

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY ONE

Ephesians: A Life-Changing Letter

An Overview of Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians gives us a doctrinal foundation for believing, and it is full of practical advice. The information helps us not only at work and in the social realm but also at home and in private. Ephesians talks about things that matter.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OF all the world's works of literature, the Bible nourishes our souls the most. We savor its words as food from heaven, morsels of divine revelation about God and what it means to walk closely with Him. Each book of the Bible teaches us “what is true” and how to do “what is right” (2 Timothy 3:16), and Paul's letter to the Ephesians is no exception.

Ephesians perfectly balances Christian doctrine and practical application—creating a healthy blend of *believing* “what is true” and *doing* “what is right.” According to Chuck Swindoll, Ephesians feeds our souls with the heartiest of spiritual fare:

This letter skips the light hors d'oeuvres of the spiritual banquet and jumps straight into the main course. Within a few verses we discover that this is no dainty lunch for the grazer, but a veritable feast of theological truth served up by a Master Chef.¹

In this survey of Ephesians, we'll overview the full expanse of the spiritual feast God spreads before us. As we step into God's banquet hall, let's prepare our hearts to receive all the spiritual nutrition God offers on the menu of Ephesians.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we always pray for God's Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts as we open God's Word. As Chuck advised, "Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort."²

You may wish to pray as Chuck prays before he studies the Word: "I often pray, 'Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.'"³ Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading Scripture carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. For helpful instruction from Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.

Now let's turn to the Scriptures! Familiarize yourself with the background of Ephesians by reading about Paul's brief visit to Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey in [Acts 18:18–22](#). Then read about Paul's longer stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey in [Acts 19](#).



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Observation: The World in Which the Letter Was Written

Paul's ministry in Ephesus played a strategic role in his fulfilling God's mission to tell "the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). The capital of the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus was geographically central, located at a thriving seaport connecting Asia to the east with Europe to the west.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Bible maps are a vital tool in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible Study. Find Ephesus on the map in the back of your Bible. You can also locate Ephesus by going to the map, titled, "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*," on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Take a few minutes to follow the paths of Paul's second and third journeys to Ephesus as you read the next sections.

Paul's First Visit to Ephesus

According to Acts 18:18–19, Paul took his friends and fellow tentmakers, Priscilla and Aquila, with him from Corinth to Ephesus. Paul then left Ephesus, promising, "I will come back later, God willing" (Acts 18:21). Staying in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila mentored the young teacher, Apollos (18:24–28). Paul referred to Priscilla and Aquila in his letter to the Corinthians. What did he say was happening in their home (*1 Corinthians 16:19*)? What does this brief reference tell us about the way the early church functioned?

The seedling church in Ephesus took root with Priscilla and Aquila, but when Paul returned, it blossomed and spread!



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Paul's Return and Extended Stay in Ephesus

Paul saw the strategic potential of Ephesus as a gateway city for the gospel, staying there for about two years during his third missionary journey. What were his ministry activities as described in the following passages?

Teaching—[Acts 19:8–10](#). Note how far Paul's teaching spread from this strategic center of ministry.

Miracles—[Acts 19:11–20](#). Note the results of Paul's miracles and how they spread the message of the Lord.

Paganism in Ephesus

The believers in Ephesus lived in a city renowned for its paganism. The temple of the Greek goddess Artemis stood as the city's crown jewel and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.⁴ Not only did the temple control the spiritual climate of the entire region, it also drove the economy. What did Paul do and say to upset the idol-worshipping industry ([Acts 19:23–31](#))?



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After the riots calmed, Paul gathered the believers together to encourage them. “Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia” (Acts 20:1). What did Paul say before he left? We don’t know exactly, but we know what he wrote in his letter to them years later while under house arrest in Rome.



Interpretation: Overview of Ephesians

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, Nero ruled the Roman Empire and was persecuting Christians ruthlessly. Despite the dangers, Paul urged the Ephesians not to cower behind a curtain but live openly “as people of light!” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul challenged the church to swing wide the doors of ministry and to “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (5:15).

The Believer’s Position in Christ—Ephesians 1–3

The first three chapters of Paul’s letter lay out the doctrine of our position in Christ. Christ, through His death, resurrection, and exaltation has reconciled us to God—has united Jews and Gentiles into “one body” (Ephesians 2:16). Dip your finger into the chapters in this section of Paul’s letter by reading the following verses and writing down Paul’s points.

What God has done for us—Ephesians 1:3

What Christ has done for us—Ephesians 2:4–6



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What the “mystery” means to us—*Ephesians 3:8–11*

The Believer’s Practice on Earth—Ephesians 4–6

Chapters 4–6 instruct us how to live in light of our position in Christ. Write down Paul’s points from these verses.

The walk of the believer—Ephesians 4:1–4

The life of the imitator—Ephesians 5:1–2



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The strategy of the warrior—*Ephesians 6:10–12*

EPHESIANS

	Introduction (1:1–2)	Our Position in Christ	Our Practice on Earth	Conclusion (6:21–24)
		Section 1: What God has done for us (1) Emphasis: sovereignty Section 2: What Christ has done in us (2:1–10) Emphasis: grace Section 3: What Christ has done between us (2:11–3:21) Emphasis: reconciliation CHAPTERS 1–3	Section 1: Our new unity (4:1–16) Section 2: Our new walk (4:17–6:9) Section 3: Our new strength (6:10–20) CHAPTERS 4–6	
Emphasis	Doctrinal: vertical relationship with God		Practical: horizontal relationship with others	
Core Phrase	"He chose us in Him." (1:4)		"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling." (4:1)	
Subjects	Declarations of heavenly truths (God's accomplishments)		Exhortations for earthly living (Christians' assignments)	
Prayers	Paul's prayer for Ephesians (1:15–23)	Paul's prayer for the whole church (3:14–21)	Christians' prayers for one another (6:18–20)	
Theme	The holy community God is creating and how it is to live out its calling			
Key Verses	1:9–10; 4:1–3			
Christ in Ephesians	Jesus is the source of spiritual blessing, the Cornerstone of the church, and the goal of spiritual maturity (1:3; 2:20; 4:11–16).			

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Paul's Prayers

Three prayers reinforce this structural balance between *declarations of doctrine* in the first three chapters and *exhortations to duty* in last three chapters. Summarize the key points of these prayers.

Prayer for wisdom—Ephesians 1:15–20

Prayer to know Christ's love—Ephesians 3:14–21

Prayer for boldness—Ephesians 6:18–20

Tying together the letter are the golden threads of grace and peace. They open and close the letter (Ephesians 1:2; 6:23–24), and they weave throughout. Through Christ, God shows us grace (2:8–9) and, with the peace of Christ, unites all people in the church (2:14–18). May our lives glimmer with such golden qualities!



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Correlation: Greetings of Grace and Peace

Paul made a practice of beginning and ending his letters with these themes. Read *Galatians 1:3*; *Philippians 1:2*; *Colossians 1:2*; *1 Thessalonians 1:1*; *2 Thessalonians 1:2*; and *Titus 1:4*. Write down the reason you think Paul made grace and peace prominent in his communications.

As you study Ephesians, you will begin to do what I call one of the greatest Christian activities you can do, and that is think God's thoughts after Him. Before long, you will find the decisions being made will be filtered through truths out of Ephesians. Before long, struggles you had been wrestling with will begin to be solved through the truths of the letter to the Ephesians. And it will no longer be print on a page. It will be a letter written on your heart.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

As we study this important letter, let's keep three thoughts in mind.

1. *We are all under the headship of Christ.* Because we serve Jesus and answer to Him, we are to be *submissive* both to Him and each other.
2. *We belong to a body.* We're not alone; we don't have to act on our own or handle our problems by ourselves. We can take refuge in the body of Christ. We need to be *committed* to Christ and to each other.
3. *We can stand against the assault of our enemies.* We have God's resources available to us. To take advantage of them, we need to become *equipped* to utilize them properly.



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Studying Ephesians will show you how to become fully submissive, committed, and equipped as you live as God's light in a dark world. Take a moment and look back at the verses you read in this study. Does any one verse or phrase stand out to you as a special encouragement today? Write it here and note what it means to you.

We've looked over the banquet table of this exquisite book, and in the next study, we'll take a seat and dig in to the first few lines of the chapter 1—the first sampling of truth from many morsels to follow!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how precious is Your Word to us. Thank You for the precepts that give us specific direction and the principles that fill our minds with wisdom. Your Word gives light. And I long to live in the light and reflect the glory of Your Son in this dark world. Speak to me words of life and fill me with Your marvelous grace and wonderful peace. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 160.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
3. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 128.
4. The mythical goddess Artemis, also known as Diana, was considered the mother of all life. For more information about the cultic rituals and the economic importance of the temple at Ephesus, read the online article, "[Diana; Artemis.](#)"



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWO

Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

How could Paul write a letter like Ephesians? The answer is he lived what he wrote. Christ was in control of his mind, his attitude, his heart, his desires, and his perspective.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A single principle revolved around Paul’s teachings about the Christian life: *grace*. According to Paul, we must securely fasten our salvation to the solid bedrock of grace, not the shifting sands of personal righteousness (*Ephesians 2:8–9*). But Paul also taught that grace is more than a foundation; it is *fuel* that energizes our daily walk as God works through us (*1 Corinthians 15:10*). Just as we can’t save ourselves, we can’t grow in godliness without grace.

Paul wrote about grace because he lived by grace. He drew this spiritual power from his close relationship with Christ, to whom he had given complete control. Paul took to heart the lesson Jesus taught about Himself and how we relate to Him:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.” (John 15:5)

How did Paul come to embrace God’s grace through Christ? The answer can be traced back to Paul’s first encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. The experience reshaped Paul from the inside out—from being a hateful, murderous legalist to becoming the man we know as the Apostle of Grace.

Let’s examine Paul’s story in more detail, because we really can’t appreciate all the features of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians until we understand Paul’s heart—the source from which his fountain of theology flows.



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Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Scripture encourages us to “come boldly to the throne of our glorious God. There we will . . . find grace to help us when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:16). Draw near to God’s throne in prayer right now. In what circumstance do you need His gracious power? Are you in conflict with a loved one? Have you been struggling with guilt or shame? Come boldly to the throne! Express in prayer your desire to seek grace as you turn to His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first words that flowed from Paul’s pen identified himself as the writer of the letter and the believers in Ephesus as the recipients. In this straightforward greeting, we find hints at who Paul was and his mission in life.

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God’s holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. (Ephesians 1:1–2)



Observation: The Author

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by noticing details. This is the observation phase, which lays the groundwork for interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ We may wonder when Paul was “chosen” or what is an “apostle of Christ.” Let’s dig through Paul’s background to find some answers.



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

Read *Acts 7:58; 8:1–3; 22:3; Philippians 3:5–6* and write down Paul’s original name, his activities prior to conversion, his hometown, and his credentials as a Jewish rabbi.

Paul was a “pure-blooded citizen of Israel” (Philippians 3:5), but he was also a Roman citizen by birth (*Acts 22:25–28*). Given “a thorough Jewish training from [his] earliest childhood” (26:4), brilliant young Paul rose in the ranks as a Pharisee, “the strictest sect” of the Jewish religion (26:5). In his own words, “I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors” (Galatians 1:14). Paul was on his way to taking a seat on the Sanhedrin, the highest religious court in Israel.²

Fanatically zealous, Paul determined to stamp out the church as a heretical sect by imprisoning and torturing Christians. What turned Paul from a persecutor of Christ-followers to a follower of Christ (*Acts 9:1–5, 17–18*)?

Through this personal encounter with Jesus, Paul’s militant zeal for the Law melted into devoted love for Christ. How many times does Paul mention the name Jesus in *Ephesians 1:1–2*? What does the repetition of Jesus’ name suggest about Paul’s heart?



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

At this time, God revealed Paul’s life mission. What did God call Paul to do (*Ephesians 3:8–9*)?

Paul’s grace-encounter with Christ transformed this violent legalist into a new person with a new life!

When Christ comes into your life, He transforms you. Your whole future is changed. Your whole occupation is transformed. Your whole reason for existence is altered. Your whole attitude is reshaped. It’s Christ, Christ! —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Apostles and Saints

In the interpretation phase, let’s examine the meaning of the phrases, “apostle of Christ” and “God’s holy people” (*Ephesians 1:1*).

Read about Paul’s unique role, *apostle of Christ*, in the online [Encyclopedia of the Bible](#). What does the Greek root word for *apostle* mean?



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

How were apostles called by Christ *after the resurrection*?

In the section, “The apostles and the Church,” what were the vital functions of the apostles in church (*Ephesians 2:20*)?

Christ’s appointment of Paul on the road to Damascus as the missionary to the Gentiles qualified Paul as an apostle and included him with the Twelve as the foundation of the church—second only to Christ Himself.

God’s holy people is a translation of the Greek word, *hagios*, translated “saints” in the New American Standard Bible. In his message, Chuck explains the meaning of this word as an individual “set apart to God.” Would Paul include *us* as God’s holy people? Yes!

Do you think of yourself as one of God’s holy people, a saint? What does that title mean to you personally?



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

When did God set us apart as “saints?” When we believed in His Son, God placed us *in Christ* (Ephesians 2:10). Our union with Christ is a central theme in Ephesians, which Chuck explains in his commentary on Ephesians.

This phrase [“in Christ Jesus”] and its equivalents, such as “in Him,” “in Christ,” or “in the Lord,” occur thirty-nine times in Ephesians. They reflect a profound theological truth. . . . By God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, every believer is incorporated “into Christ.”³

We don’t deserve our position in Christ; rather, God grants it to us as an act of grace. What does *grace* mean? And what is the connection between grace and *peace*? For help with the meanings of these words and how they are connected, look up Ephesians 1:2 in [Constable’s Notes](#), which is a free online commentary at NetBible.org.

When you said yes to the Lord Jesus Christ, God took you into His own and He placed you into His beloved Son, so that the things He sees about His Son, He sees about you. This is called your position in Christ. You are in Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: United with Christ

To be “in Christ” is to be united to Christ, just as the branches are joined to the vine and all the members of a person’s body are joined to the head. Let’s look closer at this analogy. According to the following verses, what are the implications of our position as members of Christ’s body with Christ as the head?



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

Ephesians 4:15–16

Colossians 1:18

Paul could write so eloquently about life in Christ because, by God’s grace, Paul lived every day joined to Christ as his head—his highest authority. And so can we!

Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

We’ve unloaded a truckload of theology from Ephesians, and we’ve only covered the first two verses! Studying Ephesians will transform your life by helping you lay a solid theological foundation. Upon these truths, we build a lifelong love for Christ—which is the goal. Paul’s heart was completely devoted to Christ. Christ had control of Paul’s mind, his attitude, his desires, his motivation, and his perspective.

What does it mean to you for Christ to have “control” of every part of your life?



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

What assurance do you get today from the truth that you are God’s holy one because of your union with Christ?

Read Paul’s blessing of grace and peace for you, personally: “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give *you* grace and peace” (Ephesians 1:2, emphasis added). How can you receive that blessing and pass it to others today in the way you relate to them?

Paul could write a letter like Ephesians because he had first built his life on the truths contained in its pages. Let’s make it our goal to not just learn the truths but live them as well. Then a life of grace and peace will be truly ours.



Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a blessing You have given me through Paul's life. He was a man of violence heading down a road of hate, and yet, You met him on that sinful path and turned his life around, merely through the true knowledge of Your Son, Jesus. May, like Paul, I see Jesus on my road of life as I study this beloved book of truth. And may my life be transformed forever. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. For more fascinating background information on Paul's life prior to conversion, we recommend John Pollock's, *Apostle: A Life of Paul*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 164.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY THREE

Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

This passage is a great declaration of blessing that comes to us because we are believers in Christ, and, therefore, these blessings are ours to claim and to enjoy.

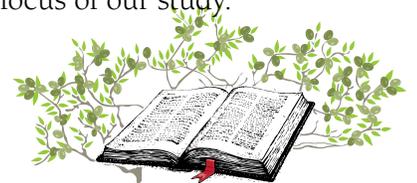
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF we want to sing God’s praises, we might naturally turn to the book of Psalms for inspiration. However, we might also open the first chapter of Ephesians. Surprised? Paul’s theological treatise in the opening of his letter seems more suited to the classroom than the sanctuary. Isn’t worship out of place with theology? Just the opposite! In fact, theology has no *closer* companion than worship, for the higher we scale the majestic heights of God, the more our hearts yearn to sing God’s praise!

Paul composed Ephesians 1:3–14 like a grand symphonic score interspersing refrains of praise with his theological themes. As if he were a choir director in Solomon’s temple, Paul gave the downbeat for voices to ring out in worship *four* times:

- “All praise to God” (Ephesians 1:3)
- “So we praise God” (1:6)
- “Bring praise and glory to God” (1:12)
- “So we would praise and glorify him” (1:14)

In Greek, this paragraph is a single sentence in which Paul’s ideas flow one after the other without pause. The sentence seems to never end! Like the angel’s chorus of worship in heaven, Paul’s lines go on and on declaring the many reasons God deserves praise—ten reasons, in fact, which comprise the focus of our study.



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open Ephesians 1:3–14 as you might enter a cathedral with ten magnificent stained-glass windows lining the walls and encircling you with reasons to give God praise. Pause for a moment of prayer and invite the Lord to fill your heart with wonder as you examine these truths about His character and deeds.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul's doxology in verses 3–14 begins with a call to worship: "All praise to God" (Ephesians 1:3). In Greek, the word for "praise" is *eulogētos*, which means "to speak well of," as when we eulogize someone. In the New Testament, however, the object of *eulogētos* is exclusively God.¹

God alone is praiseworthy. Why? Because He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing" (1:3). In Greek, the words translated "blessed" and "blessings" are from the same root word for "praise." However, these words emphasize what God has *done* for us. Greek scholar Kenneth S. Wuest explains the distinction:

When we bless God, we praise Him, speak well of Him. When He blesses us, it is not that He speaks us good but He does us good. Our blessing is in word. His is in deed. He confers benefits upon us.²

According to Paul, each member of the Trinity takes a role in God's plan to bless us. The Father *initiated* the plan (1:3–6); the Son *implemented* the plan (1:7–12); and the Holy Spirit *empowered* the plan (1:13–14). Let's take a closer look at God's blessings.



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14



Observation: Ten Spiritual Blessings

Take a few moments to read *Ephesians 1:3–14* slowly in two Bible versions, giving attention to each phrase. Highlight the words that identify the Trinity: “Father” (1:3), “Son” (1:6–7), and “Spirit” (1:13–14). And make special note of what each member of the godhead does for us. Use the space below to make your initial observations.³ Can you find the blessings that the Father initiated in eternity past, the Son implemented through His sacrifice, and the Spirit empowered and continues to empower?

The Blessings the Father Initiated

The first three blessings were initiated by “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Ephesians 1:3*).

God Blessed Us with Every Spiritual Blessing—*Ephesians 1:3*

God’s blessings are not earthly, material, or temporal. What *kind* of blessings has God given us (*Ephesians 1:3*)? And what does this imply about their origin, nature, and quality?

These blessings are ours not because we deserve them but “because we are united with Christ” (1:3). Our union with Christ is the foundation for all our blessings.

Positionally, our heavenly Father sees His children as in the Son, and therefore all the blessings He set aside for the Son are ours to claim. —Chuck Swindoll



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

God Has Chosen Us—Ephesians 1:4

What do you observe about the next blessing (*Ephesians 1:4*)? Remember, this is a blessing that the Father *initiated*. What is it? When did He initiate it? And for what purpose?

God chose us. Isn't that remarkable? He slipped His hand into the ranks of humanity and He chose you. —Chuck Swindoll

God Has Predestined and Adopted Us—Ephesians 1:5

How could God choose us “before he made the world” (*Ephesians 1:4*)? We weren’t born yet! God is not limited, not even by time—which leads to the third blessing. Motivated by love, what else did God the Father do for us in ages past (1:5)?

What does the concept of *adoption* imply about our relationship with our heavenly Father? For more insight, read *Galatians 4:4–6*.



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

As adopted children, we have the same rights and privileges as the Son who is part of the Father. Isn't that a great thought? —Chuck Swindoll

The Blessings the Son Implemented

Now let's praise God for how the Son implemented the Father's plan.

God Has Redeemed Us—Ephesians 1:6–7

Once again, Paul invites us to “praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us” (Ephesians 1:6). Observe *Ephesians 1:6–7*. Write down who receives God's grace, what God did for us through Jesus, and how He did it.

The phrase, “purchased our freedom,” is a translation of the Greek word for *redeemed*. In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck helps us understand this biblical term which is rich with meaning:

The word *redemption* describes the act of purchasing from bondage by paying a price. . . . Paul's use of this term points to the fact that God has redeemed believers, setting them free from the shackles of sin. In order to do so, however, a price had to be paid. How did He do it? Not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of His own Son, Jesus Christ.⁴



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

God Has Forgiven Us—Ephesians 1:7

Paul adds God’s blessing of forgiveness to the blessing of redemption: “He . . . forgave our sins” (Ephesians 1:7). Paul connects our redemption (liberation from bondage) with God’s forgiveness (rescue from judgment) in *Colossians 1:13–14* as well. God’s forgiveness is the immediate result of redemption, and both are accomplished through the sacrifice of God’s Son. What does *Hebrews 9:22* say is necessary for sins to be forgiven?

*“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed your transgressions from you.”
You know what that means? You don’t have to live with shame. You don’t have to live with
guilt. They’re removed. You’re forgiven. —Chuck Swindoll*

God Has Lavished His Grace on Us—Ephesians 1:7–8

Read *Ephesians 1:7–8* in three versions and write down what you observe about Paul’s description of God’s grace.

God doesn’t merely drizzle His grace on us; He drenches us in it through His Son!

*You have what you have by the grace of God. You are what you are by the grace of God. You
do what you do by the grace of God. And you go where you go, ultimately, by the grace of
God! —Chuck Swindoll*



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

God Made Known the Mystery of His Will—Ephesians 1:9–10

The Father cloaked His plan in mystery until His Son unveiled it. Can you find the truth revealed in *Ephesians 1:9–10* that God had kept hidden? Write down what you observe.

While sins like anger, greed, and pride split people into warring factions, God weaves together the frayed fragments. In the end, He will unite all created things under Christ (Revelation 7:9). How did Paul describe this unity that we can experience now in *Galatians 3:27–28*?

God Has Provided an Eternal Inheritance—Ephesians 1:11–12

Read *Ephesians 1:11–12* and write down the reason we have an inheritance from God—certainly not because we earned it!



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14

The Plan the Holy Spirit Empowers

The divine plan of salvation that the Father initiated and the Son implemented was and is continuing to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Let's look at the Spirit's role in the next two verses.

God Has Sealed Us in Christ—Ephesians 1:13

The final phase of Paul's grand benediction centers on our security in Christ. What words of assurance do you observe in *Ephesians 1:13*? Be certain to highlight the verbs and notice the prepositions "in" and "with" and to whom they refer. What does this verse say to you personally?

God Has Guaranteed Our Inheritance—Ephesians 1:14

What further assurance of our salvation do you observe in *Ephesians 1:14*?



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14



Interpretation: Security in Christ

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we draw out Paul’s intended meaning for his original audience and formulate principles that we can apply in our day. In Ephesians 1:3–14, Paul taught that because believers are united with Christ, we are

1. Chosen by God “before he made the world” (Ephesians 1:4)
2. Adopted “into [God’s] own family” (1:5)
3. Redeemed “with the blood of his Son” and forgiven (1:7)
4. Sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is “God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised” (1:14)

Based on these rock-solid truths, formulate a principle about our security in Christ.

We are sealed! Permanently, eternally secure. It is impossible for us to diminish what God has done, having called us, brought us into His family, and chosen us, especially when we read that we are sealed. This means the transaction is complete. —Chuck Swindoll



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14



Correlation: Chosen, Called, and Right Standing

Paul taught on our security in Christ elsewhere in his epistles. Can you see the same theme in *Romans 8:29–30*? Write down the key words in this passage and the assurance they give you.

The ten blessings in Ephesians 1:3–14 ring from the rafters like bells in a tower, pealing God’s praise to every nation! Let’s conclude our study by giving ourselves in worship to our great God.



Application: Two Truths to Remember

Two truths stand out from these verses. First, *because all ten blessings are implemented by Christ, they’re all dependent on His crucifixion and resurrection.* We must believe in Him to enter into His blessings. Second, *because all are initiated by God, they are all given to His glory.* Remember, it’s all about glorifying God.

Write your praise in a poem if you wish. Or simply express your heart in flowing lines of prayer to the Lord. Thank Him for each of His blessings and conclude with your own benediction.



Ten Reasons to Give God Praise

Ephesians 1:3–14



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may the bells ring out Your praise! Nothing on earth compares to the blessings we receive from Your hand. And all of them were given to us through Christ and guaranteed by the Spirit. I can hardly drink in all the grace that overflows my cup. I dedicate myself in lifelong service to You, the One who keeps my eternal inheritance secure. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 25.
2. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament*, 26.
3. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 169.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY FOUR

Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

Some of the most soft-spoken, sweet-spirited of God's saints are like human dynamos beneath the surface. How did they get like that? Prayer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EPHESIANS was written by someone who really knew how to pray—maybe because he spent so much time in desperate situations! When Paul wrote this letter, he was in Rome under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar for crimes he didn't commit (Acts 25:6–12). Such a circumstance would drive all of us to our knees!

However, the strong pulse in Paul's prayers was linked more to his love for his Ephesian friends than concern for himself. Paul prayed like he meant it—from his heart. He prayed for others with genuine thanksgiving out of true connectedness to God, with power and purpose.

In this study, we'll examine one of Paul's prayers. It's not a long one, but it isn't the length of a prayer that makes it effective. The greatest prayers are those we voice from the depths of our souls, and we can't miss the sincerity in the tone of this prayer. Even more inspirational than the tone is what Paul prayed. His carefully phrased petitions form a memorable outline for us when we just can't find the words. As we look closer at Paul's prayer, let's join him on his knees and pray along with him for those we love.



