about your challenges.

02 After reading today's verses, what are your first thoughts?

03 If you truly lived this week believing that you are chosen, redeemed, and marked by God, what might change about the way you treat yourself, God, or other people?

Know Him Better

There is a lie that has crept into churches all over the world. And while it might look a little different in each church, the basic idea is this:

> **THE LIE**
>
> **More knowledge = More spiritual maturity**

We assume that the people who know the most theology, the most Bible verses, the most Greek and Hebrew words - are the most spiritually mature. However, that's not true. Like most lies, the reason it has taken root is because there actually is some truth to it. Knowing the Bible is a good thing, understanding important theological concepts is a good thing, and yet the reality is:

> **THE TRUTH**
>
> **More knowledge ≠ More spiritual maturity**

For example, during the time of Jesus, the religious people who knew the most were the Pharisees, and yet they opposed Jesus at every turn. Paul, the author of our letter, was an incredibly knowledgeable religious leader himself. He had memorized large chunks of the Old Testament, studied the scriptures for decades, and yet he was consumed with pride, arrogance, anger, and racial prejudice. He was spiritually immature...UNTIL He met Jesus. It was a wild and personal encounter with Jesus that changed everything. Paul then knew Jesus and his information-based knowledge no longer mattered as much. Paul learned that knowing about God is not the same as knowing God. (Read the intro to this book for more about Paul)

So here in the very first verses of Ephesians, Paul begins with a prayer for this Jesus-following church that he loved. At the center of his prayer is this phrase:

> **That God may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**
>
> Ephesians 1:17

The goal is to know GOD, not to know facts about God.

THE BIG TRUTH

Knowing God more = More spiritual maturity

In this context, the word “know” carries the idea of recognition.

KNOW

to have a deep, ongoing familiarity with someone or something, recognition

Think of it this way: Parents and children recognize each other’s voices. If you are a parent and your child is on the playground with ten other kids and you hear a cry, you know instantly if it is your child because you recognize their voice. You know them so well you can even tell if it is a sad cry or an angry cry. You recognize their voice.

That’s Paul’s prayer here. He prays that we would recognize and “know” God like a parent knows their child and vice versa. His prayer is that we would be able to discern God’s voice even in a loud and noisy world.

He gets specific about the parts of God’s character that he wants them (and us) to know. He prays that we would know the **Hope** (verse 18) and the **Power** (verse 19) that Jesus offers.

HOPE

confident knowledge that something will happen in the future.

POWER

ability to bring healing and wholeness to a broken and hurting world

We learn through this prayer that the goal of the Christian life is not to gather lots of interesting facts about God, the goal is to know God Himself in a close and intimate way - to know Him, his hope, and his power. So today as we read, make this prayer your prayer.

READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

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

Reflection Questions

01 What stood out to you most from Paul's prayer in this passage? Why?

02 Paul prays that the Ephesians would have “the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” What do you think it looks like to know God rather than simply know facts about God?

03 The devotional compares knowing God’s voice to a parent recognizing their child’s voice. What are some ways we learn to recognize someone’s voice? How might that apply to recognizing God’s voice?

04 What is one practical way you could create space this week to move from simply learning about God to knowing God more personally?

Memorize Scripture

For the word of God is alive and active.

Hebrews 4:12

Memorizing Bible verses will change your faith and your life. It's like always having the power of God in your pocket to guide your choices. Scripture reminds you of God's promises and power, leads you away from temptation, allows you to help others, and so much more.

Each week on day 3 we will focus on learning a little of God's Word by heart.

Choose one verse below to memorize this week. Read it out loud at least twice:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:7

That God may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1:17

Or find a verse or passage you really need at this moment from chapter 1.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Finally, write the verse on something you will see everyday

(In your car. On your bathroom mirror or fridge.)

One trick when you start to get closer to memorizing it, you can use just the first letter of each word as a trigger to help you remember. Cover the verses above and use these to practice when you're ready.

I h w h r t h b t f o s i a w t r o G g. Ephesians 1:7

T G m g y t s o w a r s t y m k h b. Ephesians 1:17

Big Idea: The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the invisible, living presence and active power of God available as a companion for every believer.

“God is a trinity made up of three co-equal, co-eternal, co-existing persons whom the Bible refers to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” - Rooted

The Holy Spirit is God. He isn't an "it" but a Person who is with us and is in us. We give the Spirit our attention because this is a relationship with our living God. The Holy Spirit teaches, comforts, strengthens, and reminds us that we belong to God. Here’s just a few important things the Holy Spirit does in our lives:

> **HOLY SPIRIT**
> the invisible, living presence and active power of God available as a companion for every believer.

The Holy Spirit is a guarantee given to us when we believe in Jesus.

> **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 guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.**
>
> Ephesians 1:13-14

Imagine buying your first home. After the offer is accepted, you put down a deposit. That deposit is a promise that more is coming. Paul says the Holy Spirit is God's deposit in us. His presence today is a guarantee that one day we will experience God's kingdom in all its fullness. Every time the Spirit comforts, guides, convicts, or strengthens us, He reminds us that heaven is not just our future - it has already begun in us as we live out our faith.

The Holy Spirit is an invisible person helping us grow.

You cannot see the wind, but you know it is there because you see the trees move and you feel its power. In the same way, you may not see the Holy Spirit with your eyes, but you begin to notice His work: you are able to find joy even in hard times, you remember to be patient in a

tough moment, you sense conviction when you wander from God, or you discover strength to forgive someone you never thought you could. The invisible Spirit produces visible fruit.

Galatians tells us:

> **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**
>
> Galatians 5:22-23

The Holy Spirit comes alongside you in everything.

> **But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**
>
> John 14:26

Notice the word Advocate. In the original Greek, it is the word “paracletos.” In English, there is no direct one-word translation. He is the “one who is sent to help.” He is your helper, counselor, teacher, intercessor, and constant companion.

A. W. Tozer once said

"The Holy Spirit is not an optional luxury for a few; He is a vital necessity for all."

Today, take a quiet moment and simply pray: Heavenly Father, I ask that your Holy Spirit will help me recognize Your presence. Teach me to listen, trust, and follow You. Thank You that I never walk alone. Amen.

Reflection Questions

01 What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit? How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit changed (or not changed) over the years?

02 Have you ever experienced a time when you sensed the Holy Spirit guiding, comforting, convicting, or strengthening you? If you're new to faith, where would you hope to experience His presence in your life?

03 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our "Advocate" or Helper (John 14:26). What is one area of your life right now where you need His help? How might inviting the Holy Spirit into that situation change the way you approach it?

The Holy Spirit is the invisible, living presence and active power of God available as a companion for every believer.

02

WEEK TWO

What Did Jesus Rescue Me From?

DAY 1	Ephesians 2: The Rescue Plan
DAY 2	Ephesians 2: Outsiders Become Family
DAY 3	Ephesians 2: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: The Gospel

Sermon Notes

WEEK TWO

The Rescue Plan

One of the greatest themes in movies today is rescue.

From *Finding Nemo*, where a father sets out to rescue his son, to *Dunkirk*, where the British fight to save their soldiers before they're overrun by the Nazis, to *Moana*, where one person risks everything to rescue her people - we love stories where someone is willing to put everything on the line to save someone else.

And that theme is at the heart of today's reading.

In Chapter 1, we read about what God has already done for us. He blessed us by choosing us, adopting us, redeeming us, and marking us with the Holy Spirit.

Now, in Chapter 2, Paul shows us why we needed that rescue in the first place.

He begins with a sobering reality:

> **You were dead in your transgressions and sins.**
>
> Ephesians 2:1

The word “sin” describes our rebellion against God - our tendency to miss His mark and choose our own way. Paul doesn't describe our condition as simply being lost, confused, or a little bit broken. He says we were dead.

Think about a plant that has completely died. You can give it sunlight. You can water it. You can add nutrients to the soil, but there comes a point when there is nothing you can do to bring that plant back to life.

That is the picture Paul gives us.

Before Jesus, we were spiritually dead and separated from the source of life. We couldn't fix our condition through trying harder, being better, or doing more good things. We didn't need a little improvement.

We needed a rescue.

And a rescuer came.

