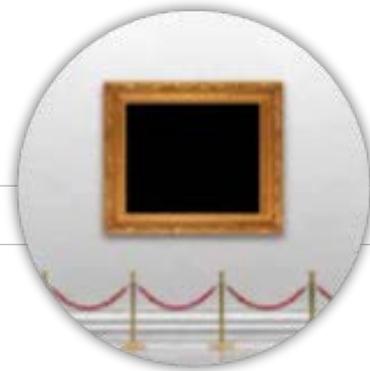


STUDY GUIDE



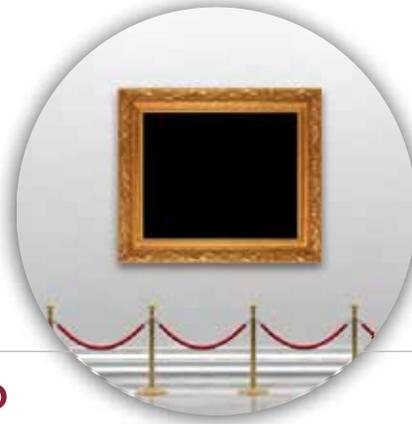
Ephesians: You are God's Masterpiece



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Introduction

Introduction



Why read this book?

The greatest adventure in life is not an exotic safari, a booming business success, or a love relationship with that perfect someone. Rather, it's discovering the purpose for our lives. This letter answers the question men and women have asked throughout all time: "Why am I here?" The answer may startle you, considering the standard talk-show ideas of our age. It has to do with eternity, making peace with God, and identifying with Christ. Interested? Read on. The adventure is only beginning.

Who wrote this book?

The apostle Paul.

When was it written?

Sometime during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, around A.D. 60 to 62.

To whom was it written and why?

To encourage believers in Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey) to think of themselves in a whole new way. Instead of people once involved in idol worship, illicit sex, and foolish philosophies, Paul wanted them to think of themselves as people "in Christ"—people with a radically new identity (2:12–13).

What to look for in Ephesians:

In this book you'll learn about God's intentions for his people, and you'll gain insight into the nature of the church. Notice the various word pictures describing the church and how Paul stresses the unity of all believers. The last half of the book offers practical ways to live in unity with God and one another.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*

Basic Group Guidelines

Basic Group Guidelines

Though we call these Basic Group Guidelines, these are also essential in all relationships and environments. These should be observed whether in a 1-on1 conversation or in a group discussion.

- *Guidelines give boundaries for people to operate within.*
- *They help with the flow and pace of the discussions.*
- *They help us value one another.*
- *They help people to be more comfortable sharing deep and meaningful things.*

THIS IS A SAFE GROUP

Confidentiality is key, what is said in the group stays in the group. Be aware how you are affecting the environment: words, actions, and non-verbal communication. This needs to be a place where people feel comfortable opening up and sharing.

NO CROSSTALK

Be considerate of others as they are sharing. No side conversations, checking phone, responding to text or email, etc.

LISTEN

Let's value one another by listening to what is being shared. Allow a pause after someone shares to allow them to finish and others to consider what was said. Eye contact and body posture play key roles in creating a positive or negative group environment.

NO RESCUING OR FIXING

We are not here to fix each other, Jesus does that part. Avoid the tendency to rescue when someone is struggling to get the words out or shares a struggle or conviction.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

It's easy to talk about the issues of other or respond with "we", "us", "the church". But for us to grow as disciples and build relationship we want to use "I" statements.

DON'T OVER-TALK

We want to create time for all members of the group to participate in the discussion. Be careful not to always be the first responder or regularly give long responses.

FIGHT FOR RELATIONSHIP

It's not 'if' conflict or hurt feelings will happen, but 'when'. We commit to fight for relationship with each other. Go to that person and share your struggle or seek wise advice if you are not sure how to handle the conflict.

God Wants You to Know Him

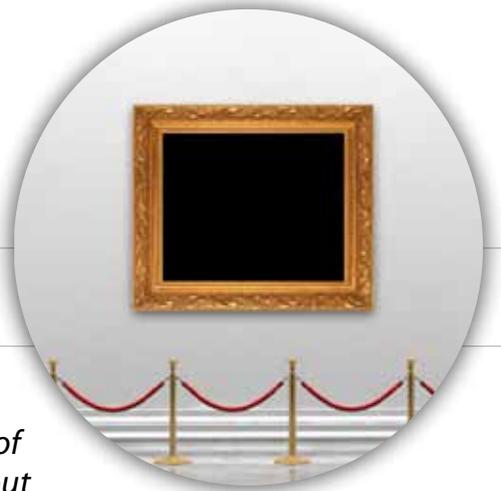
God Wants You to Know Him

God chose you, so that you would choose him.

Some of us relate to God in a timid way. We cower and want to run away, yet are afraid of being abandoned. We don't have a clue about what it means to be part of God's family. In Ephesians you will find your identity. You will discover who you are, who you are meant to be, what you are meant to do, and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ.

Scripture: [Ephesians 1](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



God Wants You to Know Him

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Steve May shares this story:

Quincy was on death row when I first saw him. As I walked the long corridor past the dozens of others facing an imminent demise, Quincy watched me through the bars of his cage. Right away I knew he was the one I had come for. I paid the animal shelter \$50 and took Quincy home with me.

Adjusting to life with the May family wasn't as easy for him as I thought it would be. He must have been abused in the past, because he cowered every time I approached him. And even though we saved him from the gas chamber with the intention of feeding him, playing with him, loving him, and even spoiling him, he tried to run away two or three times.

When he got past the desire to run away, he began to develop other problems. Acute separation anxiety, for one. I guess he decided that since he no longer wants to leave, surely we must. Every time we pack a suitcase, Quincy goes a little nuts. He shadows my wife's every step (he's still a little afraid of me), and if she steps outside—even for a moment—he sits at the door and whines. Clearly, Quincy has some abandonment issues to deal with.

If I could speak Quincy's language, I would say to him, "Relax. Everything is going to be okay. You are part of our family, and we will take care of you. Whatever happened in the past is past. You're with us now. Your life is different. Enjoy it." That's what I would say if I could speak dog. Unfortunately, I don't. I've tried saying it to him in English, but I don't think he gets it. So, for now at least, Quincy remains just a little neurotic.

In the church, I have met a few Quincys. In fact, there have been times in my own spiritual life when I have related to God exactly the way Quincy relates to us: Timid, cowering, wanting to run away, yet afraid of being abandoned—and not having a clue about what it means to be part of God's family.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Do you have any difficulty in trusting God with your life? If so, in what specific ways?

- Why do you think it's difficult for you to trust God with these things?

[R] Which of the following best describes how you see God?

- Kind and caring

God Wants You to Know Him

- Strict and exacting
- Awesome and holy
- Generous and giving
- Mystical and mysterious
- Close and intimate
- Far away and unreachable

Why did you pick the ones you did? What does that tell you about how you see God?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us to understand God as he truly is.*

Activity: *Looking at the options in the last question, go through each one and discuss how each of them could be true from what we know of God in Scripture. Then go through each of them and discuss how each one could be twisted in such a way as to be false and to misrepresent God.*

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: You belong to God, and that will never change.

A million centuries before Genesis 1:1, God knew that you would be where you are today in your job, in your relationships, in all areas of your life. For some, it's been a rough ride. There have been mistakes and disappointments along the way, and you've fallen short of God's glory more times than you want to admit. Many of you have regrets; many of you have wanted to give up. But God's love for you has never changed. From the beginning, he has known that your life would bring you to this place today. Even though your past may be littered with failure upon failure, it doesn't change the fact that God loves you, chose you, and believes in you. You have been on his mind from the very beginning.

Ephesians defines our relationship with God in permanent terms. Read Ephesians 1:1–14.

You've been on God's mind from the beginning. We all know what it is like to be the last chosen and the least talented in at least one area—academically, athletically, musically, and so on. But there is an area where we never need feel that way: our relationship with God. Probably all of

God Wants You to Know Him

us have wondered, at one time or another, *If they could do it all over again, would they choose me? Would they hire me? Would she marry me?* Maybe some of you have even thought, *If God could do it over, would he save me again?* Some of you believe that you have been such a disappointment to God that he would probably have been better off not to have saved you in the first place. The message of Ephesians 1 is the exact opposite. The message of Ephesians is that God accepted you into the body of Christ not because he had to, but because he wanted to.

You are part of his plan. From the beginning, he has wanted you to be a member of his family.

[Q] What evidence do you find in Ephesians 1:1–14 that God wanted you to be part of his family from the beginning?

[Q] How can we be “holy and blameless” in his sight when we obviously still do things wrong (v. 4)? (See verse 7.)

