

Love Letters

Lesson 1: Ephesians 1–2

Introduction

Have you ever wondered about the meaning of life and why you were put on this earth? Ever given thought to where you fit in to the big picture? The letter to the Ephesians presents the answers to such questions and offers a unique worldview to the Christian. It conveys the message of the divine purpose being accomplished by the almighty acts of God in Christ—our source for the meaning of our existence. We see Paul beautifully unfold aspects of the Christian life such as: *chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, enriched, sealed, and enlightened*.

It's normal for human beings to go through a crisis of identity. In fact, we will most likely experience more than one as we navigate through different seasons of life. The important thing to know is who we are in Christ so that we learn His ways and not the ways of the world. The letter to the Ephesians gives us a clear look into who we truly are as Christians and the rich inheritance that comes with our new identity.

Take a moment now and pray for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your spiritual understanding and to make clear and dear to you what He has for you now and in the life hereafter.

Read Ephesians 1:1–23.

Fast Facts ~

- The letter to the Ephesians was not sent to a singular church building, but to the collective body of believers assembled throughout the city.
- It was most likely couriered by Tychicus, a ministry co-laborer and friend of Paul's.
- It is one of the "prison epistles" (Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon being the others) written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment in AD 60–62.
- Ephesus was a capital city of the Roman province of Asia—an influential, wealthy, sophisticated, very pagan city.
- It was the center of worship of the goddess Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world.
- This letter focuses on the believer's responsibility to walk in accordance with the calling in Christ Jesus.
- It was not written to correct errors within the church but rather to prevent problems by encouraging the believers to grow up to maturity and to become more aware of their high calling.
- There is emphasis not only on the believer's standing before God but also on spiritual warfare, which is the daily reality of the Christian while here on earth.
- Key chapter: Ephesians 6, which gives clear advice for how to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Day One:

Christ Our Redemption

The focus of today's perspective will be on Ephesians 1:1–14.

Paul addresses his letter to the “saints” in Ephesus; meaning those who are set apart for God, and to the “faithful” in Christ Jesus, including believers everywhere: “Grace to you and peace.” Paul knew who he was—an *apostle* of Jesus Christ, called to carry out the will of God. Here in verses 3–14, he begins to poetically lay out the rich blessings every believer enjoys through the ministries of the triune God: *Father—Son—Holy Spirit*. He prefaces the unlimited, never-ending blessings of the believer with the gratitude that is due to God. The word *blessed* in verse 3 is the same as *praise*; and the word *blessing* is the same as *gift*. He notes that our heavenly Father has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*.

1. What specifically are *God the Father's* blessings to you as a believer (verses 4–6)?
 - a. Verse 4
 - b. Verse 5
 - c. Verse 6
2. Personal: Reflect on verse 4 along with Romans 8:29–30. How does God's choice of *you* bear on your standing before Him?
3. There are also blessings from *God the Son* for you; what are they (verses 7–12)?
 - a. Verse 7
 - b. Verses 8–10
 - c. Verse 11
4. The third person of the Trinity—*God the Holy Spirit*—is the giver of blessings that allow you complete assurance of your inheritance. What are they (verse 13–14)?
 - a. Verse 13
 - b. Verse 14
 - c. Personal: What should be your appropriate response to all of the above?

Memory verse: Ephesians 2:10 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

“The Trinity is the basis of the gospel, and the gospel is a declaration of the Trinity in action.”
—J.I. Packer

Day Two: Paul’s Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

Reread Ephesians 1:15–23.

Once believers understand the hope of God’s calling and the richness of our inheritance, the next step is to realize our access to the power of God through prayer. In verses 15–23, Paul initiates a prayer that concludes in chapter 2. Here he displays not only an apostle’s leadership but also a shepherd’s heart. Paul was a man of prayer and we can only imagine how encouraging it must have been for these young believers in and around Ephesus to hear these words: “I heard of your faith . . . and your love . . . and do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (verse 16). He emphasizes the basis and power behind prevailing prayer: *thankfulness*.

1. For what specifically does Paul pray in verse 17?

The revelation of God is divine, it is God making Himself and His Word known in a personal way. Wisdom involves the ability to understand how to apply Scripture to everyday life.

2. Paul prayed that believers would be enlightened to what in the following?
 - a. Verse 18a
 - b. Verse 18b

- c. Verse 19
- 3. In your own words, what does Paul share about the magnitude of God's power in verses 20–23?

Selah~

As you've studied Ephesians 1, you've been able to get a glimpse into your true identity and the person you are becoming. Take a moment to consider the questions below and be ready to discuss them with your group.

- Knowing the blessings that are yours in Christ, how do you want this information to affect your Christian walk?
- Which spiritual blessing meant the most to you? Why?
- How might Paul's prayer in verses 15–23 help guide you in praying for others?

What we see on display in chapter 1 is the big picture of our inheritance as children of God. It is by no means all there is—these are the mere edges of His ways, and each aspect gives us a taste of the entire package, which is within our mind to grasp, within our reach to possess, and within our power to prevail. What would you like to say to God that He took the initiative in your relationship with Him?