Paul writes:

> **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.**
>
> Ephesians 2:4-5

Underline these two words: **But** and **God.**

> We were dead. **But God.**
>
> We were separated. **But God.**
>
> We couldn't save ourselves. **But God.**

God saw our condition, and because He is rich in mercy and great in love, He took action.

He made us alive with Christ. This is the greatest rescue story ever told.

God did what we could never do for ourselves. Through Jesus, He rescued us from sin and death and brought us into new life. We weren't saved because we earned it. We were saved by grace. Paul starts each letter with “Grace and peace” because through grace we are saved and given peace in Jesus.

This is the gospel - the good news about Jesus that the church is called to proclaim and that we carry into the world around us when we live out our faith and grow in the Great Commandment and Great Commission.

In, by and with Jesus, we are rescued.

And when we believe, it changes how we see everything.

We don't have to live as people who are still trying to save ourselves. We live as people who have already been rescued.

So today, as you read Ephesians 2, don't just read about something God did a long time ago.

Remember your own rescue. Remember where you were. Remember what God has done. And thank Him that what was dead has been made alive.

We were dead.

But God.

We are alive.

And the “good work” we are made to do is spread this good news.

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

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

Reflection Questions

01 The devotional says, “We didn't need a little improvement. We needed a rescue.” Why is that distinction important to understanding the gospel?

02 What does the phrase “But God” mean in the story of our salvation? What changes because God chose to take action?

03 Remember your rescue. How has Jesus changed your life?

Outsiders Become Family

We all have a tendency to create “us” and “them.”

In the 1970s, social psychologist Henri Tajfel conducted a fascinating series of experiments. He divided people into groups based on completely arbitrary criteria - sometimes something as simple as a preference for a particular artist or even the flip of a coin.

Then he gave people money and asked them to distribute it among members of the different groups.

Here's what was fascinating: even though the money-distributors knew nothing about the other people and had never met them before, they consistently favored people who were in their arbitrary group.

Tajfel's research became part of what we now know about “in-group bias” - our natural tendency to gravitate toward people we see as being like us and to distance ourselves from people we see as different.

And it happens everywhere.

We gravitate toward people who grew up like we did, speak the same language, look like us, dress like us, think like us, and believe what we believe. Sometimes, without even realizing it, we create walls between ourselves and people who are different.

We see it in our workplaces, neighborhoods, schools and even in our churches.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously observed that Sunday morning was one of the most segregated times of the week.

This isn't a new problem.

In fact, it was a major problem in the early church.

When Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, the people were divided into two very different groups.

There were the **Jews** - people who followed the Scriptures we now know as the Old Testament. Their laws, traditions, and practices set them apart from the people around them.

Secondly, there were the **Gentiles** - everyone who wasn't Jewish. Many worshiped gods like Zeus and Apollo and had no connection to the Jewish Scriptures or traditions.

For generations, these groups had been separated by culture, religion, history, and deep-rooted hostility.

They had built walls between their groups - some cultural, some religious, and sometimes even physical.

But then Jesus came, and Jesus didn't simply ask these two groups to get along.

He made them ONE.

Paul writes:

> **For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.**
>
> Ephesians 2:14

And then:

> **He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.**
>
> Ephesians 2:17

Think about what Paul is saying. Jesus tears down the walls. The people who were far away are brought near. The outsiders become family. The “us and them” becomes “we.” This is one of the most beautiful things about the church. The church isn't a group of people who are all alike. It's a group of people who were once far from God who have been brought near through Jesus.

> Different ethnicities.
>
> Different ages.
>
> Different backgrounds.
>
> Different political opinions.

> Different personalities.
>
> Different experiences with faith.

And yet we share one Savior, one Father, one Spirit, and one family.

That means following Jesus confronts our instinct to build protective groups around ourselves. We don't get to decide who belongs based on who looks like us, thinks like us, or comes from the same background.

Jesus has already decided who belongs: everyone who comes to Him.

And if the heart of Jesus is to bring people near, then the heart of His church should be the same. Because when we understand how far God was willing to go to bring us near, our hearts begin to change. We become people who bring others near, too.

In Jesus, outsiders become family.

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22

[11]Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called
"uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in
the body by human hands)— [12]remember that at that time you were separate
from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of
the promise, without hope and without God in the world. [13]But now in Christ Jesus
you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14]For
he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the
barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15]by setting aside in his flesh the law with its
commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new
humanity out of the two, thus making peace, [16]and in one body to reconcile both of
them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. [17]He came
and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were
near. [18]For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.
[19]Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens
with God's people and also members of his household, [20]built on the foundation of
the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. [21]In
him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the
Lord. [22]And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which
God lives by his Spirit.

Reflection Questions

01 Why do you think people naturally create "us" and "them" groups? What are some groups or differences that can create those divisions today?

02 The devotional says, “The people who were far away are brought near. The outsiders become family.” When have you experienced a community where you truly felt welcomed and brought near? What made you feel that way?

03 Think honestly about these questions: Who do I naturally see as “us”? Who do I tend to see as “them”? What kinds of people might you naturally distance yourself from?

04 How does Jesus unite us?

Memorize Scripture

We memorize a lot of things without even trying - our phone number, our favorite song lyrics, the route to work. The things we repeat become part of us. The same is true of God's Word.

As you hide God's Word in your heart, you'll discover that He uses it to shape your mind, strengthen your faith, and draw you closer to Him.

Choose one that speaks to you today and read it out loud at least twice:

> **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.**
>
> Ephesians 2:4-5

> **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.**
>
> Ephesians 2:8

Or find a verse or passage you really need at this moment from chapter 2.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Try praying the verse back to God:

For example:

Father, thank You for Your great love for me. Thank You that You are rich in mercy and that You made me alive with Christ. Help me remember today that I am saved by grace, not by my own effort. Ephesians 2:4-5

Father, thank you that I am saved by your grace, through faith. I know this is not from me, it is a gift from you. Ephesians 2:8

Set a one-minute timer each day and repeat it til you've got it!

Remember last week's memory verse?

I h w h r t h b t f o s i a w t r o G g. Ephesians 1:7

T G m g y t s o w a r s t y m k h b. Ephesians 1:17

Big Idea: The Gospel

The word *gospel* simply means "good news." But it raises an important question:

Good news about what?

The answer = Jesus

The good news is that God saw our greatest need and did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He came to earth to give us grace and love in a way we could understand.

> **He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**
>
> 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Jesus, the Son of God, entered our world and lived the life we were unable to live - a life of perfect love and complete obedience to the Father. Then, on the cross, He willingly took our place. The consequence of our sin fell on Him instead of us. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, defeating sin, death, and the grave once and for all.

That's the good news of the gospel.

The cross is where God's justice and God's love meet. God didn't ignore our sin; He dealt with it completely through Jesus. Because Jesus walked out of the tomb alive, everyone who places their trust in Him can be forgiven, made new, and welcomed into God's family.

That is grace. Grace is God paying the price because we matter to Him.

Imagine you owe a debt so large you'll never repay it. Every payment you make barely touches the interest. Then one day, someone walks into the bank, pays the debt in full, and hands you the receipt stamped, "Paid." You didn't earn it. You couldn't afford it. You can simply receive it with gratitude.

That picture only scratches the surface of what Jesus has done for us.

Tim Keller wrote, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

This is why Christianity is different from religions built on human achievement. Religion says, "Do enough, and maybe you'll reach God." The gospel says, "God has come to you and done it all."

> **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.**
>
> Ephesians 2:4-5

God. *God loved. God showed mercy. God made us alive. God saved.*

When Jesus died on the cross, He declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The work of salvation was complete. Nothing can be added to it.

Today, if you've never trusted Jesus, the invitation is simple: receive the gift He has already purchased for you. Do what it says in Romans. Declare with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

> **If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**
>
> Romans 10:9

And if you already follow Him, remember that the same grace that saved you is the grace that sustains you. You don't have to earn God's love today. In Christ, you already have it.

It's the best news the world has ever heard.

Reflection Questions

01 After reading today's devotional, how would you explain the gospel to a friend in one or two sentences?

02 The devotional says, "We receive God. We do not achieve God." Which of those two ways of thinking comes more naturally to you? Why do you think that is?

