



BIBLE STUDY BASICS

Ephesians

Find out what it looks like to live as one of God's adopted children.



In a time when so many people struggle with identity, Ephesians is the perfect book of the Bible to study. Paul makes it clear: Our identity is found in the fact that we are children of God, adopted into his family, and we're to live as children of light in a dark world. Ephesians reminds believers of all Christ has done to reconcile us to himself and what that means for how we should live. It provides practical instructions for relationships that honor God.

This Bible Study Basics study can be done in the number of sessions you'd like, with the ideal number being 6–8 sessions. It includes excellent discussion questions for the text, fun icebreakers and activities to engage group members, clear application points, great tips on leading discussion, and information on how to make the study work for all levels of spiritual maturity.



How to Use Bible Study Basics

We're so glad that you're using this study guide with your group. We know you'll gain a lot of wisdom through your discussion. Use this guide to make the most of this resource.

Decide How Many Meetings

Any of our **Bible Study Basics** can be covered as quickly or as slowly as you'd like. If the book you're studying has five chapters, you might plan on five meetings. Or to look at the passages more in depth, plan for ten meetings. Consider how long your group would like to meet to discuss this book of the Bible.

Decide Which Themes to Cover

In this resource, each chapter is divided up into major themes that are covered in the text. As you discuss a chapter, you may choose to discuss only one of the themes or all of the themes in the chapter. Or you might focus most of your discussion on one theme and only briefly cover another. If you're going more slowly through the book, you'll be able to cover all of the themes more in depth. As you prepare for your study, consider what main idea or ideas you'd like your group members to walk away with.

Choose 4–6 Questions

In the **Talk It Out** section, we've given you a variety of questions to choose from for your study, but please don't use them all! You simply don't have time to cover every single question we've written. Plan to cover 4–6 questions per meeting and choose them based on the themes you've chosen to cover. This will ensure you'll have enough time to discuss each of the questions thoroughly. If you have extra time, you can always ask additional questions.

Do the Activity

Start your meeting with one of the **Start It Out** activities to engage your group members. If you're covering multiple themes in one meeting, just choose one activity. The Start It Out activities will get your group focused and thinking about the important themes of your study.

Lead the Discussion

Use the tips and suggestions in “**Lead a Great Discussion**” and “**Engage Everyone in Your Group**” to make the most of your time together. This proven advice comes from the experts at SmallGroups.com.

Identify Your Next Step

The **Live It Out** section provides a list of possible action steps to take as a result of your discussion. Applying what you've learned will be unique to each group member. Let group members choose one application step from the Live It Out section or come up with one on their own. You might also consider what your next step as a group will be.

End With Prayer

Don't forget to share prayer requests. Pray that group members will follow through with their application. Thank God for all he's teaching you through your time together.



Lead a Great Discussion

For many, facilitating a group discussion—especially in a Bible study—can be intimidating. But the goal isn't to have all the right answers or even to get through all the material. To lead a great discussion, get all your group members involved, and help them connect the discussion to their lives. This is what leads to life change, and that's the goal. Here are a few tips for leading a great discussion with your group.

Get to know each other. Take some time, especially at the start of a new group, to get to know one another. As relationships develop, group members will be more likely to share authentically, which will help your discussion lead to life change. Share a snack, devote the opening 15 minutes to small talk, or intentionally linger after the meeting.

Create a safe environment. Trust makes your group a place where genuine community can form. Group members need to be able to trust that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on. Let everyone know that what's shared in group should stay in the group.

Ask follow-up questions. Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook.

Ask more questions that follow up on their responses. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short or simple answers that people often give:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would've affected you if you'd lived at the time this was written?
- How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?

Make sure the rubber hits the road. Tell your group that by the end of the night you'll each decide how to apply what you're discussing. Otherwise you'll just leave a little smarter, rather than with changed lives. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions. Help your group members consider what the passage has to do with their lives today and what one thing they'll do differently this week as a result of your discussion. Use the Live It Out section as a guide for some ideas.

Affirm everyone who shares. When people share in the group—no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be—make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Thank them for sharing. Having the courage to share is a big deal, and you'll want to recognize it. If someone says something theologically off, consider talking with the person outside of group, one on one. And make sure to ask for clarification first. The person may have simply misspoken. If they still hold on to the incorrect belief, you can lovingly point out the truth to them.