Day Three: His Grace through Our Faith

Read Ephesians 2:1–22, focusing on verses 1–10.

Maintaining the right spiritual perspective not only helps us keep things clearly in focus; it also helps in motivating us to do the right thing. When we are able to contrast our former condition with that of our current position in Christ, we appreciate what He has done for us and we want to please Him.

Paul states that at one time we were all dead in trespasses and sins—then further that those who are spiritually dead fall under the influence of the world, the flesh, and Satan. The dynamics of being spiritually dead involve the world's influence from *without*, the influence of the flesh from *within*, and Satan's influence from *beyond*. Paul is not speaking of a segment of society

that has become wicked or depraved, but rather *all humanity*—everyone apart from Christ is dead; they are held captive by the influences of this present evil age. In other words, under enemy control.

1. In order to appreciate the intensity of Paul's words, look for a moment at Romans 3:9–18. What does it say in these verses about the kind of children we were apart from Christ?
2. What does Paul declare about our marvelous God before we knew Him in a personal way (verse) 4–5?
3. In addition to His indescribable gift of salvation, what else has He done for us (verse 6–7)?
 - a. What do you suppose are some of the “exceeding riches of His grace” yet to be experienced in heaven?
4. Personal: According to verses 8–10, how and why did God choose to save you?
 - a. *God saved me by:*
 - b. *God saved me so that:*
 - c. *God prepared good works beforehand for me.* (What are some of them?)

Selah~

Paul exclaims in 2 Corinthians 9:15, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” You don’t have to define His gift; you simply have to *live it out* in thanksgiving. How is *your* lifestyle a living expression of your gratitude to Him (what are you giving back out of an overflowing heart)?

Day Four:

Brought Near by His Blood

Reread Ephesians 2:11–22.

It is possible that there may have been some friction between Jewish and Gentile believers that caused Paul to address the relationship between these groups at this point in his letter. The Gentiles were in a hopeless condition before salvation; the Jews were entrusted with God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament. Although the Jews had a special standing before God, their hearts were far from Him; they were not submissive to His will. Both groups were in need of His divine intervention.

1. List the specifics Paul shares about the condition of the Gentiles in verse 12.
2. God did not leave the Jews or Gentiles in their hopeless condition; what did He do (verse 13)?
3. What barrier did Christ break down? How? See verses 14–16.

The written commandments—the Law—had created a barrier between Jew and Gentile that only the death of Christ could break apart. Not only did the cross destroy enmity between God and man, it overcame the human barrier separating us from one another. He made them one in His eyes, resulting in peace. The Father devised the plan; the Son carried out the plan; and the Holy Spirit provided unhindered, permanent access to Him.

4. As a result, what does Paul declare about both the Gentiles and Jews (verse 19)?
 - a. Who is the chief cornerstone of the relationship making it all possible (verse 20)?
 - b. Paul's use of the "building" as a metaphor reveals that both Gentiles and Jews are living "stones." Together what are they forming (verse 21)?

Selah~

Think about it: *your sacrifice—your peace—your cornerstone*. In Christ, all believers are being built into God's temple; together they comprise a place of worship that God Himself inhabits through His Spirit. What does it mean to *you* to be a part of God's dwelling place? See 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. Does He have access to every area of *your* temple? Please explain.

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. **LISTEN:** In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. **LEARN:** How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. **LIVE:** Take the next step of obedience and record the difference it makes in your life.

Prayer Requests~

Notes

Love Letters

Lesson 2: Ephesians 3

If you're an avid reader or moviegoer, you probably appreciate a mystery: a good "whodunit." Ephesians 3 is devoted completely to the word *mystery*, but not the kind you might imagine. In the biblical sense, the word *mystery* is not a reference to something that is perplexing or puzzling. Paul devotes 21 verses to the Greek word *mysterion*, referring to something which was previously unknown but has been divinely revealed through the Holy Spirit. In this case the mystery is that Gentiles are fellow-partakers, fellow-heirs with the Jews of the promises of God. In Colossians 1:26, Paul speaks of it as "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

How is it possible to not only understand but also possess the reality of this marvelous truth? The key that unlocks the mystery is found in Paul's prayer here in chapter 3: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (verses 17–19 NKJV). To this end we can add a hearty "Amen" as we ponder the fact that in everything life presents us, God promises we will be able to rise up and become more than conquerors through Him.

Day One: God's Sacred Secret

By the time Paul sat down to write his epistle to the Ephesians, he'd been a Christian for nearly 30 years. He had worked tirelessly to establish churches throughout the Mediterranean, spanning three missionary journeys. If anyone had a working knowledge of their salvation and their mission, it was Paul; yet he wrote as being nothing apart from Christ.

