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FALL 2010

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul was a prisoner when he wrote these letters to the early church. They reveal great freedom and joy in spite of adversity. The key for Paul was “life in Christ,” a life of true freedom. For Paul, nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He yearned for everyone to share his joy.

These Prison Letters contain, much as Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prison writing generations later do, great insights about the supremacy of Christ, the cost of discipleship and the importance of living together in community. They are filled with thanksgiving. They are laced with prayers that encourage people of all generations to live as visible expressions of God’s grace in the world. They invite today’s readers to “put into practice” much that will lead to true peace and freedom.

The theme of Ephesians is unique among all his letters. It is the theme of the nature of the true church, the body of Christ.

LESSON ONE: EPHESIANS 1:1-14

OPENING QUESTION: *How would you introduce yourself in a letter?*

Note: In the original Greek verses 3-14 formed the longest sentence in the Bible.

Note: *Saints* are those “set apart” to be God’s people.

1. Skim the entire book of Ephesians.
List several key ideas.

 2. Read Ephesians 1:1-14. What are the “spiritual words” in these verses that are difficult for you to understand?

 3. Who had shaped Paul’s life and message? (v. 1, see also 1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

 4. Describe the characteristics of Paul’s audience (v. 1)

 5. Why is God to be worshiped and praised? (v. 3)
- Psalm 145
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-
-
6. How did God choose His children and what indicates that He designed them for relationship with Him?

v. 4

vv. 5-6

vv. 11-12

John 6:37-40, 45

John 15:16

7. What questions do you have about God's choosing?

8. What ultimate purpose did God have in mind when He chose His children? (vv. 6, 12, 14)

How can you live to fulfill His purpose?

9. How is one adopted into God's family?

v. 13

John 5:24

10. Read 1 John 3:1-3. What difference does it make to be part of God's family?

How has this truth shaped your view of yourself and others?

Memory Verse: "Praise to be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." *Ephesians 1:3*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus, help me live to the praise of Your glory.

LESSON TWO: EPHESIANS 1:15-23

OPENING QUESTION: *When has your life been altered because of something powerful?*

Note: The *heart* is the center of a person's thought, will and emotion.

1. What causes Paul to give thanks for his readers?
2. Why do you think it is so important to Paul that people come to know God better? (v. 17)
3. What allows a person to know God better?
v. 17

v. 18a

John 15:5-10
4. How do *knowledge* and *faith* work together? (see also Titus 1:1-2)

How have you seen them work together in your life to make a difference?

5. Use the verses below to explain the meaning of Paul's prayer requests.
 - a) **to know "the hope to which He has called you"** (v. 18a)
Romans 8:22-25

Ephesians 2:12-13

Ephesians 4:1, 4-6

Philippians 3:12-14

- b) **to know “the riches of His glorious inheritance”** (v. 18b)

John 17:24

Philippians 3:20-21

Revelation 7:9-17

- c) **to know “His incomparably great power”** (v. 19)

Isaiah 40:26-31

6. How was God’s power displayed in Christ? (vv.19-22)

7. How is God’s power displayed in you?

Romans 8:11

2 Corinthians 4:7-8

2 Corinthians 12:9

8. In what current situation do you need God’s power? (see also Colossians 1:10-12)

9. What three words best describe *church* for you?

10. What central role is the church to play in God’s plan?

vv.22-23

Ephesians 4:12-13

11. How is your view of the church challenged by God’s plan for the church?

Memory Verse: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.” *Ephesians 1:17*

Prayer Guide: Lord, help me to know You better.

LESSON THREE: EPHESIANS 2:1-22

OPENING QUESTION: *Describe a time when you were an outsider and someone welcomed you.*

Note: *Grace* is God's free and merciful offer to commit Himself to us in Christ. (Lucas)

Note: The *wrath of God* is a holy, just revulsion against what is contrary to and opposes His holy nature and will.

1. Describe the life of a spiritually dead person. (vv. 1-3)
2. What happens when you live to gratify your cravings? (see also Romans 1:21-26)

What are the cravings you continue to gratify?