Lead, don't teach. Empower others to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves by asking questions and refraining from lecturing. Allow the Holy Spirit to move in your group members.

Wait 30 seconds. While it may be tempting to ask a question and then immediately answer it, doing so will create an unsafe environment for sharing, and group members will come to expect your answers. It takes at least 20 seconds for many people to process a question, so allow them time to think. If there's still no answer, rephrase the question.

Pray together. As you dig into God's Word, don't forget to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. When you're finished with your discussion, pray for one another. Praying together not only brings your group members before God, but also allows your group members to care for one another.



Engage Everyone in Your Group

Studying the Bible is for everyone—from not-yet believer to mature Christ-follower. To ensure you're engaging everyone in your meeting, use these tips.

Dedicate time to small talk and casual conversation. As counterintuitive as that sounds, people need to get to know each other socially so they can come to understand each other spiritually. One great idea is to build a meal into your small-group time or dedicate a portion of your meeting to coffee and refreshments. The casual conversation over food will help build trust and deepen relationships within the group.

Incorporate icebreakers at the beginning of your study time. While icebreakers may not seem to have much lasting value, they actually go a long way in setting up a healthy environment that will help group members develop authentic relationships. Be sure to use one of the Start It Out activities to begin your meeting.

Read Scripture from multiple translations during your study. Use both a more traditional translation and a modern translation. Consider the differences in how the words are translated and the changes in language over the years.

Research the historical context or commentaries for passages that will be studied. When you share the background information, you'll give all group members, regardless of their level of maturity, a common place to start. You'll find a great overview at the beginning of this study. Alternatively, have some of the more mature believers volunteer to do this research and present it at the meeting. Tap into their knowledge.

Make it clear that all questions are welcome. Whether they're questions of clarification or deeper analysis, members should feel safe asking what's on their mind. Deeper questions may push new believers to take the next step in their relationship with God; questions from new believers may prompt seasoned believers to take a second look at a familiar passage.

Watch your language. Don't assume everyone knows what *covenant* means—or any other “church” word, for that matter. Always clarify the meaning of these words with your group. Ask group members to explain the concepts to the rest of the group. This will both challenge mature believers to articulate their beliefs and help new believers understand biblical terms.

Look for opportunities to break into smaller groups. If your group is getting large, break into groups of three to five for portions of your discussion or prayer time. More people can share when there are fewer in a group.

Empower those further along by asking them to help you in some way. Allow them to organize aspects of the meeting, present background information on a passage, lead a discussion from time to time, or facilitate the group prayer.

Let group members dig in at their own level. As group members prepare for the meeting, make it clear you'd like everyone to read the passage you'll be discussing. Challenge more mature believers to read the passage each day of the week to see if they gain any new insights. Or challenge them to read the entire book for context (if it's a shorter book like an epistle). They could also incorporate journaling into their reading. Or assign a more challenging question ahead of time to mature believers to research and report back to the group. Stretch group members with homework that fits their stage, allowing them to choose for themselves which level is appropriate.

Overview of Ephesians



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 your life. 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 understanding the believer's new identity in Christ. Interested? Read on. The adventure is only beginning.

Who wrote this book?

The apostle Paul.

When was it written?

Sometime during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, around AD 60.

To whom was it written and why?

It was written to believers in Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey) to encourage them to think of themselves in a whole new way. Paul wanted them to think of themselves not as people who had once been involved in idol worship, illicit sex, and foolish philosophies, but 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 stressed the unity of all believers. The last half of the book offers practical ways to live in unity with God and others.

—From the *NIV Quest Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2011)



CHAPTER ONE

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Ephesians 1:1–14

► Start It Out

Spend time sharing the blessings group members have received this week—anything big or small. Share a few of your own to get the sharing started, and be sure to share both small and large blessings to set an example.

► Talk It Out

- Why do you think Paul introduces himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”?
- Who are “God’s holy people in Ephesus”?
- How have we been blessed in the heavenly realms?
- What are the spiritual blessings in Christ in verse 3?
- What kinds of blessings have you received? Where did those blessings come from?