Most often it is in looking back that we gain perspective. Living "in the moment" can be distracting, causing us to dismiss the lesson or purpose God has for us. But in quiet reflection we see things clearly, often for the first time. Paul now has a message he wants to convey to believers about heavenly things that can only be spiritually discerned. He is relying on the Holy Spirit to drive home transforming truths to these believers. Ask God today to pull back the veil and allow you to comprehend His divine mystery involving the church and your part in it!

We have not merely been saved that we might escape hell; we have been saved in order that God might present a people which will astonish the whole world.
(Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones)

Selah~

Take a moment to go back and reread Lesson 6: Ephesians 1–2, for your review. In your own words, briefly recap from these chapters what you have learned so far about . . .

- a. *Your adoption as a child of God*
- b. *Your spiritual inheritance*
- c. *Your God-ordained purpose in life*
- d. *Your place in God's holy temple*
- e. *Your understanding of what it means to be God's dwelling*

Memory verse: Ephesians 3:16 NIV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

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

Day Two:

The Mystery of Christ Revealed

Paul's preface "for this reason" in verse 1, refers back to everything he earlier stated in 2:11–22, that we were once aliens, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God, but now have been brought near by the blood of Christ, who is our peace and the Cornerstone of our faith. This indeed is God's plan for the ages!

1. Paul is a self-professed prisoner but not of Rome; by whose will is he captive (verse 1)?

In verses 2–13, Paul launches into a parenthetical statement that prefaces his prayer for all believers begun in verse 1 and picked up again in verse 14 ("For this reason . . ."). For just a moment he digresses from his point about prayer in order to explain the fullness of God's mystery. (It would be helpful for you to read verses 2–13 in more than one translation to grasp the meaning of Paul's words.)

The *dispensation* or *administration* (NIV) of God's grace (verse 2) refers to the unique stewardship and authority that Paul was given to explain God's marvelous truth.

2. For whose benefit was the mystery made known to Paul (verses 2–4)? (Paul is not referring to a different letter in verse 3, but rather his earlier comments in this one.)
 - a. What is Paul's point in disclosing the mystery to his readers (verse 4)?
3. To whom besides Paul did God reveal this mystery? How? (See verse 5.)

The unity of the believers Paul speaks about in these verses takes place through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. How does Paul state his responsibility and enabling of this God-given trust in verse 7?

Selah ~

Paul became a minister or servant—*diakonos*—one under orders from his master. He knew he was called, appointed, and enabled by God to carry out his mission. Take a moment to look up Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:1, and 2 Timothy 1:8. Think about it: as God's chosen minister of the gospel, how did Paul see himself? What bearing would his perspective of his calling have on his motive for service?

- Personally speaking, can *you* identify with Paul's self-described titles as relating to *your* own service? Please explain.

Day Three: The Purpose of the Mystery

Paul recognized that he did not deserve, nor did he possess, the qualifications for the mission God called him to fulfill. He didn't have the proper resume or criteria; his only part was his obedience to God's call.

1. How did Paul describe himself? His purpose? (Verses 8–9)

Think about it: Paul was asked to do more than explain the mystery; he had to play his own part in reaching across the aisle to demonstrate to both Jew and Gentile that they were now part of one body in Christ! Until this point in time, God had kept both the mystery—reaching back to the time of creation—and the implementation of it to Himself (verse 9).

2. To whom did God wish to reveal His plan of the ages through believers (verse 10)?

Why at this particular time was the mystery revealed? Only God knows—He decided that the time was right for people on earth and rulers and authorities in heaven to know His wisdom. But even the very principalities and powers who had tried to thwart God's plan of redemption greatly underestimated the manifold wisdom of the Creator! The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ upon the cross made possible the forgiveness of sins, crushing the power of Satan, and releasing all who were once held captive at his will but who now are set free! God chose the church as His perpetual witness to the spiritual realm of His magnificent power and grace in His eternal purpose.

3. Aren't you astonished at the fact that God has chosen you to "show off" His glorious plan to the heavenly realm? Please share your thoughts.
4. As the result of what Jesus Christ did on your behalf, you can now come directly to the throne of God (verse 12). What call to action do the following verses reveal?
 - a. Hebrews 4:16
 - b. Hebrews 10:19–23

With the focus on prayer, Paul encourages all believers not to lose hope or give up in the face of his suffering (verse 13) because it helped to further God's plan for the church. Paul hoped that through his trial those who read his letter would come to know and experience the salvation of God for themselves.

Selah ~

Think of some of the ways the church—the body of Christ—lets the world see God’s plan of salvation accomplished and in action then—and now?

Day Four: The Appreciation of the Mystery

Paul now resumes his prayer for the realization of God’s power in the believers’ lives that he began in verse 1. In contrast to the custom of standing to pray, Paul states his posture in prayer as one of kneeling to the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 14). Put yourself in his sandals; pondering the reality of God’s mystery, as well as the responsibility of his own appointment, and the potential for all believers, his appropriate response was to kneel in humble adoration.

In verse 15, Paul speaks of God as the Creator of everything: *from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*. He is the Father of everything visible and invisible and He is in complete control of all He has made. It is with these words Paul frames his prayer that follows.