03 The illustration describes Jesus paying a debt you could never repay. How does that picture help you understand God's grace? Is there another illustration that helps the gospel make sense to you?

03

WEEK THREE

What Kind of People is God Creating?

DAY 1	Ephesians 3: One Family
DAY 2	Ephesians 3: Strength Through Prayer
DAY 3	Ephesians 3: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: A Different Kind of Power
BONUS	Prayer Experience

Sermon Notes

WEEK THREE

One Family

We all want to belong.

We want to know that there is a place where we are known, valued, and wanted. A place where we don't have to pretend to be someone we're not.

That is what church is meant to be - us being our real selves as we grow in our faith.

But when we hear the word church, we often think about a building.

We say things like, “I go to church.” “I love my church.” “I'm frustrated with my church.”

But the church isn't a building. The church is people.

We know this. If someone says, “I was hurt by the church,” we know they weren't hurt by a building. They were hurt by people.

When The Crossing shows up in our community to provide shoes for kids in Newport-Mesa Unified School District, it isn't the building that shows up.

It's the people. We are the church.

That's what makes Paul's words in Ephesians 3 so powerful.

Paul talks about a mystery that God has revealed through Jesus:

> **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**
>
> Ephesians 3:6

The mystery is this: God takes radically different people and makes them one family. (Clearly, it is so important that we come together across our differences, as this is a theme Paul comes back to repeatedly throughout his letters.)

People who once had nothing in common, become one body in Jesus.

People should be able to look at the church and wonder: “What on earth could possibly unite all of these people?”

The answer is Jesus.

In fact, our differences become part of our witness.

When someone sees a church full of people who are radically different from one another and are choosing to love, serve, forgive, and follow Jesus together, they see something the world can't easily explain.

That's the mystery.

And we know from our previous reading that this doesn't happen automatically.

Our natural tendency is to gravitate toward people who are like us. That's why following Jesus means intentionally reaching beyond our comfortable circles and making room for people who are different from us - especially for people who are far from God.

Paul understood this personally.

> **I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.**
>
> Ephesians 3:7

Paul saw his life as an opportunity to carry the good news of Jesus to people who were far from God and invite them into this new gathering - The Church.

So can we. You have people in your life that others will never meet. People with different stories, different questions, different struggles, and different backgrounds. You have a unique opportunity to help them discover Jesus.

So as you read Ephesians 3 today, don't just think about the church as a place you attend.

Think about yourself as part of the church - God's family, Christ's body, and His hands and feet in the world.

READ EPHESIANS 3:1-13

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
[2]Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, [3]that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. [4]In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5]which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [6]This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. [7]I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8]Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, [9]and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10]His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11]according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12]In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. [13]I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Reflection Questions

01 Paul calls the gospel a “mystery” because God brings radically different people together through Jesus. What do you think people should see in a healthy church that makes them wonder, “What could possibly unite these people?”

02 Who is God inviting you to move toward? Is there someone who is different from you - or perhaps far from God - with whom you could intentionally build a relationship and share the love of Jesus?

03 What could you do to feel more part of the body of believers? Could you take a step to attend service more often? Could you start volunteering? Ask God to nudge you toward more participation.

Strength Through Prayer

Has anyone ever prayed for you in a moment when you really needed it?

Whenever Andrew thinks about some of the most meaningful moments of his life, many of them involve someone coming alongside him when he needs it most and simply asking the question, “Can I pray for you?”

There is something powerful about knowing that someone sees what you're going through and is willing to bring your need, your struggle, or your hopes before God.

There is power in prayer.

In fact, in 1998 there was a study done by Randolph Byrd where he took 400 hospital patients and divided them into 2 groups. For one group, he had people pray for them as they received medical care. The second group received no prayer, just medical care. The first group, who had people regularly praying for them, had fewer complications and illnesses and were released from the hospital sooner. Prayer is powerful.

As we reach the halfway point of Ephesians, Paul pauses and prays for the people in the church at Ephesus. He knows the power of prayer.

There are two parts of Paul's prayer to notice.

Strength for the Journey

First, Paul prays:

> **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.**
>
> Ephesians 3:16

Think about a marathon runner. Runners talk about hitting “the wall” - that moment late in the race when their body and mind are telling them they can't take another step.

What does a runner need at that moment? Not criticism. Not someone reminding them that they should have trained harder. They need someone who knows what they're going through

to come alongside them and say, “Keep going. You can do this.” Sometimes they actually need someone to even run the next few miles *with* them.

Most of us will never run a marathon, but we all know what it feels like to hit a wall.

Maybe it's...

> a marriage that feels impossible.
>
> a difficult relationship with a family member.
>
> financial stress that doesn't seem to end.
>
> a spiritual struggle that has gone on for years.
>
> a health challenge that has worn you down.

There are moments when we wonder, “How much longer can I keep going?”

If you've ever been there, Paul's prayer is for you.

Paul reminds us that we don't have to rely on our own strength. God's Spirit is with us in our inner being, strengthening us from the inside.

God doesn't always remove difficult circumstances. But He promises that we don't have to face them alone.

A Love Bigger Than We Can Imagine

Secondly, Paul prays:

> **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 3:17-18

Paul isn't praying that they would simply know *about* God's love. He’s praying again that we would *KNOW* God.

We can hear, “God loves you,” and not be amazed by it.

Because knowing something intellectually isn't the same as experiencing its depth.

Think about the ocean.

People spend their entire lives studying it, and yet there is still so much we don't understand. It's vast, deep, and full of things we haven't discovered.

Paul gives us a similar picture of God's love.

We can spend our entire lives discovering more of it.

The more we experience God's love, the more we realize how deeply it sustains us, changes us, gives us hope, and reminds us that we are never alone.

And notice what Paul connects together:

God's power strengthens us. God's love surrounds us.

We need both. We need His strength when we feel like giving up. We need His love when we wonder if we are enough, if He is near, or if He really cares.

So today, as you read Ephesians 3, make Paul's prayer your own.

> Ask God to strengthen you where you feel weak.
>
> Ask Him to help you keep going where you've been tempted to give up.
>
> And ask Him to help you discover the depth of His love in a way that feels new.

May you know the power of the God who helps you keep going, and the love of the God who never lets you go.

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21

A PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

[14]For this reason I kneel before the Father, [15]from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. [16]I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17]so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18]may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19]and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. [20]Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, [21]to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Reflection Questions

01 Where in your life do you feel like you are "hitting the wall" right now? What would it look like to ask God to strengthen you through His Spirit rather than trying to rely only on your own strength?

02 Paul prays that the Ephesians would be strengthened “in your inner being.” What do you think it means to be strengthened on the inside, even when your circumstances haven't changed?

03 Paul prays that we would understand “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” What makes it difficult for us to fully receive or believe God's love? What helps you experience it?

Memorize Scripture

We all have an inner voice that shapes the way we think, respond, and live. Sometimes that voice speaks truth, but often it's filled with fear, doubt, comparison, or discouragement.

Memorizing Scripture is one way we invite God's voice to become louder than all the others.

When God's Word lives in your heart, the Holy Spirit brings it to mind exactly when you need it - when you're anxious, making a decision, facing temptation, or simply needing hope. You may not remember every sermon you've heard, but the verses you've hidden in your heart have a way of staying with you for a lifetime.

Choose one that speaks to you today and read it out loud at least twice:

> **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 3:17-18

> **Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.**
>
> Ephesians 3:20

Or choose a scripture that speaks to your life today.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Play fill in the blank (cover the full verses above)

And I pray that you, being _____ and established in _____, may have _____ together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how _____ and _____ and _____ and _____ is the love of Christ. Ephesians 3:17-18

Now to him who is able to do _____ more than all we ask or _____, according to his _____ that is at work within _____. Ephesians 3:20

Set a one minute timer each day and repeat it til you've got it!

Big Idea: A Different Kind of Power

When you hear the word “power” what comes to mind?

Maybe it's physical strength, political influence, wealth, success, the ability to control a situation or get your way.

The Bible paints a very different picture.

As Paul prays for the church in Ephesus, he doesn't pray that they would become more successful, more comfortable, or more influential. He prays for something deeper.

> **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19]and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**
>
> Ephesians 3:16-19

Notice where God's power begins.