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Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We begin our study of prayer by asking God to grow our prayer life. Many Christians find it hard to pray and daunting, so we need God’s Spirit to inspire a longing to connect with God as children crying out for their father.

Because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6)

Call out now to your “Abba,” asking Him to guide your understanding, spark your enthusiasm, and strengthen your resolve to pray like Paul. Use this space to write your prayer.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

This section of Ephesians is a doorway into Paul’s spiritual life, where we see elements of Paul’s walk with God on display. In the previous study, we sampled ten spiritual blessings for which Paul praised God. Great praise to God naturally leads to great prayer. In Paul’s intercession, he gives thanks for two qualities in his friends (Ephesians 1:15–16); and then, he makes two requests on their behalf (1:17–19). It’s a simple outline that anyone can use.



Observation: Thanksgiving and Intercession

A helpful practice in the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures* is to mark key words in the passage.¹ Read Ephesians 1:15–19 below in the New American Standard Bible and then, by using your cursor or printing the page and using a pencil, mark the verbs, such as “giving thanks,” “making mention of you,” “may give,” “be enlightened,” and “will know.”



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:15–19)

Of these verbs, two stand out as the frame on which the whole prayer hangs: “giving thanks for you” and “making mention of you” (1:16 NASB). In the New Living Translation, the phrases are “thanking God for you” and “I pray for you” (1:16). Let’s use these ideas as our main points: *giving thanks* and *interceding*.

Paul Gave Thanks for the Ephesians—Ephesians 1:15–16

Paul could have noted many qualities for which to thank God, but he focused on the two most fundamental qualities for followers of Christ. What two qualities did Paul highlight (*Ephesians 1:15*)? If you’re marking your text, draw a line from “giving thanks for you” (1:16 NASB) to these two words to show their connection.

In *1:13*, Paul recalled when the Ephesians heard the gospel and “believed in Christ.” This step of faith indicated their *conversion*. In *1:15*, Paul mentioned what seems to be an ongoing walk of faith after their initial step. How do you think their conversion faith mentioned in *1:13* is different than their “strong faith” in *1:15*?



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

The Ephesian believers endured persecution and likely strengthened their faith by walking with Christ day by day and trusting Him through rough storms. The most severe persecution could not break their loyalty to Christ. Such *faith in Christ* freed them to *love like Christ*, specifically, to love “God’s people everywhere” (Ephesians 1:15), not just people in their cultural or ethnic group. And for this, Paul was thankful!

Our loyalty to Christ should work its way out in love for one another. A church that has truth but lacks love is not a church. It’s a big Bible class cultivating a clique, leading to a clan that becomes a cult. —Chuck Swindoll

Paul Interceded for the Ephesians—Ephesians 1:17–19

While the Ephesians’ cups of faith and love overflowed, their cupboard of knowledge was bare. And so Paul made two requests that God meet this need. How does Paul phrase the first request in *Ephesians 1:17*? Write down how different Bible versions translate this phrase.

If you’re marking the text, draw a line between “making mention of you” (Ephesians 1:16 NASB) and this first request. What is Paul’s second request in *Ephesians 1:18*? Write down the different translations of this phrase in parallel Bible versions. And then, draw a second line between “making mention of you” (1:16 NASB) and this second request to show the connection.



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

Notice that Paul’s second request includes three purposes that Paul lists at the end of verse 18 and the beginning of verse 19. Each of them begins with the word, *what*, in the New American Standard Bible. As God enlightens the Ephesians’ hearts, they will know what three things (*Ephesians 1:18–19*)?

Finally, in your text, show the relationship between “be enlightened” (1:18 NASB) and these three outcomes by connecting them with a line. Here’s the completed outline of Paul’s prayer:

- I. “I . . . do not cease **giving thanks**” (1:15, 16 NASB)
 - A. for “the **faith** in the Lord Jesus which exists among you” (1:15 NASB)
 - B. for “your **love** for all the saints” (1:15 NASB)
- II. “**making mention** of you in my prayers” (1:16 NASB)
 - A. that God “may give to you a spirit of **wisdom** and of **revelation** in the **knowledge** of Him” (1:17 NASB)
 - B. that “the eyes of your heart may **be enlightened** so that you will know” (1:18 NASB)
 - 1. “the hope of **His calling**” (1:18 NASB)
 - 2. “the riches of the glory of **His inheritance**” (1:18 NASB)
 - 3. “the surpassing greatness of **His power**” (1:19 NASB)

This is a masterful prayer! Now, let’s define some key words.



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19



Interpretation: The Meaning of Paul’s Words

Build on Paul’s framework by looking closer at six key nouns: *wisdom*, *revelation* (or *insight*), *knowledge*, *calling*, *inheritance*, and *power*. In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we can consult commentaries and lexicons to arrive at the meaning Paul intended for his original audience.

Read the following excerpt from Chuck’s commentary and write down your understanding of these words and how they contribute to grow our faith.

“Wisdom” refers to the ability to take profound theological truths *about* God and apply them to everyday situations of life. . . . A spirit of revelation, then, indicates an unveiling of insight—that is, the ability to grasp the meaning of God’s truths so that we comprehend His perspective on life and circumstances. . . . Through both wisdom and revelation, we enjoy a fuller understanding of our heavenly Father. When that happens, we’re no longer “clueless,” walking around life as senseless victims of circumstances. Instead, we see through things. We begin to grasp God’s perspective on the world. The result? With great eagerness, we submit to His authority and trust in His promises.²

Can you see that the concepts build on each other? Wisdom from God’s Word leads to insight into God’s point of view, which leads to fuller, more intimate knowledge of God—not merely factual knowledge about God. Knowing God in this sense implies a maturing, interactive relationship with God built on trust, commitment, and security.

As we know God more intimately, He floods our hearts, that is, our mind, will, and emotions with His light! Sin may cloud our mind, bind our will, and cast a gloom over our emotions. But God’s light replaces the darkness with God’s truth, which reveals:

- “The hope of His calling”
- “The riches of the glory of His inheritance”
- “The surpassing greatness of His power” (Ephesians 1:18–19 NASB)



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

Use your sources to explain the meaning of these phrases. For a free online commentary, consult *Constable's Notes at NetBible.org*.

The next step after interpreting the author's meaning for his original audience is to formulate principles that we can apply today. What are some principles that emerge from your study of these key words and concepts?

Our inheritance is seeing the Savior in all His glory. It is being rewarded for every act done with a pure motive. It is being eternally delivered from the adversary and his dark, evil ways. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Many Ways God Calls Us

Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would know the “hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18 NASB). Look up the following verses and write down the other ways in which God calls His people.

Galatians 5:13



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Colossians 3:15

1 Peter 2:9

Can you find other references to God's calling in your concordance or by searching on an online Bible website, such as Biblegateway.com? Write down what you discover here.



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

Write a concluding principle that wraps up what you've learned about God's calling based on your word study.

When the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, we realize that we're not victims any longer; we're victors. We're not helpless; we're hopeful. We're not at the enemy's mercy; "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Praying for Those You Love

Try praying Paul's prayer for a loved one. What qualities does this person display that you can thank God for?

Now, can you name the needs in this person's life? Intercede on his or her behalf by making the same requests that Paul made for wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and pray for God to enlighten his or her heart. Refer to the outline above to remind you of the specifics.



Praying Like We Mean It

Ephesians 1:15–19

Conclude your prayer by asking God to make clear His calling and then fill this person’s heart with a desire to follow Him.

When we pray for someone we love, we sometimes don’t know what to say. Keep Paul’s prayer handy, and then you’ll not only pray from the heart, you’ll have just the right words.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, give me the faith and love that Paul admired in the Ephesians. Help me to rest in You when I endure stormy seas. Be my anchor so that I don’t panic when hardship strikes or fears haunt me. I desire to love others, but first I must feel confident in Your love for me. Give me that reassurance today and fill my heart with the light of Your presence and truth. Settle my soul with Your Spirit, so I can pray for others from a place of peace and complete confidence that You will hear me when I call. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 178.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY FIVE

What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

Christ's presence, plan, and power are available to every child of God. But if we're not careful, we'll live as though we have never met Christ and didn't need His power. We must learn how to be connected and stay connected to a surpassing power that is so phenomenal there aren't words to describe it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever turned on a faucet and no water came out, not even a drop? Or flipped a wall switch and the lights didn't turn on? Most likely, the problem wasn't with the water source or the power plant, nor was it a faulty valve or switch. Rather, the pipe from the house to the main water line was clogged or an electrical relay had a short. It wasn't a problem with the source but with the connection to the source.

We can have connection problems with our source of spiritual power. The joy of the Lord that once gushed from the tap runs dry, or the light that once guided our way dims and we feel like we're stumbling through life in the dark. Determined to manage on our own, we may tap our own wisdom to make decisions or muster our own strength to tackle challenges. However, no amount of willpower can substitute spiritual power.

When we try harder to handle our own problems, we operate from fleshly self-sufficiency, declaring in so many words, "I can do it myself!" That approach guarantees failure! A better plan is to admit our weakness and focus on reconnecting to our spiritual power source: Jesus Christ.

What power does Christ have now? How is His role related to our spiritual well-being? And how can we connect to Him? Let's find out!



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What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

According to Paul, when God enlightens our hearts, we discover *why* God put us here—“the hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18 NASB); we focus on *what* is ours—“His inheritance in the saints” (1:18 NASB); and we rely on who empowers us—“the surpassing greatness of *His* power *toward us* who believe” (1:19 NASB, emphasis added). God’s power is available to us through Christ.

In what areas of your life do you need His power? Bring these needs to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to empower you even now as you open His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Open God’s Word to [Ephesians 1:19–23](#) and read this passage. Look for evidence of God manifesting His power for us through Christ. In Ephesians 1:19, Paul first *describes* God’s power, and then in 1:20–23, Paul *demonstrates* His power in Christ.



Observation: Describing and Demonstrating God’s Power

As Paul describes the greatness of God’s power, his enthusiasm about the subject jumps off the page.



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

God's Power Described—Ephesians 1:19

With bold strokes, Paul wrote the adjective, *surpassing*. The Greek word is *huperballo*, a concept that is difficult to translate with a single English word. What adjectives do the New Living Translation and the Amplified Bible use to describe the greatness of God's power in *Ephesians 1:19*? What do you think Paul was communicating about our capacity to measure the greatness of God's power?

Paul elaborated on the word, *power*, with three synonyms: “the *working* of the *strength* of His *might*” (Ephesians 1:19 NASB, emphasis added). The following excerpt from Constable's Notes defines these words:

Power (Gr. *dynamis*) refers to a spiritually dynamic living force. “Working,” “strength,” and “might” or “mighty” further describe this power. These three words describe it as energetic, inherent in God, and able to overcome resistance respectively. This is the power of God that is available to believers.¹

Write down in your own words what Paul was communicating about the multifaceted aspects of God's power. Then we'll examine how God demonstrated the greatness of His power through Christ and made His power available to us.

Paul is saying this: “May they have the kind of dynamic, energizing, forceful motivation that results in their conquering whatever difficulty they encounter—seen and unseen, familiar and unfamiliar, overwhelming and common—whatever it might be, may they know such power.” —Chuck Swindoll



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

God’s Power Demonstrated—Ephesians 1:20–23

Jesus Christ personifies the power of God through four significant demonstrations. What are the first two demonstrations of power in *Ephesians 1:19b–20*?

When Christ sat down “at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:20) He received ultimate authority. How did Paul describe Christ’s authority (1:21)? What was the significance of Paul’s claim about Christ in light of Paul’s situation? Remember, when he wrote these words, Paul was under arrest awaiting a trial with Caesar, who was considered the world’s ultimate authority and worshiped as a god.

After raising Christ from the dead, ascending Him to heaven, and seating Jesus at His side, God demonstrated the greatness of His power in two other ways. Can you find them in *Ephesians 1:22*?



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

What power does Christ have now in His position in heaven?

God raised Christ from the dead, seated Him at His right hand, gave Him authority over all things, and placed Him over all things in the church. What a tremendous thought! The Father gave Christ the power, and He now gives it to those who are in Him . . . if we will only connect to Him through Christ! —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Christ as Head of the Church

From the tomb to the throne, Christ ascended to heaven to receive authority over all things—but He did not relate to His followers as if He were a distant deity. He came near us in intimate connection as the Head of the church. In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to find the meaning of the church's relationship with Christ. What details did Paul give about Christ and His church in *Ephesians 1:22–23*?



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

Paul wrote that the church “is made full and complete by Christ” (Ephesians 1:23). What does that mean and *in what ways* does Christ make us full and complete? Consult your resources for the answer, including Chuck’s commentary on Ephesians, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. For an online resource, you can find an explanation of these verses in *Constable’s Notes* at NetBible.org.

How is Christ’s role related to our spiritual well-being? Just as a physical body can’t function without its head, the church would not even exist without Christ. With Christ as the head of the church, God unites us to Christ (Galatians 3:27), gives us life in Him (1 John 5:11), and empowers us to do what only Christ can do through us (Colossians 1:29). We *need* His power, particularly in our struggle against the invisible forces of our enemy, the devil.



Correlation: Our Struggle against Spiritual Forces

Against the forces of darkness, we are helpless without Christ. Read Paul’s description of our foes, and highlight the four categories in which Paul places them:

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Our battlefield is not physical but spiritual, and the devil uses “strategies” against us that are deceptive and powerful (6:11). How do we gain victory? Certainly, not by relying on our own strength. What commands did Paul give in *6:10–11*?



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23

Our only hope in our struggle against darkness is to connect with our Lord and His power. Let's explore ways to do just that.

Christ showed His strength in His humility, in His dependence on the Father. He modeled for us what the Christian life is about: connection to divine power. Disconnection leads to dysfunction; connection leads to victory. —Chuck Swindoll

Application: Modeling a Life of Dependency

How can we connect to Christ? One way is to follow Christ's own example of connecting with His Father. Jesus lived in constant dependency on the Father. He confessed, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does" (John 5:19). Jesus' attitude of submission models for us how to have a trusting relationship both with Jesus as our Savior and through Him to our heavenly Father.

Paul modeled a similar mind-set. A "thorn in the flesh" afflicted Paul to the point that he *had* to depend on God. Paradoxically, Paul's weakness became a pathway to power greater than he could have mustered if he were healthy. Paul prayed for relief, but the Lord told him, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

What's the key to staying connected? *A prayerful mind-set of constant dependency.* In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered a model prayer that you may wish to use now.

Father, I don't know what today holds, but I know that there are trials I will face. I sense pressure building, and I feel regret for past sins. I ask You to take away all that would hold me back and drain my energy. Give me the kind of motivating force, authority, and power that can come only through Your Son. May the Holy Spirit fill me in such a way that He lives out His victorious, conquering skills through me. Use my voice, my hands, my mind, and my will today as Your tools. Deliver me from the trap of thinking I'm a victim in this intimidating and overwhelming world. Remind me that "greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world." In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Recite this prayer in the morning and throughout your day. This discipline of prayer will keep you connected to God and His power through Christ. Remember, Christ has ultimate authority over all things. No greater source of power exists on earth or in heaven!



What Is Christ Doing Now . . . and Why?

Ephesians 1:18–23



A FINAL PRAYER

Recall the needs you expressed at the beginning of this study and use this space to write your own prayer of dependency on Christ. You may begin by calling to God from your weakness, “Help me, Lord! Take control. Put Your power to work in me. I depend on You to . . .” How would you like to finish this prayer?

ENDNOTE

1. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Ephesians 1:19,” Constable’s Notes, NetBible.org.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SIX

You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10

The Scriptures contain numerous contrasts. Dark and light. Heaven and hell. Love and hate. Bondage and freedom. Death and life. In every one of these contrasts, God alone makes the difference. Between dark and light stands God. Between death and life stands God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PAUL opens Ephesians 2 abruptly: “Once you were dead” (Ephesians 2:1). This statement is meant to grab our attention and even shock us. How can a living person once be dead? We might be scratching our heads over it until we link it to Paul’s line of thought from the previous chapter.

In Ephesians 1, Paul praised God for His power that “raised Christ from the dead” (1:20). Christ was dead in the tomb until God resurrected Him. Spiritually speaking, we were dead too until God raised us. Just as God gave life to Christ, God also “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (2:5).

This theological concept is called, *regeneration*. In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll explains what it means to be regenerated.

This is what we call being “born again,” made alive in the eyes of God and spiritually incorporated into Christ (John 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Now believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who makes us willing and able to do what was impossible in our spiritually dead state.¹

In our dead state, we were spiritually cut off from God, our true source of life. We were dead in our sins . . . *but God!* Those are the greatest two words! What did God do? He made us alive with Christ! When we were powerless to change our condition, God stepped in and saved us.



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You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
(Ephesians 2:8 NASB)*

The only way to fully appreciate our new life in Christ is to grasp the desperate condition of our old life without Christ. What was it like before God rescued us? Paul answers this question in Ephesians 2:1–3, and then he goes on to answer three other questions in verses 4–9:

- What did God do for us (2:4–6)?
- Why did God do it (2:4–7)?
- How can we receive God’s gift of new life (2:8–9)?

Indeed, the first line of Ephesians 2 is abrupt . . . and somber. It pictures a harsh, desperate, death-like existence when we lived in sin. Thankfully, God delivered us from sin’s Death Valley and led us into the promised land of new life in Christ. And Paul tells us the amazing truth of how God did it!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Deliverance is a prominent theme in the Bible. Ephesians 2 reads like a kind of Passover seder. “Once you toiled under Pharaoh’s reign of death,” Paul seems to say, “but then God rescued you through the blood of the lamb and out of the watery tomb of the Red Sea.” God delivers His people again and again throughout Scripture—from bondage to freedom, exile to return, judgment to mercy, death to life.

As you open the Word, reflect on how God has delivered you and offer Him a prayer of thanks using these verses as a guide:

*He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
he drew me out of deep waters. . . .
He led me to a place of safety;
he rescued me because he delights in me. . . .
The LORD lives! Praise to my Rock!
May the God of my salvation be exalted! (Psalm 18:16, 19, 46)*



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 2:1–9* in two Bible translations to get an overview of the passage. Look for Paul’s transition, “but God” (*Ephesians 2:4*), which forms a hinge in the passage from being dead in sin to our new life in Christ.



Observation: Our Nature, God’s Action

Observation is the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. We observe contrasts and comparisons and cause and effect; we look for repeated words, phrases, or patterns.² For example, in *Ephesians 2:1–3*, Paul answers the question, “What is it like without Christ?” by making three points about *our condition* in sin. Then, in *2:4–6*, Paul answers the question, “What did God do for us?” by listing three of *God’s actions* on our behalf when He united us with Christ. Let’s take a closer look.

What Was It like without Christ? Ephesians 2:1–3

Like a physician with a stethoscope, God listened for a spiritual heartbeat in us when we were in “trespasses and sins” (*Ephesians 2:1* NASB), but no sign of life could be found. Outwardly, we looked and acted alive. But spiritually, we were dead.

Paul listed the causes of spiritual death in *Ephesians 2:2–3*. Read these verses in the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible. In the following chart, we’ve listed Paul’s points in the left column. In the right column, write down your paraphrase of these points. Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of *Ephesians 2:1–3* in *The Message* may help with wording.

Paul’s Points	Your Paraphrase
“you formerly walked according to the course of this world” (<i>Ephesians 2:2a</i> NASB)	
“you formerly walked . . . according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (<i>2:2b</i> NASB)	
“we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” (<i>2:3</i> NASB)	



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10

According to Paul, we “were *by nature* children of wrath, even as the rest” (Ephesians 2:3 NASB, emphasis added). Not only were we sinners by choice; we were sinners by nature. We were born with a natural inclination to sin; therefore, as Jesus said, we “must be born again” (John 3:7). Otherwise, without new life from God, our destiny would be eternal death—that is, eternal separation from God. But, thankfully, God made us alive by joining us with Christ.

Since we were dead, we needed life, and God made us alive. Since we were in the valley of death, we needed to be raised up. He did that. Since we were powerless and corrupt and hopelessly condemned, we needed a new position. He provided that. He did it all!
—Chuck Swindoll

What Did God Do for Us? Ephesians 2:4–6

Can you find the ways that God gave us new life in the following passage? Use your cursor to highlight the main action words or underline them in your Bible.

But God . . . gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–6)

Compare these verses with [Ephesians 1:19–20](#). Write down the parallels you see between what God did for us and how He displayed His power in Christ.

Notice the contrasts with our former way of life. We were dead, but God *made us alive*; we were sinking in sin’s mire, but God *raised us* to a new, clean life; we were destined for judgment, but God *seated us* securely in heaven with His Son. We were helpless to do any of this, but God did it all by placing us in Christ—a new position to replace our old condition in sin.



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10



Interpretation: God’s Nature, Our Response

Why would God go to such great lengths to rescue dead, sin-entrenched people? Not because underneath it all we’re so wonderful—but because above all He’s so wonderful!

Why Did God Save Us? Ephesians 2:4–7

Read *Ephesians 2:4–7* and write down four characteristics of God’s nature.

Do you recall the ten spiritual blessings Paul sang like a praise song in Ephesians 1? Paul’s melody of God’s grace crescendos to a climax in Ephesians 2. “It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!” (Ephesians 2:5) and later, “God saved you by his grace” (2:8)—which Chuck defines as, “God’s unmerited favor unconditionally demonstrated to the undeserving.”³

Describe the grace message Paul declared in *2:4–7*. What was Paul saying about God and the reason God saved us?

How Can We Receive God’s Gift of New Life? Ephesians 2:8–9

Paul didn’t begin Ephesians 2 by saying we’re “sick” and need a cure, or “mixed-up” and need direction, or “ignorant” and need education. Rather, Paul pronounced us *dead*. No therapy or self-help course could help us, and no self-effort could bring us to life. No righteous deeds could win God’s favor. How, then, could we be saved?



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10

What answer did Paul give in *Ephesians 2:8–9*? What do these verses teach about the source of our salvation, the nature of salvation, and the way we do and don't receive it?

If we have received it, our salvation was accomplished not by our works but by God's grace. As Paul taught in Ephesians 1, the Father initiated the plan, the Son implemented it, the Spirit empowers it, and each member of the Trinity receives the glory!

So salvation is a gift. It's not of ourselves. God holds out the gift of eternal life, the gift of forgiven sins, the gift of a secure heaven, the gift of a whole new transformed way of thinking. What a marvelous gift! You can live above the drag of demonic forces and the pleadings of your inner desires. You can live through the power of Christ, having been raised with Him. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Role of Faith

God saved us “by his grace when [we] believed” (Ephesians 2:8). Faith isn't a work of righteousness but a posture of rest—the opposite of working. We express faith when we receive the gift of salvation God offers and rest in His promise.

Who exemplifies saving faith in *Romans 4:1–5*? What points did Paul make about faith and works in this passage that are similar in Ephesians 2:8–9?



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10

What are we saying to God when we express in words the faith in our hearts? “Lord, I trust that what You say is true. I trust You to keep Your promises. I accept Your gift of salvation, and I now live this new life every moment through Your grace and power.” Even if you’ve prayed a prayer like this before, take a moment to affirm your faith in Christ by repeating these words again now. Expressions of heartfelt faith never grow old!

 **Application: Warning and Reminder**

As we draw our study to a close, we conclude with a warning and a reminder. First, *don’t be fooled into thinking that those who are “dead” are fulfilled in their worldly pursuits*. Sometimes we envy others who we think have it all in this life apart from Christ. Don’t fall into that trap; rather, keep your eyes on the Savior as the source of all true blessings. He is our portion forever!

Second, *real relief comes by understanding and embracing grace*. God unites us with Christ and breathes life into our dead souls by His grace. All good things come by grace! How can you depend on God’s grace today to do something that seems impossible?

What new insight about God did you learn through this study of Ephesians 2:1–9? Write a *truth statement* that you can carry in your thoughts today and through the week when you need to connect to God, your source of life.

We were dead . . . *but God!* What an incredible message the Lord has given us through Paul’s pen! Share it with someone who needs hope today.



You Were Dead . . . But God!

Ephesians 2:1–10



A FINAL PRAYER

For the closing prayer, meditate on Charles Wesley’s lines from the hymn, “And Can It Be.” And then offer God praise for giving you life, raising you with Christ, and seating you with Him in the heavenlies.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused the quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 187.
2. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 188.
4. Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be,” hymnal.net, hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SEVEN

God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

*Works-based theology has this equation: faith plus works equals salvation.
Grace-based theology teaches this: faith equals salvation followed by works.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the previous study, we dug for treasures in Ephesians 2:1–9 and uncovered some gems! Paul answered four crucial questions about how we relate to God:

- *What was it like before Christ?* Answer: We were dead in our sins and powerless to change our condition (Ephesians 2:1–3).
- *What did God do for us?* Answer: God united us with Christ spiritually. He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavenlies, securing our relationship with God for eternity (2:4–6).
- *Why did God do this for us?* Answer: Because God is gracious and merciful. It is God's nature to express kindness toward those He loves, and in the ages to come, we will be eternal showpieces of our Father's grace (2:7).
- *How can we receive new life?* Answer: Salvation is a gift we accept by faith in Christ our Savior, without working for it or trying to earn it with good behavior (2:8–9).

Together, these answers form the essential elements of the gospel—the good news about Jesus. But Paul isn't finished! In this study, we'll discover the answer to a fifth question: *For what purpose did God save us?* Or, put another way: *What difference does our salvation make in our lives?*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

God didn't save us to set us on a shelf. Rather, He has a purpose for us to fulfill as His redeemed people. But what is it? The answer reveals a gleaming truth that may surprise us. It's about God's creative work in forming who we are and equipping us for a unique plan that God determined before we were born. It's another marvelous truth to behold, a lovely gem that we will treasure forever.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

A thousand years before Paul, David penned these lines about God's creative work as He formed our bodies in our mother's womb.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed. (Psalm 139:13–16)*

Take a few moments to meditate on these verses and thank God for His workmanship in you. Then ask Him to reveal His ongoing work in your life and, specifically, the path He charted for you before you were born.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Perhaps Paul was reflecting on David's psalm when he wrote about God's spiritual handiwork in our souls:

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things
he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)*

Brief but exceedingly profound, this verse contains the answer to the question, "For what purpose did God save us?" Let's examine each component of Ephesians 2:10 to fully grasp Paul's teaching.