[Q] What does it mean to you that God has adopted you into his family?

[Q] How is the Holy Spirit our guarantee or security of things to come (vv. 13–14)?

Teaching Point Two: Your security comes from understanding who Christ is.

As a follower of Jesus, the first step in understanding who you are is understanding who Christ is. You cannot experience a powerful, dynamic walk with God if your head is full of misconceptions about who he is and what he does. Those who believe in a weak and ineffective God will lead weak, ineffective lives. In order to fully experience God, you must come to know him.

This is why, in the second half of the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul prays for their (and our) spiritual enlightenment. He is teaching us how to get connected to God—how to go beyond mundane religious existence into a vital spiritual experience of the power of God. Read Ephesians 1:15–23.

God Wants You to Know Him

When you made the decision to follow Jesus Christ, you did much more than obligate yourself to a certain moral standard of living. Instead, you became permanently connected to the source above all sources, to the power above all powers, to the name above all names. Jesus is not just our teacher. He is our Lord and our Savior. He is not just powerful, he is All Powerful. He is not just wise, he is All Knowing. He is not just loving, he is Love. When we connect to him, we connect to all that he is.

We are often held back by a limited view of who God is. It's difficult to rise above your situation if you're not fully convinced that God is bigger than your situation. It's difficult to experience power over the darkness in your life—the darkness of fear, doubt, and sin—if you are not fully convinced that God has the power and the desire to deliver you from darkness. It's difficult to experience the abundant life if you're not fully convinced that Jesus came to give you abundant life. In order to fully experience God, you have to know him.

Knowing God means knowing Jesus. He is the ultimate power in the universe. That means that he is more powerful than any force, any person, any presence, or any thing at work in your life. Your enemies are no match for his power. Your fears are no match for his power. Your problems are no match for his power. Your sin is no match for his power. He has the power to conquer death, and through him you can have the power to conquer life.

[Q] If someone asked you who Christ is, how would you answer?

- What do you base that on?

[Q] What would it mean to have the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (v. 17)?

[Q] What does it mean that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you (vv. 19–20)?

[Q] Who would you pray a similar prayer for? Share it with the group, and have a quiet moment to pray this prayer for someone you know and love.

Teaching Point Three: Your confidence comes from understanding who you are in Christ.

When we know Christ—when we have the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, as Paul phrased it—then we can begin to make sense of who we are in him.

Look again at verse 18. At first glance, it seems Paul is talking about our inheritance—heaven, forgiveness, salvation, etc. But the word inheritance refers to the Father's inheritance, not ours. What will God inherit? He will inherit “the saints”—that is, the church. You and me.

God Wants You to Know Him

This is God's plan. He sent his Son into the world to die on the cross for our sins, so that all who come to him will be saved and will become members of his church. (We're talking about the universal church, not a specific church.) When you become a member of his church, the process begins in which he makes you pure and holy and blameless—a process which he guarantees he will complete. And when his work in you is done, he will receive you as his inheritance, his precious possession to be treasured throughout the ages. This is what God's people mean to him. This is who you are in Christ.

[Q] What does it mean to you that you are God's inheritance?

[Q] Look again at verses 19b–23. As a group, list all the things these verses tell you about Christ.

[Q] How does realizing how great Christ is affect your own confidence in him? Give an example.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God's power is available to you—his resurrection power. It is available for your benefit—to make you more like Jesus. That's because you are God's treasured possession. His plan is that you will become pure and holy and blameless—just like Jesus. That's what he sees in you.

The first step in understanding who you are in Christ is understanding who Christ is. The result of understanding who Christ is, and understanding who you are in Christ, is that you will experience his resurrection power. Power that will change you from the inside out. Power over sin. Power over despair. Power over fear. His power is available to you.

Action Point: Share with the group one area that you feel you need power in. Pray for each other concerning these things, using the words of Ephesians 1.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

God Wants to Change You

God Wants to Change You



We are new creatures in Christ, and a way for the world to see God's glory.

When we come to God, as sinners with empty, broken lives, God forgives, cleanses, and saves us. Then he begins the process of changing us—of making us like Jesus. The second chapter of Ephesians contains a popular salvation verse: “For by grace you have been saved, through faith ...” This passage teaches us not only how we are saved, but how God is at work to remake us into the image of his Son, Jesus.

Scripture: [Ephesians 2](#)

Based On: “You Are God’s Masterpiece,” by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)

God Wants to Change You

Part 1 Identify the Issue

God wants you to bury the past. In the first few verses of Ephesians 2, Paul talks about a way of life that he assumes is ancient history for his readers. For some of you, this may not be the case. In fact, everyone falls into one of three categories:

- Those who have given their lives to Christ and have successfully left behind their old way of life.
- Those who have given their lives to Christ but still struggle with their old way of life.
- Those who haven't yet given their lives to Christ, and what Paul refers to as the old way of life is actually their current way of life.

If you're in group one—hallelujah. If not, God doesn't want you to be chained to a sinful way of life. He wants to set you free. He wants to give you the power to overcome sin—and to bury the past forever in the past.

This begins with a decision to follow Jesus. It involves saying, “Lord, I want to turn my back on my old way of life and follow you. Come into my life and forgive my sins. Give me the strength to live for you.”

If you haven't yet made that decision, you can today. If you have already made that decision, you can renew it today. This is the first step in breaking away from the past.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] If you feel like sharing, what part of your past still haunts you, and why?
- [Q] Do you believe that God has forgiven you for that past? Why or why not?
- [Q] What can be the problem with not leaving your past behind?
- [Q] What do you think it would take to leave that past behind?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God will give you the power to leave your past behind and to come alive spiritually.

God Wants to Change You

Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

Notice three key words: *cravings*, *desires*, and *thoughts*. These three words reveal the pyramid of power of the old way of life.

For some of you, sin is not just an occasional slip-up; it's a constant, never-ending craving—one that leaves you completely powerless. Once that craving consumes you, there is nothing you can do to escape it. Maybe that craving is the temptation to explode in anger at your spouse or children; maybe it is to drown your misery in alcohol or food; maybe it is to commit some kind of sexual sin; maybe that craving is to spend too much money at the mall; maybe it is to exploit a business situation and take advantage of someone for your own selfish gain. The lure of the old way of life comes at us in dozens of different forms and faces, but the result is always the same: it brings the stench of the past into the present, and makes living a new life for Christ virtually impossible.

How do you get rid of it? How do you bury the past in the past? Paul gives us a hint in this “pyramid of power” in verse 3. Our cravings are born out of our desires, and our desires are born out of our thoughts. If you want power over sin, then you have to attack the source of its stronghold: your thoughts. When you change what you think about, and (listen carefully) when you change what you *want* to think about, you change your destiny.

We have a tendency to identify ourselves more with our sinful past than with our sanctified future. We think things like, *I have no control over my temper ... I am powerless over food ... I'm basically a dishonest person*, and on and on. Those things may have been true in the past, Paul says, but God wants to bury the past in the past. What was true about you yesterday doesn't have to be true today. He wants to change you through and through. In order for him to change you, you have to change the way you think.

For example, when a situation comes up that typically would cause you to blow your top, take these two steps:

1. Change what you think about. Instead of dwelling on the situation, dwell on the solution, or dwell on a non-related subject that is more conducive to a peaceful mind. Then ...
2. Change what you want to think about. Instead of thinking, *This is the kind of thing that puts me over the edge! say to yourself, This is the kind of thing that used to put me over the edge—the very thing that Christ is changing in me.*

If you want to bury the past, you have to kill it first. The only source of life the past has in your life is in your thoughts. Change what you think about, and you change your destiny.

God Wants to Change You

[Q] Don't answer this out loud, but what one thing would you change about yourself if you could? Be brutally honest with yourself. Ask yourself: What one thing would my spouse want to change about me? What one thing would my kids want to change about me? What one thing would my parents, siblings, or coworkers want to change about me?

[Q] Again, answer this quietly. How might thinking the following be useful in conquering this thing: *This is the kind of thing that puts me over the edge, but not anymore. This is the very thing that Christ is changing in me.*

[Q] If you would like to, mention this thing to the group and ask everyone to pray for you in this area. You may even want to give them permission to ask you how it's going in a week or two.

Teaching Point Two: God wants to custom design your future.

Imagine the heavenly realms that Paul made reference to in verse 6 as they appear at this very moment. There is Jesus, sitting on his throne. There, seated with him, is a group of Christians. If you look closely, you'll see it's not just the superstar Christians sitting with him; the stumbling Christians are there, also. Look closer. There YOU are. In the heavenly realms. With Jesus. How did you get there? Is it because of something you did? Something you didn't do? No. You're there because he brought you there. You're alive spiritually because he made you alive spiritually. This spiritual life that he gave to you gives you a capacity for change greater than you ever had before. God changes you through and through by making you into a brand new person.