> Not in our circumstances.
>
> Not in our careers.
>
> Not in our bank accounts.
>
> Not in our ability to control what happens around us.

God's power begins within us - strengthening our hearts and connecting us more deeply to His love.

The greatest demonstration of God's power isn't changing what is happening around us. Often, it is changing what is happening within us.

But this doesn't mean God is asking us to become perfect people who have it all together. God's power doesn't require our perfection. It meets us in our weakness.

Paul experienced this firsthand. When he asked God to remove a struggle from his life, God's answer was:

> **My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**
>
> 2 Corinthians 12:9

God's power is not something we earn by becoming stronger. It is something we receive by surrendering to Him. This is a power we can put our full weight on.

It's the kind of power that transforms ordinary people into people who look more and more like Jesus - in the middle of real life.

Jesus Himself lived completely dependent on the Father's power. Throughout His life, He showed that true power doesn't come from control or independence, but from being connected to God.

When His disciples wondered what was possible, Jesus said:

> **With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**
>
> Matthew 19:26

Notice those two words:

With God.

That is where our power comes from.

The goal of the Christian life isn't simply trying harder to become a better version of ourselves. It is learning to walk *with* God and allowing His power to transform us from the inside out.

Because it is God's power and God's love that truly changes our lives.

And this power isn't just for spiritual moments. It is practical power for everyday life.

Peter reminds us:

> **His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.**
>
> 2 Peter 1:3

And Paul writes later:

> **For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.**
>
> 2 Timothy 1:7

When God gives us power, it is not a power over other people or our circumstances, it is a power to become more like Jesus - to live *with* God.

Today, you do not have to live by your own strength.

The God who created Heaven and Earth, who raised Jesus from the dead in the most powerful moment of human history, is at work in you through His Spirit. His power is enough for whatever He has called you to do today.

Ask Him to strengthen you in your inner being, root you deeper in His love, and help you live by His kind of power - at work, in your family, with your friends, and in your own heart and mind. Real power is living with God everyday.

Reflection Questions

01 How is the Bible's picture of God's power different from the way our culture usually defines power?

02 Paul says God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Why do you think God chooses to meet us in our weakness instead of waiting until we have everything figured out?

03 Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." What is one situation, challenge, or area of your life where you need to trust God's power instead of relying only on your own strength?

The greatest demonstration of God's power isn't changing what is happening around you. It is changing what is happening within you.

Prayer Experience

Prayer isn't about saying the perfect words or getting the formula right. Prayer is simply being with God - talking to Him, listening to Him, and allowing Him to shape our hearts.

This experience is an opportunity to create space and spend intentional time with God. You can do this with your small group, family, or friends.

Begin Together | 30 Minutes

Gather your group and begin with a short devotional or a passage of Scripture.

Some Ideas:

Psalm 8 — Wonder and worship

Psalm 19 — God reveals Himself

Psalm 34 — God is near to the brokenhearted

Psalm 121 — God watches over us

Psalm 138 — God hears and responds

After reading, spend a few minutes talking together about what you noticed.

Then talk about prayer. Prayer is more than asking God for things. It is a relationship. It is talking with God and learning to listen to Him. What do you think about prayer?

Talk together about what you hope for in this prayer time.

Before you begin your individual prayer time, choose a place where you can be alone and will not be interrupted. Put away your phone and find a comfortable place to sit or walk.

Individual Prayer | 30–60 Minutes

Spend the next 30 - 60 minutes alone with God.

You don't have to follow this structure perfectly. Let it be a guide, not a checklist. Spend more time in the places where you sense God inviting you to stay.

Adoration

Begin by simply worshiping God. What do you love about Him? What have you seen about His character? What attributes of God give you confidence today?

Confession

Ask God to show you anything you need to surrender. Where have you made mistakes? Where have you missed His best? Where have you allowed fear, pride, anger, comparison, selfishness, or control to lead you?

Confession isn't about beating yourself up. It's about bringing what's hidden into the light and receiving God's forgiveness and grace.

Thanksgiving

Spend time thanking God. Thank Him for the big things. Then look for the small things to thank Him for as well.

Ask

Now ask. What do you need from God? What are you afraid of? What are you hoping for? Bring all of it to God.

Listen

After you've talked, stop. Be still. Ask: “God, is there anything You want me to know?”

You may want to sit quietly for several minutes.

A thought may come to mind. A Scripture may surface. You may become aware of something God is inviting you to do, surrender, or change.

Debrief Together | 30 Minutes

Come back together and give everyone a little time to settle in.

What was this experience like for you? What did you notice about yourself? What did you notice about God?

As you debrief, listen to one another without trying to fix, interpret, or explain someone's experience. Celebrate what God may be doing and give people space to wrestle with what they experienced.

04

WEEK FOUR

How Does My New Identity Change How I Live?

DAY 1	Ephesians 4: Serving One Another
DAY 2	Ephesians 4: Surrender & Transformation
DAY 3	Ephesians 4: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: Better Together
BONUS	Serve Experience

Sermon Notes

WEEK FOUR

Serving One Another

Have you ever seen someone so confident that they stopped listening to other perspectives?

Sometimes success can convince us that we already have all the answers. Instead of staying curious and learning from others, we begin to believe that we don't really need anyone else.

One famous example is the history of Blockbuster Video.

At the height of its success, Blockbuster had more than 9,000 stores and dominated the movie rental industry. Then a young entrepreneur named Marc Randolph approached the company about a small startup that mailed DVDs directly to people's homes.

Blockbuster executives laughed at the idea that this tiny company could ever compete with them.

That startup was Netflix.

Ten years later, Blockbuster filed for bankruptcy while Netflix had transformed the way people watched movies.

Business schools often tell this story as a warning about pride. Pride causes us to stop listening and dismiss learning.

That same truth appears at the turning point of Ephesians.

Up to this point, Paul has spent three chapters reminding us of everything God has done for us.

> God chose us.
>
> He adopted us.
>
> He redeemed us.
>
> He made us alive.
>
> He made us one family.

But when we reach Chapter 4, the letter shifts.

Chapters 1–3 are about what God has done for us.

Chapters 4–6 are about how we now live because of what God has done.

The first quality Paul talks about is **humility**.

> **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**
>
> Ephesians 4:2

That's not an accident.

Humility is the doorway to growth.

Humility doesn't mean thinking less of yourself or pretending you don't have gifts. It means thinking about yourself less so that you can notice the people around you.

When we're consumed with ourselves - our comfort, our preferences, our schedule - we often miss the opportunities God places right in front of us.

Humility helps us see, and it helps us ask:

Who needs encouragement? Who needs help? Where could I serve? What has God uniquely gifted me to do? What can I learn today?

That's where Paul takes us next. He explains that Jesus has given gifts to His people and that church leaders are called to do what we read here:

> **...to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.**
>
> Ephesians 4:12

Notice that pastors weren't meant to do all the ministry. The church staff wasn't meant to carry all the work. Their role is to help equip God's people for works of service.

Your gifts aren't accidents. God has placed them in you so that you can help build up His church and serve the people around you.

Using those gifts will often require us to risk our comfort. Serving might mean showing up when you'd rather stay home. It might mean talking to someone you don't know. It might mean trying something new. It might mean discovering a gift you didn't even realize you had.

But here's the beautiful thing:

When we stop asking, “What's in it for me?” and begin asking, “How can God use me?” something changes.

We grow. The church grows. And people experience the love of Jesus through us.

So today, as you read Ephesians 4, pay attention to the shift.

The question is no longer simply, “What has God done for me?”

It becomes: “Because of everything God has done for me, how will I live?”

You don't have to do everything. But God has given you something, and in humility, He invites you to use it.

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-16

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you
have received. [2]Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one
another in love. [3]Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond
of peace. [4]There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope
when you were called; [5]one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6]one God and Father of
all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7]But to each one of us grace has been
given as Christ apportioned it. [8]This is why it says:

> *"When he ascended on high,*
> *he took many captives*
> *and gave gifts to his people."*

[9](What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower,
earthly regions? [10]He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all
the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) [11]So Christ himself gave the
apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [12]to equip his
people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13]until we all
reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become
mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. [14]Then we will no
longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there
by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their
deceitful scheming. [15]Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in
every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. [16]From him
the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and
builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Reflection Questions

01 Paul begins this section by calling us to humility. What does humility look like in your life, and why do you think Paul connects humility with spiritual growth?