Look closely at verses 16–19 as one flowing sentence in as many different translations as you can.

1. Where is the emphasis placed in the following?
 - a. Verse 16b
 - b. Verse 17a

Paul is not speaking here of saving faith; rather the faith that it takes to make Christ feel at home in your heart—making room for Him to abide and feel welcomed.

2. What is the foundation for realizing God’s power in your life? See verse 17b.
What comes to mind when you think of your faith being *rooted* and *grounded in love*?

It takes the church—together in its unity and diversity—to know in a personal, intellectual, and emotional way the love of Christ, which is beyond our human capacity to comprehend!

3. An experiential knowledge of the love of Christ leads us to what end (verse 19)?

“The fullness of God” means simply that we are abundantly satisfied with Him: realizing Him through our prayers, being strengthened with His might, and making Him feel at home in our hearts. This leads Paul to an outburst of praise to God—a *doxology*.

4. Look closely at verses 20–21 before answering the following:
 - a. What do these verses tell you about God’s sovereignty in your life?
 - b. What do you learn about God’s power in your trial?

c. What is the purpose behind His power?

d. How will you praise Him today?

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. ***LISTEN***: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. ***LEARN***: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. ***LIVE***: Determine to take the next step of obedience: what will it be?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Love Letters

Lesson 3: Ephesians 4

At the halfway point in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul begins his appeal to the Ephesian believers to live and work in the unity that is based upon Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit, in order to reveal the direct correlation between behavior and basic core values.

Paul is now in prison but he did not see himself as a prisoner; rather he was constrained by the love of Christ at work within him. And fortunately for us, Paul was shut in with his pen, his parchments, and his prayers—the result of which is the letter containing this wonderful exhortation. If, two thousand years later, believers today could operate from this same vantage point, we too would be able to dramatically impact our loved ones, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our world for Christ!

Read Ephesians 4:1–32.

Day One: Family Unity

The word *therefore* in verse 1 connects Paul's present exhortation with his teaching in the previous chapters regarding God's ultimate purpose for mankind and the unveiling of the mystery in Christ Jesus. There is a life-lesson here in Paul's words: Christianity is a *walk* and God expects His children to walk worthy of their calling; but how is this possible? We're about to find out.

For the benefit of your study today, take a moment to meditate on the first three verses of this chapter in the Amplified Version: "I therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal and beg you to walk [lead a life] worthy of the divine calling to which you have been called with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service, living as becomes you with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another. Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of [and produced by] the Spirit in the binding power of peace."

1. What initially stands out to you in the reading of these verses?

Previously, Paul stated that believers are: *chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit*. He said we are: *His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*. Now Paul says emphatically that we are to *walk worthy . . . with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service*. The

word *worthy* is *axios* in the Greek, meaning *equal weight*. In other words, there should be a balance between the believer's calling and conduct that brings glory to God.

It is imperative that believers grasp the importance of this point, causing Paul to say in verse 1: "I beseech" (NKJV); "I entreat" (NAS); meaning *appeal* and even *beg*! After sharing the riches that are ours in Christ, Paul is literally begging believers to walk worthy.

2. Let's pause here and linger long enough to delve more deeply into Paul's meaning. Using your dictionary, write a definition for the virtues Paul mentions in verse 2:
 - a. Humility (See Philippians 2:1–8 for an example.)
 - b. Gentleness (1 Thessalonians 2:7)
 - c. Longsuffering (1 Timothy 1:16)
 - d. Love (1 John 4:10–11)
 - e. Personal: Is the Lord highlighting one of these virtues right now in your life? Ask Him to help you be made willing to model it in your present circumstances.
3. What, according to Paul, is the responsibility of every believer (verse 3)? Please explain.

It should be noted that believers are called to "keep" the unity of the Spirit—not to try and create it—only the Holy Spirit can do that! Our role is to guard, protect, and maintain what has been entrusted to us. The Greek translation of the phrase *endeavoring to keep* means working toward something difficult with the determination to make it happen. Is this *your* attitude today?

4. In verses 4–6, the word *one* is used seven times to refer to the unity of the church. The foundation for unity is based on the beliefs that Christians have in common. List the common core beliefs of the church that Jesus Christ has created.

Memory verse: Ephesians 4:16 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

Under his [Christ's] direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Day Two: Unity through Diversity: Spiritual Gifts

Reread Ephesians 4:7–16 for review.

Here in verses 7–16, Paul introduces the subject of spiritual gifts bestowed on each believer for the good of the body of Christ. As each one uses their gift(s) in harmony with one another, the church is able to accomplish God's will in the world.

1. What does Paul state about spiritual gifts in the following:
 - a. Verse 7
 - b. Verse 11
 - c. What is the two-fold purpose of spiritual gifts (verse 12)?
2. List the gifts Paul mentions in verse 11. Notice the diversity and how these particular gifts pertain to a life-calling.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Note: In verses 8–10, Paul presents a brief summary of Psalm 68 to reinforce his point. In it, King David describes a victory parade up Mount Zion. After God won a great victory for His people,

David returned the ark of the covenant to its rightful home in Jerusalem. He also brought home the spoils of battle, distributing some to the temple and some to his brave men. Paul uses this illustration to refer to Christ conquering His enemies, returning to His rightful place in heaven and bestowing spiritual gifts on His people.