- What blessings have you experienced that you feel were directly from God?
- We know that we mess up, so how is it possible for us to be holy and blameless in God's sight?
- What does *predestined* mean? In what two ways can we understand verses 5 and 11?
- Does God choose the people who will believe in him? Or does he simply know who will choose to believe in him?
- What does it mean that we have been adopted through Jesus Christ? What does it mean to be adopted, and how did Jesus make this possible?
- What does it mean to have redemption? How is something redeemed? How are we redeemed?
- Paul writes that God's grace has been "lavished on us." When would you use the word *lavished* normally? What feelings does this truth evoke?
- What is God's will for the world (see verse 10)?
- What does it look like to bring "unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ"?
- Where in your life do you see disunity? What will it take to bring unity to those situations?
- Who are the "we" in verse 12, and who is the "you" in verse 13?
- The Holy Spirit is referred to as a seal and a deposit. What does that mean?
- Do you feel like you've been marked with the Spirit? Why or why not?
- What words do you see repeated throughout this section, and why do you think they were repeated (e.g., according/in accordance, bless/blessing, praise)?
- What feelings does this section evoke? How does it help you understand God differently?

► Live It Out

- Keep a blessing notebook, jotting down the blessings you receive each day. Praise God for the ways he is blessing you.

- Pray for unity in a specific situation or relationship in your life. Ask for wisdom about what steps you need to take to move toward unity.
- Write “I am holy and blameless in his sight” on a note card and tape it to your bathroom mirror so that you see it each day. Remind yourself daily that God loves you.
- Because God has lavished his grace on us, consider someone in your life to whom you can give some extra grace. Determine several ways you can show extra grace to him or her.
- In light of your adoption into God’s family, consider ways that you can live that are true to that identity. What things need to go? What new things need to be added?

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Ephesians 1:15–23

► Start It Out

Pass out paper and markers. Allow group members two or three minutes to draw something that shows what they would do if they weren’t afraid. Then have group members share their pictures and the reasons they drew them.

► Talk It Out

- What does it look like to not stop giving thanks? How is that possible?
- Paul writes, “For this reason . . . I have not stopped giving thanks for you.” What is that reason?
- Verse 17 mentions all three persons of the Trinity. What does it say about each?
- What does Paul pray for the Ephesians?

- Why might Paul pray that the Ephesians would have the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation”?
- When have you experienced wisdom that you feel came from God?
- What does it mean for the eyes of your heart to be enlightened?
- If we are called to hope, what might need to change in your attitudes, thoughts, or actions?
- What does it look like to be a person of hope?
- When have you experienced an especially firm faith in God? What were the circumstances?
- The incomparably great power that is available to those who believe is the same power that God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. What are your thoughts when you hear this? How does it make you feel?
- What kinds of things might we use this incomparably great power for? (Compare to the theme of “according to his will” in vv. 1–14.)
- When and how have you experienced this incomparably great power?
- How often do you pray for other believers? What kinds of things do you pray for them?
- Where is Christ seated? What does that mean?
- What does it mean that Christ is “head over everything for the church”?
- If Christ is the head of the church, why are there so many problems in churches today?
- How does Christ fill everything in every way

► Live It Out

- Identify several people in your life for whom you are grateful. Thank God for them. Then send them a note or card to say thanks.
- Pray the prayer in verses 17–21 for a fellow believer. Replace “you” and “your” with the person’s name.
- Pray the things in verses 17–21 for yourself. Pray that God will give you wisdom, enlighten you, and allow you to know the hope to which he has called us.

- We have been called to hope. Create a plan for the next time you feel cynical, sad, or hopeless. What will you do to remind yourself of the hope we've been called to? How will you turn the situation around?
- Consider: What has God asked you to do that you have been too afraid to do? How might you lean into the incomparably great power available to us?



CHAPTER TWO

Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2:1–10

► Start It Out

Tell group members to imagine this scenario and consider how they would respond:

An acquaintance, someone that you've met once or twice yet don't know well, sends you a package in the mail. When you open it, you find season tickets to your favorite sports team and money for all travel expenses to and from the games. A note with the gift simply says, "Enjoy!" What questions run through your mind? How do you respond? Why do you respond that way?