02 What gifts, abilities, passions, or experiences has God given you that could be used to serve others? How have you seen those gifts make a difference?

03 The devotional asks us to move from “What has God done for me?” to “Because of everything God has done for me, how will I live?” What is one specific way you feel God may be inviting you to serve or use your gifts in this season?

Surrender & Transformation

Henri Nouwen, one of the most influential spiritual writers of the 20th century, once met a group of trapeze artists called the Flying Rodleighs.

After watching them fly through the air, performing incredible acrobatic stunts high above the ground, Nouwen asked the leader of the troupe some questions:

“How do you do it? How can you fly through the air, let go of the trapeze, and trust that your partner will catch you?” The response surprised him.

“The secret,” the trapeze artist explained, “is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything.”

Nouwen was confused. “You do nothing?”

“Nothing,” the man repeated. “The worst thing the flyer can do is try to catch the catcher. A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch.”

The flyer has to let go. They have to trust the person who is catching them. They have to surrender control.

And that's a powerful picture of what it means to follow Jesus and experience his life-changing ways.

Transformation begins with surrender.

We often think becoming more like Jesus means trying harder - being more disciplined, more patient, more generous, more forgiving. But the Christian life isn't ultimately about trying harder to become someone different. It's about surrendering more of ourselves to the One who is transforming us.

Surrender means releasing our grip on control and trusting Jesus with our lives.

That is hard. We want to control the outcome at work. We want to control what our kids do and how they turn out. We want to control our relationships, our reputation, our finances, our future. But when we insist on being in control, we often end up making choices that pull us away from the person God created us to be. We can get selfish, mean, manipulative, or dishonest in order to keep control.

Today, we are invited to surrender, and it starts with knowing that without God's help, we do not understand reality. Paul puts it this way:

> **They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**
>
> Ephesians 4:18

When we live according to our own desires and try to control our lives on our own terms, it can lead to lying or half-truths, uncontrolled anger, bitterness, selfishness, and broken relationships. We think somewhere deep down that we *have* to be mean, dishonest, manipulative... but it's not the truth in God's reality. It is through surrendering our pride and learning to live a new way that we see the light.

Paul gets really practical here in chapter 4.

He isn't simply giving us a list of bad behaviors. He's showing us what happens when we live from the old self instead of allowing Jesus to lead us. He tells them and us to let those old behaviors go.

> **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**
>
> Ephesians 4:22-24

God doesn't just forgive who we were. He is transforming who we are becoming.

We don't have to manufacture that transformation on our own. God is doing the work in us. But we have a part to play. We make new choices.

> When Jesus invites us to forgive, we choose forgiveness.
>
> When He invites us to tell the truth, we choose honesty.
>
> When He invites us to serve, we step outside our comfort.
>
> When He asks us to trust Him with something we can't control, we open our hands and let go.

Surrender isn't passive. It's actively choosing to let Jesus lead.

The flyer doesn't simply fall through the air. The flyer stretches out their arms, releases the bar, and trusts the catcher. That's what surrender can look like for us.

READ EPHESIANS 4:17-32

[17]So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. [18]They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. [19]Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. [20]That, however, is not the way of life you learned [21]when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. [22]You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23]to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24]and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. [25]Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. [26]"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27]and do not give the devil a foothold. [28]Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. [29]Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. [30]And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31]Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32]Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Reflection Questions

01 Paul describes an “old self” and a “new self.” As you read this passage, what differences do you notice between the way the old self lives and the way the new self lives?

02 What does surrender mean to you? Where is it easiest for you to trust Jesus and where is it hardest to release control?

03 Paul gets very practical: tell the truth, deal with anger, stop stealing, use words to build others up, get rid of bitterness, and forgive. Which of these changes feels most challenging for you right now? Why?

Memorize Scripture

This week, we are memorizing Scripture that reminds us what it looks like to live as people who have been changed by Jesus.

In Ephesians 1-3, Paul reminds us of everything God has done for us: He chose us, adopted us, forgave us, gave us new life, and filled us with His Spirit. In Ephesians 4, Paul begins to answer the question: "If this is who we are in Christ, how should we live?"

Memorizing Scripture helps us carry God's truth with us. These verses remind us that following Jesus is not just about what we believe - it changes how we treat people, how we respond to challenges, how we grow, and how we live.

Choose one that speaks to you today and read it out loud at least twice:

> **As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**
>
> Ephesians 4:1-3

> **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 4:15

Or choose a scripture that speaks to your life today.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Try going for a walk while you repeat the verse to yourself

Start at the beginning and add 1-2 words at at time til you can get the entire thing

Set a one minute timer each day and repeat it til you've got it!

WEEK FOUR — DAY FOUR

Big Idea: Better Together

We live in a world that celebrates independence.

We admire people who can make it on their own, build their own success, and never need anyone else.

But from the very beginning, God had a different vision for His people.

Following Jesus was never meant to be a solo journey.

As Paul begins the second half of Ephesians, his focus shifts from what God has done for us to how we now live together. He writes:

> **As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**
>
> Ephesians 4:1-3

Notice what Paul doesn't say.

He doesn't say, "*Create* unity." He says, "*Keep* the unity of the Spirit." Why?

Because our unity isn't something we manufacture. It's something God has already created through Jesus. Our job is to protect it, nurture it, and live like it's true.

That doesn't mean unity is easy.

Humility is hard. Patience is hard. Bearing with one another is hard.

Anyone who's been part of a family, a friendship, a marriage, or a church knows that people can be messy. Including ourselves.

That's why Paul points us back to God's Spirit. Unity isn't the result of everyone agreeing on everything. It's the result of people who have been transformed by Jesus learning to love one another in the Spirit.

Jesus prayed for this before He went to the cross:

> **My prayer is... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... Then the world will know that you sent me.**
>
> John 17:20-21

Think about that.

One of the greatest ways the world sees Jesus is through the love and unity of His people. That doesn't mean we ignore our differences. In fact, Paul celebrates them.

Writing to another church, he says:

> **Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:27

A body only works because every part is different.

Eyes don't compete with hands.

Feet don't compare themselves to ears.

Each part has a unique role, but they all belong to one body.

The same is true in the church.

God never intended for everyone to think the same, serve the same, or have the same gifts. Diversity is not a problem to solve - it's part of God's design. Our unity is found not in our sameness but in our shared life in Christ.

The church is at its best when every person uses their unique gifts to help the whole body flourish.

And the church is at its best when each of us chooses God's way instead of the ways of the world. Maybe today your next step is simple.

> Choose patience instead of frustration.
>
> Choose humility instead of needing to be right.
>
> Choose forgiveness instead of holding onto resentment.

Every act of love strengthens the unity God has already given His people.

Today, thank God that you don't have to follow Jesus alone. Ask Him to help you love His church, serve His people, and remember that together we are the body of Christ.

Reflection Questions

01 Which quality in Ephesians 4:2 - humility, gentleness, patience, or bearing with one another in love - is the easiest for you? Which one is the most difficult? Why?

02 Paul compares the church to a body, where every part has a unique role. What gifts, experiences, or abilities has God given you that could strengthen the people around you?

03 Is there a relationship in your family, church, workplace, or community where God may be inviting you to choose humility, patience, forgiveness, or peace this week? What would that look like?

Serve Experience

Faith isn't just something we learn. It's something we live.

Throughout this study, we've been exploring what it means to follow Jesus – to love God, love others, and become more like Him. Now it's time to put that faith into action.

Step 1: Gather Your People

Choose who you'd like to serve with. This could be your small group, your family, or a few friends.

Step 2: Look for a Need

Take some time to look around your community and ask:

Where is there a need we could help meet?

Think about The Crossing, your neighborhood, your workplace, a local school, or an organization serving people in need.

Step 3: Make a Plan

Once you find a need, decide together what you're going to do, who will participate, and when you'll do it. Keep it simple.

The Serve Experience doesn't need to take an entire day. What matters is making the intentional choice to step outside your normal routine and use your time, energy, and gifts to serve others.

Step 4: Serve

Show up with a willing heart.