God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10



Observation: Our Nature, God's Action

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, it's important to look closely at every detail.¹ For example, although the word *for* in Ephesians 2:10 is small, it is significant to Paul's thoughts as they flow from verses 8 and 9 into verse 10.

Summarize Paul's message in 2:8–9. Particularly note who does all the “work” of salvation.

The emphasis is on God in 2:8–9. “*God* saved you by *his* grace,” apart from our works (Ephesians 2:8, emphasis added). Paul concludes his point with the word, *for*, emphasizing again God and His work: “For we are *God's* masterpiece” (2:10, emphasis added). Since our works could not earn our salvation or raise us to life, what must we conclude? We are not who we are because of self-effort. Instead, we are *God's* creation. As the Artist, He signs His autograph on our lives and deserves all the recognition and glory for who we are and all we accomplish.

To what is Paul referring in this statement: “He has created us anew in Christ Jesus” (2:10)? Hint: review 2:4–6 to find the answer. Also, look ahead to 4:24 for additional insight.



God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

Another small word, *so*, conveys a very important idea—the purpose for which God saved us. According to Paul, we are God's masterpiece created anew in Christ Jesus for what purpose (2:10)?

Although our good works don't contribute to our salvation, they glorify God, help us reveal Him to the world, testify to the reality of our faith, and express our God-given gifts. In other words, they fulfill the purpose for which we were created and saved.

Are there no works for us to do since we are saved by an act of grace? Our works don't get us into heaven, but our works prove we're in. Works-based theology has this equation: faith plus works equals salvation. Grace-based theology teaches: faith equals salvation followed by works. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Masterpiece

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we unlock the meaning of this passage, and the key is the Greek word for “masterpiece,” *poiema*. The online NET Bible at NetBible.org translates *poiema* as “creative work,” emphasizing the creativity in God's workmanship.

In the following verses from the NET Bible, highlight or circle the words *works*, *work*, *creative*, and *created*.

[Salvation] is not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.
(Ephesians 2:9–10 NET Bible)



God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

We're saved by grace “for good works.” According to these verses, how did God transform us so that our works can be good works?

Later in Ephesians 4–6, Paul will clarify with examples what he means by “good works,” but for now, he simply says that these actions were “prepared beforehand that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 NASB).

What does this phrase mean? Consult your resources for the answer, including Chuck's commentary on Ephesians, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. For an online resource, you can find an explanation of this phrase in *Constable's Notes* at NetBible.org.

God is the artist. He's putting us together just as He would have us go together. It's wonderful! Our whole life begins to be transformed and we live out that new life for His glory and by His strength and power. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's New Creation

Paul also pointed out God's creative work in our lives in *2 Corinthians 5:17*. Reflect on this verse in light of what Paul taught in Ephesians 2:8–10 about God joining us to Christ, raising us from the dead with Christ, creating us anew in Christ, and making us His masterpiece.



God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

What do you think Paul means by saying we're a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB)? What has "passed away" and what "new things have come" (5:17 NASB)?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck sums up the purpose of our salvation:

"What difference does salvation make in my life?" . . . [God's] plan for our lives does not end when we receive the message of the gospel and receive eternal salvation by grace through faith apart from works. Rather, this experience simply marks the beginning of our Christian life as new creatures "in Christ Jesus" (2:10). His plan extends beyond salvation to sanctification, beyond standing in grace to walking in good deeds."²

How encouraging! God charted a path for our lives long before we were born. Then He saved us and created us anew in Christ so that we could walk in that path. It is God's work from beginning to end!



Application: Masterpieces on a Mission

God's masterpieces aren't designed to hang on a museum wall and collect dust. God created us to do the good things that He designed us to do.

What good thing do you think God designed for you to do today? An encouraging word to a child? A thoughtful act of service done in Jesus' name? A decision to forgive someone who wounded you? Your good deed may seem small, but when God is working through you, the impact is always great. Where does God's good path lead you today?



God's Artwork on Display

Ephesians 2:8–10

Made alive in Christ, His life now flows through your works of kindness, love, mercy, and grace—all reflections of God's own good works. As the beauty of artwork testifies to the skill of the artist, so does God's work in us give glory to the Artist who made us His masterpiece. You are God's masterpiece! Let that truth encourage you today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I will never forget the wonder of Your grace poured over me through Christ. You saved me from a life of futility and put me on a path that You charted long before I was born. Thank You for Your marvelous handiwork in my life that traces back to my birth, leads to my salvation, and culminates in following Jesus. I am Your masterpiece. Use me as You please. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 192.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY EIGHT

Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

Paul is telling us as members of the church of the twenty-first century, “Get rid of prejudice. Let it go. In the family of God, we are one in Christ Jesus.” The church is one of the few places where the ground stays level.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SINCE the days of Moses, a thick curtain hung at the entrance to the holy of holies, separating sinful people from their holy God. One day each year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered this sacred chamber on behalf of the nation and “brought the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin” (Hebrews 13:11). This practice of reconciling people with God went on for centuries, until Christ put an end to it with the blood of His own sacrifice.

On the cross, Christ, our High Priest, “offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time” (10:12). It was the ultimate Day of Atonement all the other Days of Atonement anticipated. As a result, Christ’s priestly act made the old system obsolete; it opened access to God for anyone who believed. *Anyone!*

To herald Christ’s epochal achievement, “the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). God literally tore down the barrier between Himself and sinful humanity through the sacrifice of His Son.

However, the veil between God and sinners wasn’t the only barrier that Christ’s atonement brought down that day. Long before Moses and the tabernacle, Gentiles (non-Jews) were excluded from God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel.



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Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

As we'll discover in Ephesians 2:11–16, Christ put an end not only to the alienation of sinners from God but also the alienation of Gentiles from God's covenant. Christ's death broke down both barriers! Let's learn from Paul how this happened as well as how we can experience the freedom of living without a wall between us and God or between us and others.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, follow Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17. First, ask "the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God."

And then, pray that your heart will be "flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance" (Ephesians 1:18).

Conclude by thanking the Lord for breaking down all barriers between you and Him, opening a way for you to join the community of His "holy people."



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his message, Chuck Swindoll identifies three main sections in this passage, using the key questions, *where*, *what*, and *why*:

- Where were we as Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11–12)?
- What difference did Christ make (2:13–14)?
- Why can we be grateful (2:15–16)?

As you read *Ephesians 2:11–16*, mark these sections in your Bible or make mental notes as you observe these sections in the passage.



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16



Observation: Where, What, and Why

A technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* method is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene.¹ Picture yourself joining the Ephesian church as a new Greek or Roman convert in the first century. As you enter a church leader's home, you notice Jewish converts in the meeting. Only months ago, these same Jews shunned you as if you had a disease and, in return, you mocked and laughed at them. How awkward it must feel to sit side-by-side! How are you supposed to relate to people you formerly considered enemies?

Paul addressed this sensitive issue by first explaining to the Gentiles their state of separation from God and His people before Christ.

Where Were We as Gentiles? Ephesians 2:11–12

As a Jew, Paul wrote to the Gentiles as “you,” not to deride them but to explain the reality of their standing as “outsiders” in God's plan. Although God chose Abraham and his descendants to be “a light to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 49:6), the Jews kept God's glory to themselves. What attitude did the Jews have toward Gentiles (*Ephesians 2:11*)?

Can you name the five ways that Gentiles were outsiders in God's redemptive plan, according to Paul's description in *2:12*?



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

The Gentiles were aliens to Messiah—Christ-less; aliens to God’s nation—stateless; aliens to the covenant—friendless; aliens to any kind of meaningful future—hopeless; and aliens to the Creator—godless. —Chuck Swindoll

What Difference Did Christ Make? Ephesians 2:13–14

Without a Savior, the Gentiles turned to pagan shrines, empty rituals, and futile prayers. Endlessly, they chanted incantations to idols and gave themselves over to demonic powers bent on keeping them enslaved. “But now,” Paul declared in [Ephesians 2:13](#) as if ringing a liberty bell! What did Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, make possible not only for the Jews but particularly for the excluded Gentiles?

As the perfect covenant-keeper, Jesus fulfilled Israel’s mission to be a blessing to “all the families on earth” (Genesis 12:3). God brought *near* to Himself the alienated Gentiles. He also brought *together* the Gentiles and the Jews. According to [Ephesians 2:14](#), how did God give Gentiles peace with Himself and His people?

Peace is not in some monument. One wag put it this way: “Our nation’s capital has a large assortment of peace monuments; we build one after every war.” Peace isn’t found in some song. You will not find peace in the world apart from Christ Himself. If you’re hoping to find peace in your neighborhood, you’ll never find it. If you’re hoping to find it at work, it won’t be there. You’ll only find it in a Person. —Chuck Swindoll



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

Why Can We Be Grateful? Ephesians 2:15–16

How grateful we are! God has united us to Christ and to one another as brothers and sisters in God’s multiethnic, multicultural, worldwide family. How did Paul explain this union according to *Ephesians 2:15–16*?

The Mosaic law with its dietary restrictions and countless regulations *required* Jews to separate from Gentiles. By abolishing these laws, Christ could open His banquet table of grace to Jews and Gentiles, reconciling all races to each other and God as “one new people” (Ephesians 2:15).

What does “new people” mean? The New International Version uses a broader term, “one new humanity” (2:15 NIV). This new classification breaks the old distinction of Jews and Gentiles. Some have called it “a third race”!² Let’s decipher the meaning of this phrase in the next section.



Interpretation: Reconciled into One New People

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we can consult commentaries and resources to find the meaning of “one new people” that Christ created. If you have a commentary that explains Ephesians 2:15–16, what does it say?³ For an online resource, we recommend *Constable’s Notes* at NetBible.org.



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

Bible scholar John R. W. Stott helps us grasp the magnitude of Christ's creation:

It would be hard to exaggerate the grandeur of this vision. The new society God has brought into being is nothing short of a new creation, a new human race, whose characteristic is no longer alienation but reconciliation, no longer division and hostility but unity and peace.⁴

What does Christ's vision look like in day-to-day living? Let's survey three verses to find out how citizens of God's new society relate to one another.



Correlation: God's New Creation

Write down what you discover.

Romans 13:8

Galatians 5:13



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

Hebrews 10:25

Christ formed the church by reconciling us with God and with each other so we can obey His great commandment: “Love each other” (John 13:34). This is Christ’s grand vision for His church. As we close our study, let’s consider how we can bring His vision to life.

Application: Two Closing Questions

Return to your earlier mental picture of the Ephesian church. As a new Greek or Roman convert, imagine that you attend a church meeting with Jews who were once your enemies. Suppose the church leader has just read this section of Paul’s letter on reconciliation between races in Christ. If you had lived in first-century Ephesus, would you have believed what you just heard? Would Paul’s letter inspire you to embrace the enemies sitting next to you? What walls would have to fall for them to embrace you?

What about in your twenty-first century church? Do you believe Paul’s words are possible? Can Christ’s ideal be reality? Yes, it can! If you’ve been at odds with another believer, what bridges of peace can you build this week in the name of Christ?



Breaking Down the Barrier

Ephesians 2:11–16

Peacemaking may not be simple. How can families split by divorce or abuse live in peace? What about churches divided over theological issues? Paul offers this helpful counsel: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18 NASB). The key phrase is “so far as it depends on you.” Although you may not be able to restore broken relationships in all situations, love is always possible. Hatred, prejudice, favoritism, an unforgiving spirit, resentment, and animosity are never appropriate for Christ’s new society.

Seek peace when possible and always make Christ’s love your aim. As we close this study, reflect on Chuck’s words from his message.

Paul is telling us as members of the church of the twenty-first century, “Get rid of prejudice. Let it go. In the family of God, we are one in Christ Jesus.” The church is one of the few places where the ground stays level. —Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for my seat at Christ’s banquet table of grace where all people are welcome . . . even my enemies. Fill me with Your love and help me reconcile with those to whom I feel anger. If any prejudice exists in me, please stamp it out and replace it with brotherly love. Thank You for reconciling enemies through Your Son. Make Your church a great haven of peace in a hostile world. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 97.
3. Recommended commentaries include Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015); R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990); John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979); Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).
4. Stott, *God’s New Society*, 110.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY NINE

God's Household

Ephesians 2:17–22

The church's foundation is perfect; the cornerstone is perfect; the plan is perfect. But Christ is putting together in His church imperfect people who must get along. That's why reconciliation transcends theology and moves into the realm of relationships. Reconciliation is a wonderful thing!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the psalmist wrote, “How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!” (Psalm 133:1). And how sad it is when disharmony splits people apart.

Thankfully, Jesus is the master bridge-builder who unites even enemies. He “broke down the wall of hostility” that separated Gentiles from Jews and joined the two contentious factions “into one people” (Ephesians 2:14). And, remarkably, He built this bridge of peace with *His own body*. Through His death and resurrection, He reconciled Jews with Gentiles, and along with them, us with each other—and all of us with God.

Reconciliation is central to Christ's mission. As Eugene Peterson observes in the introduction to his paraphrase of Ephesians:

Jesus, the Messiah, is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together. . . .
The energy of reconciliation is the dynamo at the heart of the universe.¹

Christ is a reconciler! He wants us to do more than just cross His bridge; He intends us to dwell together in harmony and become a living temple for the glory of God. Let's learn from Paul this marvelous truth about our peace and unity in Christ, which, when experienced, is a wonderful and pleasant way to live.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

God's Household

Ephesians 2:17–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus' message of peace paints a hopeful vision of unity in our divided, combative world. As you begin this study, invite Christ's peace to settle on your soul and then your relationships at home, work, church, and in your community. Ask Him to help you follow in His steps as an ambassador of peace and a minister of reconciliation.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you recall, Paul opened Ephesians 2 with a bleak portrait of humanity. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, but then God raised us with Christ and gave us new life. With new life came a new community, for, as we discovered, unity with Christ includes unity with His people.

According to Ephesians 2:14–15, people who formerly had nothing in common—Jews and Gentiles—now had Christ in common. Christ created in Himself “one new people from the two groups.” Now read [Ephesians 2:17–22](#). As you read, notice how Paul's bleak portrait of humanity in the opening lines of Ephesians 2 turns into a beautiful vision of community, the new society of our dreams.



Observation: What We Have in Common

Paul illustrates with word pictures the mutual benefits of our union with Christ, specifically, four things all Christians have in common.



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Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Similes, metaphors, and analogies are figurative comparisons that form pictures in our minds and help bring to life the author's concepts.² Paul packed his writing with figures of speech, and, in this passage, we can identify Paul's main points by observing his rich assortment of metaphors—such as “citizens,” “family,” “house,” “foundation,” “cornerstone,” “temple,” and “dwelling.”

A Common Access to God—Ephesians 2:17–18

According to Ephesians 2:17, to whom did Christ preach the “Good News of peace”? And how did Paul describe these two groups?

At the temple, Jews could enter the courts around the sanctuary, but only the high priest could access God's presence behind the veil. An imposing wall, guarded by a sign that threatened death to trespassers, kept Gentiles far away, and they had no high priest to access God on their behalf.

Jesus, however, changed all that when His death tore the temple curtain in two (Matthew 27:50–51) and broke down the “wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14). Now, according to 2:18, what could the “near” Jews and the “far away” Gentiles have in common?



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The Greek word translated “can come” or “have our access” in the New American Standard Bible, is *prosagō*. According to Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, the word bears a profound analogy:

It was used of those who secure for one the privilege an interview with a sovereign. The French word *entree* exactly translates it. . . . God the Son provides the way into the Father's presence through the Blood of His Cross, God the Spirit conducts the saint in and presents him, and God the Father is the One into whose presence the believer is brought.³

All three members of the Trinity work in sync to secure our access. Amazing! Based on this truth, how should we come to God, according to [Ephesians 3:12](#)? What issue would you like to bring before God right now?

I come before God confident that He has forgiven me, He cares, He hears me, and He will respond with what is best. —Chuck Swindoll

A Common Citizenship—Ephesians 2:19a

How did Paul characterize the Gentiles before and after Christ in the following verse?

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. (Ephesians 2:19a)



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To whom do you think “God’s holy people” referred? Hint: the original Hebrew was Abraham, and according to *Galatians 3:6–9*, Paul connected us spiritually to him.

Through their faith in Christ, Gentiles were inducted into God’s kingdom and granted the same rights of citizenship as the most devout Jews. But there’s more!

A Common Family—Ephesians 2:19b–20

What other connection do Jews and Gentiles share, according to *Ephesians 2:19*? What does the repeated title for God in *1:2*; *3:14*; and *4:6* communicate to you about your bond with God and other believers?

How does God join us to His family, according to *1:5*?

When we come to the bridge of the cross and see written the word, peace, we meet the Father, who comes to us with His arms outstretched. We have a Father. —Chuck Swindoll



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Ephesians 2:17–22

A Common Temple—Ephesians 2:21–22

What else do Jews and Gentiles have in common, according to *Ephesians 2:21–22*? Keep in mind that when Paul wrote these verses, an actual dividing wall in Jerusalem still blocked Gentiles from the temple by threat of death. Reflect on the revolutionary nature of Paul's declaration and how it challenged all the accepted religious norms of his day.

These pictures of our commonality in Christ offer four perspectives of the church, an institution that Paul doesn't specifically name but is at the heart of his analogies.



Interpretation: The Church's Foundation and Cornerstone

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek the meaning of the figures of speech. As analogies, they tell us what the church (the worldwide community of believers) is like. It is like a kingdom in which God is King, a family in which God is Father, and a temple in which God's holy presence dwells. And, like any great building, the church has a solid foundation fixed to a secure cornerstone.

What does Paul mean when he writes that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20)? Feel free to consult your Bible study resources for an answer.

In his message, Chuck found an answer in John Stott's commentary, *God's New Society*:

Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church's foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction. Moreover, we are to think of them as inspired teachers, organs of divine revelation, bearers of divine authority. . . . In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents.⁴



God's Household

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If so, then what does the “foundation” analogy imply about the nature of the Scriptures and the role they play in the church?

As individual stones, we are fitted together and attached to the foundation stones, which are aligned with the “cornerstone,” who is “Christ Jesus himself” (Ephesians 2:20). What does the cornerstone analogy imply about the essential connection to Christ of every individual in the church, including the church fathers?

As a worldwide community of believers, we are being “joined together in Him” (2:21). This image of “joining together” brings us full circle to Christ’s core ministry of peace through reconciliation, His process of carefully joining us to one another as a “dwelling where God lives by his Spirit” (2:22).



Correlation: Ministry of Reconciliation

Correlation helps us confirm and augment our interpretation by consulting a similar passage. What did Paul teach about Christ’s ministry of reconciliation in *2 Corinthians 5:18–20*? And what is our role?



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Ephesians 2:17–22

Ambassadors often travel to other nations on peace missions. If all goes well, treaties are signed and wars cease, but rarely does peace last. Our task as ambassadors is much more effective. Let's look at our role as ministers of reconciliation as we wrap up and apply our study.

Application: Christ Is the Message

Our mission as ambassadors is not to win peace between people but to win people to the Man of Peace. Commentator William Barclay explains how allegiance to Christ inspires peace within us and then with others:

He is our peace. It is in a common love of him that people come to love each other. That peace is won at the price of his blood, for the great awakener of love is the Cross. The sight of that Cross awakens in the hearts of men of all nations love for Christ, and only when they all love Christ will they love each other. It is not treaties and leagues to produce peace. There can be peace only in Jesus Christ.⁵

Christ is our only hope of peace! What privileges we share through our common bond with Him: access to God, citizenship in His kingdom, membership in His family, and being living stones in His temple! With these privileges comes the responsibility of peacemaking. With whom can you join hands today in a spirit of reconciliation?

Go with boldness and confidence in prayer to the Father right now. Open your heart to allow His peace to pour in and then pour out to others. With Christ, the joy of living together in harmony is not just a dream, it's possible!



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son as a bridge-builder. Thank You for not abandoning sinful humans to our constant quarrels and hostilities. Erase the ugly racial barriers that keep people apart. Take away the prejudices that eat at societies and even churches like cancer. Fit me together with others in Your family as stones in a gleaming temple where Your Spirit dwells. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), 401.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 78.
4. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 106–107.
5. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 114.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TEN

The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

One of the greatest lessons the Lord ever taught me is this: Nothing touches us that has not first passed through the fingers of God. Nothing!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN addition to Ephesians, Paul wrote three other letters while under house arrest in Rome: Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In each letter, Paul explained the reason for his arrest.

To the Ephesians, he stated that he was a prisoner “for serving the Lord” (Ephesians 4:1). He wrote to the Philippians, “I am in chains because of Christ” (Philippians 1:13). He asked the Colossians to pray for him for open doors to speak about Christ, noting, “That is why I am here in chains” (Colossians 4:3). And he put it plainly to Philemon that he was “a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1).

Paul saw himself as a standard-bearer for Christ, and he considered his suffering a privilege. He displayed his inmate identification as a badge of honor, declaring without a hint of shame, “I, Paul, a prisoner” (Ephesians 3:1). The Ephesian believers might have questioned God for permitting Paul to be arrested, but for Paul, God’s plan could be trusted even when it included chains. To borrow Peter’s words, Paul rested beneath “the mighty hand of God” and assured himself that God would “exalt [him] at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6 NASB).

Paul never grumbled about his circumstances or viewed himself a victim. He didn’t even acknowledge Caesar as his captor. At no time was Paul a prisoner of Rome but always “of Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:1). Paul answered to a higher King who alone had ultimate say over him, not the Roman Empire with all its legions of soldiers. Only God had power to give or take Paul’s freedom—or even Paul’s life.



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The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

Paul’s message about Christ came directly from God, and that’s the reason Paul was so committed to it. In this study, we’ll examine how God revealed this message to Paul and how Paul declared it. We’ll also see how God is working out His eternal plan to build a kingdom of people from every race and nationality that no prison walls can contain.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps you’re experiencing limitations which feel like confinement. Maybe some authority has put you in “chains” through an injustice or false accusation. Ask the Lord to strengthen your confidence in His plan and sovereign rule. In the space below, tell the Lord your doubts or fears and seek His perspective as you open His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 3:1–13*. Identify the two major sections as you read: God *revealing* His plan to Paul (Ephesians 3:1–6); Paul *declaring* God’s plan to the world (3:7–13).



Observation: Revelation and Declaration of the Mystery

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we take note of the context of our passage within the whole of the book. Repeated words or phrases often link sections and can give us clues to Paul’s main points.¹



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

What phrase is repeated in *Ephesians 3:1* and *14*? What clues do you find in 3:2–13 that indicate a digression from Paul’s train of thought in verse 1 and 14? Why do you think Paul decided to add this section?

Paul already explained God’s plan to unite Gentiles and Jews in Christ as one new people (*Ephesians 1:12–13; 2:14–15, 19*), calling it God’s “mysterious will regarding Christ” (1:9). However, Paul hadn’t explained how this “mystery” came to him and his role in it. So, he let his pen wander down this side path before circling back to his original intention to pray for his readers (3:1, 14–21).

Paul repeated the word *mystery* three times in this passage and a total of six times in his letter (1:9; 3:3–4, 9; 5:32; 6:19 NASB). We’ll decipher its meaning later, for now it’s simply worth observing as an important concept.

The Revelation of the Mystery—Ephesians 3:1–6

How did Paul come to know of God’s plan to unite Gentiles and Jews (*Ephesians 3:2–5*)? And why do you think no one knew the details of this plan before Paul?



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

Read Ephesians 3:6 in the New Living Translation, New American Standard Bible, and The Message, in which Paul summarized the mystery God revealed to him. In the following space, put in your own words the message God gave Paul.

Although this message may not cause alarm today, it sent shock waves through the first-century Jewish community. Because the Jews believed God had chosen them only, their sense of spiritual privilege had fostered an attitude of racial superiority toward “unclean” Gentiles. For joining Gentiles with Jews in salvation, Paul deserved death according to Jewish law.² They refused to accept that Paul’s message was from God!

The Jews had seen themselves as God’s people. They were meant to be missionaries to the Gentiles, but they had forgotten that role. God revealed to Paul that Gentile and Jewish converts to Christ would become one great family of God. Paul was proclaiming a revolutionary paradigm shift. —Chuck Swindoll

The Declaration of the Mystery—Ephesians 3:7–13

How did Paul describe his feelings about being called to be God’s messenger to the Gentiles (*Ephesians 3:7–9*)?



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

God appointed Paul to “preach” and “bring to light” (Ephesians 3:8–9). Specifically, what was Paul to preach? And what was he to bring to light?

What did Paul say is God’s purpose for the church (3:10–11)?

What is the result of Christ’s work on our behalf (3:12)?



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

What encouragement did Paul give his readers (*Ephesians 3:13*)? Why should they feel honored that Paul is suffering on their behalf?

Paul may be under arrest, the champion of the Gentiles may be set aside, the outlook may seem bleak, but the “up-look” is clear. What Paul was going through had to happen in God’s mysterious plan, and the Ephesians would reap the benefits of Paul’s time in prison.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Mystery Revealed

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand key words, such as *mystery*. In Scripture, a mystery is not a riddle to be solved, as a detective follows clues to solve a murder-mystery. Paul never set out to discover God’s mystery; God *revealed* it to him.

Read Paul’s account in *Acts 22:6–21* of when God revealed to Paul the mystery through two visions of Christ, first on the road to Damascus and then at the temple. What happened?