These particular verses in this context are challenging to interpret and have puzzled scholars for centuries. Paul states that Christ's ascent was prefaced by His descent to the *lower parts of the earth*. It's possible Paul is referring to Christ's descent into hell to preach to the captives following His death on the cross (Acts 2:27–28 and 1 Peter 3:18–22), or he could have been speaking about Christ's descent to earth in His incarnation. Whichever the case, the point here is that Christ descended and ascended—there is nothing hidden from Him. He completely fills all things; everything in heaven and on earth is under His authority and control.

Selah~

Did you know that as a child of God it is in *your* spiritual DNA to serve Him for His glory? It is part of your "good works prepared beforehand that you should walk in them." The list of gifts here in Ephesians 4 is not all-inclusive; others are also mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Look these up and note the gifts mentioned.

- Romans 12:3–8

- 1 Corinthians 12:1–31

- Personal: Take a moment for a little spiritual inventory. Based on your knowledge, what gift do you believe God has given you to use in serving others? Are you allowing yourself to develop to your full potential? What do you hope to contribute over time to the body of Christ?

It takes the entire community of believers, united in will and purpose, to carry out the work of the ministry. Though individual members may seem insignificant in terms of the big picture, each one has a vital role and contribution; no one is more or less important than another. Together we can accomplish much more than any of us can do alone. The world is watching and whenever they see us operating in unity, they witness us modeling the fullness of Christ in action!

3. Earlier, in verse 3, Paul mentioned the unity we believers are to keep. Here in verse 13, it is the goal we are to reach. In your own words, summarize that goal as stated in verses 13–15.

4. As each member of Christ's body fulfills its part, what amazing dynamic occurs (verse 16)?

Day Three:

The New Man

Reread Ephesians 4:17–24 for review.

The *believing* and the *doing* of the gospel are both present in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The first three chapters are devoted to who we believers are in Christ. Then in chapter 4, Paul reaches a turning point, going from the spiritual to the practical, getting specific about what *to do* and what *not to do* in developing a Christian lifestyle.

Repeatedly Paul uses the word *walk*. It is an action verb that takes in the whole of life—requiring believers not to only to *be* but also to *do*. When Paul speaks about the walk of the believer he is referring to every aspect of their conduct that has first been transformed in the heart and mind by the Spirit.

1. Use verses 17–19 to depict in your own words the believer's previous conduct and the reason for it. Pick out specific words that describe the "old life."
 - a. Verse 17
 - b. Verse 18
 - c. Verse 19
2. "But you have not so learned Christ" (verse 20). In contrast to unbelieving Gentiles, the Ephesian Christians were taught how to conduct themselves when they put their faith in Christ. Note what Paul highlights in these verses.
 - a. Verses 21–22: What are you to put off?
 - b. Verses 23–24: What are you to put on?
 - c. Personal: Identify a part of your previous "old nature" that you no longer practice (you don't need to share this with your group if you're uncomfortable). Contrast this with an aspect of your current Christian lifestyle that exemplifies Jesus Christ.

*Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character;
sow a character, reap a destiny. —Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Day Four:

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Reread Ephesians 4:25–32 for review.

In verses 25–32, Paul moves in terms of lifestyle behavior to that of personal relationships. The glimpse we are given here is that the believers in the early church dealt with the same issues we Christians face today. The underlying lesson is that when we do fall short, we must realize it is possible to *grieve* (offend, vex, or sadden) the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed, branded, secured as His own. In other words, it's very personal to Him.

Don't rush the exercise below; take some time with it, allowing God's Spirit to search your soul and make it personal to you.

1. What are the specific "do nots" that Paul lays out in the following verses:
 - a. Verse 26
 - b. Verse 27
 - c. Verse 28
 - d. Verse 29
 - e. Verse 30
 - f. Verse 31

If God has put His finger on any of these "do nots" today, lift it in prayer and ask His forgiveness.

2. Along with the command of what not to do, Paul gives several positive commands. List those below along with why they are important.
 - a. Verse 25 (Reinforced and restated from verse 15)
 - b. Verse 28
 - c. Verse 29
 - d. Paul's last command in verse 32 depicts the very nature of God. What is it and why is it so essential that we put it on?

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Prayer Requests ~

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Love Letters

Lesson 4: Ephesians 5

As God's children, we are called to behave in our sphere of influence the way He acts in dealing with His universe; demonstrating that we do in fact belong to Him. In Ephesians 5, Paul calls on all believers to live a life that is submissive, so as to walk in love overflowing from the Holy Spirit. In one sublime sentence Paul spells out the answer to every conflict we will ever encounter: *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:21 NIV). We will see Paul apply this same principle over and over in situations involving relationships in the church as well as that of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees.