Pay attention to the people you're serving. Look for opportunities to encourage them. Remember you're not simply completing a project. You're practicing the way of Jesus.

Step 5: Reflect Together

Afterward, take some time to talk about the experience.

What did we learn about ourselves?

Where did we see God at work?

Serving is one of the foundational ways we become like Jesus.

Because following Jesus isn't just about what we learn. It's about how we live.

Because of everything God has done for me, how will I live?

05

WEEK FIVE

What Does It Look Like to Walk in Love?

DAY 1	Ephesians 5: Walking in Love
DAY 2	Ephesians 5: Christ-Centered Relationships
DAY 3	Ephesians 5: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: A Better Master

Sermon Notes

WEEK FIVE

WEEK FIVE — DAY ONE

Walking in Love

Pastors officiate a lot of funerals. Often, there are unspoken questions and answers that bubble up in everyone in attendance:

“Did this person love well?”

“With their life, did they go out of their way to love their friends and family? Did they love their community, did they ever sacrifice for a person in need? Did they give up time to help a kid struggling in school, or a friend whose marriage was hurting? Did they love people well? Because at the end of our lives, no one will care about our income, influence, intelligence.”

What matters is that we lived a life of loving people well and that is the heart of chapter five of which Paul begins with this incredible sentence:

> **Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.**
>
> Ephesians 5:1-2

Think about what walking really is. It’s an ongoing decision to move forward. Walking is a slower deliberate action we take to move to a preferred destination. Walking will rarely impress anyone, but walk long enough in the same direction and you will cover a lot of ground.

That’s the hope here. That we would walk in the way of love. Everyday we move towards loving God and loving others well, and how do we best do that?

Paul answers this in the very same verse: **follow God’s example**.

Think about a young child who imitates everything their mother or father does. That is how we grow. We dedicate time and energy towards imitating and living like Jesus. So as we move away from our old life (our old self described last week in chapter 4) through surrender, what we move towards are the habits of Jesus.

We walk away from things like:

Sexual Immorality (verse 3) It’s the Greek word: “porneia” (where we get the word pornography). Sexual immorality is the taking of a good gift that God gave us (sex and sexual desire) and using it outside of His design for marriage. This word can mean lusting after people or images, sexual activity outside of a marriage relationship, and any other illicit sexual behavior.

Greed (Verse 3) Instead of lusting for people this is the lust for money. It is the belief that ultimately my life would be better and happier if I just had more money. It is an insatiable hunger for more and more money.

Course Joking (verse 4) While on the surface this one may not seem like a big deal, Paul understands that our words matter. When we tell jokes that disparage or degrade someone else, when we use our words to cut someone down… we are moving away from God and our new self. Doing those things and then playing it off with "Oh I was just kidding" has an incredibly damaging effect on others and on ourselves.

Drunkenness (verse 18) Paul isn't warning against having a drink. He's addressing what happens when alcohol (or any substance) takes over our thoughts and behavior. Drunkenness means surrendering control to something that pulls us away from God.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit

Ephesians 5:18

As we read, we begin to see what it looks like to walk in trust and surrender to Jesus. We see what it is like to move with the Spirit… to be filled with the Spirit with a new life forming. Here are things we do instead:

Speak to one another in hymns (verse 19). We use our words to encourage and bless. We use our words to point others to the grace and peace Jesus offers.

Sing and make music to your heart (verse 19) We worship God privately and publicly. We do this with music, and also in the way we live our lives.

Always giving thanks to God (verse 20) Our lives are marked by gratitude, not just for what God has given us, but also for who God is and the spiritual blessings he has given us. (Week 1 of this study)

So, today as we read, we continue to reflect on what it looks like to live in surrender and walk everyday with Jesus. The journey towards growth and transformation is never fast, but always impactful.

READ EPHESIANS 5:1-20

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children [2]and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [3]But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4]Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. [5]For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. [6]Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. [7]Therefore do not be partners with them. [8]For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9](for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10]and find out what pleases the Lord. [11]Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12]It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. [13]But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. [14]This is why it is said:

> *"Wake up, sleeper,*
> *rise from the dead,*
> *and Christ will shine on you."*

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

Reflection Questions

01 Paul says to “walk in the way of love.” What does walking in love look like in everyday life? What are some ways we can love people that don't necessarily feel dramatic or significant?

02 Our reading today focused on transformation and walking in love to be more and more like Jesus. That doesn’t happen until we get honest about where we are currently struggling (or walking in darkness). Chapter 5 gives us a list of areas that move us away from the love of God. What areas are you struggling with the most?

03 Paul contrasts these old patterns with being “filled with the Spirit.” What do you think it looks like in practical terms to be led by the Holy Spirit in your everyday choices?

Christ-Centered Relationships

Often, we see incredibly misleading headlines from news organizations.

Take this example: *"NASA spends millions on a pen that can write in space"*

A headline like this is designed to communicate how the government wastes money rather than the fact that they designed a pen for space. The headline is designed to mislead us. It leaves out important context. For example, writing in space with a pencil releases small pieces of graphite which poses a risk to delicate instruments and can clog air filters that are necessary to sustain life. So, making a pen that works to assuage this from happening is important, and while it might be technically true that millions of dollars were spent, this one sentence pulled from the context of the larger story can create a lot of damage and lead us away from what is actually true.

Unfortunately, that's what happened with Ephesians 5 as Paul, the author, talks about marriage. Throughout history, people have pulled individual verses or sentences and taken them out of context to mean something Paul never intended.

For example:

> **Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.**
>
> Ephesians 5:22

This verse has unfortunately been used countless times to create unhealthy dynamics in marriage relationships. It has been used to justify that men get to do, say, and go where they want in marriage while wives must "submit" and just be ok with whatever their husband chooses. This verse has even been used to justify verbal, physical or sexual abuse in relationships. Which is completely contrary to God's heart for marriage and God's heart for every single person.

In fact, in instances of abuse, the greatest act of love and trust in God we can make is to get help immediately and remove ourselves from the situation.

With all that said, today we get the joy of putting these verses back into the context in which they were written and get the FULL picture of what it looks like to walk in love in all relationships, including marriage.

The first words we will read today are:

> **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 5:21

Each one of us is called to submit to each other. Submission isn't something just women are called to do. It's something all followers of Jesus are called to do together.

Which brings us to the question, what does it mean to submit?

Submission means to willingly trust the intentions and actions of another. It's to place someone else above ourselves. For example, if I go to a doctor and the doctor tells me to stop eating so much fat, submission means I trust the doctor's intentions and I choose to obey the directive.

If you want to follow God's example, especially in our relationships, we need to submit and trust the words and intentions of the other person.

Now, it is important to note, Paul never asks us to blindly follow other people who are set on hurting us. All of chapter 4 and 5 assume a partnership that is earnestly seeking to look more and more like Jesus.

So, in marriage, as a husband and wife strive to grow and walk in love, a relationship should not involve just the wife's submission, but *mutual* submission.

The following verse is also a call to submission:

> **Husbands love their wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for the church.**
>
> Ephesians 5:25

Husbands are to love their wives just like Jesus loved the church, giving His life in service of her and their marriage. The heart is one of mutual submission and sacrifice where couples choose to walk in love and live like Jesus.

And here's how this applies to us today: if we are married, we look to serve and submit to our spouse not out of duty or obligation, but out of love. If we are single, we should ensure that any romantic relationship centers on growing in the grace and love Jesus offers. Even in our close friendships, we can look for ways to submit to one another.

For anyone in a relationship where you might desire to seek God but your spouse doesn't. We choose to serve and love.

READ EPHESIANS 5:21-33

[21]Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. [22]Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. [23]For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. [24]Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. [25]Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26]to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, [27]and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. [28]In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29]After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— [30]for we are members of his body. [31]"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." [32]This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. [33]However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Reflection Questions

01 Paul begins this section with "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." What do you think mutual submission looks like in a healthy relationship?

02 The devotional defines submission as “willingly trusting the intentions and actions of another.” How is this different from simply doing whatever someone tells you to do?

03 Paul calls husbands to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” What does Christ's example teach us about what sacrificial love actually looks like?

Memorize Scripture

Following Jesus doesn't happen by accident.

The more we fill our minds with His Word the more our hearts begin to reflect His heart.