► Talk It Out

- When were we dead in our transgressions and sins?
- What is the difference between transgressions and sins?
- Why were we deserving of wrath?
- Who is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air"?
- How were we made alive in Christ?

- Why did God make us alive?
- Why is the idea that we must “shape up” before coming to Christ incorrect?
- What does it really mean that we are saved by grace, not works?
- How do we live like we’re saved by good works?
- Why do you think it’s so hard for us to truly believe that we’re saved by grace alone?
- How does this section compare with James 2:14–26? What is the relationship between grace and works?
- What does it mean to be God’s handiwork?
- What kind of good works do you think verse 10 is referring to?
- What good works do you feel God has prepared *you* for?
- What does this passage reveal about the character of God? What words are used to describe him?

► Live It Out

- Spend time in prayer considering how you try to earn your salvation. Repent and ask God to help you accept his free gift of grace.
- Consider how God has uniquely made you: your strengths and weaknesses, your experiences, your upbringing, your resources. What works might he specifically have prepared you for? How can you move forward in this calling?
- Make a diagram that lists what you were like before and after you started following Christ. Thank God for the ways he has been working in your life.
- List three to five of the most pivotal points in your faith journey. What made them pivotal? How were you changed through them? Share at least one of them with the group, and spend time praying for one another, thanking God for the ways he has been at work.

Jew and Gentile Reconciled

Ephesians 2:11–22

► Start It Out

Make lemonade as an object lesson. Ahead of time, place a pitcher of warm water, a bowl of lemon juice, and a bowl of sugar on a table. Make sure you've measured the correct amount of each so that you'll have tasty lemonade. You'll also want glasses with ice. Have group members gather around the table for this demonstration. Ask group members to describe lemon juice, sugar, and water on their own. Then mix the juice and the sugar into the water so that it is all dissolved. Pour lemonade into the glasses of ice, and hand them out to group members. Ask them to describe the lemonade. Ask them how it is different from the ingredients on their own. Brainstorm other mixtures that are different from the individual ingredients or pieces that make them up.

► Talk It Out

- Explain a little about the background of the Jewish people. What makes them unique or special?
- Who are Gentiles? Why were they previously excluded from God's plan?
- What does circumcision have to do with being Jewish?
- How were the Gentiles brought near to Christ (v. 13)? How does this reflect verses 1–10?
- Why did Paul need to write about this topic to the Ephesians? Why was it important?
- Who is our peace? Why is that key?
- Why is it important that Jesus set aside the law? Should we still keep the law today?

- Paul writes that Christ made “one new humanity out of the two.” Why do you think he created a new group rather than simply making all Gentiles Jewish?
- How is this new humanity similar to the lemonade we made?
- When did Jesus preach peace to Jews? To Gentiles? (E.g., the disciples were Jewish, the woman at the well was not.)
- Paul writes that through Jesus we all have access to the Father by the Spirit. Prior to Jesus, who had access to God?
- In Christ, we are no longer foreigners or strangers to God; we are his children. When have you felt like a foreigner? What was it like?
- Who in your community might feel like a foreigner or a stranger? How does your own experience as a foreigner help you to empathize with those people?
- What is the importance of a cornerstone? How does Christ serve as the cornerstone?
- Is the temple a literal temple? Why or why not?

► Live It Out

- Jesus is peace, and his purpose is unity. What situation or relationship in your life needs some peace? What will you do to work toward peace?
- Pray about ways you can better support people in the church so that you can work together in peace for God’s purposes. Determine something you can do this week toward that end.
- Praise God for reconciling you to himself. Consider this enormous blessing and thank God for all he did to bring about reconciliation.
- Thank God that you are no longer a foreigner or stranger to him. Then determine ways you and your group can bless the foreigners and strangers in your community.
- Consider the people in your life who are far from God and need to know they have been reconciled to him. Pray for them by name and listen to the Spirit for how and when to talk to them about God’s love.



CHAPTER THREE

God's Marvelous Plan:

Ephesians 3:1–13

► Start It Out

Have a discussion about planning, and use these questions to guide you: Do you tend to be a planner, or do you go with the flow? When you go on vacation, do you plan everything ahead of time, or do you wait until you're there to see what you'd like to do? Do you tend to like routines, or do you do things in different ways each day? What are you like when you're following someone else's plan? For instance, what if you went on a vacation where someone else had planned everything for you? What if they didn't tell you the plan ahead of time? How would you react?