Good works aren't enough to save you. But God wants you to do good works to bring him glory. Look at verse 7.

In other words, God wants your life to be an example of his goodness. He wants your life to reflect all that he can do in a person's life.

Verse 10 makes clear that God has a custom-designed future for you. There are things that you can do—that only you can do—that will bring him glory throughout the ages. It's hard to imagine, but it's true.

[Q] What difference does it make to your everyday life to know that you are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?

[Q] What are some things about you that are unique, that no one else does quite the same way you do?

[Q] What are some things about your past that are unique—even things you have struggled with—that God may want to use to reveal his goodness?

God Wants to Change You

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us understand how God wants to use us.*

Activity: *Sometimes it's hard for us to recognize our own gifts. Focusing on one person in the group at a time, ask each person in the group to say what they think that person is best at—something they think is their strength.*

Teaching Point Three: God wants to use community to help you be all you can in Christ.

An article in *Reader's Digest* explained how the roots of trees—even trees of different species—can become linked together. By being linked together, each tree can draw from the resources of every other tree in the forest. The trees furthest from the water can draw from the trees that are closest; the trees lacking nutrients can draw from the trees with an abundance. Each tree has access to all the resources of the forest.¹

Some of the redwood trees in California are 2,500 years old and stand 300 feet tall. The roots of the trees don't go as deep as some might expect, but they're all intertwined. The way these trees' roots are locked together gives the trees additional stability in high winds.

It works the same with the church. When you're connected to a group of people, the storm is not as likely to knock you down.

We belong to one another. We are not connected only to the believers in this room; we are connected to all the believers in this city. In this state. Throughout this country. Across this continent. Encircling this planet. As we gather together, think of all the other Christians throughout the world who are together right now, worshiping as we are worshiping.

Across this planet at this very moment, millions and tens of millions of Christians have come together for the same purpose that we have come together—to worship the name of Jesus Christ. We are connected to them. We belong to them, and they belong to us. Just as we share our strength with one another here, we need to do all we can to share our strength with the global church.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22.

[Q] How does this passage demonstrate that in the kingdom of God, we are all on level ground?

¹ *Speaker's Quote Book*, p. 71.

God Wants to Change You

[Q] How does remembering that Christ is our cornerstone help us to accept those in the church who are not like us, or who disagree with us?

[Q] What are some ways that community can help you transform to be more like Christ? Give a specific example of when that has happened in your life.

[Q] What habits do you need to change in order to be more involved with other Christians?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God has plans for you. Big plans. He wants to show the world the incomparable riches of his grace, and you're the one he can use to do it. Even when you fail, he doesn't give up on your future. Because God not only has plans for you, he knows you can become like Jesus. He is sure of this because he has the power to change you through and through. He'll bury your past, because he wants to change you; he'll give you new life, because he wants to change you; and he has custom-designed a future for you, because he wants the world to see the change.

Action Point: Break into pairs and share with your partner one thing you are going to do this week to change. It can be a habit to break or a habit to start. It can be a prayer to pray every day, or a Scripture to memorize and make a part of your life. Pray for each other after each of you has shared.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

God Wants You to Find Your Mission

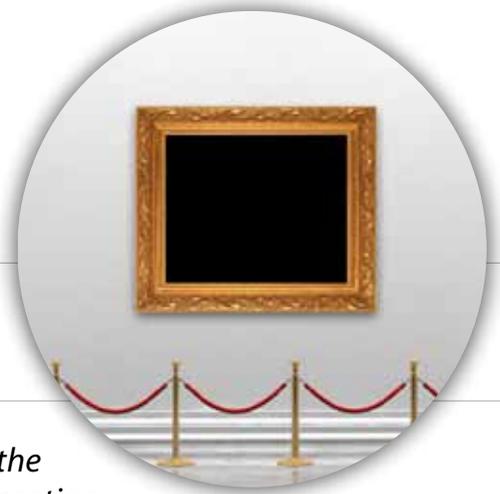
God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Adopt the same attitude as Paul: "I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do."

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the opportunity to start again—and without exception, we all need a fresh start from time to time. The apostle Paul certainly did. When we look at him from this side of history, most often we only see the good that he did. He wrote most of the New Testament, he started churches throughout the world, and he helped shape human history. We call him St. Paul, and many churches are named after him, but the fact is that there was a time in his life when he was anything but a saint. In those days his name was Saul, and he was, in fact, quite a rascal.

Scripture: [Ephesians 3](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Part 1 Identify the Issue

By the apostle Paul's own admission, he was an enemy of God and of the church. He persecuted Christians and did all he could to stop the growth of the church. Then, suddenly, his life changed. He was walking on the road to Damascus when a bright light from heaven blinded him and a voice spoke to him, saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

He asked, "Who are you?"

The voice responded, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting."

From that day on, Paul was a new man. He wasn't perfect; he still made mistakes and committed sins, but his life took on a new direction, and the world hasn't been the same since.

You can change just as dramatically by adopting the same attitude as Paul: I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] What was your conversion experience? Tell us about it.

[Q] When you decided to follow Christ, did you also have a sense of mission (I now have something important to do)? If so, what was it? If not, why do you think you lacked a sense of mission?

[Q] Why would it be good to recognize that you are not an important person, but that you have an important job to do? What is the difference?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Live with a sense of purpose.

Have you ever seen Bruce Springsteen in concert? He's semi-retired now, but in the 80s he was one of the hardest-working people in the entertainment business. His concerts typically last four hours—and whether he is playing to 20,000 people in an outdoor arena or just a few hundred people in a small room, Springsteen always gives 100 percent to every performance. There is always one point in the performance when the band dramatically stops playing and he screams into the microphone, "I'm just a prisoner of rock and roll!"

God Wants You to Find Your Mission

You know what? He is a prisoner of rock and roll. From the time he decided to be a musician, he has been obsessed with playing music before an audience. He refused to allow anything to stand in his way. Once, when he was still struggling to make it, he attended the wedding of a fellow struggling musician. At the wedding Bruce said to his friend, "I'm happy for you, but I'm sad—you'll never be able to make it now that you're married." Springsteen pursued his career with unbridled enthusiasm, and ultimately became a big name in rock music. It wasn't until after he became one of the highest-paid persons in show business that he settled down, got married, and started a family. Until then, he gave his life to rock and roll.

In the very same way, Paul gave his life to preaching the gospel. In Romans, Paul referred to himself as the "bondservant" or "slave" of Christ. In Ephesians he called himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." In Ephesians 3:7 he said, "I became a servant of this gospel."

Paul was consumed with a mission. His purpose in life wasn't just to be a religious person and preach in church on Sunday. His purpose was to save souls, change lives, and bring about worldwide racial equality through the ministry of the church.

Paul was Jewish, and like most Jewish men of his time, he grew up with the notion that there were two types of people in the world: Jews, who were God's chosen people, and everyone else. In the early days of the church, most Jewish Christians would have been content to let Christianity remain as Jewish as possible. Paul couldn't do it, though. After his face-to-face meeting with Jesus, he recognized that he had a purpose in life—to tell Gentiles about Jesus and bring them into the church. This made Paul extremely unpopular in certain circles, but he never let go of the mission to which God had called him.

What about you? What is your mission? God has given you a purpose. That purpose isn't created to serve you—you are created to serve that purpose. We need to get past the idea that we deserve or need an easy life. Instead, our attitude must be, "I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do, and I will serve my purpose."

Read Ephesians 3:1–13.

[Q] According to this passage, what did Paul see as his mission?

- What did it cost him to stay on this mission?

[Q] Sometimes our mission changes as we grow and mature. How has yours changed? What is your mission at this point in your life, and why?

Teaching Point Two: Live with a sense of humility and wonder.

God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Some of the things Paul said about himself are surprising. Without a doubt, he was one of the greatest men who ever lived, yet he spoke of himself in rather harsh terms. He called himself a slave, a servant, and a prisoner for the Lord. In 1 Timothy, he called himself the chief of all sinners. In Romans 7 he referred to himself as a “wretched man.” And in Ephesians 3:8 he says, “I am less than the least of all God’s people.”

From a theological standpoint, Paul knew this statement was inaccurate. He knew better than anyone that all individuals are equal in God’s eyes. In fact, equality was the very heart of his message. He knew God shows no partiality, and he himself was no worse than anyone else. Yet, Paul chose to look at himself from this perspective because he knew it was necessary for him to keep his ego in check. He refused to allow himself to be too important in his own eyes.