Memorizing Scripture is one way we stay close to Jesus. As His words become part of us, they shape our thoughts, guide our decisions, and remind us how to love, forgive, and live. We don't memorize Scripture to check a spiritual box - we memorize it because we want to become more like the One we follow.

Choose one that speaks to you today and read it out loud at least twice:

> **Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.**
>
> Ephesians 5:1-2

> **Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
>
> Ephesians 5:18-20

Or choose a scripture that speaks to your life right now.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Try breaking it into phrases and learn each phrase:

Follow God's example, therefore,
as dearly loved children
and walk in the way of love,
just as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit,
speaking to one another
with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.
Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,
always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Set a one minute timer each day and repeat it til you've got it!

Big Idea: A Better Master

Some passages in the Bible are inspiring the first time we read them. Others are difficult. Just like our reading on Day two this week, there are parts in Ephesians 6 that can be confusing or misunderstood. So as we talk about submission, let's talk about freedom or the lack thereof.

Paul writes:

> **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear... as you would obey Christ... And masters, treat your slaves in the same way... Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**
>
> Ephesians 6:5,9

For many readers today, these verses raise an honest question:

Why doesn't Paul simply condemn slavery?

To understand this passage, we need to step back and look at the bigger story of the Bible.

From the beginning, God's design was never slavery. Every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), which means every human being has equal dignity and worth. God's desire has always been relationships marked by love, justice, and freedom - not domination.

But sin broke the world.

Human beings began using power to control, exploit, and oppress one another. Slavery became one of the many tragic results of a fallen world.

Throughout the Old Testament, God placed limits on slavery in a culture where it already existed and continually reminded Israel that they had once been slaves in Egypt. One of the defining stories of the Bible is God rescuing His people from slavery. The Exodus reveals His heart for freedom.

When Jesus began His ministry, He announced:

> **The Spirit of the Lord is on me... He has sent me... to set the oppressed free.**
>
> Luke 4:18

Jesus honored the overlooked, welcomed the outcast, and showed that true greatness is found in serving others, not ruling over them.

So why does Paul speak to slaves and masters instead of calling for slavery's immediate end?

Because Paul was writing to small churches living under the Roman Empire. They had no power to overturn an institution woven into society. (Historians say perhaps one in five people during this time was a slave). Instead, Paul planted a revolutionary truth that would eventually undermine slavery itself:

> **There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**
>
> Galatians 3:28

In Christ, slave and master, male and female... everyone stands on equal ground. They have the same value, the same Savior, and the same Lord.

None of this means God approves of people hurting, exploiting, or controlling one another. Throughout Scripture, God consistently stands with the oppressed and calls His people to pursue justice, mercy, and love. Whenever people use power to diminish another person's dignity, they are moving against God's heart.

At the same time, the gospel reminds us that no circumstance - not injustice, suffering, imprisonment, or even slavery - can keep us from knowing and serving God.

In the Old Testament, Joseph was sold into slavery, yet God remained with him, so much so that later he could say:

> **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.**
>
> Genesis 50:20

Joseph didn't call evil good. He simply trusted that God's power was greater than evil itself.

The same was true for Paul, who wrote many of his letters - including Ephesians - from prison. His circumstances did not stop God from working through him.

Today, if you're walking through hardship or injustice, know that God sees you, walks with you, and is able to bring hope even into painful places. If God has entrusted you with influence or leadership, use it the way Jesus did - not to control others, but to serve them.

In God's kingdom, every person has immeasurable worth, every act of love matters, and Jesus alone is our true Master. The church submits to Christ.

Reflection Questions

01 The devotional says every person is created in the image of God and has equal dignity and worth. How would our relationships change if we truly saw every person that way?

02 Joseph's story reminds us that God can work even in painful and unjust circumstances (Genesis 50:20). Can you think of a time when God brought something good out of a difficult season in your life?

03 The devotional ends by saying, "Jesus alone is our true Master." What does it look like in everyday life to live with Jesus as your Master above every other priority or authority?

Jesus alone is our true Master.

06

WEEK SIX

How Do I Stand Strong in Jesus Every Day?

DAY 1	Ephesians 6: Families That Follow Jesus
DAY 2	Ephesians 6: The Armor for the Battle
DAY 3	Ephesians 6: Memorize Scripture
DAY 4	Big Idea: The Battle You Can't See
BONUS	Bible Experience

Sermon Notes

WEEK SIX

Families That Follow Jesus

Talk to almost any parent and they'll tell you that parenting is one of the hardest jobs they've ever had. It comes with an enormous cost.

There are the sleepless nights, endless decisions, worry about whether your child is okay, pressures to get it right, and eventually the terrifying moment when you realize they're going to leave home and make their own decisions.

Then there's the noise...

Parenting experts telling you what you're doing wrong, family members offering their opinions, social media showing you how everyone else's kids seem to be thriving...

It's no wonder parents can feel exhausted and overwhelmed.

But here's the good news:

God never intended parents to do this alone, and He never intended the responsibility of helping the next generation follow Jesus to belong only to parents.

That's part of what makes today's passage so interesting.

Paul begins:

> **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" which is the first commandment with a promise.**
>
> Ephesians 6:1-2

At first, this seems pretty straightforward: children are called to obey and honor their parents. However, there's something that's easy to miss here.

Paul is writing this to the whole family.

He expects children to hear the teaching, He expects parents to teach it, and He expects families to wrestle *together* with what it means to follow Jesus.

That's important because following Jesus was never meant to be something we simply teach to the next generation. It's something we practice together.

At The Crossing, our hope is that families would talk about faith together, parents and kids would ask questions together and we would learn how to serve, forgive, love, and follow Jesus together.

This is a responsibility for parents. Within your family is the biggest opportunity. But it's for all of us. If you're an aunt or uncle, grandparent, teacher, coach, neighbor, mentor, or volunteer, you have a role to play in helping the next generation discover Jesus.

The church is at its best when we all take responsibility for one another.

Paul writes in Romans:

> **Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.**
>
> Romans 12:13

And there are few people who need encouragement and practical support more than parents. Sometimes loving a family looks like bringing dinner to new parents. Sometimes it's an aunt or uncle offering to babysit so exhausted parents can have a night together. Sometimes it's an older couple investing in a young family. Sometimes it's serving in TC Kids or TC Students so that the next generation has people who will know their names, listen to their stories, and point them toward Jesus.

We all have something to give.

Paul doesn't stop with the children. He turns his attention to fathers:

> **Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**
>
> Ephesians 6:4

That word exasperate means to unnecessarily provoke someone to anger.

In the Roman world, fathers held enormous authority over their children. Parenting could be harsh, controlling, and intimidating. So Paul introduces a radically different way. If Jesus is our example, power is never an excuse to control people. Power becomes an opportunity to serve them.

Paul challenges fathers not simply to rule over their children, but to actively help them know and follow Jesus. Not through fear. Not through intimidation. But through patience, instruction, love, and example. This isn't just a message for dads.

The Old Testament gives this instruction to *all* parents:

> **These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.**
>
> Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Faith is meant to become part of everyday life. It's what we talk about in the car. It's how we respond when someone hurts us. It's how we handle money. It's how we apologize. It's how we forgive. It's how we treat people who are different from us.

The next generation learns who Jesus is by watching how we live.

Paul is continuing to show us what life looks like when Jesus is at the center of our relationships.

When Jesus becomes King, every relationship begins to change. We use whatever influence we have to love, serve, protect, and help others. That's the freedom Jesus brings. Not simply the freedom to do whatever we want. The freedom to become the kind of people who love like Jesus.

Because the next generation doesn't need perfect parents. They need people who are willing to walk with them toward Jesus.

That is something all of us can do.

READ EPHESIANS 6:1-9

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2]"Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise - [3]"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." [4]Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. [5]Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. [6]Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. [7]Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, [8]because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. [9]And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Reflection Questions

01 Paul addresses children, parents, and other relationships in this passage. What stands out to you about the way Paul describes how we should treat one another when Jesus is at the center of our relationships?

02 The devotional says, “Following Jesus was never meant to be something we simply teach to the next generation. It’s something we practice together.” What are some ways people learn about Jesus by watching how we live?

03 The devotional asks, “What am I teaching the people around me about Jesus - not just with my words, but with my life?” What is one thing your life might currently be teaching others about Jesus? Is there anything you would like to change?