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

The fact that God used visions to reveal something hidden gives us insight into the meaning of *mystery*. In his commentary on Ephesians, Warren Wiersbe explains the word:

In the New Testament, a *mystery* is . . . “a truth that was hidden by God in times past and is now revealed to those who are in His family.” A *mystery* is a “sacred secret” that is unknown to unbelievers, but understood and treasured by the people of God.³

Based on our study, can you restate as concisely as possible the sacred secret that was unknown until God made it known? If you need help, review [Ephesians 3:6](#).

As Paul preached salvation for all, churches welcomed Jewish and Gentile converts by the thousands. Jews and Gentiles, like two tectonic plates, were coming together in the church, and Christianity was pushing its way to the surface of society like a gigantic mountain range. Neither the Jewish authorities nor the entire Roman Empire could stop this movement from reshaping the world’s spiritual landscape.

Who was watching and marveling at the wonder of God’s new creation, according to [3:10–11](#)? What impressed them? For help interpreting Paul’s meaning in these verses, consult your resources or click the tab, [Constable’s Notes](#), at NetBible.org.



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13



Correlation: The Angels' View of the Church

What did Peter teach about the prophets' anticipation of the mystery of the church as well as its impact in the angelic realm (*1 Peter 1:10–12*)?

Whenever people heard Paul teach, they understood the body of Christ better. Gentiles felt part of it. Jews lost their prejudices in gratitude to God for His grace in saving them. Even the angels learned of salvation from the proclamation of “the mystery.” —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Christ Is the Message

It was a privilege for Paul to receive God's secret, shine Christ's light in the Gentile world, and even suffer on behalf of those who were blessed by it. What can we learn from Paul's example and teaching?

First, *the message of the church has eternal roots*. Before Adam and Eve, before there were animals, the oceans, or even the celestial spheres, God planned to bring about salvation and unity through Christ. Reconciliation through Christ was hidden to the prophets and angels, but the message is no longer a secret. Share it freely!

Second, *because our roots are in Christ, we have a secure relationship with the Father*. No forces on earth or in the spiritual realm can separate us from God. Enter His presence with confidence and with joyful trust as we seek His wisdom and ask for His help.

Third, *our relationship with God can help guard us from discouragement*. If anyone had a reason to tumble into despair, it was prisoner Paul. But he told others to not “lose heart” (Ephesians 3:13)! What kept Paul's spirit free while his wrists were locked in chains? His perspective that God was in control and no prison could hold him because God's grace had set him free.



The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Ephesians 3:1–13

Which of these principles speaks most to your heart? What truth can you meditate on today as you face hardships?

In the next study, we'll see the natural response to such good news as we join Paul and fall on our knees in prayer, lifting our unchained hands to God in gratitude and praise!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for revealing the sacred secret of salvation in Christ and our unity with all believers, regardless their race, nationality, or language. Your church is a multicultural community with members from every corner of our world, a variegated tapestry of grace. Help me to accept others and love all people in the name of Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. The Jews determined to kill Paul in Jerusalem when a rumor spread that Paul had brought into the temple a Gentile convert from Ephesus named Trophimus. The Jews erupted in a riot—which led to Paul's arrest and eventual trip to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 21:27–36).
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1976), 68.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY ELEVEN

Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

For those who feel distant from God, I want you to understand that the One who knows you the best loves you the most. You can't do anything to make Him love you less. Isn't that a great thought? You can relax in love like that. It's the most comfortable place in the world to be.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CAN you recall a time when you felt discouraged? Perhaps you had been gliding smoothly through life when someone criticized or mistreated you, and, suddenly, the wind went out of your sails. Your morale drooped, your spirit sagged, and you may have even wanted to give up. Paul identified this down-in-the-dumps feeling as “to lose heart.”

Concerned that his Ephesian friends had dipped into discouragement, Paul begged them, “please don't lose heart” (Ephesians 3:13). That's so like Paul, isn't it? *He* was the one suffering unfairly. And yet, he worried about the Ephesians losing heart. Why? Perhaps they blamed themselves for Paul's problems. After all, Paul was defending *their* rights as Gentiles to share in God's blessing. And the whole trouble started when a rumor spread that Paul had taken Trophimus, a Gentile believer from Ephesus, into the inner courts of the temple (Acts 21:27–30). So, it's understandable that the Ephesians might feel responsible for their champion being in chains.

As an antidote for their discouragement, Paul administered first a dose of *perspective*. God appointed Paul to deliver His message to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1–13). It was a calling of love worth suffering for, and the Ephesians “should feel honored,” not discouraged (3:13). Second was a dose of *prayer*, which we'll examine in this study. Paul prayed that God would bolster his discouraged friends with strength, love, understanding, and filling.



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Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

Paul's prayer closes the doctrinal portion of Ephesians and forms a bookend with his first prayer in 1:15–23. In the first, Paul prayed for divine illumination; and in this prayer, he prayed for divine enablement. One of the most eloquent prayers in Scripture, Paul's inspired words pull us out of our pit and lead us into the heights of glory where we find relief and true joy.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Discouragement is a common malady and can come upon us without warning. Have you lost heart lately? If so, the Scriptures invite you to “Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7), and “tell God what you need” (Philippians 4:6).

Use the space below to express your thoughts and feelings to the Lord. And then, after each point, take a moment to pray Paul's prayer for yourself as you study Ephesians 3:14–21.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

One glimpse of God's glory can chase away any gloom. Paul had just recalled God's revelation of His “mysterious plan” to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to Himself as “part of the same body” in Christ (Ephesians 3:3, 6). The plan shimmered with the splendor of God, His amazing grace, and His world-embracing love. No wonder Paul fell to his knees:

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. (3:14–15)

The context of Paul's prayer was his own joyful, awestruck reverence. More than anything, Paul yearned to share with others his experience with God. He wanted the Ephesian church members to not just look at God's goodness as one might view the ocean but to dive into it and let it wash over them. Feel Paul's heartbeat as you read *Ephesians 3:16–21*, imagining him praying this prayer for you.



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21



Observation: Four Requests and a Benediction

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for main points, marked by verbs, such as, “I pray” and “may you have” and transitions, such as, “then” and “so.”¹ A closer look at Paul’s prayer reveals four main requests and closes with a benediction.

To Be Strengthened with Power—Ephesians 3:16–17a

Because discouragement often weakens people to the point of giving up, Paul initially prayed that God will strengthen his readers. Use your skills of observation as you read closely the following verses. Note the request, resources, kind of strength, result, and our response; and write what you discover in the space below.

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. (Ephesians 3:16–17)

Did you observe that Paul calls upon each member of the Trinity in his prayer? He prayed to the Father, who is the “Creator of everything in heaven and on earth” (3:15). Based on verses 16 and 17, what roles do the Holy Spirit and the Son have in our spiritual life?



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

Pause right now to pray for the Father to empower you through the Spirit and invite Christ to make His home in your heart.

When Christ is at home in your life, down deep within your being, you are strengthened.
—Chuck Swindoll

To Be Rooted and Grounded in God’s Love—Ephesians 3:17b

Not only can God’s Spirit strengthen us, His love can stabilize us. Paul prayed that our “roots will grow down into God’s love and keep [us] strong” (Ephesians 3:17). Our emotions can sway erratically and sometimes snap in a storm, can’t they? Reflect on Paul’s metaphor of roots and write down what he is communicating about how God’s love can help us weather hardships emotionally.

Would you like to pray this part of Paul’s prayer for emotional stability as you endure today’s storm?



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

Just as you would find in a tree the deep roots that give it stability and in great structures a fine, solid foundation that give it stability, so love does that for all of us. —Chuck Swindoll

To Comprehend the Immensity of Christ’s Love—Ephesians 3:18–19a

In this section, Paul prays that we will be able to comprehend something that “surpasses knowledge”—which is a paradox (Ephesians 3:19 NASB). How can we know something we can’t know? We’ll explore the meaning of this paradox later, but for now, observe these lines in Paul’s prayer. What does Paul pray we comprehend? How is this request different than the previous request? What language does Paul use to describe something that is far-reaching?

May [you] be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. (3:18–19 NASB)

Would you like to pray that you can grasp, at least as much as is humanly possible, the wonders of Christ’s love for you and those you love?

I think of the shape of the cross when I read these words. Christ’s love is broad enough to cover whomever, long enough to go beyond any barrier, deep enough to touch any need, and high enough to take us all to glory. —Chuck Swindoll



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

To Fill Us with God’s Fullness—Ephesians 3:19b

Paul’s final request was an amazing one: “That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19b NASB).

Here is the same verse in the Amplified Bible, which defines key words to aid our comprehension. After reading it, write down in your own words what Paul prayed.

That you may be filled up [throughout your being] to all the fullness of God [so that you may have the richest experience of God’s presence in your lives, completely filled and flooded with God Himself].
(3:19 AMP)

Now use the pronoun “I” to pray this request for yourself. And then pray it again using the names of others for whom you wish to pray.

I pray that you will have the essence of God washing over you. And when you do, there will be relational intimacy with God—a kind of intimacy not even known between husbands and wives. It’s deep, unmeasured, boundless. —Chuck Swindoll



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21



Interpretation: Knowing the Unknowable

Let's go back to Paul's paradoxical request "to comprehend . . . and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18–19 NASB). Read this part of Ephesians 3:19 in the following two versions and then write down what you think Paul means.

May you have the power to understand. . . . May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. (3:18–19 NLT)

And may you . . . be fully capable of comprehending . . . and [that you may come] to know [practically, through personal experience] the love of Christ which far surpasses [mere] knowledge [without experience]. (3:17–19 AMP)

As you might imagine, there are various ways to interpret Paul's interplay between "comprehend," "know," and "knowledge." He may be contrasting personal experience (*comprehend* and *know*) with mere knowledge about Christ's love (*knowledge*).

For example, to really comprehend the ocean, we can't just view it from the shore; we must splash around in its waves and experience it personally. Paul prayed that we would feel Christ's love in our hearts not just know about it with our intellect. But even through personal experience, we can't fully comprehend something so vast!

Perhaps Paul's point is that we as humans can know only so much about Christ's love, but what we can grasp is enough to keep us grasping for more. Certainly, we will spend eternity joyfully exploring its depths!



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21



Correlation: What Can Separate Us from God’s Love?

Paul’s admiration of “how wide, how long, how high, and how deep” is Christ’s love (Ephesians 3:18) reminds us of something he wrote about God’s love in Romans. Compare Ephesians 3:18 with *Romans 8:37–39* in the New American Standard Bible, and write down what additional insights you discover about the “love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39 NASB).



Application: The Answer to Discouragement

Paul’s prayer can encourage you no matter what situation you’re in. When you’ve lost your inner strength and motivation, remember that God wants to empower you (Ephesians 3:16). When you feel uncared for, root yourself in God’s love for you (3:17). When your brain is fogged and you can’t recall the doctrines of your faith, meditate on the all-embracing love of Jesus (3:18). And when you lose your way and feel empty spiritually, ask God to fill you with the bounty of His presence (3:19).

What a great prayer to meditate on and memorize! Chuck offers this simple formula that sums up Paul’s prayer in a nutshell:

- Claim God’s strength.
- Remember that you’re loved.
- Seek His fullness.



Paul on His Knees . . . Again

Ephesians 3:14–21

Which part of the formula do you need most today?

We've prayed for God's strength, love, understanding, and filling. All that remains is the benediction in Ephesians 3:20–21, Paul's grand finale of praise.



A FINAL PRAYER

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWELVE

A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

The whole point is this: when you “walk in a manner worthy of the calling,” you will be like Christ and people will notice. You won’t have to wear a badge. You won’t have to wave flags. You’ll walk the walk, and they won’t be able to deny it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MOST of Paul’s letters contain a “hinge”—a point where they shift from theoretical to practical, from principle to application. Often Paul signaled this change in direction with the word *therefore* (Romans 12:1; Galatians 5:1; Colossians 3:1 NASB). In keeping with Paul’s pattern, the first word we meet at the beginning of Ephesians 4 is “Therefore” (Ephesians 4:1), which is the hinge point in this letter. To see Paul’s dividing point illustrated, refer to the [chart of Ephesians](#) on our website or in the first study in this series.

In the first half of Ephesians, we sat in awe as Paul unveiled a starry host of theological wonders:

- Our adoption as God’s children (1:4–5)
- The hope of our inheritance (1:11, 18)
- Christ’s glorious rule (1:20–23)
- God’s lavish grace (2:1–10)
- Our reconciliation with God and unity with each other in God’s family (2:11–3:13)
- The Lord’s incomparable love (3:14–21)



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

We've learned so much about our spiritual blessings in Christ. Now, as we begin the second half of Paul's letter, it's time to get up and set out through the gate marked "therefore." On the other side, a grand adventure awaits as Paul leads us through the twists and turns of church life, marriage, family relationships, work, and even spiritual battles. Our pilgrims' path winds as far as we can see, all the way home to God.

Are we ready to hit the trail? Let's lace up our boots, strap on our packs, swing open the gate, and set out on our journey lit by the starlight of God's grace.¹



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you step into this new territory, you'll notice that Paul gives a lot of commands, which can feel overwhelming. We have so much to do and so far to go! Just remember that God, through His "unlimited resources," will "empower you with inner strength through his Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16). The key to survival on the trail is step-by-step, moment-by-moment dependence on the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide.

As you begin this journey into practical Christian living, confess your need for His empowerment to transform you from the inside out and to do through you what you can't do on your own.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll reminds us that observing a passage takes time. He writes, "Discipline and diligence are required when we prepare our own meals from the Bible, just as time and effort are required when we cook physical meals."²

Linger over *Ephesians 4:1–6* as you read the passage in multiple versions of the Bible. Read it aloud and more than once, allowing the words to simmer in your soul. Notice Paul's *overarching command* in verse 1, how we live it out in verses 2–3, and *the reason for it* in verses 4–6. Also, look for Paul's lists: five character qualities in verses 2–3 and the sevenfold repetition of the word *one* in verses 4–6.



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6



Observation: How to Walk in Unity

Now let's examine each component of Paul's opening instructions, beginning with his overarching command which sets the theme for the rest of Ephesians: practical ways we walk worthy of our calling.³

Overarching Command—Ephesians 4:1

Paul had dedicated his life to teaching the truths in Ephesians 1–3 and walking in a manner worthy of them, which led to his present circumstances. How did Paul refer to himself in *4:1*? And what point do you think he was making right before imploring his readers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling?

Paul used the Greek verb *peripateō* which, literally, means “to walk” but refers “to one's lifestyle or pattern of behavior.”⁴ What does this idiom imply about the Christian life?

From Paul's Greek word for “worthy” we get our English word, *axiom*—which, according to commentator Kent Hughes, means “to be of equal weight.”⁵ We are to live in a manner *equal* to our “calling” (Ephesians 4:1). For example, when a princess is called to be queen, she must learn to act in a manner equal to her new role. She is crowned queen, now she must act like a queen.

Similarly, God has crowned us “his holy people” (1:18) and united us as “one new people” (2:15); now, Paul pleads, we must act like the people He called—holy and as one in unity. Later, in Ephesians 4:17–5:20, Paul reveals how to live a holy life. In the immediate passage, Paul explains how to walk the steppingstones of unity by cultivating five essential character qualities.



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

How to Walk in Unity—Ephesians 4:2–3

The following chart lists four of the five character qualities in the left column. In the right column, write down your definition of these virtues, and if you need help, read *Ephesians 4:2* in the Amplified Bible.

Character Quality	Definition from the Amplified Bible
Humility (Ephesians 4:2 NASB)	
Gentleness (4:2 NASB)	
Patience (4:2 NASB)	
Tolerance (4:2 NASB)	



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

Notice that Paul seems to pair the first two virtues and the second two. What do you think is the connection between humility and gentleness? And what links patience with tolerance?

Humility expresses itself in gentleness which results in patiently making allowances for one another. One steppingstone leads to the next and the next, culminating in the fifth virtue: *agape*. This Greek word for “love” means to sacrificially seek the well-being of others, to look out not for our own interests but for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). Love is both the apex and the basis for all virtues, our all-encompassing standard for moral behavior.

What did Paul say was the outcome of these inner qualities (*Ephesians 4:3*)?

When I step into the body of Christ as a result of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for me, having paid the price on the cross, I step into the realm of unity that He has established. That’s what He wants for His body. The apostle implores ministers, congregational members, believers, young and old alike, “Lay down the arms. Pick up the belt of peace.”
—Chuck Swindoll



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6



Interpretation: Why We Walk in Unity

To help us discover the reason God wants us to walk in unity, Paul leads us into the mystery of the Trinity itself, where God’s “three-in-oneness” is on display.

For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. (Ephesians 4:4–6)

Can you identify the seven “ones” in this passage? Write them down here and what each one means. For help with definitions, consult Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians* or, for an online resource, *Constable’s Notes* at NetBible.org.

Paul seems to cluster the first three “ones” around the Spirit, the second three around the Lord Jesus, and the final “one” on God the Father. The apostle repeats the word *one* as if ringing a church bell to get the church members’ attention: *We must preserve our unity!* What was Paul trying to communicate by repeating the word *one* so many times and linking the church’s unity with the oneness of God?



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

Commentator John Stott aptly capsulizes the interpretation:

We must assert that there *can* be only one Christian family, only one Christian faith, hope, and baptism, and only one Christian body, because there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . Is there only one God? Then he has only one church. Is the unity of God inviolable? Then so is the unity of the church. The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself.⁶



Correlation: Jesus' Prayer for Unity

In the waning hours before Jesus went to the cross, our Lord prayed for His present and future followers to be one. As you read a portion of His prayer, can you see where Paul gets his teaching about oneness in the Trinity and the church?

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” (John 17:20–23)

Because we are one with Christ who is one with the Father, we are one with each other. We might say that unity is in our spiritual DNA. It runs in our heavenly family! What impact did Jesus say this distinguishing trait has on those outside the family?

The world will know us as Christ's followers because we display the single-most identifiable mark of our Savior—His love.



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6

The “bond of peace” is secured when we work in harmony with each other, when we allow love to flow freely, and when we forgive quickly. The most powerful testimony a church can demonstrate is unity. Don’t think the world doesn’t spot it. It amazes them when they see a truly happy church, when they see a church of any size working in harmony.

—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Living in Unity

God has called us to a life of great beauty. Peace instead of hostility, grace instead of rigid demands, kindness in place of harshness, enriching companionship instead of lonely striving. All these good and lovely qualities mark the path ahead of us. But such beauty is not skin deep. The outer glow radiates from the inner virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and most of all, love. Develop these virtues in the members of any church, and eye-catching unity will follow.

Which of these character qualities would you like Christ to develop in your spirit? These virtues shone beautifully through Jesus, and He is in you (John 17:23). In a quiet moment of prayer, ask the Lord to light up one of these virtues in you this week. What would that virtue look like in your closest relationships?

Sure, the differences between individuals are many. Each one of us is uniquely gifted, and our personalities are as varied as the shades on a painter’s color wheel. However, as Paul will teach us in our next study, our individuality enhances our unity in the body of Christ and makes His church truly beautiful.



A Worthy Walk

Ephesians 4:1–6



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, just as You are one with the Son and the Spirit, may those who bear Your name be equally unified. We do not have many objects of our faith but one: Jesus. We are baptized only in Your name. And our hope is only in Your promise. All these cords tie us together as one. You have called us to be one people and so, in our families and churches, may we live as one. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Parts of this study are adapted from Insight for Living Ministries, “A Worthy Walk,” in *Becoming a People of Grace Study Guide* (Plano, TX: IFL Publishing House, 2001).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 57. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
3. We walk in unity (Ephesians 4:1–16); we walk in purity (4:17–5:20); we walk in mutual submission (5:21–6:9); we walk in victory (6:10–24).
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 228.
5. R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 121.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY THIRTEEN

His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

We are possessors of a limitless power source at work in each of one of us that comes out in a practical way in the exercising of our gifts.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGH His death on the cross, Christ built a bridge linking sinful humanity and God. He also “broke down the wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles, linking together His followers as one new unified people (Ephesians 2:14). Unity is a core value for Paul, a strong current in the flow of his letter.

But is unity the same as uniformity? When God made us one in Christ, did He create a collection of assembly-line robots, each one walking, talking, and acting the same? Definitely not! We are the *body* of Christ. And just as a physical body includes diverse members that complement and benefit one another, so also the body of Christ is made up of a diversity of individuals, each one with unique characteristics working together as one.

To help us function together gracefully, Christ gave us the gifts of the Spirit. As you recall from our study of Ephesians 2, Christ already gave us the gift of salvation: “God saved [us] by his grace when [we] believed . . . it is a gift from God” (2:8). God gave us this free gift when we came to the cross in faith and trusted Christ as Savior. But the same One—who with nail-pierced hands gave us the gift of *spiritual life*—also imparted gifts for *spiritual living*, along with the *spiritual enablement* to help us make these gifts work! Let’s look more closely at these wonderful gifts, what they are and how Christ gave them to each one of us.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

How gracious of our Savior to not only unite Christians as one people but also to supply us with what we need to live together well. Every member of Christ’s body has a unique gift and a valuable role to fill. As we examine God’s Word, ask the Lord to help you know His joy in using your gift.



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His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

A key Bible-study strategy is to read the verses that come before and after a passage to better grasp the context. Go back to the beginning of Ephesians 4 and read our current passage in its context all the way through verse 16: *Ephesians 4:1–16*.

As we learned in the previous study, Paul gave his readers the overarching command “to lead a life worthy of your calling” (Ephesians 4:1). How do we do this? In Ephesians 4:1–16, Paul presents the first answer: *by walking in unity*.

In 4:1–6, Paul lays the theological foundation for our unity in the church—the three-in-one nature of God. In 4:7–11, he gives the basis for our diversity in the church—our spiritual gifts. And, as we’ll see in the next study, Paul links the two concepts, showing us how we achieve unity *through* diversity in the body of Christ (4:12–16). Now, let’s zero in on the passage at hand: 4:7–11.



Observation: What Christ Did for Us

We begin with observation in *Searching the Scriptures*.¹ Look for the verbs that carry the flow of thought through the passage and write down the phrases that communicate Christ’s actions in *Ephesians 4:7–8*.

While explaining what Christ did to give us spiritual gifts, Paul abruptly inserted a parenthetical explanation of Christ’s ascension in verses 9–10. Then, in the next verse, he returned to the theme of the gifts “Christ gave to the church” (Ephesians 4:11).



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

Paul's parenthesis can be confusing. To see more clearly his flow of thought, let's remove the parenthetical section and save it for the interpretation phase. The passage reads like this without verses 9 and 10:

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.

That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,

he led a crowd of captives

and gave gifts to his people. . . .”

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. (Ephesians 4:7–8, 11)

Can you better see Paul's progression of thought from Christ's "gift" in 4:7 to "gifts" in 4:8 and then the list of gifts in 4:11? Let's look at each part of this fascinating Scripture!

He Gave the Gift of Grace—Ephesians 4:7

The word, *however*, in Ephesians 4:7 indicates a contrast from the previous verse. In contrast to "Father of *all* . . . over *all*, in *all*, and through *all* (Ephesians 4:6, emphasis added), Paul narrowed his scope from "all" of us to "each one of us" (4:7). It's as if he turned to each individual in his audience, including you and me, and said, "This is for you!"

Read 4:7 in the New American Standard Bible, and in the space below, rewrite the verse but insert your name instead of the phrase, "each one of us." What did *you* receive from Christ?

“Grace” is a one-word synonym for the gospel. It’s the good news that Jesus Christ came to bear the sins of the world. He overcame death, the grave, and the power of the Enemy. He was resurrected and is seated at the Father’s right hand to live and reign over His people. Our sins are forgiven, washed clean by His blood. That’s the gift! “To each one of us grace was given.” —Chuck Swindoll



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

He Led a Host of Captives—Ephesians 4:8

We received God’s grace at the cross when we came to faith in Christ. But God never meant us to stop there. After all, Jesus isn’t on the cross anymore! Having vanquished the enemy death, Christ was raised and ascended into heaven as victorious King.

Paul didn’t imagine Christ as a limp and lifeless body on the cross but as glorious God. In Ephesians 4:8, he quotes Psalm 68 to illustrate Christ’s triumph. In the following chart, read Psalm 68:18 alongside Paul’s quote in Ephesians 4:8. Write down below what you observe as you compare the verses and how Paul applied it to Christ.

Psalm 68:18	Ephesians 4:8
<p><i>When you ascended to the heights, you led a crowd of captives. You received gifts from the people.</i></p>	<p><i>That is why the Scriptures say, “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”</i></p>

Psalm 68 recalled how God led the Hebrew captives out of Egypt, scattered the kings of the earth, and ascended Mount Sinai. In ultimate fulfillment of God’s triumph, Christ also led His people to freedom, scattered the powers of death, and ascended the heavenly heights. When Christ ascended, however, He didn’t receive gifts from His people. He *gave* spiritual gifts to His people. What a wonderful expression of grace!



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

Pause here for a moment of reflection. Do you sometimes feel like you have stopped at the cross and not made much progress in your Christian walk? How do you picture Jesus? How does your concept of Jesus affect your ability to move forward?

He Gave Spiritual Gifts—Ephesians 4:11

In His triumph, Christ distributed the bounty of His victory in the form of spiritual gifts. Paul didn't list all the gifts Christ gave His church, but he did name four. What are they in *Ephesians 4:11*?

What role did the apostles and prophets fulfill in the church in Paul's day, according to *2:20* and *3:4–5*?



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

In the early days of the church, apostles were the spiritual pioneers who shaped the doctrine of the church, and prophets were inspired spokespersons for God before the Scriptures were complete. Today, evangelists introduce people to Christ, and pastors / teachers shepherd people and feed them the solid food of the Word. Of all the gifts Christ gave to the church, why do you think Paul listed these four here?



Interpretation: An Important Parenthesis

Now let's consider the possible interpretations of Paul's puzzling parenthesis.