Paul was just like we are. If we’re not careful, we will act like we are the center of the universe. That’s why Paul adopted this attitude: I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

A few years ago, a religious satire magazine called *The Door* published an issue on the subject of racism. To give their readers an idea of what it is like to be the object of discrimination, they sent out photocopied issues of the magazine with a letter explaining that they had inadvertently printed too few magazines this time and had run out of copies. The letter said that the limited quantity of printed copies went to top priority subscribers, so you would have to accept this lesser-quality photocopy. Of course, all readers got this same letter and photocopied issue, but many of them didn’t get the point. *The Door* office was flooded with complaints. One pastor wrote a letter saying, “I have never been treated with such disrespect—I demand a written apology.” Sometimes we forget to live with a sense of humility.

In contrast, Kenneth Blanchard co-wrote a little book called *The One-Minute Manager*. The book was a huge success; it ended up on the *New York Times* bestseller list and sold millions of copies. Overnight, he became a celebrity in the business world. Later, he said that during this time he realized that he had two choices. One was to take all the credit for his success and assume that he was a better writer and more insightful thinker than anyone else. The other was to take the path of wonderment. He asked himself, “Why has this happened to me, and what can I learn from it?” As an observer of his own success, he was better able to manage the pitfalls and challenges that came with it.

Paul lived his life with a sense of wonder. He said, “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,” and “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.”

The word Paul repeatedly used to describe God’s work in his life was “grace.” Grace literally means an undeserved favor. He didn’t fool himself into thinking that he was doing God a favor by serving him. He had a sense of wonder about the calling God had placed on his life.

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There are two temptations we must resist. The first is an attitude of smugness—thinking that we're really something and that God is lucky to have us on his team. The second is an attitude of "Why me?" complaining about our lot in life: "Why couldn't I have been born rich? Or handsome? Or talented?" In many ways life seems to be unfair. Some are born to prosperity, others to poverty. Some are born with talent, some aren't. As we look at our own lives, we need to have a sense of wonder. We need to ask ourselves, "Why did God place me in this time, this place, this situation? What can I learn from it, and what does he expect me to do about it?"

[Q] Are you more tempted to smugness, thinking God is lucky to have you on his team, or to complaint, thinking God isn't fair? Why do you think you are tempted toward that?

[Q] What habits or traits do you have that show you are tempted to act like you are the center of the universe?

- Read Ephesians 3:7–13.

[Q] How might you describe yourself in terms of humility, as Paul did in this passage?

[Q] What are some ways you feel wonder at what God has done in and through you?

[Q] Why can we approach God with freedom and confidence in spite of our flaws (v. 12)?

Teaching Point Three: Live with a sense that God's love is your life.

Read Ephesians 3:14–21.

God has it all. He owns it all. As Psalm 50 says, all the animals of the forest, the cattle on a thousand hills, every bird of the mountains ... "the world is mine, and all that is in it" (Psalm 50:12). He can give you anything he wants—money, possessions, prestige, success, a life of privilege. But look at what he most wants to give you, according to Ephesians 3:18–19.

He can give you anything, and what he wants to give you most of all is the ability to know his love. Love is God's greatest resource. He takes love so seriously that he defines himself by it. The Bible says God is love. To experience the fullness of God in your life—which includes experiencing his power at work within you—you need to develop at least an inkling of the awesomeness of his love, although in this lifetime we will only, at most, scratch the surface of understanding God's love.

God loves you far more than any parent could love a child. As Augustine said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." Paul's prayer is that you will grasp this. God's greatest resource is his love.

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[Q] What has most helped you grasp God's love for you?

[Q] What can you do to better experience God's love in your everyday life? Brainstorm ideas.

[Q] How might this passage be a prayer that helps you to experience God's love?

[Q] How does this love motivate you in your mission?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To give us insight into the breadth of God's love.*

Activity: *God's love is beyond comprehension, and we will never fully understand it, but we can at least begin to try. August Hare once said (paraphrased), "Love flows downward. The love of parents for their children has always been far more powerful than that of children for their parents. In the same way, no one has ever loved God with more than 1/1,000th of the love that God has given us."*

Think of pre-school children. Think of how totally dependent they are on adults—how vulnerable, helpless, and fragile they are. Brainstorm some ways they can't understand the limits adults set on them. Then discuss how those limits show our love for them. Finally, compare this to our relationship with God, and make analogies."

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Living in God's love is the key to power. To the extent that we understand his love, we experience his power. What kind of power are we talking about here? Power over sin. Power over weakness. Power over fear. Power over shame. Power over despair. Power over rage. Power over lust. Power over greed. Power over pride. Power over doubt. Power over guilt.

These are the things that beat us down. These are the things that make our lives miserable. We don't have to live under their tyranny any longer. God promises his power. It's available to you. To receive his power, you only have to yield to his love.

Do you want to experience the power of God so that you can move past your sin and gain his mission for your life? Then get immersed in the love of God. Pray about it. Think about it. Meditate on it. Contemplate it. Believe it. Receive it. When you know his love, you will experience his power and find your mission.

Action Point: **To begin to understand God's love, we need to meditate and contemplate. Meditation is thinking in a specific direction; contemplation is**

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thinking for an extended duration. That's how you get immersed in God's love. Think about it intensely, and think about it extensively.

This week, read a Bible verse or passage that reaffirms God's love for you. As you read, pray, "God, make these words real to me." Ask yourself, "How would knowing that I am loved by God affect what I think about myself? How would it affect the way I respond to insults or criticism? How would it affect my need for recognition or approval? How would it affect my life's work?" Then pray, "Lord, make your love real to me," and think about times that you have experienced a special touch of God's love through his mercy, through a spiritual blessing, or through the ministry of one of his people. Say, "Lord, help me to know always what I have known in the best moments of my life—that I am your beloved child." This is meditation and contemplation. It's not a snappy 60-second formula; it's a lifetime process. The longer we meditate on his love, the deeper we are rooted in it, the better we understand it, and the more we experience it.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

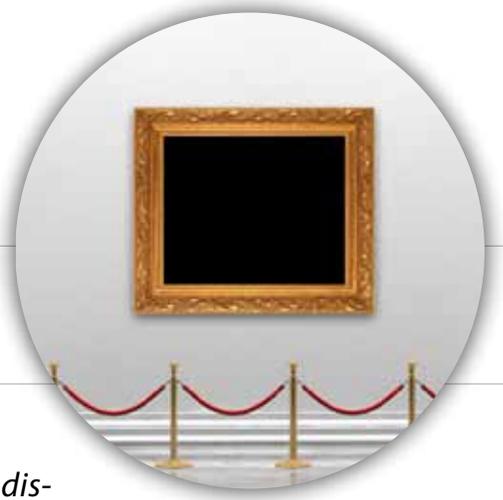
God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

We want to be useful, and in Ephesians 4, Paul teaches us about how God wants to use each one of us and to set us apart for him.

We have an innate desire—even a need, you could say—to be useful and to be used. Most disgruntled employees are disgruntled because they feel that their employer isn't maximizing their skills. Ask any player in the NFL if he would rather be the highest paid back-up or the lowest-paid starter, and the overwhelming majority would certainly say, "Put me in, Coach, I'm ready to play."

Scripture: [Ephesians 4](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Paul talks about our usefulness in Ephesians 4. He says, “As a member of the body of Christ, you have been given a special gift, a special grace, a special ministry, that Jesus designed especially for you.”

Whether your gift is or isn't obvious at this point, it does exist. To help you maximize your gift (or ministry), Paul teaches that God has given you a team of leaders whose job it is to bring your gift to full fruition in the service of Jesus Christ and his church.

Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. What do these titles mean? These terms didn't mean the same thing then (or, rather, didn't have the same connotation) as they do now. But all four offices are crucial to the ministry of God's people. You need this team of leaders to help you become fully functional in your service to him.

Ephesians 4 is also about unity. But a team cannot function as a team without coaches or leaders to give them guidance. Your coaches—your team of leaders—consists of these four offices.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How would you define each of the following?

- apostle
- prophet
- evangelist
- pastor-teacher

Where did you get your definitions?

How can each of these people help you use your gifts?

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God gave all four offices for your good.

Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

Let's look at each of these offices.

Apostle. Most often, *apostle* refers to a person having a special type of authority. Paul described himself as an apostle, emphasizing that his primary qualification was that he had seen the Risen Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1). So, in New Testament times, the title of *apostle* applied to a limited group of believers with unique authority in the church.

Near the end of the fourth century, when the Council of Carthage convened to determine which books would comprise the New Testament canon, they chose the 27 books we use today based on, in part, the books' apostolic authority—the fact that there was sufficient reason to believe that Paul's letters were truly written by Paul, the books of John were truly written by the apostle John, and so on.