The Armor for the Battle

The average American spends roughly $1,445 every year on new clothes. That adds up to billions of dollars spent making sure we're wearing the right shoes, the right brands, and the right styles.

It's easy to be negative about the fashion industry and how much we spend on clothing. But there's something happening underneath the surface that we should pay attention to when it comes to what we wear.

Psychologists call it “enclothed cognition.” The idea is that what we wear can affect how we see ourselves and how we behave.

You've probably experienced this yourself.

You have a favorite hoodie that makes you feel comfortable and safe. You have workout clothes that make you feel like an athlete. You have a suit or dress that makes you feel confident, attractive, or successful.

What we wear can shape how we see ourselves. Which makes it interesting that Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians by talking about what we should “wear” spiritually.

This time, he's not talking about clothes that make us look good. He's talking about clothing that prepares us for a battle.

> **Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.**
>
> Ephesians 6:11

Paul reminds us that we are part of a spiritual battle. There is an enemy who wants to deceive us, discourage us, and pull us away from the life God has called us to live.

Jesus described the enemy this way:

> **He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth... for he is a liar and the father of lies.**
>
> John 8:44

We have a real spiritual enemy who lies, deceives, and creates havoc in our lives. So God doesn't leave us unprepared. He gives us armor.

Paul lists several pieces, but let's focus on three.

The Belt of Truth

> **Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.**
>
> Ephesians 6:14

A belt might not seem like an important piece of armor, but it holds everything together.

If Satan is the father of lies, we need to stay connected to truth. Not just any truth, but God's truth about who we are, who God is, and how we are called to live. When lies tell us we're worthless, God reminds us we're His. When lies tell us we're alone, God reminds us He is with us. When lies tell us we have to earn our worth, God reminds us that His love is already ours. Truth holds us together.

The Shield of Faith

> **Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**
>
> Ephesians 6:16

Faith doesn't mean we'll never be attacked. It means we have something to hold onto when we are. When people lie about us, when circumstances don't make sense, when we're afraid, or when we don't know what comes next, faith reminds us that God is still God. He will provide. He will see us through. He is for us.

Our faith becomes a shield that helps us keep moving forward when everything around us tells us to give up.

The Helmet of Salvation

> **Take the helmet of salvation...**
>
> Ephesians 6:17

Paul uses the helmet to remind us of the reality of God's salvation. Salvation isn't only a promise about where we will go someday. It is the reality that God is with us and saving us today. We belong to Him. Our future is secure in Him, and whatever we face, we can trust the promises of the God who loves us and will never leave us.

There's one important thing to remember about all of this:

Our battle isn't against people.

Paul doesn't tell us to put on God's armor so we can fight our neighbors, our coworkers, our family members, or people who disagree with us.

Our battle is spiritual. We fight against lies, against apathy and indifference, against injustice and evil, against the things that keep us - and the people around us - from experiencing the life God desires for us.

God doesn't send us into that battle alone. He equips us with everything we need to stand firm.

So today, as you read Ephesians 6:10-24, pay attention to the armor God provides.

Because when we put on the armor of God, we aren't pretending the battle isn't real.

We're remembering that God is with us in the middle of it.

READ EPHESIANS 6:10-24

[10]Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. [11]Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. [12]For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. [13]Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. [14]Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, [15]and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. [16]In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. [17]Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [18]And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. [19]Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, [20]for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Final Greetings

[21]Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. [22]I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. [23]Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24]Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Reflection Questions

01 The Belt of Truth: What lies are you most tempted to believe about yourself, God, or your circumstances? What truth from God do you need to hold onto instead?

02 The Shield of Faith: Think about a time when you were afraid, discouraged, or uncertain. What helped you keep trusting God? What would it look like to use faith as a “shield” in a situation you're facing right now?

03 The Helmet of Salvation: How does remembering that you belong to God and that your future is secure in Him change the way you face difficult circumstances today?

Memorize Scripture

> **Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer.**
>
> Proverbs 30:24-25

On most days, think of learning scripture like being an ant. Little by little, you store up the things you need. You will be surprised at what you can do. Like an ant, carry it crumb by crumb.

Just keep practicing. And you'll have what you need.

Choose one that speaks to you today and read it out loud at least twice:

> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**
>
> Ephesians 6:10

> **Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**
>
> Ephesians 6:13

Or find a verse or passage you really need at this moment from chapter 6.

Now, write it out here while saying it out loud:

Record a voice memo of yourself saying it so you can listen over and over.

Set a one minute timer each day and repeat it til you've got it!

Big Idea: The Battle You Can't See

Some of life's biggest battles aren't the ones we can see.

> Fear.
>
> Temptation.
>
> Bitterness.
>
> Shame.
>
> Pride.
>
> Discouragement.

These struggles often begin long before they show up in our actions. They begin in our hearts and minds.

As Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians, he reminds us that there is more happening than meets the eye:

> **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**
>
> Ephesians 6:12

Paul isn't telling us to be afraid. He's helping us see reality more clearly.

Sometimes we think the battle is against a difficult coworker, a family member, a political opponent, or someone who has hurt us. Paul reminds us that people are not the enemy. Our true battle is spiritual, which means we need spiritual strength.

That's why he says:

> **Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.**
>
> Ephesians 6:11

Notice whose armor it is. God's.

We are not called to fight in our own strength. We are invited to stand in His.

Paul goes on to describe the armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. These aren't magical objects. They are reminders to stay rooted in what God has already given us through Jesus.

> When fear whispers, God's truth speaks louder.
>
> When temptation comes, His righteousness guides us.
>
> When anxiety rises, the gospel reminds us that we belong to Christ.
>
> When doubt creeps in, faith helps us trust what we cannot yet see.

James writes:

> **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**
>
> James 4:7

Notice the order. First, submit to God. Then, resist the devil.

Our attention belongs on Jesus, not on the enemy. The more we draw near to God, the stronger we become for the battles we face.

Peter offers a similar encouragement:

> **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.**
>
> 1 Peter 5:8-9

Standing firm doesn't mean never struggling.

It means continuing to trust Jesus when life is difficult. It means choosing truth over lies, forgiveness over bitterness, hope over despair, and faith over fear.

The good news is that we never fight alone.

Jesus has already won the decisive victory through His death and resurrection. Because of Him, we don't fight for victory - we live in victory.

Whatever battle you are facing today, remember that God has not left you defenseless. He has given you His truth, His Spirit, His Word, and His presence.

So today, put on the armor of God. Stand firm.

And remember that the One who is with you is greater than anything that stands against you.

Reflection Questions

01 When you hear the phrase "spiritual warfare," what comes to mind? How did today's devotional challenge or expand your understanding?

02 Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood." How might remembering that people are not the enemy change the way you respond to conflict this week?

03 The devotional says, "We don't fight for victory - we live in victory." How would your attitude toward a current struggle change if you truly believed Jesus has already won the ultimate victory?

Bible Experience

Now that you've walked through Ephesians, don't stop here.

One of the greatest ways to grow in your faith is to learn how to read the Bible for yourself – to open God's Word, slow down, and allow it to speak into your everyday life. This is how we walk everyday with Jesus.

You don't need to be a Bible expert. You just need to start.

Go back and read Ephesians again.

You can read the entire book in one sitting or read one chapter each day. As you read, don't rush. Make it personal. Interact with what you're reading.

Try this:

> Read in a physical Bible.
>
> Circle words or phrases that stand out.
>
> Write down one truth about God.
>
> Write down one truth about yourself.
>
> Write down one next step you'll take.
>
> Pray through the chapter in your own words.

Talk to God about what you've read, what you don't understand, what challenged you, and what you want Him to change in you.

Then ask yourself:

What does this chapter teach me about who God is, who I am, and how I should live today?

...Then Keep Going

Once you've finished Ephesians, choose another book of the Bible.

If you're new to reading the Bible, start with one of the Gospels: John, Mark, Luke, or Matthew.

Whatever you choose, use the same simple approach:

> Read it.
>
> Notice it.
>
> Reflect on it.
>
> Pray through it.
>
> Live it.

The goal is to let God's Word shape your heart, renew your mind, and change the way you live.

Grace & Peace

GRACE & PEACE

a book on ephesians

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