(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:9–10 NASB)

What does "He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?" mean? Paul could have had in mind Christ's descent from heaven to earth at His incarnation. The New Living Translation reflects this interpretation: "Christ descended to our lowly world" (4:9). Or Paul could have meant Christ's descent into the grave. Another view is the "lower parts of the earth" might refer to the place of departed spirits, or Sheol, where, according to Peter, Christ "preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19).²

Whatever Paul meant by Christ's descent, his point about Christ's ascension was clear. By ascending into heaven, Christ did not leave the world behind; rather, He ascended so that He might fill the world more completely with His presence. According to *John 16:7, 13* and *Colossians 1:27*, what were the benefits of Christ's ascension?



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

Through the Spirit, Christ fills His people—“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27 NASB). And He inhabits the entire creation with His glory—“who fills all things everywhere with himself” (Ephesians 1:23). All this was made possible because Christ ascended into heaven. How important is the ascension to our present relationship with Christ and our hope for the future!

On His ascension, Christ made clear to the demonic realm, “I am victorious over all powers.” He is the supreme preeminent One. That’s the reason all our praise goes to Christ and why we lift Him up and exalt Him as Savior and God. Great theology! —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: What Are Spiritual Gifts?

If Christ hadn’t ascended, we wouldn’t have His gifts. Thankfully, He has blessed us with them, but what are they exactly? In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll offers a helpful definition:

It is a God-given ability or skill that enables a believer to perform a specific function in the body of Christ with effectiveness and ease.³

Other New Testament passages unveil more spiritual gifts than the four Paul listed in Ephesians 4. All of them are listed on page 10. Let’s overview key passages on the spiritual gifts that answer the following questions.

Who has a spiritual gift? Read *1 Corinthians 12:7*.

In whose strength do we perform our spiritual gifts and for what purpose? Read *1 Peter 4:11*.



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

What should our attitude be toward those with different gifts? Read *1 Corinthians 12:12–25*.

What is God's role in the spiritual gifts? Read *1 Corinthians 12:4–6*.

God distributes spiritual gifts “as He wills.” That keeps me from feeling inadequate or complaining that I don’t have another gift. It’s not about what I want; it’s about what He wants me to have. You have the gifts God wanted you to have. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Our Differences Enhance Our Unity

God desires diversity. Variety enhances our unity, not threatens it. We can encourage and foster other people's giftedness by recognizing God's hand in their lives and acknowledging the effectiveness of their work when they exercise their gift.

What about your spiritual gift? Look through the list of spiritual gifts on page 10. *You* are on that page! What gift or gifts do you think God has given you?



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

How can you put your gift into action today?

What a relief to know that we don't have to copy other people's gifts. We can exercise the gift God gave us and feel His power when we see Him working through us in ways beyond our own abilities. There's no greater joy than that!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for seeing me as a unique person and gifting me in a unique way. I receive Your blessing with humble gratitude. Give me opportunities to use my gifts and, in so doing, contribute to the health of Christ's body. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. For more detailed explanation of these views, consult Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 238–40.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 240.
4. Insight for Living Ministries, "His Gift and Our Gifts," in *Becoming a People of Grace Study Guide* (Plano, TX: IFL Publishing House, 2001), 112. Spiritual gifts of healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and miracles were confirming signs of the Spirit in the era of the early church and appear to have ceased today.



His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

Spiritual Gifts[†]

Administration—the ability to organize people in the church toward a specific goal

Discernment—an uncanny ability to distinguish truth from error or to evaluate spirits to determine if they are from God or Satan

Evangelism—a special ability to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelievers or to train others to do so

Exhortation—the ability to effectively challenge and encourage believers to shore up weaknesses and grow in the faith

Faith—an inclination or ability to genuinely trust God when there seems to be no human or natural basis for that trust

Giving—a joyful and eager generosity that gives resources (material and otherwise) without any motives for self-benefit or reciprocation

Hospitality—a cheerful openness to host, shelter, and feed fellow believers at home whenever the need arises

Knowledge—a knack for understanding the meaning of Scripture

Leadership—having the zeal and communication skills to rally people in the church around a common cause or goal

Mercy—a devoted, freely given compassion for those who are needy and suffering

Ministering—performing any task that benefits others by joyfully meeting their practical or material needs (also called “helps” or “service”)

Pastoring / Teaching—a bent toward caring for and protecting fellow believers, and being able to understand the complex teachings of the Bible and explain them in an easily understandable way

Wisdom—the ability to consistently make wise decisions and provide godly insights for problems



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY FOURTEEN

Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

If there's a message the church of the twenty-first century needs to hear, it is this one. The church is a family. The church is a body. We are not a corporation.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the 1960s, Ray C. Stedman, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, inspired his congregation to live out Paul's principles for church life in Ephesians 4. Stedman coined the term, *body life*, to describe what happens when people use their spiritual gifts and relate to one another with an open-hearted, vulnerable, and unguarded style.

“We easily forget that the church is a body,” wrote Stedman. He continues,

We have tried to operate the church as an institution, a corporation, a business. But the reality Paul wants us to grasp in Ephesians is that the church is a body, made up of “cells”—and the cells are individual believers, you and me and our other brothers and sisters in Christ. Each cell has a unique role to play in keeping the entire body healthy.¹

Red blood cells, white blood cells, nerve cells, muscle cells, skin cells—there are more than two hundred types of cells in the human body, and each type operates in a specialized way. Each type is essential; each cell is important. When cells work in harmony, the body stays healthy. But what happens when some types stop functioning? Or when damaged cells attack other cells? The body degenerates and even dies.

Body life in the church operates by the same principles. Like cells, we must all function in harmony to benefit the church body, but if we stop using our gift or we fight among ourselves, the body suffers and local churches die.



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Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

Because so much was at stake, Paul begged his readers to “lead a life worthy of your calling” (Ephesians 4:1), to be humble, gentle, patient, tolerant, and loving toward each other. From the depths of his heart, Paul pleaded,

Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. (4:3)

At our salvation, Christ outfitted us with the necessary tools—at least one spiritual gift for each believer—to achieve His vision for the church. Each church possesses the potential for unity and peace when every member exercises his or her gift. But it’s up to church *leaders* to unlock this treasure. The unity-through-diversity dream won’t happen without the leaders of the church taking specific steps to urge church members toward unity. Thankfully, Paul outlines these steps in Ephesians 4:11–16, and in this study, we’ll discover what they are!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whether or not you are a church leader, you fill an influential role in someone else’s life. You can implement the principles in this passage in your personal sphere of influence. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to ways you can apply what His Word is teaching you.

Also, although Paul was speaking to leaders, church members need to hear what he has to say. The purpose of this passage is to inspire leaders to equip you so that you will mature in Christ. Ask the Lord to help you be receptive to the influence of your church leaders and responsive to the Lord’s unique calling for you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostles and prophets in Paul’s day pioneered the Christian movement, codified God’s Word in the Scriptures, and established the doctrines of the faith. Their work is the foundation on which evangelists and pastor/teachers built local churches, then and now. Paul listed these four vital leadership roles as “gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).

What was the primary responsibility of these church leaders? What were their core purposes? And what was the ultimate outcome? Read *Ephesians 4:12–16*, and we will set out to answer these questions.

Body life in a church is at its best when it reflects an openhearted, vulnerable, unguarded style where the leadership doesn’t remind people of who’s in charge, where image is never at stake, and where the body really does function as such. —Chuck Swindoll



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16



Observation: Responsibility, Purpose, Outcomes

First, let's observe Paul's immediate reason for addressing church leaders: to spell out their primary responsibility.

The Leaders' Responsibility—Ephesians 4:12

God gave specific gifts to leaders to fulfill an essential task so the church could experience body life. Read Ephesians 4:12, and in the space below, write down what church leaders are supposed to do and what God's people are to do as a result.

Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)

Does this verse surprise you? So often, we view our leaders as church employees. We think *they* are the ones to do God's work and build up the church—which we assume is to increase attendance and erect buildings. But that's "corporate" thinking and it's wrong!

Do Paul's instructions change your thinking about what your church leaders should do and your role in the ministry? If so, in what ways?



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

The purpose of the church staff isn't to do the work of ministry; it's to train others to do the work of ministry. It's an eye-opening thought, isn't it? We are not to be a group of spectators watching a few people do the work of ministry. We participate. It's like the cells working together. And when they work together, the church is healthy. It's remarkable!
—Chuck Swindoll

Four Core Purposes—Ephesians 4:13–15

The surest signs of a healthy church are God's people doing ministry and building up each other. But what does "healthy" mean, exactly? What is the purpose of all this equipping, doing, and building up in the church? Paul listed four core purposes, and the first two are in [Ephesians 4:13](#). What purposes do you observe in this verse?

What is the next purpose in [4:14](#)?



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

And what is another purpose in *Ephesians 4:15*?

A healthy body is one in which believers exhibit unity, maturity, stability, and truth balanced with love. None of these signs of health are possible, however, without the body's connection to its Head. Read *4:13–15* again, and this time write down each time Paul refers to Christ. What do you think Paul was trying to communicate about the church's link to Christ?

This is body life at its best. We grow up. We are not adults living like children. We are adults handling ourselves in an adult manner. One of the great things about being an adult is you're no longer selfish. —Chuck Swindoll

The Ultimate Outcome—Ephesians 4:16

The church connection to its Head leads Paul to assert the ultimate outcome of believers using their spiritual gifts. What was Paul's point in *Ephesians 4:16*?



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

The most wonderful fruit from the tree of knowing Christ is *agape*—the love of Christ. Body life is at its ultimate when Christ’s love is lived, spoken, and experienced among its members.

When the body of Christ, the church, is at its healthiest stage, you will witness the outworking of humility (the absence of pride), gentleness (the absence of force), patience (the absence of impatience and rage and anger), tolerance (the absence of legalism and restrictive thinking), and love (the absence of ignoring others and fighting with one another). —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Equip”

A key concept for Paul is *equip*, which is the first step in a series that leads to a healthy church body. The Greek word Paul uses also appears in Matthew 4:21, referring to James and John “repairing their nets.”

Reflect on this image of a fisherman repairing, mending, or completing a net as you consider Paul’s statement to church leaders to “equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church” (Ephesians 4:12). What insight into the meaning of Paul’s command can you infer?

The reason fishermen repair their nets is to put them into action, not to put them on show. The steps are simple: prepare the nets, put them into service, catch fish! How do Paul’s instructions mirror this three-step process of equipping, deploying, and yielding?



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

Just as fishermen mend a tear in their nets to make them stronger, church leaders see the needs in their church members, complete what's lacking, and put God's people into service using their spiritual gifts with amazing results in the church. "The whole body is healthy and growing and full of love" (Ephesians 4:16).

The purpose of your time in the body of Christ initially, thanks to these gifts, is to be built up or equipped so that you function in ways that you otherwise would not know to function.

—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Common Good

Paul's teaching on body life echoes throughout his writing to other churches, specifically, the church at Corinth. How do the following verses add to your understanding of what Paul taught in Ephesians 4:12–16?

1 Corinthians 12:4–6

1 Corinthians 12:7



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

1 Corinthians 13:1–3

Body life at its best is a beautiful blend of submission to Christ as our Head, acceptance of one another's gifts, and mutual love as we support one another. Let's see how we can bring these principles to life in our world.

Application: Body Life in Action

Ray Stedman's church in California put body life principles into action during special Sunday evening services in which people shared honestly about their struggles, offered practical help, prayed for one another, welcomed outsiders, and celebrated each other's gifts. The openhearted, vulnerable, and unguarded style of ministry transformed their community.

It's possible to put body life principles into action in our own sphere of influence. Can you think of ways you can improve the body life of your immediate family? How can you equip, serve, and build up those nearest you?



Body Life at Its Best

Ephesians 4:11–16

What can you do today to encourage and celebrate the spiritual gifts God gave those you love?

How can you draw others together in unity and build up one another? Maybe the answer is as simple as singing worship songs together, sharing a meaningful verse, or offering encouraging words. Bring body life home and enjoy what Paul dreamed for God's people: relationships that are healthy, growing, and full of love.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the future feels uncertain and everything in me tries to take control of things out of my control. Grant me a sense of quiet confidence in You. Point me to what's important, such as showing humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance toward others who are also just as stressed out as I am. Mostly overflow me with Christ so that His love not only meets my needs but pours out to others through me. Bless me with unity, maturity, stability, and truth. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Ray C. Stedman, *Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer's Inheritance* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1998), 188.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY FIFTEEN

Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

We come to the cross wearing our old garments, filthy as they are, and we stand before the living, all-pure, all-clean God. We claim His forgiveness, shed the old garments, and He fits us with new ones that have been created in righteousness and holiness and truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN we were dead because of our sins, God “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (Ephesians 2:5). We are alive in Christ, living proof of God’s grace, and with new life comes a new lifestyle. How strange it would be for us who are alive to act as if we were dead. Christ freed believers from sin’s grave. Why would we live like those who are still entombed?

When Lazarus came out of his tomb still bound in his burial linens, Jesus, who had raised Lazarus, exclaimed to the dumbfounded onlookers, “Unwrap him and let him go!” (John 11:44). People brought back to life don’t walk around in graveclothes! They put on new clothes and start living!

Christ tells us to do the same, to discard our old dead ways and walk in Christ’s new life-giving ways. As commentator Warren Wiersbe puts it, “Take off the graveclothes and put on the grace-clothes!”¹

How do we put off the old and put on the new? In our study of Ephesians 4:17–24, Paul helps us understand the process by first exposing the dark futility of sin, and then he describes the delight of walking with Christ. So let’s step into the apostle’s changing closet to get fitted for a new set of clothes for our new selves.



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Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before beginning the study, pause for prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see truth in His Word. Consider this prayer of David to help prime your heart:

*I will study your commandments
and reflect on your ways.*

*I will delight in your decrees
and not forget your word.*

*Be good to your servant,
that I may live and obey your word.*

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:15–18)*

Write your own prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The context of the passage is Paul's overarching command, "lead a life worthy of your calling" (Ephesians 4:1). We live worthy of our calling first through our *unity* (4:2–16) and then *purity* (4:17–32). Just as God called us "one new people" (2:15), He also called us His "holy people" (1:18). Living as holy people requires us to exchange old behaviors for new, just as we might take off old clothes and put on new clothes.

Read *Ephesians 4:17–24* and notice in verse 20 the division of the two main sections. Verses 17–19 reveal how people live without God ("Gentiles"); verses 20–24 spotlight Jesus' life and teaching and conclude with key commands to follow.



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

Remember, always integrate the section [of Scripture] you're looking at with its context. Never just plunge right into a verse. Always see where you're coming from and look at where you're going. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: The Old Wardrobe

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we look for contrasts and comparisons, cause-and-effect relationships, repetition, and similarities and opposites.² In this text, Paul contrasted the Gentiles who live without God with Jesus who is God.

According to Ephesians 4:17, what did Paul warn his readers not to do?

Paul gave reasons for his command by exposing the true nature of these people who want nothing to do with God. Let's take a closer look . . . and be warned. The harsh reality of a life trapped in sin is a disturbing picture.

The Heart of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

We begin with the source of all sin, the core of our being where our will and longings take shape. How does Paul describe the Gentiles' hearts in *Ephesians 4:18*?



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

The Greek word Paul chose draws a dreadful picture of a stony and impenetrable covering like a thick callus or calcification that deadens our ability to feel. What do you think Paul was implying by this word picture?

The Mind of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

How did Paul describe the unbelievers' minds in *Ephesians 4:18*? And what does this description imply about the hopelessness of their mental state?

If our society is so advanced, why are so many people taking drugs, getting drunk, getting divorced, and battering spouses and children? Why are all these problems rising instead of declining? Great questions. It's because there is a hardness of heart and a darkness of mind which leads to a deadness of life. —Chuck Swindoll



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

The Condition of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

Because they have hardened their hearts and darkened their minds, those who shut out God are in what condition, according to *Ephesians 4:18*?

Paul has already used the word “dead” to describe this state, applying it to our own condition (Ephesians 2:1). We, too, were dead and alienated from God before Christ saved us and brought us near!

Before any of us cluck our tongues or look down our noses, remember the nature within us is just as wicked as theirs. When we act out, we walk in step with a culture that has lost its way. —Chuck Swindoll

The Lifestyle of the Godless—Ephesians 4:19

How did Paul describe the lifestyle of unbelievers in *Ephesians 4:19*?

Look at the tawdry fashions that line the spiritual closets of those who live without God: insensibility, immorality, degradation, grasping greed. It's a shocking parade of iniquity—and we have witnessed it on our television screens, in our movies, and even in ourselves.



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

Commentator William Barclay summed up Paul's view of souls trapped in sin:

He saw men's hearts so petrified that they were not even aware that they were sinning; he saw men so dominated by sin that shame was lost and decency forgotten; he saw men so much at the mercy of their desires that they did not care whose life they injured and whose innocence they destroyed so long as these desires were satisfied. These are exactly the sins of the Christless world today, sins that can be seen invading life at every point and stalking the streets of every great city.³

Thankfully, Christ models a new way to dress, and these spiritual clothes are ours for the choosing.



Interpretation: A Change of Wardrobe

In contrast to the sinful deeds of the godless, Paul wrote about the person of Christ. Read the following verses in which Paul reveals our primary motivation for changing our “wardrobe.”

But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. (Ephesians 4:20–22)

Why do you think he focused on Christ here? What have we received from Jesus that those without Him don't have?



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

The transition from a life of futility to a life of following the Savior begins when we “throw off [our] sinful nature and [our] former way of life” (Ephesians 4:22). A more literal translation of “sinful nature” is “old man” or “old self.” To what was Paul referring? For help with the answer, consult your resources, and for an online resource, consult the entry “*old man*” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. What does it mean to “throw off” the old self?

What is the next step in [4:23](#)? And what did Paul mean by “renew”?

What is the final step in changing our wardrobe from old to new, according to [4:24](#)?



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

I begin my day by realizing that the old self is corrupt and will never be less than corrupt. And it is deceitfully appealing. My day continues with frequent reminders that the new self is Christlike and wholly satisfying. This “renewed-in-the-spirit-of-your-mind” process needs to be done daily. The renewal of the mind is like clean, fresh water when we take a shower.
—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Transformed by Renewing the Mind

For Paul, the key to right living is renewing the mind. What did he teach about this daily practice in Romans 12:1–2? What other essential components of sanctification do you find in these verses?

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2)

What can we draw from Paul's words? Simply that God has designed a wonderful new wardrobe for every aspect of personhood. He wants to dress our new self with a heart that is soft and receptive; a mind that dwells on the words of Christ; a soul that is alive to the Spirit, not dead and excluded from God; and a lifestyle that is like Christ's, righteous and good.

What a wonderful hope there is! Instead of hardness and darkness and deadness and recklessness, there can be cleansing and holiness. And it starts at the cross.
—Chuck Swindoll



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24



Application: A Closing Focus

The source of all righteousness and goodness is in our heart. It is in the core of our being that our will and longings are formed, where we choose—by the power of the Holy Spirit—Christ as our Lord and seek after Him. When Christ is central in our choosing and our longing, He takes over our thoughts and desires. We can't wait to shed the old garments of sin and get dressed in our new clothes He gives us.

Close our study with a portion of a prayer known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” written circa AD 433. Make this prayer your application. Repeat it in the morning, reminding yourself to “put on your new nature” as you put on clean clothes for the day. Say it often throughout the week, along with memorized Scripture to renew your mind and put Christ at the center of who you are and all you do.

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.⁴*



Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I come to the cross with my old garments and shed them before You. I claim Your forgiveness and cleansing regeneration. Thank You for the renewal You offer through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Clothe me in Christ and lead me in Your ways. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979), 107.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 153–54.
4. Attributed to St. Patrick, "St. Patrick's Breastplate," *Our Catholic Prayers*, www.ourcatholicprayers.com/st-patricks-breastplate.html.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SIXTEEN

Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

How hard it is to break old habits. But Christ paid the price for you. The strings to your old life have been cut. You have the wings to fly; you have a new nature with which to fly. Now, go!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THERE once was a man selling quail in a bazaar in India. He attached strings to a stake and tied the other ends to little bands on the birds' legs so they could only walk in circles. A stranger felt sorry for the quail, so he bought the entire covey and set them free. Cut loose, the quail flew away about twenty yards to a patch of dirt where they landed and began walking in circles again!

These habit-loving quail illustrate how hard it can be to break free from our old ways. Like the compassionate stranger, God “purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son” (Ephesians 1:7). He cut the strings that bound us to sin and set us free to fly on the currents of His will, doing all “the good things he planned for us long ago” (2:10). However, old habits can keep us walking in circles!

What must we do to live in the full measure of freedom God has given to us? As we saw in the previous study, we need to put off the old self and put on the new. In this study, we'll examine examples of sins that God intends for us to shed so that our new life can take flight. Paul lists five traits of those who spread their wings and let their new nature soar. Let's take a closer look!



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Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32



PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may already enjoy the freedom from an old habit through the power of the Holy Spirit. If so, in the space below, give thanks for your liberty using [Psalm 28:7](#) as your prayer guide.

Paul's list of traits in Ephesians 4:25–32 may reveal an area in which you are seeking freedom. Use [Psalm 118:5](#) as a prompt for prayer as you prepare your heart to embrace the freedom God intends for you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul often waved the flag of liberty in his epistles and called us to follow him into a new life. To the Galatian believers, Paul proclaimed:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1 NASB)

With Paul's hopeful freedom call sounding in your ears, read [Ephesians 4:25–32](#). Notice how all his commands concern relationships. Holiness happens in the real world where we rub shoulders with people in our family, church, workplace, and community. Imagine an entire society in which people followed Paul's commands—what freedom and goodwill would fill the world!



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

 **Observation: Traits of Those Who Live Free**

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we pull out our detective’s magnifying glass and look for the smallest details in the text.¹ Sometimes a pattern emerges. In this passage, Paul balances negative commands with positive ones, and he provides a principle on which the commands are based. Christian morality is always tied to a spiritual principle.

In the following chart, list the negative commands, the positive commands (if there are any), and the principle in the verses. We’ve filled in the first one as an example.

Scripture	Negative Command	Positive Command	Principle
Ephesians 4:25	“Stop telling lies.”	“Let us tell our neighbors the truth.”	“For we are all parts of the same body.”
4:26–27			
4:28			
4:29–30			
4:31–32			



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

Reflect a little longer on Ephesians 4:25–32 and use the following space to record any other observations you find. Do you see any common threads linking the behaviors Paul tells us to lay aside? Any points of comparison between Paul’s positive commands? Can you identify a truth that is the foundation for all the principles?

Remember, as a Christian you’re not a victim. You can keep from lying by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your anger does not have to get out of control. That’s the old life. You’re supposed to fly free from such things, and you can! —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Deciphering the Meaning

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand the meaning of parts of the passage that may not be immediately clear. Consult your Bible study resources as we focus on interpreting Paul’s teaching on anger in Ephesians 4:26–27.

“Be Angry, and Yet Do Not Sin”—Ephesians 4:26 NASB

Paul allows anger and even commands it in certain circumstances. The Greek word Paul uses is, *orgē*, which is “an abiding and settled habit of the mind that is aroused under certain conditions.”²² Evils such as abuse, violence, or mistreatment *should* arouse anger in us, filling our sails with a passionate zeal to defend the helpless or stand up for God’s standards. Our Lord was rightly indignant over money changers extorting worshipers at the temple (Matthew 21:12–13).



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

However, Paul put a necessary restraint on *orgē*: “yet do not sin.” What characterizes anger that slips into sin? Consult your resources or the online resource, *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, to find examples throughout Scripture of ungodly anger and its devastating consequences.

To guard our anger from veering out of control into sin and hurting someone, Paul adds another “don’t” command.

“Don’t Let the Sun Go down While You Are Still Angry”—Ephesians 4:26

In this command, Paul used another Greek word, *parorgismos*, which “refers to anger that is accompanied by irritation, exasperation, embitterment.”³ Scripture always forbids this resentful type of anger because it poisons relationships and sours the soul.

What does Paul’s figurative language about not letting “the sun go down on your anger” mean (Ephesians 4:26 NASB)? Use your Bible resources to find possible answers. For an online resource, consult *William Barclay’s commentary on Ephesians* at studylight.org.

“Do Not Give the Devil an Opportunity”—Ephesians 4:27

Angry brooding over unresolved offenses opens the door to our enemy the devil. “He loves to lurk round angry people,” observes commentator John Stott, “hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship.”⁴



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

Formulate Paul’s teaching on anger into a timeless principle that is true for all people. Write it in the space below and share it with someone.

If you have a problem with someone, connect with him or her and deal with it. Don’t act like it will go away. It won’t. Don’t let it get out of control. Don’t let it fester. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Better Way

How do we resolve an offense before it festers into sinful anger? Paul laid out a plan in *Romans 12:17–21*. What did Paul instruct his Roman readers to do when someone treated them wrongly? Write down Paul’s positive commands in these verses as your checklist for handling offenses.

The next time someone offends you, try following Paul’s steps and, having done all you can to mend the relationship, leave the results in God’s hands.

I do everything that’s possible to make peace. And still I have not made peace with some people because they don’t want peace. They want to fight. But I don’t keep fighting with an individual. I don’t take revenge. Instead, I pray, “Lord, my heart is right. I’ve done all I can do. I’m willing to confess whatever wrong I’ve done. Lord, You take over.”
—Chuck Swindoll



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

Application: Be Kind, Tenderhearted, and Forgiving

What characterized our old life? Lies and deception, uncontrolled anger and resentment, taking what wasn't ours, foul and abusive language, and bitterness. We kept walking in circles and couldn't break these relationship-killing habits.

To continue in these ways would “bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30), who empowers us to live free. What characterizes our new freedom? Review the list from earlier in our study and, in the space below, summarize the positive traits that can be yours in your new life in Christ.

Paul's final commands in Ephesians 4:32 capsule his counsel: “be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” There's no greater antidote to anger and all the poisonous vices on Paul's list than forgiveness—receiving it from God and giving it to others.

Has God revealed to you an area of bondage in which you are seeking God for release? Write down the issue as well as some steps you can take this week that lead to freedom.



Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

When we walk in freedom—loving as Christ loved, caring as Christ cared, and forgiving as Christ forgave—we reflect His light in this dark world. We honor the One who secures for us a beautiful future with God, and we soar on the wings of His good plan for us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, everything within me yearns to move in the direction of freedom. I don't have to walk in defeat, pacing around in circles of the same old sins. You've cut the string. You've set me free. Right now, give me power to guard my lips, respond kindly, forgive an offense, and let Your love for me flow through me to others. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 113.
3. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, 113.
4. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 187.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SEVENTEEN

A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

In the Christian life, belief and behavior always go hand in hand. And they go in that order—first belief and then behavior. Because if there isn't behavior to back up the beliefs, not only will we be hypocrites, we will cause confusion among those searching for truth and answers.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN a child acts like his or her parent, we sometimes say with a smile, “The apple didn’t fall far from the apple tree.” Children naturally imitate their moms and dads in the way they gesture or laugh or walk or even in their tone of voice. Has your friend’s teenaged son ever answered the phone and you thought for certain that you were talking to his father? The son and father sounded just alike! And the same is true for daughters and mothers. Like parent, like child.

Paul tapped into our natural instinct to imitate our parents when he urged us to model our lives after our heavenly Father. “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). But how can we imitate God?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll suggests these ways:

He’s good; we should be good. He’s kind; we must be kind. He’s just; we should be fair. He’s holy; we are to be pure. He’s full of grace; we ought to demonstrate grace toward one another. The list could go on and on.¹



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

Jesus spent His life imitating His Father. In fact, the Son mirrored the Father's qualities so clearly that He could state with honesty: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" (John 14:9). That's our goal—that people would see in us the same character traits of our Father, just as people saw the Father's traits in Jesus. And, as we'll examine in this study, our first baby steps in imitating God is to "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2 NASB).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imitating God would be impossible were it not for Christ's Spirit who lives in us and through us. Jesus stated truly, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But He also made this promise: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" (15:7).

As you open God's Word, take a moment to yield your will to Christ, acknowledge your need for His power, and pray for His life of love to fill you and flow through you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 5:1–7* in the New Living Translation alongside the New American Standard Bible. As you read, note the contrasting themes: love versus sexual sin, self-sacrifice versus greed, Christ's kingdom versus the world, following the example of Christ versus partnering with sinners.



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1-7

 **Observation: Walk in Love Not Sexual Sin**

Now take a few minutes to write down your observations in the chart below.² What did Paul say about each of the contrasting themes?

Love (<i>Ephesians 5:1-2</i>)	Sexual Sin (<i>Ephesians 5:3-4</i>)
Self-Sacrifice (<i>5:2</i>)	Greed (<i>5:3, 5</i>)
Christ's Kingdom (<i>5:5</i>)	The World (<i>5:5</i>)
Following Christ (<i>5:1-2</i>)	Partnering with Sinners (<i>5:6-7</i>)



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

Do you observe any other contrasts or perhaps any similarities?

At the helm of sexual immorality and impurity is Captain Greed, the obsessive impulse of our nature that steers us into sin's treacherous waters. Why do you think Paul included "greed" in his prohibition of sexual sin? What is the connection?

Paul not only warned his readers to stay away from sexual sins, he added, *Don't even joke about sex!* "Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you" (Ephesians 5:4). What did Paul say to do instead (5:4)? How does this practice break the bad habit of vulgarity?



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

Who created sex? Our heavenly Father, who gave it to the first couple that He married. He told them, “I give you the joy of intimacy which can be enjoyed between the two of you.” And the implication is, “not with anybody else.” So give thanks to God for the gift of sex. He put it together in its beauty and joy and innocence between a couple who is married.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Walk in Love”

As we interpret this passage, let’s explore deeper Paul’s concept of love, particularly as it relates to our understanding of sexuality. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “Live a life filled with love” (Ephesians 5:2), also translated, “walk in love” (5:2 NASB)? What form of love did Paul have in mind? Read the following references to “love” in Ephesians—God’s love for us and our love for others—and write down what you gather is the meaning of “walk in love.”

God’s love for us: [1:4](#); [3:18–19](#); [5:2](#)

Our love for others: [4:2](#), [16](#); [5:25](#)



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

What do you conclude is Paul's definition of love and the meaning of "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2)?

How would you say that "walking in love" guards us from sexual sin?

Jesus, who left heaven and took upon Himself human flesh and lived on this earth a little over thirty-three years, modeled the life of God. What characterized Him? Two things: self-sacrifice and a fragrant aroma. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Those Who Inherit the Kingdom of God

Loving others with the self-sacrificing love of Christ is the highest form of imitating God. But we must receive by faith Christ's great love before we can share it. Those who haven't received Christ's love have no relationship with Him. Their immoral and greedy lifestyle exposes both their lack of faith and their rejection of the kingdom of God in favor of the kingdom of this world.

Paul wrote these somber words:

You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. (Ephesians 5:5)



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

He wrote a similar statement to the church in Corinth. It also appears within the context of Paul's warnings against sexual sins. Compare Paul's statements to help you understand his teaching on this subject. Read *1 Corinthians 6:9–11*. What did Paul add in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that helps clarify the distinction between those who inherit the kingdom of God and those who don't?

When we come to the cross of Christ, we are able to be changed. Until then, we're a lost soul. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: A Stirring Summons for Purity

Why would we even *want* to imitate immoral idolators who worship this world and not God? We wouldn't! How much better it is for us to walk in step with God by walking in His Son's footsteps of love. This is the crux of Paul's stirring summons for us to live in purity.

In his message, Chuck Swindoll sums up Paul's teaching with these final thoughts:

- *Sexual perversions degrade our humanity.* Immorality never enhances our character.
- *Sensual talk and gutter humor serve no beneficial purpose.* Vulgar language never makes us better people.
- *Trafficking in sexual sins is incompatible with the Christian faith.* The self-gratifying, self-centered ways of the world oppose the way of Christ.
- *Stay away from anyone who tries to convince you that living close to the edge of sexual sin is acceptable.* Paul makes this point clear:

Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.
(Romans 13:13–14)



A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

Clothing ourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and walking in His love is the strongest antidote to sexual sin. Put Paul’s summons for purity into action, first, by the way you think about sexual sin and those who participate in it. What changes in your thinking do you need to make?

Second, what changes in your actions can you make?

Finally, use the prayer below to invite the Lord to transform your spirit into a place where the love of Christ lives and pours out to others.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I desire my behavior to reflect my beliefs about Jesus Christ. He who loves me and sacrificed Himself for me is the One I want to follow. Help me see others through the lens of His love instead of the impulse of my own greed. Enable me to see sexual sin for what it is—a degrading imitation of Your beautiful gift of sexual intimacy. And, finally, bless me with an ache for Your kingdom that nothing else on earth can satisfy. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 265.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY EIGHTEEN

This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

When God makes Himself known, He often appears in bright, burning, brilliant light. Everything around Him lights up because God is light. I'm not surprised, then, that when Paul tells us to imitate God, he says, "Live like children of light."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NO one has to teach children to imitate their parents. Like ducklings waddling in line behind mama duck, children naturally do what their parents do. Toddlers cradle their baby dolls just like mommy cradles her newborn or, when they grow up a little, try to cast the line from their toy fishing rod just like daddy casts his line. When Paul wrote, "Imitate God . . . because you are his dear children" (Ephesians 5:1), we understand Paul's point. As children, we yearn to imitate our Father—the question is, how?

First, as we learned in the previous study, we "walk in love" (5:2 NASB). After all, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), so it follows that we love people as He loves them. In our current passage, Paul takes his point a step further. Not only is God love, "God is light" (1:5). So, second, Paul tells us, "Walk as children of Light" (Ephesians 5:8 NASB).

Just as we look to Jesus as our example of God's love in action, we also look to Him as our model of how to shine God's light. Christ came from heaven "as a light to shine in this dark world" (John 12:46). So, as we love others with the love of Jesus, we shine by reflecting Jesus' light. In this study, we'll examine more specifically what it means to "live as people of light" (Ephesians 5:8), following Christ's example as we walk in our Father's footsteps.



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This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

At the dawn of creation, God spoke His first recorded words in Scripture: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), and light from heaven shone in the darkness. God’s good light has been scattering the darkness of sin and ignorance ever since. Take a moment to invite the same divine light to enlighten your mind and illumine your soul as you open God’s Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 5:6–14* and highlight on paper or with your cursor Paul’s warnings, “Don’t participate” (Ephesians 5:7) and “Take no part” (5:11). These warnings identify the two main sections of the passage; all the points hang on or flow from these commands.



Observation: Walk in the Light, Expose the Darkness

A good practice in the observation stage of *Searching the Scriptures* is to write a list of everything you notice and to look for any patterns.¹ If you recall, in Ephesians 4, Paul listed behaviors to throw off followed by behaviors to put on. “Throw off your old sinful nature” (Ephesians 4:22), he wrote, and then “put on your new nature” (4:24). Paul continues this throw-off-and-put-on pattern in our current passage. He gives negative commands followed by positive commands, and, in between, Paul explains his reasons. The formula could be stated like this: *Don’t do this, for this reason; instead, do this, for this reason.*

In the spaces below, write down the negative commands and the reasons and the positive commands and the reasons.

“Don’t Participate”—Ephesians 5:7

Verses	Negative Commands and Reasons	Verses	Positive Commands and Reasons
<i>Ephesians 5:6–8</i>		<i>5:8–10</i>	



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

“Take no part”—Ephesians 5:11

Verses	Negative Commands and Reasons	Verses	Positive Commands and Reasons
<i>Ephesians 5:11a, 12</i>		<i>5:11b, 13–14</i>	

Now summarize in your own words what you observed. First, what was Paul urging his readers *not* to do and why?

Second, what was Paul urging his readers *to* do and why?



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

You may recall from our first study, the church in Ephesus was in one of the largest centers of idolatry in the ancient world. The massive Temple of Artemis towered over the city, drawing multitudes of worshipers seeking favor from the goddess whom they revered as mother of all life. Demonic darkness and wanton immorality engulfed the city.

Read about the cultic practices in the temple in your Bible dictionary or consult the online article, “*Diana; Artemis*,” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* at biblestudytools.com. What would it have been like for the Ephesian believers to live in such a spiritually dark city?

Considering the idolatry in Ephesus, we can better understand the urgency of Paul’s command: “Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Many former idolators in the church had friends and relatives still practicing cultic rituals. How tempting it must have been to slip back into their past sinful ways.

But Paul reminded them, in so many words, “You are not children of the darkness; you are children of your heavenly Father! So, walk as God’s children, in His light.”

Don’t participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. After all, at night it gets confusing to people in the dark when they see that you live just like them. But when they see you shining, they see there’s hope, there’s a way to get out. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Walk as Children of Light”

Let’s examine the meaning of Paul’s command, “Live as people of light!” (Ephesians 5:8), which is also translated, “walk as children of light” (5:8 NASB). First, Paul defined *light* by what it produces: “for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (5:9 NASB)—in contrast to the immorality of the “greedy person [who] is an idolator, worshiping the things of this world” (5:5).



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

List a few examples of goodness, righteousness, and truth that you see in your everyday life.

Second, *light* not only describes our behavior it defines our new identity: “you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8 NASB). Notice, Paul declared we *were* darkness—in much the same way as he previously stated, “Once you were dead” (2:1). Until God “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (2:5), we had no spark of *life*. Neither did we have a spark of *light* until God gave us light. Now, because of our new position “in the Lord,” we *are* light.

Paul referred to our new life and light in a Christian poem that may have been lines from an early church hymn based on Isaiah 60:1:

*“Awake, O sleeper,
rise up from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.”* (Ephesians 5:14)

What do you think this poem means, and how may it have been used in first-century Christian practice? Consult your sources for help with the answer, or for an online resource, read the notes on this verse from [William Barclay’s commentary on Ephesians](#) at [studylight.org](#).



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

Third, as we walk as children of light, we expose “the worthless deeds of evil and darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Not only will evil deeds be exposed but also the “evil intentions” of the people who do the deeds (5:13). In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll clarified what it means for believers to “expose” the wrongdoing of others.

Paul didn’t intend that we parade other people’s sins before a self-appointed moral court. . . . Rather, our light is meant to reveal what’s there by way of contrast. By simply engaging in deeds of light, you and I expose the deeds of darkness. When we live honestly, we expose dishonesty. When we live with integrity, we shock the person who pads his or her expense account or wastes time at the office.²

Paul may have had in mind the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus told His followers to be light bearers in their dark world. Let’s gain insight into Paul’s words by comparing them with Jesus’ teaching.



Correlation: Lights for All to See

After delivering the eight beatitudes, Jesus illustrated how His disciples who obey His teaching will influence those around them. He compared His disciples’ influence to salt, and then He gave the following illustration about light.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:14–16)

If we authentically live like Jesus, people will see His light in our actions. Like cities on a hill, we won’t be able to hide Jesus’ light. And like lamps in a dark room, people will see the Father in the light of our lives and will be drawn to worship Him with us.

Considering the location of the church in Ephesus in a major metropolis known for its idolatry, how do you think the believers to whom Paul wrote would have understood Jesus’ teaching?



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

What insight does Jesus' teaching give to Paul's words?

What was it like for us living in the darkness? Well, stop and remember. We didn't know the way out. We were selfish, and we did a number of things we were ashamed of. We didn't have the power to change, but then Christ came. He turned our darkness into something that other people in the darkness see as another way to live. They see goodness, righteousness, and truth—but those qualities are not from us. They are from the Light. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Reflections of God's Light

Light has two purposes: to dispel the darkness and attract people to it. In a similar way, as we walk as children of light, we expose the sins of people who live in darkness and we draw them to God. Like people lost in a dark cave, unbelievers grope around, not knowing whether they will pitch over a ledge or ever find their way. When they see light in us, their disorientation changes into direction, and their fears melt into hope as they follow its guidance to safety and home.

The light we shine, however, doesn't originate inside us. We are like the moon that lights up the night sky. We merely reflect a greater light, the light of God's Son!

We have so much to offer people who dwell in darkness. Why would we partner with them or take part in their dark deeds when we can live as light? Is God exposing any deeds of darkness that He can help you shed? Ask Him right now to throw off these sins of your old life and put on God's new radiant ways.



This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

How can you “live as people of light” (Ephesians 5:8)? What might be a simple act of goodness, righteousness, or truth you can do or say to shine God’s light in your world?

The light you reflect may be small, a flicker of a kind deed or glimmer of a loving word. But set against the darkness, it will light up the whole room! So, shine! Those lost in darkness need to see God’s light in you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, as I close my eyes to pray, I shut out physical light so I can focus on the spiritual light of Christ. He is my light-giver and my life-giver. Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son into this world to rescue me from the dark cave of my sin and lead me into the light. Now I am light—Your light—in a world still lost in darkness. May Your light shine through me today. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 271, 272.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY NINETEEN

The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

Life gets complicated, and things get convoluted. When that happens, it helps to come back to what is absolutely foundational: to get back to the basics.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN college catalogs, the number 101 identifies the most foundational course in a subject. For example, Chemistry 101 teaches atomic structure and how molecules bond—the basic information on which all our knowledge about chemistry builds. Without these fundamental keys of understanding, we can't unlock the deeper mysteries of the chemical world.

If the apostle Paul were a college professor, what basics of Christian living would he offer? Ephesians 5:15–21 contains Paul's core principles for being a disciple of Jesus—the essential functions that could be the main subjects for Christian Life 101. Let's enroll in Paul's class and learn about Christian living at the “molecular” level—the most basic level of understanding where we discover five keys for following Jesus.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Studying Scripture is like mining for gold. With a bit of effort, we can uncover great eternal truths. Take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the valuable nuggets of spiritual wisdom in the Bible using this simple prayer from the psalmist.

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



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The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method, Pastor Chuck Swindoll encourages reading the Bible slowly and thoughtfully.¹ Read *Ephesians 5:15–21* with a receptive heart and try to identify Paul’s five main points which he lists as positive commands: “be careful,” “make the most,” “understand,” “be filled,” and “submit.”



Observation: Five Essentials for Christian Living

Good observation looks for the how, when, what, why, and who of a passage. Let’s start with the *how* question, as we examine Paul’s first command, “be careful.”

“Be Careful How You Walk”—Ephesians 5:15 NASB

Paul frequently uses the word, *walk*, as a metaphor for our behavior. How did Paul say we must conduct ourselves, according to *Ephesians 5:15*?

Earlier, Paul prayed that God would give us “spiritual wisdom and insight” (Ephesians 1:17). In this section, Paul urged us to put our God-given wisdom into practice. We must “be careful,” like tightrope walkers who concentrate only on one step at a time, focusing on the moment and not the destination. *How* they walk is crucial. They must be centered, balanced, composed, prudent, and wise. Acting like a fool on the highwire would certainly lead to a fall!



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

What would you say a “careful” and “wise” Christian does to focus on the present?

Some of us have learned by walking in the wrong way that there are consequences. Why didn't we think before we stumbled into peril? Be careful how you walk.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“Make the Most of Every Opportunity”—Ephesians 5:16

Paul’s next command considers *when* to act wisely. What did Paul advise, according to [Ephesians 5:16](#)? The Amplified Bible offers an expanded translation to help with your observations ([Ephesians 5:16](#)).

The best time to act wisely is now, not tomorrow or when the mood strikes or when life isn’t so hectic. What qualities do you think are necessary for making the most of our time? And why did Paul say it is vital to use our time well?



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

Are you making the most of your opportunities? Are you applying the discipline and discernment to invest those opportunities well? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“Understand What the Lord Wants You to Do”—Ephesians 5:17

So far, we’ve learned how to walk: carefully and wisely. And we’ve learned when to act wisely: at every opportunity. Now then, *what* must wise people do, according to *Ephesians 5:17*?

One of the most basic tasks of discipleship is decision-making, which is a thoughtful process of understanding and obeying God’s will. Commentator John Stott divides God’s will into two categories: God’s “general” will and God’s “particular” will. He elaborates:

The former is so called because it relates to the generality of his people and is the same for all of us, *e.g.* to make us like Christ. His particular will, however, . . . is different for each of us, *e.g.* what career we shall follow, whether we should marry, and if so whom.²

God communicates His general will in Scripture, and we discover it through prayer, reading, learning from teachers, and Bible study. What additional strategies do you think are necessary for discerning God’s *particular* will, which may not be as straightforward?

A key element in decision-making is sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s leading. Next, Paul addresses the fundamentals of how we relate to the Spirit who indwells all believers.



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

Seek the counsel of people you admire in the Christian life who are objective and who have nothing to gain or lose in your decision. Then, wait. Listen. Then obey.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“Be Filled with the Holy Spirit”—Ephesians 5:18–20

A helpful analogy regarding the Spirit’s role in our lives is driving a car. We may know where God wants us to go and have gas in the tank, but we still must start the engine for the car to move. Otherwise, we don’t move forward and we have to get out and push! What must we do to engage the Spirit’s power, according to Paul in *Ephesians 5:18*?

We’ll examine the meaning of “be filled” in the interpretation phase. For now, can you observe the three evidences of the Holy Spirit’s influence in *Ephesians 5:19–20*?

Why do we praise the Lord and give thanks? Because of the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit. The more we are “filled” with the Spirit, the more our hearts sing!



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

*Wouldn't it be great if all of us in the body of Christ were Spirit-filled at the same time?
There would only be giving thanks and harmonious relationships that are balanced and fun.
What a wonderful way to live! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

“Submit to One Another”—Ephesians 5:21

Paul’s final lesson in Christian Life 101 concerns the *who* issue. Our walk with God affects not only our private world but also our relational world. Our guide is Jesus, who humbly served others and teaches us to do the same. According to *Ephesians 5:21*, what was Paul’s rule of thumb for healthy relationships? How did Jesus model this way of relating? And how does treating others as Jesus would treat them show reverence to Him?

Paul’s five fundamentals for Christian living address basic issues of conduct, time, decision-making, control, and submission to one another. Before measuring our walk by these yardsticks, let’s look a little closer at the meaning of “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

 **Interpretation: The Meaning of “Be Filled with the Holy Spirit”**

Paul contrasted “be filled with the Holy Spirit” with “do not get drunk with wine” (Ephesians 5:18). Both being filled and getting drunk refer to control or influence—but the instrument of control could not be more opposite, along with the effects. In the following chart, we’ve listed some negative characteristics of drunkenness. Fill in what you think might be the contrasting positive attributes of being Spirit-filled in the right column.

Characteristics of Drunkenness	Characteristics of Being Filled with the Spirit
Out of control	
Deadened senses	
Confused thinking	
Depressant	
Undignified and humiliating behavior	
Ruined life	

When the Spirit fills us, our minds are clear to see the full scope of Christ’s love for us, and we overflow with praise, “making music to the Lord in [our] hearts” (5:19). The Spirit awakens our spirits in communion with God, and we experience a kind of joy that can’t be found in a bottle.



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

How are we filled by the Spirit? In one sense, we already are filled. The Holy Spirit indwells all believers like fuel in a car's gas tank, and our spiritual tank never needs refilling! What did Paul teach about the Spirit's indwelling earlier in his letter (Ephesians 1:13–14)?

In 5:18, Paul had in mind another sense of the term, *filled*. What did Paul mean? Use your Bible study sources to find an answer, including Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

How are we filled with the Spirit? The answer lies in our yielding control to the Spirit and walking by His power. Paul offers some further insights into this process in his letter to the Galatians.



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21



Correlation: Walking by the Holy Spirit

Read the following verses about walking by the Holy Spirit and write down what Paul is teaching about how the Spirit influences our lives.

Galatians 5:16

5:18, 22–23

5:25

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, He guides us away from sin, grows in us fruitful qualities that only He can produce, and influences every part of our lives for good. Pause for prayer and tell the Father that you need the Spirit to guide, grow, and influence you right now.



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21



Application: Putting the Fundamentals into Practice

What are your current circumstances? Perhaps you're struggling in your job or in a relationship, or maybe you face a major life decision. Let's review Professor Paul's basic principles by answering the following test questions.

Conduct Test

Can you find a way to walk more carefully and wisely? If so, what changes might you need to make to focus more intently on the next step?

Time Test

How are you using your time? If you realize that you're producing less and procrastinating more, what can you do today to make the most of the opportunity in front of you?



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

Decision-making Test

Do you need to consult God’s Word and wise, Christian counsel regarding an important decision? Do you need to set aside time for prayer and listening to God? What can you do today to move forward in making this decision?

Control Test

Have you yielded to the Holy Spirit and invited Him to manage the circumstances you can’t handle? Ask Him to take control and produce His fruit in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Submission Test

In what ways can you honor and serve others, not with a “me-first” attitude but with a submissive “you-first” attitude?



The Christian Life 101

Ephesians 5:15–21

These five tests conclude the imaginary course, Christian Life 101. However, Paul's principles live on. When life gets complicated and you don't know what to do, get back to Paul's basics. These fundamentals of Christian living will see you through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, please help me to navigate the storms of life with the simple tools You offer in Your Word. Christ is my north star, the Spirit is the wind in my sails, Your Word is my rudder and keel, and You are at the helm. Navigate me through the narrow passage of life with Your wise counsel, keep me from the jagged rocks of sin, and guide me to Your haven of peace. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 203.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24

In God’s order, He has arranged certain roles to be in authority over other roles without, for a moment, taking away the dignity or worth of the individual. Those roles must be sustained or there is anarchy, confusion, unhappiness, and a breakdown of the spiritual order.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR most challenging relationships are those closest to home. Thankfully, Paul enters our households bearing gifts of divine wisdom, first for husbands and wives, then for parents and children, and finally for employees and bosses (Ephesians 5:21–6:9).

In all three settings—marriage, family, and work—Paul anchors his instructions to the foundation he’s already laid: “be filled with the Holy Spirit” and “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:18, 21). The first command leads to the second. Spirit-filled believers naturally infuse their relationships with a sweet spirit of mutual submission.

In this study and the next, we’ll see how husbands and wives can apply Paul’s submission principle in their marriage. Admittedly, Paul’s teaching on submission in marriage pushes buttons, particularly for women who have been mistreated by men who twisted Paul’s meaning. In God’s plan, submission does not mean subservience. As bearers of God’s image, husbands and wives have value and dignity, and men must treat their wives as equals before God. Ranking of roles does not imply ranking of worth.

Paul’s teaching provides no grounds for abuse—instead, he offers us a model of loving, mutual submission that works for the other’s highest good. As he has written, “Be kind to each other” (4:32) and “Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ” (5:2). Especially in marriage.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of someone in authority. When others' sins wound us, we must run to the Savior, who makes a safe place for victims. Take a moment for quiet communion with the Savior. Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you, and pray that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan. If you're married, open your heart to God's truth about your responsibilities and to feel God's assurance that He is with you as you follow Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We're dividing Paul's teaching on marriage into part one, instructions to wives, and part two, instructions to husbands. Although we'll cover just part one in this study, read the entirety of *Ephesians 5:21–33* to gain the overall flow of Paul's thoughts. What strikes you about the spiritual metaphor of husbands and wives and Christ and the church? How does Paul sum up his instructions on mutual submission in marriage in *5:33*?

Keep in mind Paul's commands to *love* and *respect* as we consider husbands' and wives' core duties. With the big picture in view, let's focus on Paul's specific teaching for wives.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24

 **Observation: A Word to Wives**

In *Searching the Scriptures*, when we observe a passage, we examine closely each phrase.¹ Are there any repeated words? Did Paul use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing? Use the chart below to record your observations and discoveries. Look for commands, contrasts and comparisons, cause and effect statements, emphatic statements, images, or figures of speech. Highlight references to Christ in every verse, for He is central to Paul’s instructions.

Verses	Observations
<p><i>And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)</i></p>	
<p><i>For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (5:22)</i></p>	
<p><i>For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. (5:23)</i></p>	
<p><i>As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. (5:24)</i></p>	



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24

Imagine hearing the apostle Paul read these verses in a marriage enrichment class, in which it's okay to raise your hand and ask questions. What questions would you ask Paul?