► Talk It Out

- Why does Paul refer to himself as a prisoner?
- What is the mystery he writes about?
- Imagine being a Jewish believer reading verse 6 at the time it was written. How might you feel?

- How might Jewish believers reading verse 6 feel like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15)?
- How is Paul a “servant of the gospel”? What does that mean?
- Why does Paul say he is “less than the least of all the Lord’s people”? Is this true?
- When do you feel like you’re less than everyone else? What does God do with the least?
- Paul definitely knew that his calling was to preach to the Gentiles. Do you have a strong feeling about your own calling? Why or why not?
- Why do you think God kept this mystery a secret until the Resurrection?
- Did God know at the beginning of the world that he would have to send Christ to die? Was it part of his eternal plan? Why or why not?
- How is it possible that we can approach God with freedom and confidence because of Christ?
- Does being able to approach God with freedom and confidence encourage and energize you? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about approaching God? Are you afraid to talk to him or ask him for what you need?
- The ability to approach God means we can have a relationship with him, but what does that look like? How do we build and maintain a relationship with him? What has worked well for you?
- Why might the Ephesians be discouraged as they look at Paul’s sufferings? What was he going through in order to preach the gospel to the Gentiles?

► Live It Out

- Set aside at least a two-hour block of time to spend alone with God this week. Read, pray, take a walk, or do something else that helps you feel close to God.
- Identify something you’ve been scared to go to God with—a struggle, a question, a doubt. Go with confidence before God, knowing that he welcomes you into his throne room. He can handle anything you bring to him.

- Think about a situation in your life where you feel you haven't been recognized properly—something that makes you feel like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son. Pray about the situation, asking God to give you a right heart.
- Praise God for revealing his plan to his children, and thank him for the ability to approach him with freedom and confidence.

Prayer for the Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14–21

► Start It Out

Share about someone who has prayed for you in a way that has impacted your life. What did he or she pray for? How did it impact you? Did you ask him or her to pray? Did you know he or she was praying for you at the time, or did you find out after the fact?

► Talk It Out

- What all does Paul pray for the Ephesians in this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does it mean to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner being? Have you experienced this? When?
- How does Christ dwell in our hearts?
- What does it mean to be rooted and established in love?
- Do you think it's possible to grasp how wide, long, high, and deep God's love is? Why or why not?
- How would you describe God's love? What experiences lend to your description?

- How are we able to experience God's love? What examples do you have?
- How does this prayer compare to the prayer in 1:17–21?
- What are your thoughts when you read that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine?
- How does the fact that God is able to do more than we ask or imagine change the way you pray? The way you live? The risks you take?
- When have you seen God do more than you could ever have imagined?

► Live It Out

- Use verses 14–21 as an outline for pray for yourself or someone else. Insert your name or your friend's name.
- Consider your last few prayers. Do your prayers assume God is able to do more than all we ask or imagine? If not, how can you pray bigger?
- Identify a situation in your life that seems too big even for God to fix or redeem. Reread verses 20–21. Then tell God about this situation. Acknowledge you don't know how it can be fixed, but you know that he is able.
- Identify someone who has prayed for you and really impacted you. Find a way to thank him or her this week.



CHAPTER FOUR

Unity and Maturity

Ephesians 4:1–16

► Start It Out

Describe the moment when a child becomes an adult. Is there a moment? When in your development did you feel like an adult? When did you feel like you were mature? Did you feel mature at a certain age only to look back a few years later and laugh? What are the signs of maturity or adulthood?

► Talk It Out

- What does it look like to live a life worthy of our calling? What advice does Paul give? What else would you add?
- Why do you think Paul says to be *completely* humble and gentle? Why is it necessary to add “completely”?
- What does it mean to bear with one another? Why is it coupled with “be patient”? (Look at some other translations for guidance.)