Read Ephesians 5:1–33.

Day One:

Walk in Love

1. From your initial reading of this chapter, you can hear Paul explaining that the Christian walk is to be lived in love, light, and wisdom for our relationships to be fruitful. As you consider your walk today, how evident are these attributes in your relationships with others?

The King James Version of 5:1 says that we are to be “followers of God, as dear children.” The Revised Standard Version words it with more emphasis: *Be imitators of God, as beloved children*. Since a child will naturally follow the example of the parent, Paul states those of us who are spiritual children should be willing to imitate the example of our heavenly Father.

2. What supreme example do we have of this? v. 2
 - a. Specifically, Paul is talking about following the example of Christ's love. Put v. 2 in your own words.
3. Paul lists some behaviors in Vv. 3–4 that are the opposite of imitating God; what are the things we must not engage in if we are to walk in love?
 - a. Why is it important to avoid such practices? v. 5
4. There are individuals who will try to justify their own immoral behavior and influence others to do the same. What does Paul say about them? Vv. 6–7

The take-away truth here is that Christians are not to participate in these things because we are not in darkness anymore; we are no longer numbered among those who are disobedient, and so should no longer be like them. Simply put—it would be a gross inconsistency for a believer to participate in such outrageous sins!

- a. Rather than engage in obscene language and behavior, what should be our focus? v. 4
How would maintaining this perspective affect your conduct?

Memory verse: Ephesians 5:18b–19 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

. . . Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

Day Two:

Walk in Light

Reread Ephesians 5:8–14.

Paul goes on to further explain the reason why—before meeting Christ—it was easy to participate in obscene works and why that can no longer be the case. The Ephesian Christians were once just like all those who were disobedient—but no longer! The contrast to what was is made clear in the command to *walk as children of light*.

1. What word does Paul use to describe unbelievers? v. 8 Conversely, what are you now?
2. Rather than engaging in impure and immoral acts, children of light engage in acts of what? Vv. 9–10 Give a couple of examples.

Not only should believers not engage in the same acts of those who don't know Christ, Paul makes a startling announcement that believers should *expose* those who do! Whether Paul is speaking of exposing the sins of disobedient Christians within the body or exposing the sins of non-believers in the world is hard to tell. Christians within the church are responsible to hold one another accountable for their lifestyles. If a Christian lives in habitual unrepentant sin, fellow believers are to attempt to get them to turn from their sin.

3. What scriptural direction for this are you given in each of the passages below . . .
 - a. Matthew 18:15–20
 - b. Galatians 6:1
4. What does Paul say about these works of darkness? v. 12
5. Think for a moment about the power light possesses (v. 13) and the mission of the church in the world. Whether we are talking about the people in darkness that are inside or outside the church building, what is the ultimate goal of the body of Christ?

Selah~

As far as dealing with non-believers in the world, their sins are best exposed when a Christian's light shines into the darkness of that lifestyle, which can be done merely by example. Light always exposes and dispels the darkness! And often the silence of one role model can speak volumes at the one running from God. What is the promise for those desiring to get right with God? v. 14

Day Three:

Walk in Wisdom

Reread Ephesians 5:15–21.

It's safe to say that the Christian who walks in love and light also walks in wisdom. This is the model of virtue to which the people of Paul's day aspired—they considered it the upward climb to God. Possessing wisdom is the ability to apply scripture to the “what and where” of everyday life.

God came to us through the “foolishness of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18 and 25). He did so in order to accept, forgive, and enable us to live “not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15). Wisdom allows us to keep our conduct consistent with our faith.

1. Move slowly through the following exercise containing numerous exhortations to walk in wisdom. Put them in your own words . . .
 - a. v. 16
 - b. v. 17
 - c. v. 18
 - d. v. 19
 - e. v. 20
 - f. v. 21

The key to walking in wisdom is found in verse 18: “And do not be drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit.” Remember that Paul was addressing a city known for being the center of pagan worship, idolatry, and drunken orgies. The people in this day mixed these elements together in worship of their god. Paul was instructing them on how to know the one true God; how to serve and obey Him. He contrasted the difference between being filled with wine to serve their god and being filled with the Holy Spirit to serve the God of heaven.

The verb tense of “filled” in verse 18 is present and active and could best be translated: *be being filled*. It means to be directed, influenced, governed by the Holy Spirit, bringing our lives into conformity with the will of God.

Selah~

In verses 19–21, the four participles: *speaking*, *singing*, *giving thanks*, and *submitting*, all modify the verb “be filled” in verse 18. Think about it: speaking and singing suggest the sweetness of music and praise overflowing from the Spirit; while gratitude and submission suggest the heart attitude and humble posture of the one filled with the Spirit. Please share your thoughts.

Day Four:

Walk in Mutual Submission

Reread Ephesians 5:22–33.