Interpretation: Questions and Answers about Submission

In the interpretation phase, we'll consider a few common questions people ask about these verses. Gather your Bible study resources, such as a commentary on Ephesians or a Bible dictionary.² Free online resources are available at biblestudytools.com. William Barclay's *commentary on Ephesians* is available online as well. This free study aid contains interesting background information about first-century views on marriage that give us insight into Paul's teaching.

What Does *Submit* Mean?

The Greek word for *submit* is *hupotassō*, which means “to arrange under, to subordinate.”³ It implies respect for a person in leadership and a willingness to follow. Paul's statement, “wives . . . submit to your husbands” (Ephesians 5:22) has nothing to do with inferiority. Men and women are equals in Christ, but they do have different and complementary responsibilities. The Lord has designed husbands to provide godly leadership in the home and wives to support and respect their husbands as leaders (5:33).

Paul added to his instructions “as to the Lord” (5:22), which does *not* mean that a wife must submit to her husband as if he were her lord. Certainly not! We have only one Lord, Jesus Christ. What did Paul intend this phrase to mean? Consult your Bible study resources or, for an online resource, Constable's Notes at netbible.org.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24

How Is the Husband “Head” of His Wife?

In Paul’s day, husbands treated their wives according to Greek, Roman, or Jewish cultural norms. What deplorable practices once considered acceptable does William Barclay describe in his *commentary on Ephesians*?

Paul shattered the culture’s mold in order to recast Christian men into a new form—to transform their behavior into the loving way of Christ. How is a husband “the head of his wife,” according to what Paul intended his first-century readers to understand (Ephesians 5:23)?

To be appointed as head in no way gives husbands the prerogative of taking unfair advantage of those under their leadership. Headship is not dictatorship. Leading like Christ starts from the vantage point of love. A wife is to love her husband enough to submit to him. But a husband must love her enough to die for her. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24



Correlation: The Limits of Submission

Christian husbands strive to be like Christ in their headship. On the other hand, Christian wives look to the bride of Christ, the church, as their role model:

As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.
(Ephesians 5:24)

Paul's comment, "in everything," does not mean wives must follow their husbands blindly. The broader Scriptural teaching on authority helps us set appropriate limits. As John Stott wisely writes:

We have to be very careful not to overstate this biblical teaching on authority. It does not mean that the authority of husbands . . . is unlimited, or that wives . . . are required to give unconditional obedience. No, the submission required is to God's authority delegated to human beings. If, therefore, they misuse their God-given authority (e.g. by commanding what God forbids or forbidding what God commands), then our duty is no longer conscientiously to submit, but conscientiously to refuse to do so. For to submit in such circumstances would be to disobey God.⁴

How did Peter draw the line when obeying a human authority means disobeying God (*Acts 5:26–32*)?

If your husband is pushing you to the point of disobedience to God, your answer is no. Take him to the Scriptures and show him what is right. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Final Points

As Christians yielded to the Spirit's control and determined to submit to one another in reverence to Christ, let's follow these guidelines as we apply Paul's teaching to husbands and wives.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24

First, we can maintain equality in worth, while maintaining our identity of roles. One person is not worth more than another person in God’s eyes. As equals, we can fulfill our roles within a loving and respectful relationship.

If you are married, have you been a loving and respectful husband or wife? If not, what can you do differently? What words do you need to say to the other person? And if you need help in your marriage, where can you turn for godly counsel?

Second, authority is not a synonym for tyranny. If you are living under someone’s control, begin by sharing your story with a pastor or counselor who can guide you in God’s path of healing and healthy relationships.⁵ Paul’s principles for marriage are a lifeline for couples in conflict. They can break the power-and-control cycle and free husbands and wives to honor and serve one another as they learn a new way of relating as followers of Christ.

What clarity do you find in Paul’s teaching regarding your role in marriage? Can you describe God’s design for marriage as you understand it so far? Use this summary as a launching point for the next study, in which we will focus on the responsibilities of husbands.

A wife doesn’t play her part alone in Christ’s order. As we’ll see in the next study, she takes her cues from how her husband leads as they walk together in the footsteps of Christ.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

Ephesians 5:21–24



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I submit myself to You and to Your leadership. I need the filling of Your Spirit to humbly obey and love my spouse according to Your design for marriage. Hold my spouse and me together and help us through whatever conflicts we may face. In Your grace and through Your power, we can experience a relationship of love and respect as we, side-by-side, follow You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Recommended commentaries include Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015); R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990); John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979); Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).
3. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 129.
4. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society*, 218–19.
5. A wife does not disobey her husband when she confronts him and resists his sin. She is opposing evil and opening a way for him to face the truth about himself and get the help he needs. If you are being abused and feel unsafe or afraid, reach out for help. Talk with your doctor, pastor, counselor, or a professional who helps victims find safety.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

God gave us a marriage pattern to follow. He didn't consult the culture or seek the interest of the media. He set the pattern, gave us the right threads, and said, "Weave them together in your life. Just follow the pattern."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD'S design for marriage is as intricate and beautiful as a masterfully woven tapestry. God has carefully chosen each thread in His pattern and handed them to husbands and wives. Together, spouses with their Lord knit a lovely work of art.

The most striking element in God's design is how He intertwines human marriage with Christ's marriage to His church. Like vibrant silk threads, husbands, wives, Christ, and His church are divinely interlaced in marriage, portraying the wonder of the divine-human relationship.

In their book, *Intimate Allies*, Dan Allender and Tremper Longman point to another lofty truth:

Every marriage is meant to represent God: his perfect relationship with himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as well as his relationship with his people.¹

God patterned Christian marriage, not only after our union with Christ and our union with one another but also the union of the Trinity itself. Paul has been developing these grand themes of unity and reconciliation since the first lines of his letter. And to think, these concepts weave together a masterpiece of divine dimensions in the ordinary, day-to-day, kitchen-table relationship of a husband and wife.



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The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we prepare our heart for this study, recall Paul’s overarching command: “Submit to one another *out of reverence for Christ*” (Ephesians 5:21, emphasis added). Our reverence for Christ motivates all our most important relationships, not just marriage. Take a moment to express your reverence for Christ in a prayer of praise. Whether or not you are married, you can stand in awe of God’s design for marriage and let its wonder draw you closer to Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous study we looked at what “submit to one another” means for wives. Now, how does a husband apply, “Submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21)? The answer is by loving his wife as Christ loved the church. A husband sees his role as “the head of his wife” (5:23), not as a license to lord it over his wife but as a mandate to protect, nurture, and serve her.

Paul details the specifics of the husband’s loving servant-leader role in [5:25–33](#). Read this passage in the New Living Translation and The Message. If you’re married, personalize your reading as if Paul is addressing you and your wife. Replace *husbands* or *wives* and related pronouns with your name or your spouse’s name and see how the passage speaks directly to you.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33



Observation: A Word to Husbands

In *Searching the Scriptures*, when we observe a passage, we try to identify main points, which often emerge from the commands.² Once we identify a pattern or list, we can see how the subpoints flow after each main point. Can you identify Paul's two primary commands to husbands in *Ephesians 5:25, 28*? Write them in the space below.

Like an officer to his troops, Paul issued these orders to men and then added a comparison to each command. Can you observe the subpoints that flow from the *first* command and comparison? From the verses below, identify the ways Christ loved the church and write down how you think these ways are similar to how husbands should love their wives.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

Can you observe the subpoints that flow from Paul's *second* command and comparison? From the verses below, identify the ways a man cares for his own body and write down how you think these ways are similar to how husbands should love their wives.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5:28–30)

According to 5:31–32, what is the *reason* a husband loves his wife as his own body?

This truth must have stunned Paul’s readers who lived in a society that considered women second to men, not one with them. What scriptural proof did Paul cite for this truth? And how did he connect this truth to our oneness with Christ?

Christ tenderly cares for us as He does His own body—because we *are* His body. We are one with Him. Likewise, husbands and wives are “one flesh” with each other through the beauty of sexual union and shared lives (5:31 NASB).



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

When we nourish and cherish our wives, there is a union that is formed that is deeper than a word can describe. It becomes a phenomenon that defies full understanding. So profound and unexplainable that two people this different can become this unified is a mystery.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: To Love Is . . .

The metaphors in this passage illustrate four vital principles for husbands in any era. These principles are golden threads in God’s design for marriage that we can stitch into our own marriages.

To Love Is to Sacrifice—Ephesians 5:25

A husband’s love for his wife, according to Paul, is no ordinary love. It is *agapē*, a form of sacrificial love that can be learned only at the feet of Jesus. Christ loved His bride so much that He “gave up his life for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

What principle was Paul teaching husbands about the extent of their love for their wives? What does “[giving] up his life for her” mean for ordinary husbands?

When my love is like the love of Christ for the church, I give up things for my wife. Love starts with sacrifice. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

To Love Is to Sanctify—Ephesians 5:26a

A husband links arms with Christ in His purpose for His bride, “to make her holy” (Ephesians 5:26). In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains how a husband’s love can have a sanctifying influence on his wife.



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

Just as Christ’s relationship with His church promotes spiritual growth, so husbands are expected to nurture positive growth in their wives. This might mean freeing up time for your wife to exercise her own gifts, talents, and interests. It certainly means helping her through her hurts, caring about her wounds, being at her side when she needs someone to lean on—anything that contributes to her wholeness and well-being.³

What principle can you draw about the purpose of a husband’s love for his wife?

To Love Is to Forgive—Ephesians 5:26b

Christ also cleansed His bride, the church, “by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:26 NASB)—which is a beautiful metaphor for forgiveness. Husbands love like Christ by forgiving their wives just as God has forgiven their wives and them as husbands. What principle can you draw about the cleansing duty of a husband’s love?

At times, your wife may do things for the wrong motive. She may be stubborn or will say things that later she regrets. Your role is to forgive her. Forgive her before she even asks for forgiveness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

To Love Is to Honor—Ephesians 5:27

Christ will one day present believers “as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Paul imagined the church as a bride in her wedding dress being presented to her groom. This is her moment of highest honor as she walks down the aisle while all eyes gaze at her admiringly.

Husbands also have a duty to honor their brides not just on her wedding day but every day. What principle can you draw from this metaphor?

Wives look for someone who will see in her the significance of her person and her place. This is the husband’s task. No one else can honor a wife like her husband can or should.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Showing Honor in Specific Ways

Peter expands the fourth principle with specific examples. Read the following verse and highlight the ways husbands can show honor to their wives.

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

How might a husband treat his wife with understanding and as an equal partner? Do this. On the other hand, how might he neglect to understand her and treat her as less than himself? Don't do this!

What wife wouldn't submit to a husband who treated her with understanding and who loved her as sacrificially, tenderly, and purely as Christ loved His bride? Certainly, she would. All of us long to be loved and respected, nourished and cherished. Let's bring these attitudes and actions into our marriages and watch Christ transform them into a mirror of His awesome grace.

Application: Love and Respect

Admiring God's magnificent design for marriage, Paul concluded: "So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). As a husband loves his wife, she respects him in return; as she respects, he loves her all the more. What a perfect balance of give and take, duty and blessing, action and response in a wedding-band circle of mutual submission.

What points stand out to you in this study and the previous study that you can put into practice? Wives, how can you respect your husband as you submit to Christ? Husbands, how can you love your wife as He loves her?



The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

In what ways can you bring *agapē* to life in your marriage? How can you work more for your spouse's highest good in the words you say and the deeds you do?

In God's design for marriage, many threads hold couples together—spools full of daily acts of kindness, caring, respect, sacrifice, forgiveness, honor, nourishment, and cherishing. All these golden threads interlace with the love of Christ to make an unbreakable bond. It takes effort, but is marriage worth it? It most certainly is!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You gave Your Son not only as a model of love but as the One who fills me with the love I lack for my spouse. Pour Your love through Your Son over me so that it can flow from me to the one I so dearly want to love but sometimes have trouble loving. Make my marriage Your masterpiece and may I give all the glory to You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Intimate Allies* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995), xviii.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 286.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-TWO

Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Regardless of the home you've come from, regardless of the mess you have made in the home where you are now, it is never too late to start doing what is right. And the secret is nurturing.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER enlightening his readers on the subject of marriage, Paul next shines the light of mutual submission on parenting. Just as he helped spouses learn how to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21), he shows the way for parents to apply the principle with their children.

Ephesians 6:1–4 features words such as *obey*, *honor*, *discipline*, and *instruction*. But we should not view these words as integers in a math formula. We can't add them up and . . . *viola* . . . perfect family! Real life's not as tidy as that—it's much messier. But it's also richer and deeper when by God's grace a beautiful family bond emerges out of the mess, despite our mistakes.

Though we don't find formulas, we do find a core concept around which we can organize our parenting efforts: *nurture*. Nurture in the parental context is similar to love in the marital context. In marriage, husbands who love their wives create an atmosphere in which women more freely submit to their husbands' leadership. Likewise, in parenting, children who breathe the air of love in a nurturing home are more likely to respond with submissive obedience.

Mutual submission is like a dance in which one partner leads and the other follows but they both take cues from each other. We've seen this graceful interplay between husbands and wives, now let's enjoy the wonder of the parent-child dance.



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Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God’s Word, open your heart to receive His wise counsel on rearing children. Reading His words may cause memories of your own childhood to surface. As emotions stir, just remember that God knows the inner workings of your soul and your child’s soul. David was in awe at God’s delicate handiwork in us:

*You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother’s womb.* (Psalm 139:13 NASB)

Take a moment in prayer to invite the Lord to minister to you as you enter what may be a sensitive part of your heart.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 6:1–4*. It takes less than a minute to read these verses but a lifetime to live them! Ponder the connections between Paul’s commands, how one command builds on the other and how all of them circle around the centrality of our relationship with the Lord. Write down your initial impressions.



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6



Observation: Instructions to Children and Parents

In *Searching the Scriptures*, when we observe a passage, we examine closely each phrase and how they interrelate.¹ Are there any couplets—parallel statements that are similar in which one expands on the other? Did Paul use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing? Let's observe first his instructions to children.

Instructions to Children—Ephesians 6:1–3

What are the parallel imperatives for children in the verses below? How would you say they are connected? For background, read the fifth command in the Ten Commandments on which Paul's instructions are based (*Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16*).

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1–3)

Obedience is the appropriate *action*; it involves a child's behavior. Honor conveys respect and devotion and reflects *attitude*. Both right action and right attitude are essential, and both flow out of *a trusting relationship*. At the heart of obedience is a relationship in which children are secure in their parents' nurturing love. They know that their parents truly desire what's best for them, and so they are willing to accept reproof and submit their will to their parents' will.



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Why does God instruct children to obey and respect their parents? Can you spot the two reasons in the verses above? Notice the motivations are both internal and external. How might this fact help you think of ways to motivate your children to obey?

On the flipside, how might things *not* go well for disobedient and disrespectful children when they grow up and get married, try to hold a job, and live as citizens in a community?

How can parents help their children avoid the inevitable life storms that defiance and disrespect stir up? Let's examine the parents' responsibilities in the next verse.

I've observed that children who are nurtured, not always but most often, have little trouble obeying and honoring. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Instructions to Parents—Ephesians 6:4

The apostle Paul advises parents to take a balanced approach.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

What did Paul warn against? What did he command?

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we'll dig deeper into the meaning of two concepts in this verse worth excavating: "provoke" and "bring up."



Interpretation: What Does *Provoke* and *Bring Up* Mean?

First, *parorgizete* means "provoke to anger." Compare its usage in a parallel passage, *Colossians 3:21*. How might a father provoke his children to anger or, as the word appears in *Colossians 3:21*, "aggravate," or, in the New International Version, "embitter"? According to Paul's warning to the Colossians, what happens to the child as a result?

The second Greek word is *ektrepheete*, translated "bring up" or "nourish." Compare its usage in *Ephesians 5:29*: "for no one ever hated his own flesh, but *nourishes* and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church" (NASB, emphasis added). Just as Paul challenged men to nourish their wives as they nourish themselves, he also challenged men as fathers to create a nourishing environment for their children. How?

Let's compare the two words in the following chart to draw out some specific actions. We'll list a few descriptors, and you can fill in some of your own. If you are a parent, take time to think through how you may have provoked or nourished in the past. How can you nourish more in the future?



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Provoke to Anger <i>Parorgizete</i>		Nourish <i>Ektrephete</i>	
Exasperate	Lecture	Affirm	Support
Nag	Harass	Encourage	Clear boundaries
Aggravate	Ridicule	Praise	Patient instruction

Nourish leads us straight back to the word, *nurture*, the single, unifying concept we can use to tie together Paul’s teaching. To shed even more light on this core principle, we turn to the wisdom literature of the Bible—and what mom or dad doesn’t need more wisdom!

 **Correlation: Train Up a Child in His or Her Way**

Read *Proverbs 22:6* in three Bible versions, noticing the differences and similarities in the translations.

Solomon counseled parents to *hanakh* (“direct” or “train up”) their children to walk in the way (*derek*) of the Lord. Interestingly, the phrase, “in the way he should go” (*Proverbs 22:6* NASB), can also be rendered “according to his way,” meaning the way God made them. Let’s seek further meaning by dividing this passage into three main concepts.

“Train Up”

In his study, Pastor Chuck Swindoll used a Hebrew-English lexicon to discover the meaning of *hanakh*. The authors of the lexicon associate the word to an Arabic root, which, in one source, means to “rub [the] palate of [a] child with chewed dates.” It also refers to a midwife rubbing the “palate of [a] new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck.”²



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

The image of a midwife stimulating a newborn’s natural desire to suckle says a lot about the purpose of nurturing—namely, to encourage a child’s God-given abilities. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from this metaphor?

If training your child involves stimulating a latent talent or gift within your child, what may lay hidden within your child’s God-given nature? Perhaps some hidden interests? Needs or longings? A thirst for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?

God gave you a child with a particular set of bents and characteristics. It is the job of each parent to make a study of each child. It takes effort; it takes flexibility; it takes time.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“ . . . A Child . . . ”

The Hebrew term for “child” is *na’ar*. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. Let’s examine three of these uses. In each of the following verses, at what stage of childhood is the “child”: *Genesis 34:19; 37:2* (NASB); and *1 Samuel 4:20–21* (NLT)?



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child’s life are you responsible to train him or her?

“ . . . The Way He Should Go . . . ”

The Hebrew phrase for “the way he should go” can be translated literally, “upon the mouth of his way,” which is an idiom meaning, “in accord with his way.” What does *way* mean in the context of this verse? For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in the Amplified Bible:

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)

In the amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or “bent.” Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a prescribed and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her personality, abilities, or natural interests. Which way should a child go? The way God designed when He formed the child in his or her mothers’ womb (Psalm 139:13).



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Now sum up your study of parenting. What secrets of a nurturing home did you discover?

Your children need you to help them know who they are. And when you find out who they are, you cooperate with them in developing them according to their God-given way.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Nurturing at Home

What do children gain from a nurturing home? First, *nurturing parents help their children know who they are*. A child speaks through the megaphone of his or her deeds. If you listen, you can hear him or her saying, “This is me. Please notice. I’m not him. I’m not her. Let me be me.” Reflect on what you’ve observed in your child’s deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. What have your child’s deeds been communicating lately?



Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Second, *nurturing parents take time to cultivate their children’s individuality*. In what ways can you encourage your child’s bents—his or her God-given personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths?

Nurturing your child is an adventure! But don’t forget to nurture *yourself* along the way. What hidden God-given bents do you have waiting to be discovered and unleashed? God has great things in store as you and your children join in God’s wonder-filled family dance.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child’s soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and You continue to shape and mold. Unite me with Your creative work in my child’s life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person You made me to be. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
2. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 335.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-THREE

Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

The way we conduct ourselves at work is our testimony. How we do our job tells others more about our relationship with Christ than how we worship on the Lord's day.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD is at the center of all things and the ruler of all He has made. Whatever He has built, He owns. Regarding how the world works, He sets the rules. And when mapping the course for our lives, He has the decisive say. God is our *final* authority. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul declared the all-encompassing authority of God—He is the “Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all” (Ephesians 4:6 MSG).

What is our role under God's authority? To take responsibility for whatever God assigns us. He is the master, and we're the managers. Put another way, *God is our boss*. Regardless of our job—whether we are a plumber, teacher, administrator, salesperson, social worker, stay-at-home parent, or full-time minister—we work for God.

For the Christian, there's no such thing as “sacred” and “secular” vocations. All vocations are sacred! God has called all of us to our work, and we play a significant role in God's kingdom simply by fulfilling His calling.

One way we submit to God's authority is by submitting to those whom God has placed in authority over us, such as our employers. In this study, Paul extends his theme of submission from the home to the workplace, where we'll discover how employees and employers relate to one another as they labor together under the canopy of God's rule.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We spend a lot of our waking hours on the job under someone else's authority or in authority over someone. As you begin this study, invite the Lord into your work relationships. In the space below, ask the Lord to bring peace if disharmony exists, resolution to conflicts, and honest communication. Also, bring your attitude before the Lord and invite Him to search your heart and guide your course.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we often read more than one version of the Bible to round out our understanding of a passage. Read *Ephesians 6:5–9* in three Bible versions, New Living Translation, New American Standard Bible, and The Message. Try reading aloud one verse at a time in each version.



Observation: Mutual Submission in the Workplace

A simple way to go from “reading” to “observing” a passage is to write what you see.¹ By recording some of the subtle differences in the versions, Scripture will come to life for you. For example, here are three phrases that express the same concept in Ephesians 6:5, but each version enhances different aspects of Paul's thought:

- “Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ” (Ephesians 6:5 NLT).
- “Be obedient . . . as to Christ” (6:5 NASB).
- “Respectfully obey . . . with an eye to obeying the *real* master, Christ” (6:5 MSG).



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

What other interesting phrases do you see in comparison?

Verse	Interesting Phrases in Comparison
6:6	
6:7	
6:8	
6:9	

Right away, we observe Paul addressing slaves, not employees—which raises the question: Was Paul endorsing slavery? No, he wasn't. We'll examine why we know Paul was not a proponent of slavery in the interpretation phase. For now, let's apply Paul's directives to employees and employers, which is a logical connection because the issue at heart in Paul's instructions wasn't slavery but attitude at the workplace.

Obedience with the Right Attitudes—Ephesians 6:5–6

The overarching command to employees is “obey” (Ephesians 6:5)—which simply means to do what our employers ask. Paul qualifies his command with six attitudes that should characterize Christian workers regardless of our employment.



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

The following chart lists these attitudes. In the left column, you’ll see the English translation of Paul’s Greek word and, in the middle column, a cross-reference to another verse with the same word. Read the cross-references and use your resources to define and describe each attitude that drives our obedience.²

Attitude	Cross-reference	Definition
deep respect (6:5) <i>phobos</i>	<i>Ephesians 5:21</i> (“reverence”)	
fear (6:5) <i>tromos</i>	<i>Philippians 2:12</i> NASB (“trembling”)	
sincerely (6:5) <i>haplotas</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 11:3</i> (“pure”)	
not by way of eyeservice (6:6 NASB) <i>ophthalmoudoulian</i>	<i>Colossians 3:22</i> (“not just when they are watching you”)	
not . . . as people-pleasers (6:6 NASB) <i>anthropareskos</i>	<i>Colossians 3:22</i> NASB	
as slaves of Christ (6:6) <i>doulos</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 7:22</i>	



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

Rewrite these concepts into a principle or principles that can guide your work ethic.

Did you catch Paul’s subtle wordplay in the Greek words for “eyeservice” (NASB) and “slaves” in 6:6—*ophthalmodoulian* and *doulos*? The first word contains the word, *doulian*, a variation of the Greek word, *doulos*. Paul is contrasting eyeservice with Christ-service. We must not work only while our boss has his or her eye on us—that’s half-hearted “eyeservice” obedience. We work wholeheartedly under the ever-watchful eye of Christ. That is Christ-service obedience—which leads to Paul’s concluding point about our true motive for working.

Obedience with the Right Motive—Ephesians 6:7–8

Christian employees don’t work for a fat paycheck, notoriety, power, security, or enviable perks. What did Paul say should be our motivation, according to *Ephesians 6:7–8*?

How might this motivation make a difference in your work attitude?



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

You work for Christ. He doesn't sign your paycheck, but He is the one for whom you are responsible. He is watching you when no one else watches. He sets the standard no one else sets. That's why you work as hard as you do. That's why you don't overlook the little things. You serve the Lord Christ as master of your life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Strong Words to Masters

By instructing slaves to obey their masters, was Paul condoning slavery? Why didn't he condemn the contemptable institution? According to commentator John MacArthur, Paul's mission wasn't to reform society but to reform hearts.

New Testament teaching does not focus on reforming and restructuring human systems, which are never the root cause of human problems. The issue is always the heart—which, when wicked, will corrupt the best of systems and, when righteous, will improve the worst. If men's hearts were not changed, they will find ways to oppress others regardless of whether or not there is actual slavery.³

Why do you think Paul focused more on transforming hearts than society?

According to *1 Corinthians 7:21–23*, what was Paul's advice to slaves and, by implication, his view on slavery?



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

Although Paul didn't tell masters to free their slaves, his words were nonetheless liberating. Read *Ephesians 6:9* as you imagine a slave owner in the first century might read it.⁴ Compare Paul's words with *Galatians 3:28*. What was Paul's revolutionary message to Christian masters that would transform their hearts and their perspective toward those society deemed underclass?

What principle can you draw for today's employers?

Employers, keep your promises, pay fair wages, have a heart, give affirmation and encouragement to someone every day. Provide a safe and wholesome environment for workers. Guard against prejudice and preferential treatment. Maintain confidentiality. Show compassion. Who wouldn't want to work for a boss like that!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9



Correlation: Rewards from the Master

Christ is the best boss to serve and offers the richest benefits package! He hands out the truest and most lasting rewards, and no good work goes unnoticed. What do the following verses add to Paul's encouragement that "the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do" (Ephesians 6:8)?