- Paul writes about being unified as a church. How well has the church stayed unified? How unified is your own church?
- How would you summarize verses 7–10? What is Paul’s point? Why is this significant?
- What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus, the one who is seated with God in the heavenly realms (2:6), came to earth to live among us? That he descended to be with us when his rightful place is at the Father’s right hand?
- Why are there apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? How are their roles important for the church?
- Do we still have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers today? Why or why not?
- What does reaching unity in the faith and full maturity look like? What are signs that we are moving in that direction?
- Compare this section to 1 Corinthians 12:14–28. How does that passage shed new light on this one?
- Sometimes people refer to new Christians or baby Christians and mature Christians. What do these terms mean? What does it mean to be a mature Christian?
- Will we ever be completely mature? Why or why not?
- Why is it important that we’re moving toward maturity in our faith? What happens if we aren’t?
- How can we determine whether someone with different beliefs is presenting false ideas that we should ignore or presenting something we need to hear and learn from?
- When have you learned something from someone with different beliefs? How did they speak the truth in love to you?
- When has someone spoken the truth in love to you about something you needed to change or fix? How did you take it? What was the result?
- Why do you think Paul mentions that we should bear with one another *in love*, speak the truth *in love*, and build up the church *in love*? Why do you think he repeated this?

► Live It Out

- In what ways do you need to grow in humility, gentleness, patience, and peace? Spend time exploring this in prayer, and ask God to help you grow in these areas. Identify any specific steps you can take this week.
- Explore the gifts God has given you. How are you currently using them to build up the church? How can you use them in new ways to build up other believers?
- Take time to evaluate the last six months. In what areas have you seen growth toward maturity in your faith? In what areas have you seen a plateau? Where has there been back pedaling? Celebrate the ways God has been growing you. Then identify things you can do to continue in a positive path.
- Consider the person or people in your life who are hard to bear with. Ask God to change your heart toward this person or people.

Christian Living

Ephesians 4:17–32

► Start It Out

Bring a picture of a close friend or group of friends. It could be from any period of your life. Explain to the group why this friendship meant (or means) so much to you.

► Talk It Out

- Why do you think Paul included this section of directions? What was going on at the time he was writing that may have prompted this?
- What does “futility of thinking” mean? What about hardened hearts?
- What can cause us to lose sensitivity to things that aren’t of God? How can we regain that sensitivity?

- Have you experienced how regularly watching the news can make us lose our sensitivity to tragedy? Why does that happen?
- Paul writes of *putting off* the old self and *putting on* the new self. Why do you think he uses these phrases?
- What does it look like to put on the new self? What actions are involved? What would you tell a new believer?
- In writing about putting on the new self, Paul does not refer to specific behaviors, but rather to the renewing of the attitudes of our minds. What does this tell you about what Christian living looks like?
- All of the actions listed in verses 25–32 have to do with relationships. Why is it so important to Paul that the readers understand how to treat one another?
- Compare this passage to Galatians 5:13–26, also written by Paul. How does the Galatians passage help you better understand this Ephesians passage?
- All of the negative actions in this passage reflect ways that we can negatively affect a relationship—whether with a person or with God. Do you view sin as something that hurts others, or just something that hurts yourself?
- Why does Paul end this section on things you *should not* do with things that you *should* do?
- What does Paul say is our motivation for forgiving others? How does this make you think differently about forgiveness?
- What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?

► Live It Out

- Pray as you read through this passage again, asking God to point out any areas that need some work in your life. Where can you grow in your relationships? How can you better live a life worthy of your calling? Identify one or two action steps for this week.
- We were created for community: both for the support and for the challenge. If you don't have a group of other believers that you meet with regularly, think about who you might be able to start a relationship with.

- Baptism is a beautiful symbol of publicly putting off the old self and putting on the new self. If you haven't been baptized, speak to a pastor about taking this step.
- Identify something of your old self that is holding you back. Pray about this issue. Then consider who might be able to help you overcome in this area.
- If you find you're losing sensitivity to God's Word, stop and pray. Pray that God will restore this sensitivity in you, that you will seek godly things that lift you up and help you put on the new self more and more.



CHAPTER FIVE

Children of Light

Ephesians 5:1–20

► Start It Out

Ask group members to describe light as best they can. Then have group members describe darkness. Discuss the relationship between light and darkness.

► Talk It Out

- Who is our example in right living?
- Why is it significant that Paul writes that there should “not be even a hint” of sin? What does that mean?
- We have all been immoral, impure, or greedy at some point. Does verse 5 mean none of us has an inheritance in the kingdom? Why or why not?
- Is there a difference between an immoral/impure/greedy person and someone who simply acts in an immoral/impure/greedy way?