As a believer, you are accountable to the apostles and their teaching—in other words, the Bible. It is the voice of authority in your life. It has the final say over what's right and wrong.

Prophet. First Corinthians 14:3–4 says, “But everyone who prophecies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort ... he who prophecies edifies the church.” That's the role of the prophet. So, as it turns out, those doom and gloom guys who keep making terrible predictions that never seem to happen—they're not even close to what the true biblical gift of prophecy is. The best word to associate with the role of prophecy is challenge. Prophets challenge people to be more holy, but they do it in a way that strengthens and edifies their listeners.

We need prophets—people who are spiritual enough to speak from God's perspective, who will say what needs to be said, who challenge us to excel in our relationships with God, but who have the gifting to say it in a way that brings strength, encouragement, and comfort.

Evangelist. One commentary defines an evangelist as “someone who focuses on proclaiming the gospel and its relevance.” The author added, “Such activity could be addressed to either believers or non-believers.”² God gave evangelists to the church because the church—just like the world—needs to be pointed to Jesus.

² Snodgrass, p. 204.

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Pastor-teachers. In the Greek, these words are combined to refer to one office. Actually, the word *pastor* means *shepherd*. Jesus described himself as a shepherd. He promised to lead, guide, feed, and protect his sheep. He even said that when one of us is lost, he will seek us, find us, rescue us, and carry us home. Jesus is the great shepherd. So a pastor-teacher is to love you and teach you the Word of God.

[Q] The Bible is our “apostolic authority.” We are accountable to it. How can we put ourselves under its authority? Who helps hold you to that authority today?

[Q] Who in your life is a prophet (has the ability to see with God’s perspective, and can say what needs to be said in a way that will strengthen, encourage, and comfort you)?

[Q] Who, as an evangelist, points you and unbelievers you know to Jesus? Who reminds you that Jesus is, always and forever, the only answer you’ll ever need? Who has the ability to help you cut through the clutter and confusion of life with the simple message that Jesus loves you?

[Q] Who is your shepherd (pastor-teacher)? Who nurtures you in your faith? One person on the list is probably your pastor, but there should be others.

God has a plan for you, a ministry for you. He has given you a special gift to accomplish it. Maybe your ministry exists within the parameters of the local church, serving in one of our established ministries. Or maybe it exists beyond our boundaries—in the workplace, or in your neighborhood, or even halfway around the world.

You are useful. You can be used by God. He has a place for you to serve him, and he has given you the grace you need to do it. He has also given you a team of leaders to help you accomplish his work in your life. Look to their leadership and do what God has called you to do.

Teaching Point Two: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your thoughts.

Read Ephesians 4:17–24.

The objective of this text is to teach you how to experience absolute transformation from your old way of life to your new way of life. Paul addresses three areas that we need to focus on in order to experience change. The first of these is our thoughts.

This idea has been repeated by teachers and philosophers throughout the ages:

The most important things in life are the thoughts you choose to frame.
(Marcus Aurelius)

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What we think about when we are free to think about what we will—that is what we are or soon will become. (A. W. Tozer)

A person is what he thinks about all day. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The mind is like a clock that is constantly running down; it has to be wound up daily with good thoughts. (Fulton J. Sheen)

Good thoughts are blessed guests, and should be heartily welcomed, well-fed, and much sought after. Like rose leaves, they give out a sweet smell, if laid up in the jar of memory. (Charles Spurgeon)

Change your thoughts and change your world. (Norman Vincent Peale)

And Paul says it in this text.

Here are some thoughts and attitudes from Scripture that can empower you to change your thoughts:

Things are working out for the best. (Romans 8:28)

Christ will finish in me the work he has begun. (Philippians 1:6)

God has turned his back on my sin. (Isaiah 38:17)

God will never turn his back on me. (Hebrews 13:5)

I belong to God, and that will never change. (Ephesians 1:5)

I have access to everything I truly need. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

My future is bright. (Ephesians 1:18)

Living in God's love is the key to living in power. (Ephesians 3:19)

This is why a daily devotional is so crucial in a believer's life. Our mind needs to be saturated with God's wisdom; we need to get into the habit of thinking his thoughts. Change your thoughts; it's the first seed of change.

[Q] Thoughts are often out of control and as natural as breathing. How can we change them? Name some ways that have worked for you or others you know of.

[Q] Looking at the list above from Scripture, which would be most useful in helping you change your thoughts?

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us understand how to change our thoughts.*

Activity: *Advise the following people how they can change their thinking about their circumstances, using the verses above.*

Joan doesn't understand why she lost her job. (Romans 8:28)

Rob gets so discouraged that he isn't growing in Christ fast enough. (Philippians 1:6)

Marcie feels so guilty for betraying a friend, even though she has asked God and the friend to forgive her. (Isaiah 38:17)

Darla feels like God is far away, even though she's doing everything she can to follow him. (Hebrews 13:5)

Thomas worries all the time that God has abandoned him because he has some sin issues he can't seem to shake. (Ephesians 1:5)

Ann, a single mom, worries all the time about whether she will be able to pay the bills. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Pete is afraid his poor health will never get better. (Ephesians 1:18)

Matt can't seem to move past his addiction. (Ephesians 3:19)

Teaching Point Three: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your words.

Read Ephesians 4:25–32.

We all need to learn to encourage one another. We must remember that our words carry tremendous weight. Words can be destructive. The philosopher C. J. Ducasse said, "To speak of 'mere words' is much like speaking of 'mere dynamite.'"

God wants his church to dwell together in unity. Simply put, he wants us to get along. In order to do that, we have to learn to watch what we say.

Paul said to speak truthfully to one another; he also said don't use abusive language. Have you ever noticed that some people have a hard time reconciling those two? They seem to think being honest means saying whatever mean thing comes to mind.

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

This matter of watching our words needs to be taken seriously by the church. It's an essential part of displaying your new nature in Christ. Don't use foul or abusive language—no matter how right you are or how wrong they are. Don't use foul or abusive language—even if they used it first.

[Q] How has your language changed since you've come to Christ?

[Q] What is conversation for you? A chance to tell others what you like? What you think? What you know? What you want? What do you most often talk to others about?

Conversation should be seen as something more than an opportunity to speak your mind. Paul says to look at it differently. Look at conversation as an opportunity to say something helpful to someone else.

Here's a principle we can all try: "When I talk to you, I talk about you." Doing this helps put a lid on criticism and gossip. It also gives us the chance to minister to our friends, rather than just chat with them.

If you want to display the new nature Christ has given you, change your words—because your words are a seed of transformation.

[Q] How can we change the deeply ingrained habits of our words? Give practical ideas.

Teaching Point Four: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your actions.

A preacher stood up in front of his congregation and asked, "Have any of you here, at any time in your life—even in childhood—ever told an untruth? And white lies count, by the way." Of course, everyone raised their hand. Then he asked, "And have any of you here ever taken something that didn't belong to you—like a piece of bubble-gum from a candy store, or a paper clip from work, or never returned something that you borrowed?" Everyone raised their hands. "That's good," the minister said. "I just needed to know who my audience is. I see that I'm surrounded by liars and thieves."

That seems to be what Paul is saying. In verse 25 he tells us to put away falsehood, and in verse 28 to stop stealing.

Liars and thieves! Is that his audience? Is that the kind of person who attended church in Ephesus? Actually, they were probably a lot like us, and they wouldn't consider themselves liars and thieves any more than we would. But Paul uses this extreme example to define the kind of transformation that needs to take place in our behavior.

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

The thief must become a philanthropist. This is transformation. A thief thinks only of himself, and acts only on his own behalf, regardless of the pain it may cause others. He's looking out for number one. A philanthropist, however, looks out for the well-being of others, and he takes care of them in addition to taking care of himself.

In your relationships, in your ministry, in your work life, look for ways to live win-win. Take care of yourself without hurting others; take care of others without hurting yourself.

[Q] What actions of yours need to change? It can be a negative action you need to drop, or a positive action you need to adopt. Share one of them with the group.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

In Paul's words, we see the essence of transformation. There's something that goes deeper than our thoughts, words, and emotions—it is the core of our being. When we talk about transformation, that's what we want to see changed. It's not just a matter of doing good; we want to *be* good, through and through.

This is how you destroy the enemy: with your thoughts, with your words, with your actions. Every time you think a godly thought, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you speak an uplifting word, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you act with generosity and kindness, you sow a seed of transformation. These things—our thoughts, our words, our actions—are more than just the surface level elements of our lives. They are the seeds of change.

Action Point: Which area of your life most needs transforming? Your thoughts? Your words? Your actions? Share your answer with the group, and pray for one another about what you have shared.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation



You imitate God by loving people.