In today's world of liberation and liberalism, we must note that no one has done more to advance the cause of women than Jesus Christ! The gospel emancipated everyone—including women. Paul has already emphasized that God's purpose is to reconcile all things in Christ, and that the church is the instrument through which He will accomplish that purpose. We will now look at that idea of reconciliation through the relationship of husband and wife; and then by looking at the family (Ephesians 6).

1. Paul begins by addressing the role of the wife; what does he say? v. 22
 - a. For what reason is the wife called to be in subjection to her husband? v. 23

Her subjection is not a reference to her being inferior to her husband. The Bible teaches that both men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and that in Christ, there is neither "Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). But God has given an order to all things, some having authority, others being in submission. A man and woman can occupy differing roles in life, but in the marriage relationship God has placed the husband as the head over his wife. As the church is subject to Christ (v. 24), so the wife is to be subject to her husband in everything.

2. What does Paul add to the wife's role in verse 33?

The word "respect" literally means *fear*; not a cowardly fear, but rather the *reverence* a person would have putting God first. It is literally a wholesome fear or dread of displeasing him. It is this kind of high regard that a wife is to have toward her husband.

3. Paul then turns to the husbands: "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (v. 25). Put this verse in your own words for emphasis.
 - a. Following the example of Christ, what are some of the practical everyday ways a husband can "give himself up" for his wife?

Paul extends his explanation to include Christ and the church in verses 25–27.

- b. What does Christ do for His bride the church?
 - c. What is His ultimate purpose for her?
4. In verses 28–32, Paul returns to the husband-wife relationship. What instruction does he repeat? Why? Vv. 28–29

The husband's body is imperfect, yet he nourishes and cherishes it. God expects him to do likewise for his wife, who is also imperfect. It is God's high standard for the marriage relationship.

Paul concludes this portion of the text by quoting Genesis 2:24: "For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." It is their sacred union that is likened to the one that exists between Christ and the church.

5. Write out the concluding thought in verse 33:

a. To the husband—

b. To the wife—

c. Personal: If married, how are *you* doing? What can you do to make room for improvement?

Selah ~

Let's turn it around and think of it another way . . . If a husband actively loves his wife as Christ loves the church, in what way(s) will she be blessed and reflect God's love?

It is not wrong to set goals for yourself and to desire fulfillment; in fact, God designed us that way. But when two people try to take different paths to achieve the same goal, they often collide with each other creating conflict. A husband and wife may not always be able to agree on their standard of living; children may vie for the love and attention of their parents; and church leaders may differ about how to shepherd the same flock. As each one asserts his or her rights, this spirit of competition may lead to outright war with the result division and disunity. Paul would remind us all that the third party in every relationship is Christ; therefore we should all practice submitting to one another in love.

"In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity [love]."
(St. Augustine)

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: Take the next step of obedience and record the difference it makes in your life.

Prayer Requests ~

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Love Letters

Lesson 5: Ephesians 6

Reciprocal Respect

Paul continues his teaching begun in chapter 5 regarding mutual submission in the lives of Christians. This time he address parents and children, slaves and masters, ending with the recognition that all of life is a spiritual war, requiring us to wear the full armor of God in order to stand firm against the devil's devices.

Read Ephesians 6:1–24.

Day One: Parents and Children

The deterioration of today's family as well as the lack of love and respect missing in raising up our children have led to devastating effects, which we are only beginning to realize. Our only hope is that Christian parents will rise up and accept their God-given responsibilities and begin modeling what the Bible teaches: righteousness begins at the household of God!

1. What is Paul's instruction and reasoning to children in the following:
 - a. Verse 1
 - b. Verses 2–3

The command to obey parents does not just refer to parents who are Christians. In the broader sense, it means that children who obey their parents are also obeying the Lord. The only exception would be if a child is asked to do something that is contrary to Scripture: something illegal, immoral, or would put them or another person in harm's way. In these specific instances, the parental command to obey would be superseded by the greater command to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

2. In verses 2–3, Paul reiterates the fifth commandment, the first one with promise. (Write out the entire command from Deuteronomy 5:16, highlighting the promise attached to it.)
3. What are fathers commanded . . .
 - a. *Not to do?* (Explain what this means.)
 - b. *To do?* (Explain what this means.)

4. In his letter to the Colossians, we see Paul making the same statement but qualifying it with a reason; what is it (Colossians 3:2)?
5. List some of the aftereffects and potential long-term consequences of continual criticism for a child.

Discipline is necessary but it must be administered in the context of *reciprocal respect* in order for it to be healthy and beneficial to a child. Character, communication, compassion, and caring all must be cultivated and nurtured in a loving environment so that a child is encouraged to thrive and reach their full potential. This is the responsibility of every parent who has been blessed to wear the title of father or mother.

Memory verse: Ephesians 6:10 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Selah~

Take a moment to carefully consider the Old Testament instruction for raising children found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Then ask yourself: what kind of environment am I fostering in our home? What kinds of TV shows do I allow? What books and magazines? What kind of friendships do I model for my kids? If you think your daily choices don't influence your family members, then think again—they do! Whatever God has pointed out that needs changing, note it here and get to work. He will honor your obedience to create a loving godly atmosphere in which to raise your child. Please share your thoughts.