Galatians 6:4–5

Colossians 3:17, 23

Hebrews 6:10



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

Christ's reward is not the kind of commission we're used to. It's not in dollars and cents. It's in eternal rewards that will come. He sees the work we do that's done for the right reasons and for His glory without praise from people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Honoring God in Your Occupation

As an employee, what does it mean for you to work for Christ and serve others in your occupation? Today, at your workplace, how can you personally live out Paul's command to "serve . . . as you would serve Christ" (Ephesians 6:5)?

Does your effort and productivity diminish when the boss isn't looking? Do you sometimes slip into an "eye-service" rather than a "Christ-service" work ethic? Next time you clock in, imagine Christ clocking in with you. What would it be like to work under His watchful and encouraging eye, knowing He will reward the good you do?



Honoring God in Our Occupations

Ephesians 6:5–9

If you're the employer, how can you do the same—serve as you would serve Christ and work under His watchful eye as you lead your employees?

The world doesn't see us worshipping in the sanctuary or learning in Bible studies. Most people know us only by our work. Let's "work heartily, as for the Lord" (Colossians 3:23 NASB), so He gets the glory and we get the satisfaction of serving the world's best Boss!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I often do my job and nobody notices . . . until I mess up. It can be discouraging at times. Thank You that You notice and You will reward me in ways I can't imagine. I love working for You, the One who has called me to do a job that only I can do. Fill my heart with joy knowing my labor is never in vain when I do it for You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. A good concordance, such as *The Strongest NASB Concordance*, lists Greek root words along with cross-references to other verses to help you define a particular word. An online source for defining Greek words is [NetBible.org](#). After finding the passage, click on the "Greek" tab and then hover over the word in the English text to highlight the corresponding Greek word. Double-click on the Greek word to see the definition and do a word study. Give it a try!
3. John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 324.
4. For more information on first-century slavery practices, read "Slavery in Paul's Day," Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 294.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE STUDY TWENTY-FOUR

Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

When we entered the Christian life, we didn't walk onto a playground. We stepped into a battleground.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THOUGH we don't hear bombs bursting in the distance or bullets zinging past us, though we don't see bayonets flashing before our faces, we live every day of our lives on a battleground.

Our enemy is the devil, whom Paul called “the commander of the powers in the unseen world” (Ephesians 2:2). Whether we're young or old, a new believer or a seasoned Christian, our adversary has one goal for us: our downfall. He intends not just to cripple us but to ruin us.

Paul, though, urged us to stand firm against the devil's schemes. Even in the hail of artillery fire that continually rains down upon us, we can be safe. But we can't stand on our own. In this study, we'll discover that the true source of our power and protection lies not in our own strength but in the Lord and His armor. We can prevail against the enemy with our Savior on our side.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Earlier in Ephesians, Paul prayed that we “will understand the incredible greatness of God's power” which is “the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19–20). As you step into the subject of spiritual warfare, draw upon God's power by asking Him to illumine your mind and embolden your heart. You have nothing to fear with Christ on your side. Put your confidence in Him right now.



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Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the last half of his letter, Paul has given several commands beginning with *be*.

- Be humble and gentle (Ephesians 4:2)
- Be patient (4:2)
- Be kind (4:32)
- Be imitators of God (5:1 NASB)
- Be careful how you live (5:15)
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18)
- Be obedient (6:5 NASB)

One more exhortation rounds out his list: “be strong” (6:10). Read *Ephesians 6:10–13* and highlight the imperatives that follow *be strong*, such as “put on,” “stand firm,” and “resist.”



Observation: Power and Protection in the Lord

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for repeated words, synonyms, metaphors, and logical progression of thought.¹ Can you see the progression in Ephesians 6:10–13? Paul first issued the imperative, “be strong” (Ephesians 6:10); second, he explained *how* we can be strong, by putting “on all of God’s armor” (6:11). And then he explained *why* we need God’s armor (6:12) and the *effects* of wearing the armor (6:11, 13). Let’s follow Paul’s line of thinking, beginning with our divine source of strength.



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

Our Strength Is in the Lord—Ephesians 6:10

What do you observe about Paul’s command as it is rendered in the New American Standard Bible: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Ephesians 6:10 NASB)? Write down the synonyms you see. Can you hear Paul’s theme of God’s power echoing from previous verses? Look up [Ephesians 1:19–21](#) and [3:16–20](#) and write down what these verses say.

We depend on the Lord’s power for every step on our Christian journey—for receiving His blessings (1:3–14), comprehending His mysterious plan (2:1–3:13), and walking in love in all our relationships (4:1–6:4). We especially need God’s strength in battling our spiritual enemy. The devil lies in wait at every turn!

We are not equipped to stand against an invisible foe. We cannot see him, measure him, or know when his attacks are coming. So God’s strength must be our salvation. We are “strong in the Lord.” In the Lord is where our strength resides. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

Our Protection Is in the Lord’s Armor—Ephesians 6:11, 13

How do we engage God’s power? Read Ephesians 6:11 and 13 side by side in the following chart. These verses are similar but contain important nuances. In the space below, write down how the verses complement one another and any subtle differences that stand out.

Ephesians 6:11	Ephesians 6:13
Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.	Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

We stand firm by putting on God’s armor, but why do we need it? Because only spiritual armor can protect us in a spiritual battle. To underscore our need for spiritual protection, Paul pulls back the veil in 6:12 to reveal the invisible forces arrayed against us—who they are and what they do. Let’s follow Paul into this unseen world of darkness and get a glimpse of our evil opponents.

It is not our armor; it’s the Lord’s armor. It’s something we can’t provide for ourselves. We put on His armor. He prepared it for us, and we put it on, just as a soldier would put on armor for the coming battle. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Rulers, Authorities, and Powers

Anyone who wishes to follow Christ is in for a “struggle” (Ephesians 6:12 NASB). The Greek word, *pallo*, conjures the image of a wrestling match in which our opponents try to take us down. To stand our ground we first must know our enemies.



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

The online commentary by Thomas L. Constable lists the characteristics of our spiritual foes—their authority, strength, worldwide influence, and evil nature. Read *Ephesians 6:12* in multiple versions and consult *Constable’s Notes* in netbible.org. In the chart below, write down your interpretation of Paul’s descriptions. For additional information, look up the cross-references to find examples of each characteristic.

Categories	Cross-reference	Meaning
Authority: “rulers” (Ephesians 6:12)	<i>John 12:31</i>	
Strength: “powers” (6:12 NASB)	<i>Acts 19:13–16</i>	
Worldwide Influence: “world forces” (6:12 NASB)	<i>Matthew 4:8–9;</i> <i>1 John 5:19</i>	
Evil Nature: “darkness . . . wickedness” (6:12 NASB)	<i>Romans 1:28–29;</i> <i>2 Peter 2:17–18</i>	

Paul warns us in so many words, *Don’t underestimate your enemies!* They are not harmless fairytale imps; they are real and powerful. “If we hope to overcome them,” writes commentator John R. W. Stott,

we shall need to bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings. . . . They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs.²



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

To stand firm, we must not only know who our enemy is, we also must know what our enemy does. We'll look closer at the devil's strategies in the next section of our study.

Satan operates with a game plan. He uses surprise, unexpected assaults, and tempting thoughts designed to draw us in and trap us. He makes us think one way all the while doing something different. He is brilliant and cunning. He knows what it takes to trip us up, and he is relentlessly on the attack. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Strategies, Schemes, and Methods

By wearing God's armor, we "will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). The Greek word for "strategies" is *methodeia*, which the New American Standard Bible translates, "schemes."

Paul gave us an example of Satan's schemes in [2 Corinthians 2:10–11](#) regarding the issue of forgiveness. According to the passage, Paul forgave a certain individual whatever needed to be forgiven. Notice his reason for forgiving. Paul forgave *so that* "no advantage would be taken of us by Satan" (2 Corinthians 2:11 NASB). Apparently, Satan can breach our defenses through our unforgiving attitude. What harm do you think Satan might cause when we refuse to forgive?

Just as harboring anger "gives a foothold to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27), so also an unforgiving spirit leads to discord, divisiveness, bitterness, resentment, and rage—Satan's favorite devices to bind our hearts and keep us from loving like Christ.



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

What else did Paul say we can do to gain victory over Satan's schemes, according to *2 Corinthians 10:3–5*? Note particularly *where* the battle takes place.

The enemy seeks to influence our thinking. That's why it's so important to meditate on God's Word. Just as Jesus countered Satan's temptations in the wilderness by quoting Scripture, we can expose his falsehoods and render his schemes powerless by quoting truth to fend off Satan's attacks.



Application: The Effects of Putting On God's Armor

Now, according to *Ephesians 6:13*, what are the effects of wearing God's armor?

What a wonderful promise! When the smoke clears from the battlefield, we will be standing firm in the protection of our Lord. We'll discuss the specific elements of the armor of God in the next study. For now, let's fortify our confidence with four principles.

- *No satanic assault is stronger than God.* We don't have to fear because our defense is God.
- *No satanic scheme can penetrate God's armor.* If we put it on and keep it on, Satan's arrows can't penetrate.



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

- *No satanic force can defeat God’s work.* God is sovereign, and the conclusion of His plan is decided—He will win the victory!
- *No satanic evil can prevail over the prayers of God’s people.* Prayer is our direct line of communication to our source of strength, and no scheme of the devil can cut that line.

Which of these four principles encourages you most today, and why is it encouraging?

Tap your line of communication with your Commander and pray right now for His strength and protection. In what areas do you feel vulnerable, and how do you need Him today?

We need spiritual protection to defend against a spiritual foe. Thankfully, we have the armor of God . . . and more. We have Christ! Conclude this study by singing the second verse of Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and praising our victorious Lord.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He—
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.³



Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are my mighty fortress, my unfailing defense against the forces of darkness. You are my helper, my shield and protector. Thank You for the promise that in You and Your Word I stand. Keep me confident in Your strength and always standing firm. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 264.
3. Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," trans. Frederick H. Hedge, *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word, 1997), hymn 151.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-FIVE

Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

If we are going to battle the enemy on enemy ground and in enemy terms, we must be people who live in and model truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IT didn't take much for Paul to convince the Ephesian Christians of the reality of spiritual warfare. A stronghold of Satan loomed over Ephesus in the form of the temple of Artemis where worshipers participated in pagan rituals and prayed to dark powers. Many church members had practiced sorcery before converting to Christ. They caused quite a spectacle when they publicly burned their "incantation books" worth "several million dollars" (Acts 19:19).

In one front-page incident, a demon-possessed man overpowered seven prominent Jews, attacking them "with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered" (19:16). The Christians also witnessed firsthand the devil's work in the city's rampant wickedness. Paul warned his readers about the "things that ungodly people do in secret" (Ephesians 5:12) and to walk carefully "in these evil days" (5:16).

Paul's readers were well-acquainted with spiritual warfare . . . but they were not so well-equipped for battle. How could they stand against the "mighty powers in this dark world" (6:12)? In our evil day, we ask the same question. Weak as we are and made of flesh, how can we hope to prevail against a powerful, invisible spiritual foe?

Paul gave his readers the answer using the metaphor of armor—a stirring word picture that has encouraged Christians for two thousand years. In this study, we'll try on each piece Paul presented and learn to live every day in the strong protection of our God.



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Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The armor of God consists not of chainmail and steel but of spiritual values forged by Christ our King during His earthly ministry. As soldiers of Christ, we march under His banner and outfit ourselves in His truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and words from Scripture. Prepare to put on each piece of Christ's armor-like qualities by presenting yourself to your King in prayer. Ask Him to dress you entirely in Himself and clothe you for battle as His loyal soldier marching into war.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 6:13–20*, noting the two overarching commands: “Put on” (Ephesians 6:13) and “Pray” (6:18). Also, highlight Paul's supporting imperatives, such as “stand your ground” (6:14) and “stay alert and be persistent” (6:18). What are your initial impressions of Paul's tone and urgency in his instructions?



Observation: God's Armor and the Believer's Battle Cry

Let's take a closer look at the pieces of armor Paul lists and how they help us resist the devil and stand firm against his schemes.



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

God’s Armor—Ephesians 6:13–17

The equipment includes a soldier’s belt, breastplate, boots, shield, helmet, and sword. Paul’s first-century readers easily pictured these pieces because Roman infantrymen were everywhere; however, modern-day readers need help. Consult your resources or the online commentary, *Constable’s Notes*, and, in the following chart, write down a brief description of each piece of armor. We’ll wait until the interpretation phase to examine what each item represents. For now, simply describe the armor.

Piece of Armor	Description
“belt” (Ephesians 6:14)	
“body armor” (6:14) or “breastplate” (6:14 NASB)	
“shoes” (6:15)	
“shield” (6:16)	
“helmet” (6:17)	
“sword” (6:17)	



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

The Believer's Battle Cry—Ephesians 6:18–20

Lines of communication linking soldiers to their commanders were just as essential in the battlefield as armor. Prayer connects us to our King, allowing us to present needs and receive help. In his writing about prayer, how many times did Paul use the word, *all*, in the following verse? What key points did Paul make?

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18 NASB)

As a fellow-soldier, Paul relied on prayer too. What did he request? Release from house arrest? A cushier assignment? No. What was number one on Paul's prayer list? And what positive perspective did he communicate about his circumstances?

Now let's examine the meaning of God's armor and how each piece causes the enemy to flee and helps us stand firm.

Shout until you're blue in the face and you will never impact a demon. You will never touch a demon with a literal shield or be protected by a literal helmet. These images represent things that make demons back off and Satan cower: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20



Interpretation: What Makes Us Strong

The pieces of armor Paul listed represent Christian values that any follower of Christ can claim and live by every day. Use your study resources to define each concept. Also note the kind of satanic attack this value protects us against. To assist you, we’ve included a brief quotation from Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. For an online commentary, consult *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

Truth—Ephesians 6:14

Definition	Protection from . . .

The belt is composed of truth—the truth of God, revealed in His written Word (John 17:17). It also includes truth of character, or integrity—practical living that conforms to the instruction of God’s Word (2 Jn. 1:4).¹

Righteousness—Ephesians 6:14

Definition	Protection from . . .

[The breastplate] was a perfect image of the righteousness that comes from God alone, righteousness we could never earn by our own merit or maintain in our own strength.²



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

Peace—Ephesians 6:15

Definition	Protection from . . .

Our “footing” against Satan is our peace with God. Christ has secured this peace for us (Eph. 2)—peace not only with God but also with one another and within ourselves.³

Faith—Ephesians 6:16

Definition	Protection from . . .

Through faith we see our circumstances from God’s perspective. We trust in Him to carry us through all trials and temptations.⁴

Salvation—Ephesians 6:17

Definition	Protection from . . .

We need to have *assurance* of our position with Christ. Why? Because Satan would like nothing better than to aim his arrows at our minds, convincing us that we don’t really belong to Christ.⁵



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

Word of God—Ephesians 6:17

Definition	Protection from . . .

The Christian’s sword is the Word of God. The Greek word translated “word” here, *rhema* [4487], is a reference to the spoken Word—the Word verbalized. . . . Paul’s emphasis here is not simply reading Scripture but actually using God’s revealed Word against Satan.⁶

As you reflect on this list, note the essential nature of every piece. A soldier without a helmet or shield or any other piece of armor would be an easy target for the enemy. Has the spiritual enemy been targeting you lately in one of the areas above? Which of the pieces of God’s armor do you need to put on to better stand your ground?



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20



Correlation: Our Model for Standing Firm

Christ modeled these spiritual values during His earthly ministry. Read the following verses that describe Jesus using each piece of armor. Write down what Christ did or taught and how you can follow His example.

Truth—*John 8:31–32, 42–47*

Righteousness—*Matthew 6:31–33*

Peace—*John 14:27; 16:33*



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

Faith—*John 5:24; 11:25–26*

Salvation—*Luke 19:9–10; John 10:7–10*

Word of God—*Matthew 4:1–11*

Many valiant Christian soldiers through history have taken up Christ’s armor and marched under His banner. Paul, himself, is one of our finest examples. He concluded his prayer for courage by stating he was “an ambassador in chains” (Ephesians 6:20 NASB).

In chains. What a poignant description of the visible evidence of Satan’s warfare against Christ and His people. The devil bound Paul, but, even so, the truth of the gospel broke through. According to the book of Acts, during those two years in chains, Paul preached “the kingdom of God and [taught] concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:31 NASB).



Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Ephesians 6:13–20

Unhindered! No power on earth can stand against believers who take up the armor of God. Let's put on His truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and Word in our world today!

I'm asking you to look at the armor and to place your hands, if you will, on each piece. The belt, the breastplate, the boots, the shield, the helmet, the sword. For the sake of your survival, I challenge you to claim God's protection in whatever situation you find yourself.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting on the Armor Today

Would you like to put on God's armor?

Use the following space to write a prayer asking the Lord to clothe you with each piece of His armor. And then, live as a soldier of Christ, fit for battle and bold in the fight against the evils of our day.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I put on Your truth. Fill my mind with Your thoughts to counter the lies of the enemy. I put on the promise of righteousness in Christ before You. Guard my heart from the temptation to sin. I put on Your peace. Keep me at rest in life's storms. I put on faith in You alone. Help me to trust when fear assaults. I put on the assurance of my salvation in Christ. Protect me from doubts. Finally, I take up Your sword—the words of the Bible that cut to the heart of every lie of the devil. Fitted with Your armor, I commit myself to You and Your cause today and forever. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 309.
2. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 310.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 310–311.
4. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 311.
5. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 312.
6. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 313.



BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-SIX

Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Prayer focuses our time and energy on what God is doing. It keeps our eyes off ourselves and guards us from throwing pity parties. Prayer makes us positive. It gives us hope to go on. Stay strong in prayer, and you will finish well.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE'VE certainly covered a lot of ground in Ephesians, haven't we? Paul began his letter by opening our eyes to the spiritual blessings we share in Christ in the "heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:3). Then he revealed how God raised us to life with Christ, turned our divisions into unity, and led us out of darkness into His radiant light. Paul showed us how to put our theology into action in every relationship, whether at home or work, as we submit to one another in reverence to Christ. So full of truth and practical application, Ephesians is a wonderful letter for all believers in every age.

What happened after Paul wrote his inspired epistle? After two years under house arrest, Paul was released, and he returned to active ministry. Later, however, he was arrested again and in chains transported to Rome where he lived his final days in the Mamertine dungeon. Paul preached Christ to the end of his life, and in his last written words, he triumphantly declared, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful" (2 Timothy 4:7).

How did Paul keep a steady course without faltering? His final lines in Ephesians reveal four guidelines for finishing well that can help us in our spiritual race. Let's follow Paul's lead and learn these final truths to conclude our study of Ephesians.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul's letter, like his life, exudes grace, from Paul's opening prayer, "May God . . . give you grace" (Ephesians 1:2) to his final blessing: "May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:24). Grace in the beginning. Grace every step of the way. Grace to the very end.

Take a moment to thank God for His grace in your life and ask Him to strengthen you to live courageously to the end of your days. In the space below, write your prayer to our Father of all grace.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 6:18–24* a couple of times, slowly and carefully. Notice how Paul echoes *four themes* that he developed throughout his letter: prayer, love, peace, and grace.

- *Prayer.* In 1:15–23 and 3:14–21, Paul prays for his readers. Here he urges them to pray for others, including himself.
- *Love.* In 3:18 and 5:2, Paul showcases the love of Christ. Here he features our love for Christ.
- *Peace.* In 2:14–17, Paul announces the peace between Jews and Gentiles. Here he prays for courage to keep on declaring this message of peace.
- *Grace.* In 2:8–9 Paul teaches that God saved us by His grace. Here he prays that God will continually extend His grace over us.

Paul expressed these themes throughout his life and ministry, and we can see them reflected in the *four guidelines* Paul modeled for finishing the Christian life well.



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24



Observation: Four Guidelines for Finishing Well

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for examples to follow, such as Paul's prayer life—which forms the frame around the first guideline.¹

Stay Strong in Prayer—Ephesians 6:18

Write down everything you observe in Ephesians 6:18, such as repeated and emphasized words, imperatives, and anything else you see.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18 NASB)

Did you count the number of times Paul wrote the word, *all*? Four times in one verse! What point do you think Paul was making by repeating *all* so many times?



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Let's examine closer what "all" referred to each time Paul used the word. "All prayer and petition" refers to *kinds* of prayer; "all times," to *occasions* for prayer; "all perseverance," to *duration* in prayer; "all the saints," to *beneficiaries* of prayer. What do these particular concepts teach you about prayer?

The easiest discipline to neglect is prayer for our children. As they go off to school, as they make their way on their own, as they get older, pray. Pray your warnings. Pray your corrections. Your children will be enhanced by that kind of prayer with perseverance. And you will finish well. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Be Bold in Courage—Ephesians 6:19–20

Now observe *Ephesians 6:19–20*. What key points do you see? By requesting prayer for himself, what was Paul teaching his readers about prayer? And what was foremost on Paul's list of prayer needs?

If the apostle Paul ought to speak boldly at his age, so should we. Not tactlessly or offensively but boldly. You never get so old that you are not important. Quit talking yourself out of speaking up for Christ. You'll finish well if you stay bold in courage. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Cultivate Closeness with Faithful Friends—Ephesians 6:21–22

Through his letters, Paul kept in touch with those he had ministered to over the years. What do you observe about Paul's personal comments in *Ephesians 6:21–22*? What principle did Paul model that you can follow?

How many friends did Paul have? The large number might surprise you! Just take a look at the end of many of his letters to see how many names he listed: *Romans 16:1–16, 21–23*; *1 Corinthians 16:19*; *Colossians 4:7–15*; *2 Timothy 4:19–21*. Can you count the names? That's a lot of faithful friends!

Let Love for Christ Abound—Ephesians 6:23–24

In his final benediction in *Ephesians 6:23–24*, Paul wraps up his letter with love for Christ, peace, and grace. This benediction is like an elegantly wrapped gift to his readers, full of life's richest treasures. Receive Paul's gift to you personally and write down what you observe . . . and if you turn back to verse 18 to include "Pray in the Spirit," be certain to catch Paul's emphasis on each member of the Trinity.



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Did the word, *eternally*, stand out to you? Paul inserted this word for a purpose. He began his letter looking back to God's love for us in eternity past, "before he made the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Here Paul concludes by looking ahead to God's grace "upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" for eternity (6:24). From eternity past to eternity future, God lavishes us with love and grace! What does this truth about eternity imply about your assurance of peace with God in your present circumstances?

God has His own timetable. He has you exactly where He wants you. He is in control. As painful as the path may be right now, you are right where the Father wants you to be. Accept His plan and use it as an opportunity for love for Christ to abound in you.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Love Brings Doctrine to Life

For interpretation, let's look closer at Paul's fourth guideline: love. Can you remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians about God's love for us? Write down what Paul said in the following verses.

Ephesians 1:4–5: _____

Ephesians 2:4–5: _____

Ephesians 3:17–19: _____

God pours His love *into us* so that His love can pour *out of us*. What did Paul say in the following verses about letting the love of Christ abound to others?

Ephesians 4:2, 15–16: _____

Ephesians 5:2: _____

Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33: _____



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Remarkably, Paul used the word *love* fifteen times in his letter. Perhaps he emphasized this point because he knew it can be a challenge for love to flourish in churches that are strong in dogma like the Ephesian church. About thirty-five years later, Jesus Christ, through the apostle John, had this to say about the church at Ephesus: “I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!” (Revelation 2:4).

Pause here for prayer asking the Lord to guard you against becoming like the Ephesian believers who lost their first love. Invite Him to fill your heart with His love and to spark in you a fire for loving others in His name.



Correlation: The Power of Prayer to Make us Bold

For correlation, let’s focus on the role of prayer in Paul’s life, which was the secret to his courage. Interestingly, Paul wasn’t naturally courageous. What do the following verses say about Paul’s natural inclination toward self-doubt and discouragement?

1 Corinthians 2:1–4

2 Corinthians 1:8–9



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

What did Paul say helped him through such difficult times, according to *2 Corinthians 1:10–11*?

Don't discount the power of others' intercessory prayers to encourage you. Who can you ask to pray for you today? In what areas do you need courage?

Application: A Final Send Off

As a final application, reflect on a section that touched you most deeply in Ephesians. Perhaps the section that impacted you most was Paul's list of spiritual blessings in chapter 1. Maybe it was about God reconciling us to Himself and to our brothers and sisters in Christ in chapter 2. Or it could have been Paul's prayer in chapter 3 that we know the fullest extent of Christ's love. Or Paul's focus on submission in our relationships in chapters 4 and 5. Or, finally, Paul's teaching on wearing the armor of God in chapter 6 or the guidelines for finishing well that we just studied.

What truths touched you the most, and how can these truths change your life starting now?



Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Are you ready to let God's living words in Ephesians soak into your soul and flow out to everyone you know? Be assured, the Spirit will empower you to follow Christ with a whole heart and finish your race well—just as Paul finished his race, staying faithful to the end.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may the truths I learned in Ephesians help me to not only live well but finish well. Guard me from the temptation to let my commitment fade as I grow older. Keep me from discouraging thoughts that tell me I have nothing to offer Your kingdom. Here is my heart, mind, body, and soul. Use me as You wish for Your glory until the end of my days and forever. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

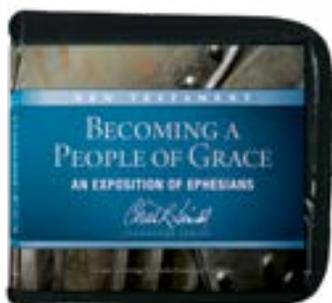


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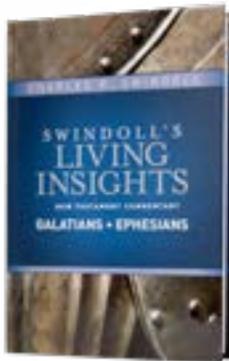
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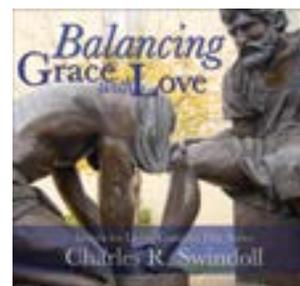
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