Occasionally, when you read the Bible, you'll come across a verse that overwhelms you by virtue of its sheer impossibility. For example, when Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Or the time when Jesus told what was left of his original band of disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Sounds like "Mission Impossible" for 11 ragtag, uneducated men, doesn't it? There's another scripture where Paul tells us to do the seemingly impossible: "Be imitators of God ..."

Scripture: [Ephesians 5](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Marlon Brando was one of the most imitated actors. He's kind of like Elvis—everyone thinks they can do a Brando impersonation. Part of the reason is that he spoke so many classic movie lines. People immediately know who you're imitating when you shout, "Stella!" Or when you say, "I coulda had class! I coulda been a contender!" Or when you say, "Santino, don't ever go against the family."

It's amazing how an actor or a comedian can adapt the facial expressions, the physiology, and the vocal inflection of a famous person. Dana Carvey's impersonation of the senior George Bush was one of the best—even the former president loved it. Carvey once explained the trick involved in doing George Bush. He said you take one part John Wayne, one part Mr. Rogers, mix them together, and you end up with "Not gonna do it; wouldn't be prudent."

Some imitations are good, but they're no substitute for the real thing. For example, no Hollywood producer ever says, "We can't get Arnold Schwarzenegger for this movie, but my unemployed nephew does a pretty good Schwarzenegger impersonation, so let's use him instead." There's more to imitating a famous actor than just repeating their best-known lines with their accent.

Which brings us to the subject of imitating God. In the same way, there's more to imitating God than just talking the talk. Some people think that if they just quote enough Scripture enough times in enough conversations, they'll be branded as godly. Quoting Scripture is, of course, a good thing, but there is more to imitating God than just repeating his best-known lines.

So, how do we imitate God as Ephesians 5:1 says we are to do?

Discussion Questions:

[Q] What first comes to your mind when you hear "Be imitators of God ..."?

[Q] In what ways is it impossible to imitate God?

[Q] How do you think we should go about imitating him?

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Read Ephesians 5:1–2.

That's how you imitate God: you love people. Love is not a feeling, it's an action. Love is something you do. The Bible says that God loves us, and he demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). So when Paul talks about imitating God by walking in love, he's not talking about having a feeling, he's talking about showing an action. So, we'll look at some actions that demonstrate God's love to the world.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: You imitate God by forgiving others.

Read Ephesians 4:32–5:21.

Look again at Ephesians 4:32. You imitate God's love by forgiving others. Mohandas Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." He may not have been a Christian, but he understood this aspect of forgiveness: It requires strength.

The inability to forgive is a sign of weakness; the ability to forgive is a sign of power. That's because forgiveness isn't easy or human. It doesn't come naturally to us. C. S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive."

If you're married, there's no doubt that you have something to forgive. If you have children, parents, or siblings, you have something to forgive. If you have a boss or employees, you have something to forgive. If you serve in ministry or volunteer in any area of the church, you have something to forgive. In the course of human events, it is inevitable that offenses will come; we all find ourselves facing opportunities to forgive. The question is: What will you do about it? Whose example will you follow? Who will you imitate?

When you are struggling with the need to forgive someone, ask yourself a couple of questions: If I did what this person did, would God forgive me? While you may not be guilty of the same offense, you are guilty of an equal offense. (See 1 John 1:8 and James 2:10.)

[Q] Why are some offenses so hard to forgive?

[Q] What was the most difficult offense Jesus had to forgive?

[Q] How can we get past our feelings of bitterness to forgive someone else?

[Q] What is the difference between forgiveness and trust? Are they the same? Does one automatically mean the other? How might you forgive someone that you don't trust?

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Teaching Point Two: You imitate God by suffering for others.

Look again at verse 2. Because of his love for us, Jesus denied himself—his own rights and even his own will—and gave himself for us.

Just as forgiveness requires strength that is beyond us, so does self-denial. It is not easy to say no to yourself, and yet, that is what God has called us to do (Matthew 16:24).

You will never be called upon to suffer for others to the extent that Jesus suffered for you, but you will be inconvenienced. You will have to take calls when you don't want to take calls, run errands when you don't want to run errands, give when you don't want to give. The willingness to suffer for others is saying, "I'm not the center of the universe; the world doesn't revolve around me." If Jesus (who truly is the center of the universe) can adopt that attitude, so can you!

This willingness to suffer for others is not about suffering that happens to you—that you have no choice about. It's about self-denial, a choice that you make. And that's why it takes strength to do it, because—like Christ—you are giving yourself up willingly. When we choose to suffer—or even be inconvenienced—for the sake of others, we demonstrate God's love.

Do you want to imitate God's love? Serve others. Ian Maclaren said, "The world cannot always understand a person's profession of faith, but it can understand service."

[Q] How do service and self-denial demonstrate love so completely?

[Q] What did Jesus give up to come to Earth?

[Q] Name the ways that Jesus served others while he was on Earth.

[Q] What circumstances are the hardest for you to serve in (home, work, church, etc.)? Why?

[Q] Who do you think God is calling you to serve sacrificially?

Teaching Point Three: You imitate God by being careful, perceptive, and filled.

In Ephesians 5, Paul tells us several times to "be" a certain way—not "do" certain things.

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Why the distinction? What is the difference between “being” and “doing”? When Paul tells us to “be” a certain way, he’s talking about attitudes and habits that we need to adopt and exhibit around the clock. He’s talking things we need to do—but we do them because they are so much a part of who we are that these attitudes and habits just flow out of us. Being always leads to doing.

There is an unbreakable connection between being and doing. One substantiates the other. Do you want to BE generous? Then DO generosity—in other words, give. Do you want to BE compassionate? Then DO compassionate things. There is an unbreakable connection between being and doing, and the more you “DO,” the more you will “BE.” So, in Ephesians 5, when Paul says to “BE,” he’s saying: Do these things again and again and again, until they become so entrenched in who you are that they are part of your very nature.

Look at verse 15. You tell someone to “be careful” when they’re about to face something dangerous, or when they’re about to encounter something important. And that describes every day of our lives. Paul’s phrase in the original text has a “seize the moment” connotation to it—this day, this hour, this moment is important. Seize it. Maximize it. Redeem it. Live it for all it’s worth.

We should approach every day with a certain amount of caution, because there is spiritual danger all around us. When the pressure to succeed is mounting and you start to think about cutting some ethical corners, be careful. When that person in the office says something subtly flirtatious, be careful. When you come home on edge and as soon as you walk in the door your spouse says the wrong thing, be careful. Danger lurks at every turn of the day. Be careful. Approach each moment of each day with caution.

But at the same time, we should also approach each day with anticipation, because each day is an opportunity to accomplish something great for the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 17. Usually when we talk about God’s will, we are referring to major decisions, such as who does God want me to marry, where does God want me to work, and so on. That’s not what Paul is talking about here. He is referring to what God wants us to do on a daily basis, how he wants us to live. It does no good to have a grand vision for your life if you don’t understand that living the Christian life is a day-to-day process.

Look at verse 18. Paul’s command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is an indication that when it comes to being Spirit-filled, the ball is in our court. It is up to us to activate it. How? You ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit, to give you as much of him as you can have. Then you yield yourself to him, surrendering your will to his will. And you receive it, because at that moment he fills you with his Spirit. You don’t have to wait for a feeling or any kind of sign, because the proof of his presence is not in your emotions, it’s in the reliability of his Word. It

God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

is God's will that you be filled with the Holy Spirit. If you ask him to fill you with a heart yielded to him, he will fill you—guaranteed.

Bill Bright teaches this concept on spiritual breathing: As we go throughout the day, becoming aware of impurities in our life, we “exhale” them by confessing them to God. And then we “inhale” his presence in our lives by surrendering ourselves to his control, asking to be filled with his Spirit.

[Q] How can you live each day carefully and cautiously? Give practical examples.

[Q] How can you live each day immersed in God's will? What does that look like in daily life?

[Q] How do you know when you are filled with the Holy Spirit? How does your life reflect his presence?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us understand what it means to live daily in God's presence.*

Activity: *Break into three groups. Assign each group one of the following: Live carefully and cautiously. Live immersed in God's will. Live filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Ask each group to come up with two short skits. The first should illustrate the opposite of the thing they were assigned (for example, someone who lives carelessly and takes risks all the time). The second should illustrate that person converted into the Ephesians 5 way of living. Perform both skits for the entire group and discuss.

Teaching Point Four: You imitate God by being good to your spouse and family.

Read Ephesians 5:22–6:4.