Day Two:

Bondservants and Masters

Reread Ephesians 6:5–9.

It has been estimated that as much as one-third of the Roman population consisted of slaves of all races, many of which could expect to be emancipated by the age of 30. Their work was not limited to hard labor; often they worked in different occupations, many owning their own land. Due to the widespread poverty of Paul's day, some free laborers chose to sell themselves into slavery purely for economic reasons. But in the full context of Paul's letter, he states that slaves are full members of the body of Christ, sharing equally with their masters in the spiritual blessings as heirs of Christ.

1. From our text we can deduce several principles for all Christians in the workplace. What do you see in verses 5–9 that could pertain to your personal behavior on the job? Put these points in your own words.
2. What is to be your heart-motive for serving (in any capacity) as unto the Lord?
3. What do you glean from these verses that would help you to develop a good work ethic?
4. What is the Christian's reward for a good job done on earth?
5. What reminder does Paul emphasize to all employers in verse 9?

Selah ~

Paul's words to servants here must be heard in the same context as his exhortation to wives, husbands, and children. There is one common thread woven throughout all: that our behavior in every relationship should be influenced by our expectation of the return of Christ at any moment. This truth should motivate our heart-attitude as well as our conduct in every circumstance of life.

Personal: Whether you're an employee, an employer, or the keeper of your family and home, what takeaway truth can you apply to your particular circumstances today?

Day Three:

Our Spiritual Warfare

Reread Ephesians 6:10–24.

Believers are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for souls! Our enemy seeks to thwart our efforts by any means possible. Since Satan deceives in order to destroy, and since we do not face a physical enemy but a spiritual one, our weapons must also be spiritual. Our hope of victory is to put on the whole armor of God that Paul describes here in full detail.

1. Paul's exhortation now is to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (verse 10). Verses 11 and 13 give us the how-to, along with the result. What does he say here?
2. Against whom is the Christian's battle being waged (verse 12)?

Paul uses the illustration of spiritual armor as a metaphor to help us practically apply these verses.

3. Carefully consider the value and purpose of each piece of armor in verses 14–17.
 - a. *Belt of truth* (verse 14):
 - b. *Breastplate of righteousness* (verse 14):
 - c. *Shoes of the gospel* (verse 15):
 - d. *Shield of faith* (verse 16):
 - e. *Helmet of salvation* (verse 17):
 - f. *Sword of the Spirit* (verse 17):
4. When preparing to engage in warfare, how and about what are you to be watchful (verse 18)?
5. Acknowledging the priority of prayer, what is Paul's request in verses 19–20?
6. Who was on Paul's heart in these closing verses of chapter 6, and what provision does he make (verses 21–24).
7. Personal: Do *you* have others praying for you as to be victorious as Paul did? Take a step of faith today . . . what will you ask others to pray for on your behalf?

Day Four:

This Present Darkness

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

—Ephesians 6:12

Paul would have believers to know that our *real enemy* is constantly lurking in the shadows of the unseen world, battling in an arena that is far beyond that which is visible to our naked eyes, yet posing a very real and present danger. In verse 12, Paul lists four categories of satanic beings against whom we may wrestle: *principalities, powers, rulers of this world's darkness, and wicked spirits in high places*. As far as Satan's wiles—or schemes—are concerned, we cannot possibly know them all, guard against them in every situation, or overcome them in our own strength . . . but God can! Since we are not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11), as we learn to trust God, become armed in His battle array, and stand in His strength, we will realize our victory in Christ.

We wrestle against principalities: In order of rank, at the head of Satan's realm are principalities or princes who share the power that Satan wields over evil spirits—the fallen angels in this world. The word used is *arche*, which means magistrate or chief ruler. The story in the book of Daniel 10:1–13 is a good example of the spiritual warfare taking place as we pray. Note below how the heavenly messenger describes Daniel, the action of Daniel that precipitated the messenger, and who attempted to thwart his mission.

We wrestle against powers: Since Satan is not capable of replicating God's attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, he compensates by organizing evil beings who work with him in the spirit world. Give an example that comes to mind of evil power at work in today's world.

We wrestle against the rulers of this world's darkness: Why are people continuing to turn to idolatry and various forms of ideology and false religions that appear appealing? Behind every attempt at spiritual blindness is one or more of Satan's rulers who are busy hindering individuals from hearing and receiving the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since Satan is not fearful of mankind but only of the Lord, why is it so important for you to fight in the power of *His might*?

We wrestle against wicked spirits in high places: Since he can only be in one place at a time, Satan has countless legions of demons at his disposal to do his bidding. His deeds can be overruled by God. Look at the example found in Mark 5:1–20, focusing your attention on verses 15–20. Note the response of the people and that of the healed man. Do you think you would've responded more like the crowd or the healed man? Why?

Selah ~

Personal: Is there a part of your spiritual armor that you've neglected? What attention can you give it to help you fight in the Lord's power?

Day Five:

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