- No foolish talk or coarse joking? Does God not have a sense of humor? Can we still have fun and laugh as children of the light? Why or why not?
- How can we avoid being partners with people who are not living in the light?
- Does not being partners with sinners mean that we should only have Christian friends? Why or why not?
- What are the things that come to mind when you think about light? Darkness? Why do you think Paul used these terms in this passage?
- What other New Testament passages use light and darkness in this way (e.g., Matt 4:14–16; Luke 11:34; John 1:1–14; 3:19–21; 12:46)?
- Why is light a good description of God?
- What does it look like to live as a child of light?
- Has the idea of God exposing everything and making everything visible ever scared you? Why or why not?
- Sometimes our light is scary to others, and they avoid us because our light convicts them. When have you experienced this? What did you do?
- When have you made the most of an opportunity to shed God’s light on a situation? When did you miss an opportunity?
- Why do you think Paul writes that we should not get drunk on wine? Why was this important enough to include here?
- What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit”?
- This passage seems to tell believers to be on alert because evil and deceit are all around us. Can living on alert all the time be a bad thing? Why or why not?
- Do you tend to live life on alert, or are you oblivious to the evil around you? Or do you join in with that evil?

► Live It Out

- Set aside time this week to prayerfully look at your life. Let God’s light shine on your life, making everything visible. Does your life look like the life of a child of light? Why or why not? What needs to increase? What needs to change? Pray that God will help you identify and change these areas in your life.

- Keep a journal this week, each night writing down your actions for the day. At the end of the week, evaluate: Am I living in the light or in the darkness? What might non-believers think when they see my actions?
- If you're convicted about the way you're living, make a plan for putting off the old self and putting on the new self this week. What can you implement right away that will get you on the right path? Who can help you in this goal?
- Who in your life needs you to be the light of God to them? Identify ways you can be the light to them.
- Pray for wisdom, that you can live in a wise way, making good decisions and making the most of every opportunity.
- Spend time thanking God for all he has done to allow you to be a child of light.

Marriage Relationships

Ephesians 5:21–33

► Start It Out

Watch a funny wedding video from YouTube. Then discuss: What are the most important parts of a wedding ceremony? What's not as important? What's your favorite part to watch at a wedding ceremony? What was your favorite moment in your own wedding ceremony?

► Talk It Out

- How does verse 21 frame the rest of this passage?
- What does it mean to submit? How is that lived out practically?
- What does it mean that the husband is head of the wife? How is that lived out practically?

- Who seems to have the more difficult job: husbands or wives?
- Why does Paul tell women to submit/respect and men to love? Are these different responsibilities or simply different ways of saying the same thing?
- How might gender differences play into these different instructions?
- Does this passage strike you as comforting or uncomfortable? Why?
- What are the different insights into this passage you've heard? What are the different views? Where do you stand?
- What does this passage say Christ did for the church?
- Does the church seem to act like Christ has done all this for her?
- What couples do you know who really love each other as they love themselves? How do you know this is true?

► Live It Out

- Thank God for all he did to redeem the church, making her radiant, without stain or blemish.
- Explore what it looks like to submit to one another in the church and in relationships. What does it mean, and when is it appropriate?
- Look up other passages on marriage and compare them with this passage. What is made clearer? What is still unclear?
- Read *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs or another marriage book to further flesh out this passage.
- If you are a husband, identify ways you can better love your wife this week.
- If you are a wife, identify ways you can submit to and respect your husband this week.
- Talk through this passage with your spouse, considering the implications. What will each of you do as a result of reading this passage?



CHAPTER SIX

Family Relationships

Ephesians 6:1–9

► Start It Out

Share a funny saying that one of your parents always used while you were growing up. What is the significance of the saying? Where did it come from?

Alternatively, discuss something (good or bad) that you see in yourself that is directly from one of your parents.

► Talk It Out

- Why do you think it was so important to make “honor your father and mother” one of the Ten Commandments?
- Why is it significant that the commandment to honor your father and mother includes a promise?
- How does the command to honor your father and mother strike you? Why?