There are at least three ways to be a good husband:

1. Accept your role as a leader (vv. 22–23). This reference to Christ is a comparison, not a job description. You're the leader of your family, not their Lord and Savior. This is what it means: Your wife needs (and wants) you to be a strong and courageous leader. Not a bully, not a dictator, not a caveman, but strong and courageous. There is not a woman in the world who wants to be married to a weakling. There is not a woman in the world who wants to be married to a coward. She needs you to be strong. Your family needs you to be strong. They need to be able to look to you for leadership. This has nothing to do with chauvinism; it has everything to do with character.

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You're the leader. Do you know what an effective leader does? Here's a great quote: "Good leaders inspire people to have confidence in them. Great leaders inspire people to have confidence in themselves." When Sam Ewing made that statement, he was talking about business—but he could have been talking about marriage.

This is your job as a leader: bring out the best in your wife and your children. Inspire them to be the very best that they can be.

2. Accept your role as a lover (vv. 25–29). Paul tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How much did Christ love the church? Enough to die for it. Who makes the sacrifices in your household? Do your wife and kids structure their lives around yours? Do they have to yield their wants and needs to yours? Are you the center of your little universe? Who makes the sacrifices at your house? If a sacrifice is to be made, you're the one to make it. You do without, not them.

Men, if you were to make a list of all the words you hope would describe your personality and character, the word *nurturing* probably wouldn't make the top five. But it should, because there is no other way to describe the way you take care of yourself. When you're hungry, you eat. When you're tired, you sleep. When you've got a headache, you take an aspirin. When you get a chance to watch a ball game, you watch it. That's nurturing in a nutshell. In the same way that you take care of yourself, you need to take care of your wife. In the same way that you love yourself, you need to love your wife.

Think about what your wife needs. Her needs are different from yours, and they're every bit as important. You might not need conversation at the dinner table, but maybe she does. You might not need to have your hand held, but maybe she does. You might not need to hear the words "I love you," but maybe she does.

3. Accept your role for a lifetime (v. 31). It is clear that God takes this matter seriously. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. You want to be a good man, a good father, a good husband? Then you've got to recognize that this is the role of a lifetime. That means you've got to be willing to stay.

[Q] If your wife is present in this group, get together with her and discuss the following. If she is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find a time to discuss them with your wife.

- Is there any area in which I am abdicating my leadership?
- I need your help in fulfilling my role in the following ways: _____

- How can I better love you? What would make you feel loved?

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What about being a good wife?

Throughout the Book of Ephesians, Paul has been talking about unity; now he brings it down to the most practical level possible—unity in the home, unity in the family.

The main focus of this passage is not the role of the woman; it is the role of the man. Anyone who thinks Ephesians 5 is just about a wife submitting to her husband is missing the point. It's primarily about the husband's role. However, Paul does mention some things the wife needs to do.

Paul says all believers are to submit to one another (v. 21), and wives are to submit to their husbands (v. 22). Wives are to submit to their husbands in the same way that we all to submit to one another. Now, men, is there anyone you submit to in a way that could be described as subservient, or blind obedience? Of course not. It's true that Christian men submit to one another in the sense that we (at the proper time) yield ourselves to the influence and leadership of our Christian brothers—but we're nobody's slave.

So, wives, your command to submit is not a command to become your husband's puppet. Paul is not suggesting that your husband make all of your decisions for you. You are still responsible for your own actions and your own decisions. That's why Paul included the qualifying phrase "as to the Lord." If your husband, or your boss, or your parents, or any person of influence demands something of you that is outside the parameters of Christian discipleship, you have an obligation to draw the line.

So, what does it mean to submit to your husband? We know it's not about being subservient, so what is it about? Wives are to submit to their husbands in the way that all believers submit to one another, so how do you do it? Here are three ways you can submit to your husband.

1. Listen to his counsel. If you're like most wives, sometimes you just want to pour out your troubles and have your husband listen with an understanding ear. And if your husband is like most men, as soon as he hears your trouble, he starts giving advice on how to fix it. When your husband starts offering simplistic advice to make your problem go away, listen to him. He probably has insight into your problem that you don't have, not because he's so much brighter than you, but because he has the right balance of distance from the problem and familiarity with your situation to speak with some amount of wisdom on the subject.

2. Look to his leadership. If your husband is good at doing something, by all means let him do it. Let him be the leader in this area, and don't challenge him every step of the way. Trust his judgment and yield to his leadership. (Don't you already yield to the leadership of other knowledgeable people? Don't you trust their judgment? Try it with your husband.) In a marriage this should go both ways.

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What about decisions you must make together, such as moving to a new city, buying a new house or car, or deciding which church you will attend, etc.? Who gets the final say? A husband who unilaterally makes decisions for the family without taking into consideration how that decision will impact his family is an irresponsible man. When it comes to major decisions, each couple needs to decide for themselves how they will be reached. And they must remember that the question is not “What’s best for me?” or “What’s best for you?” The question is “What’s best for us?”

3. Respect your husband (v. 33). Some wives treat their husbands like one of the children. They rarely make reference to any of their good qualities, but talk a lot about their faults. Remind yourself of what he does well. And while you’re at it, remind him from time to time.

[Q] If your husband is present in this group, get together with him and discuss the following. If he is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find a time to discuss them with your husband.

- How can I better listen to your counsel? When do I cut you off and not let you give your opinion?
- When do I challenge your leadership and make it impossible for you to lead?
- How do you make decisions? How can we make decisions together?
- Do I show you respect? If not, how can I do that better?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Imitating God isn’t impossible, or he wouldn’t have commanded us to do it. It’s possible, but we can’t do it in our own strength. We need to rely on Jesus to help us.

One thing you will learn as you practice imitating God is that you get better at it. Just like Dana Carvey’s impersonation of George Bush became more and more convincing over the years, our imitation of God’s love becomes more and more like his. We get better at it.

Action Point: Do you want to learn to imitate God? Then begin to say no to yourself and yes to others. Make a list of who you need to forgive and who you need to serve. Think of one action that you need to take daily to serve someone else.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

God Warns You About the War Zone

God Warns You About the War Zone

We are engaged in spiritual battle, and without God's help, we will lose.

Ephesians 6 talks about work and the armor of God. What do these have to do with each other? You live in a war zone. Your life is a battlefield. Every moment throughout the day there are things happening around you that cannot be seen with the natural eye, but are, nonetheless, all too real. We are in the midst of spiritual warfare.

Scripture: [Ephesians 6](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



God Warns You About the War Zone

Part 1 Identify the Issue

This short paragraph was written in the second century by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180 AD):

At day's first light, if you find yourself inclined to stay in bed, be prepared to say, "I am rising for the work of man." Must I grumble at setting out to do what I was born to do? Is this the purpose of my creation, to lie here under the blankets and keep myself warm? You might say, "Ah, but it is a great deal more pleasant!" Was it for pleasure then, that you were born, and not for work? Look at the plants, the sparrows, ants, spiders, bees, all busy at their own tasks, each doing his part towards a coherent world-order; and will you refuse to do your share of the work? You might say, "Yes, but everyone needs to relax sometime." Granted, but relaxation has its limits set by Nature, in the same way as food and drink have; and you overstep the limits, you go beyond the point of sufficiency; while on the other hand, when action is in question, you stop short of what you could well achieve. [Book 5:1]

When you wake up in the morning, if you dread getting out of bed, remember that getting out of bed is worth it because it gives you the opportunity to fulfill your purpose. Aurelius refers to a "coherent world-order" established by nature; believers have a more enlightened view, because we understand that we are not servants of an impersonal force of nature, but of a personal, loving Father. How much more so, then, can his words be applied to us: At day's first light, if you're inclined to stay in bed, be prepared to say, "I am rising today to do that which I was created to do. I am rising today to do the work of God."

We weren't made for the pursuit of pleasure, or the pursuit of happiness. We were created to work. (This idea goes all the way back to Genesis 1.) Christians understand that we don't work merely for work's sake or for the glory of ourselves; we work for the glory of God.

Your thoughts, struggles, fears, doubts, dreams, and goals are in the midst of a fierce battle. From the time you wake up in the morning until your head hits the pillow late at night, you are engaged in combat—in a war hard fought and not easily won, a war in which the casualty count can include every person you come into contact with, day in, day out.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Is there any kind of work that you really enjoy? If so, what is it?

[Q] How can we see all the necessary details of our day as God's work? What makes them God's work?

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[Q] How would you define a spiritual battle?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: You engage in spiritual battle and win when you show your boss respect and pour yourself into your job.

Since we no longer have the institution of slavery (thank God), think of this passage in terms of employers and employees. Read Ephesians 6:5–9.