- Why might the command to honor your father and mother be especially difficult for some people? What would you tell them in light of this passage?
- What does it mean to “exasperate your children”? How can we avoid it?
- How should parents bring up their children in the faith?
- How can parents bring children up in the faith in a way that allows them to make their faith their own? What have you seen work well and not work so well?
- What is the historical context of slavery here? How does it compare to the American slavery we are more familiar with?
- What stories are there in the Bible of slaves obeying their masters in a way that points them to God (e.g., Joseph)?
- How might the verses about slaves and masters apply to supervisors and subordinates?
- What does it look like to be a Christian worker? How is it different from being a non-Christian worker?
- Even if you don’t talk publicly about your faith at work, how should your actions be different because you follow Christ?

► Live It Out

- Visit your parents and spend time with them. Let them know that you love and support them.
- If your relationship with your parents has been less than great, work through that with God. Where do you need to forgive? How do your actions toward them need to change?
- If your parents have passed away, spend time honoring their memory this week. If your relationship wasn’t great, spend time talking that through with God this week.
- Identify ways to better bring up your children in the faith. What are you doing well now? What can you improve on? How can you ensure that you’re helping them make their faith personal?
- Identify a parent who is further along in parenting. Meet with him or her to gain wisdom on raising godly children.

- Institute a family devotional time. A great place to start is at the dinner table. Share prayer requests, read a short Bible story together, or have everyone share how God was present during the day.
- Consider your actions and motivations at work. Identify ways you can better represent Christ in your workplace. What needs to change this week?

Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10–24

► Start It Out

Share something that you're afraid of. When were you first afraid of it? How do you protect yourself from it now? (You might want to go first so that group members know where you're going. Answers could range from small things like spiders to serious things like death.)

► Talk It Out

- What does it look like to be strong in the Lord?
- When have you been strong in the Lord? When was it difficult to be strong in the Lord?
- Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of armor? Why is it good imagery? Why is it less than helpful?
- Who or what is our struggle against? Who or what is our enemy?
- What is the day of evil?
- Why does Paul repeat the word *stand* so often in this passage?
- When were you able to stand firm for Christ? What was that like?
- When have you been unable to stand firm? Why do you think that was the case?

- Why do you think each piece of armor was assigned this way? For instance, why is it a *belt* of truth or a *breastplate* of righteousness?
- How would a shield put out flaming arrows? Look up the historical context for this.
- How would armor during this time differ from armor today? Use your Bible's notes to get a better idea.
- What does it look like practically to put on the armor of God each day?
- How does putting on the armor of God relate to putting on the new self?
- According to this passage, how are we to pray?
- Do you pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers? Why or why not? When and why are you most likely to pray?
- Why do you think Paul wrote that we should be alert?
- Why is the prayer for Paul in verses 19–20 fitting? What was Paul's occupation?
- Why does Paul refer to himself as an ambassador in chains?
- How are we ambassadors for Christ? What does that mean for how we live?
- Who is Tychicus, and why is he mentioned here?
- How were epistles (letters) sent during this time?
- How does the closing of Ephesians compare to that of other books written by Paul? Compare verses 21–24 with the closings of other books like Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians.
- Why is it fitting that Paul ends by saying, "Peace to the brothers and sisters"?

► Live It Out

- Identify situations in which it's difficult for you to stand firm for God. Why are they difficult? What can you do to change this? Or do you need to avoid these situations altogether?
- Who in your life helps you to stand firm for Christ? Find a way to thank him or her this week.

- How can you ensure that you put on the armor of God each day? What do you need to do? What do you need to stop doing?
- If you struggle with talking about your faith, pray for yourself the prayer Paul asks for in verses 19–20.
- Identify any missionaries your church or group supports. Pray for one or several of them, that they may be able to proclaim the gospel through their words and actions.
- To whom are you a missionary? Your family members? Your coworkers? Your neighbors? Identify your mission field, and pray that God will allow you to proclaim the gospel through words and actions.
- Think of someone who is able to talk about his or her faith in winsome ways. Meet with him or her to learn how you can share your faith in similar ways.

—Study by Amy Jackson, managing editor of SmallGroups.com. You can follow her on Twitter [@AmyKJackson](https://twitter.com/AmyKJackson).