Some of you might say, “My boss is a jerk. He doesn’t deserve respect.” Actually, whether he or she is a jerk or not is beside the point. Show that person respect because of their position, not their personality. If you refuse to show respect, it reflects poorly on you and on Christ.

Also, pour yourself into your job. It’s been said that your “self” is made up of your mind, your will, and your emotions. Paul says to pour all three into your work:

- Your mind. Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear (v. 5).
- Your will. Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching (v. 6).
- Your emotions. Work with enthusiasm (v. 7).

Some work places seem to be designed to drain every ounce of enthusiasm from you. And some bosses seem to thrive on knocking the wind out of your sails. That’s why we must remember that Paul spoke these words to slaves—people who were in the worst possible work situation.

Mother Teresa, who worked in the slums of Calcutta among the poorest of the poor, described her ministry team’s work ethic like this: “We are committed to feed Christ who is hungry, committed to clothe Christ who is naked, committed to take in Christ who has no home—and to do all this with a smile on our faces and bursting with joy.”

She makes reference here to Matthew 25:35–36. Do it all for Jesus.

When there is an aspect of your job that you have to do, but don’t want to do, imagine that Jesus is asking you, “Would you do it for me?” Of course you would. You might not want to do it for the ungrateful people you have to deal with day in and day out, but you’ll do it for Jesus, won’t you? That’s what he’s asking you to do. Do your job for him, not for the company, not for the boss, not for the paycheck, but as an offering unto him.

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[Q] Which of the three areas is hardest for you to keep straight in your work: you mind, your will, or your emotions?

- How does one affect the others?

[Q] What difference would it make to do your work for Jesus instead of your boss?

[Q] How can we know when we should seek a new job instead of staying in the one we are currently in?

[Q] How might this passage apply if you are a stay-at-home mom or dad?

Teaching Point Two: When you put on the full armor of God, you can stand against the enemy's strategies.

Read Ephesians 6:10–20.

Think again about verses 10 and 11. It is only through God's power that you can expect to win the spiritual battles of life. If you enter the battlefield alone, there's no telling what will happen. But, if you enter in his power, you are guaranteed to win.

Because Jesus Christ has been given all power in heaven and Earth, we do not have to lose spiritual battles. What exactly is a spiritual battle?

Every time you are presented with the opportunity to entertain a lustful thought, you have entered a spiritual battlefield. Every time you have the chance to do something vindictive, you are on the battlefield. Every time you have the chance to say something harsh and hurtful, you are in the midst of battle. Every time you toy with the notion that you're just a little bit better than most of the people you know, you are surrounded by enemy fire. Every time you encounter a person in need, you are engaged in combat.

Life is a spiritual battlefield, and there is a force at work in this world that does not want you to do good and does not want you to live for Jesus. There is a force at work in this world that does not want you to minister to others in Jesus' name and reflect his love and mercy. And that force will do whatever it takes to make sure you don't do it. Some of you may say, "Wait a minute. I didn't sign up for this!" Maybe not, but when the doctor spanked your bottom, you were drafted into it. That's just the way life is. As someone said, "You gotta serve somebody—it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody."

Our enemy might be strong, but our Savior is stronger. Don't get the impression that a fight between God and the devil is a close match. The devil has been defeated. Beaten. Stomped. Humiliated. He has no power in your life, so you don't have to moan and groan about how

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oppressive he is. All you have to do is put on the full armor of God and you will win the battle. James 4:7 says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

- [Q] Give an example of a spiritual battle that you know you fight daily.
- [Q] How have you found victory in your spiritual battles? Name practical ways.
- [Q] If Christ has already defeated the devil, why do we still struggle in a spiritual battle?

Teaching Point Three: In the full armor of God, we can stand our ground against the enemy—and keep standing.

You resist the devil by putting on the full armor of God. Look again how Paul describes it in verses 13 through 17.

This is an interesting metaphor. Paul was, of course, describing a Roman soldier. At the time he was writing this letter, he was in prison and was probably chained to a Roman soldier. Each item on the list parallels a behavior—something we are to do in order to experience the fullness of God's strength. The emphasis is not on the item of armor and all it symbolizes. The emphasis is on the behavior Paul is challenging us to emulate.

Wearing the belt of truth, we can stand firm in truthfulness and sincerity of heart. Paul is talking about truthful living, truthful thinking, truthful speaking. He's talking about not lying, not being deceptive. He's talking about honesty, to live truthful lives according to God's truth.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the belt of truth.

Wearing the breastplate of righteousness, our personal holiness will be seen in doing good. The breastplate's role was obvious. It was like a bullet-proof vest. It protected your most vital organs. And what is that breastplate made of? Righteousness. Paul is talking about doing good works.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the breastplate of righteousness.

Wearing feet fitted with readiness, we can go and fight or serve the instant God opens an opportunity. Paul is saying: Put your shoes on. Be ready to go. Be ready to move. Be ready to work. Be ready to serve.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to have feet fitted with readiness.

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Wearing the shield of faith, we are protected from anything the enemy throws at us. Roman soldiers used two kinds of shields. A small one in hand-to-hand to combat, and a large one—four and a half feet tall by two feet wide—for use when the army was advancing. The soldiers would stand side-by-side, each holding up his shield, and the enemy would be faced with a solid wall of shields—row after row after row. This made the army impenetrable. That's what faith does. It makes you impenetrable, especially when you're marching side by side with your fellow soldiers.

He makes reference to fiery darts. The Roman shields were covered with leather, and were often soaked before battle so that they would quickly absorb and snuff out the flaming arrows that were shot at them. Your faith gives you the same protection. When you continue to advance side by side with your fellow soldiers, your faith protects you from anything the enemy throws your way.

[Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the shield of faith.

Wearing the helmet of salvation means meditating on all God has done for us and has planned for us. Paul is talking about the way we think. I can't give in to despair, no matter how bad things get, because God's salvation protects my head. When I think about what he has done for me, and all that he promises me, I can't believe in despair—even during the darkest days.

[Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the helmet of salvation.

Wearing the sword of the Spirit, God gives us specific words to live by. In verse 17, Paul refers to “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” In this case, Paul isn't referring to the Bible or the New Testament, which hadn't yet been completely written and compiled. And he doesn't use the word *logos* here. Rather, he uses the word *rhema*, which really means “a saying.” It refers not to a general word, but a specific word. For example, the whole Bible could be called a *logos*, but John 3:16 would then be called a *rhema*, or a specific word or saying.

The sword of the Spirit is that specific word—that *rhema*—that God gives us by supernatural revelation. Most often, it is a verse of Scripture that applies to my specific situation. We have to spend a lot of time in the Word, the Bible, so that God can speak specific words into our life when we need them most.

[Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the sword of the Spirit.

Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God. You don't have to remember the breastplate and the belt and all the others, but you do need to remember this: We are in a spiritual battle, a battle that we can win only through the strength of God. In order to experience the strength of God, we need to do certain things: Live truthfully, do good works, be ready to go where God sends us, be faithful (full of faith), think about salvation, and listen to God's word.

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This is the full armor of God. It enables you to stand against the devil's schemes. And there's one more weapon in your arsenal: prayer (v. 18).

Paul's strategy for prayer is quite simple: Pray for everything and everyone, he says. On all occasions. With all kinds of prayers and requests. For all the saints. Pray.

This is your greatest weapon in spiritual warfare. Why? Because when you pray you are submitted to God. Remember the verse from James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us understand what it means to put on the whole armor of God.*

Activity: *Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with a poster board, magazines, markers, scissors, and glue. Ask each group to make a soldier equipped with the armor mentioned in Ephesians 6. When finished, label and define each piece of armor. Share and explain the finished product to the whole group.*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Life is a war zone, and every day we're on the battlefield. The only way you can win this battle is through the strength of God. But to receive God's strength you must act. Put on the belt of truth: live truthfully. Put on the breastplate of righteousness: do good works. Put your shoes on and be ready to go where God sends you. Take up the shield of faith, and be ready to live by faith. Wear the helmet of salvation, and fill your mind with thoughts about all that God's salvation means to you. Get into the Word and listen to God's voice, so that he can speak specific words into your life. And most of all, pray—on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for everyone. Do this, Paul says, and you will stand your ground, and when the battle is over, you will remain standing for the glory of God.

Action Point: **This week make prayer your "first resort." Before you do anything, pray. When you get up in the morning, before you interact with your family, pray just a quick prayer: "God, help me help them get their day off to a great start." When you walk into your workplace, pray a quick prayer: "God, help me do your work today for your glory. And help me treat my coworkers with dignity and respect." Before you make a phone call, before you speak to a client, before you go to a meeting, pray. In traffic, pray. In stressful situations, pray. In every event throughout the day, pray. On all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, pray.**

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