3. Why did God reach out to people? (v.4, see also John 3:16)
4. What did God do to provide spiritual life for *dead* people? (vv. 5-8, 13; see also Romans 5:6-11)
5. What is salvation and why is it impossible to gain it by your own effort? (John 17:1-3, Ephesians 2:8-10)

6. What is God's purpose in saving you?

Ephesians 1:12

Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 4:24

Ephesians 5:1-2

In what way is your life shaped by His purpose?

Note: Great hostility existed between Jews and Gentiles. Jews viewed the circumcision with pride and condemned Gentiles as uncircumcised pagans. (Snodgrass)

7. How were Gentiles without Christ alienated from God? (vv. 11-12)

8. How does Christ bring in Gentiles and “outsiders”? (v.13)

How can you follow His example to welcome outsiders?

9. How does Christ make true unity among people possible? (vv.13-22)

10. Describe the new community Christ intends His people to enjoy. (vv. 19-22)

What do you find most personally challenging in this?

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

Prayer Guide: God of Grace, help me live as Your handiwork.

LESSON FOUR: EPHESIANS 3:1-13, ACTS 9:1-22

OPENING QUESTION: *How has your life been impacted by a person who lived with a clear purpose?*

Note: *Mystery* is a truth hidden in the past but now disclosed by the revelation of God.

1. What purpose did Paul see in his imprisonment and suffering?

v. 1

v. 13

Ephesians 6:19-20

Colossians 4:3

What difference would it make to view suffering this way?

2. Is there a current “imprisonment” or suffering in your life that God can use for His glory?
(see also Genesis 50:19-21)

3. What was Paul’s purpose in life?

Acts 9:15

Romans 15:17-20

Ephesians 3:8-9

4. How would you describe the purpose for your life?

Read Acts 9:1-22

5. Describe the circumstances that radically altered the course of Paul’s life. (Acts 9:1-9)

6. Why do you think Paul refers to himself in Ephesians 3:8 as “less than the least?”
(see also 1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

7. How did God use Ananias to equip Paul? (Acts 9:10-19)
List the steps of his faithful response to God’s call.

8. Is God calling you to be an “Ananias” to someone in your life?

9. What greater purpose might God be asking you to fulfill?

10. What was the mystery that Paul was entrusted to preach?

Ephesians 1:9-10

Ephesians 3:6

Colossians 1:26-27

Colossians 2:2-3
11. From your experience, what do you think the church can do to make Christ plain and known to people? (vv.9-10)

How does this passage challenge your thinking about the church and your involvement in it?
12. What allows you to approach God freely? (Ephesians 3:12)

Memory Verse: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...” *Ephesians 3:10a*

Prayer Guide: God most High, fulfill Your purpose for me.

LESSON FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:14-21

OPENING QUESTION: *Share a memory about prayer from childhood.*

* This week's passage provides an opportunity to not just learn about God but to experience Him in prayer. Spend time each day this week using Paul's prayer requests to pray for others.

1. What are your common reasons for praying?

What was Paul's reason?

2. What postures did praying people assume in the Bible?

1 Chronicles 17:16

Nehemiah 8:5-6

Matthew 26:39

Ephesians 3:14

3. What does it mean to you to "kneel" in prayer?

If you are able, consider praying on your knees at some point this week.

4. Why do you think Paul addressed God as *Father*?

5. What do you know of the *heavenly Father* from Paul's prayer? (vv.14-16)

6. Read Isaiah 55. How does this passage challenge you to enlarge your picture of the *Heavenly Father*?

Spend time praising Him this week.

Note: Power and the Holy Spirit are so commonly associated that they are virtually synonymous. The Holy Spirit is the power of God at work in people. (Snodgrass)

7. What do you most often seek God's power for?
8. What did Paul seek God's power for?
9. How does such power come? (v. 16)
10. Describe Christ's love for you. (v. 17, see also John 17:26, 1 John 4:9-10)
11. What difference does it make to live assured of God's love?
12. How do you become more "rooted and established in God's love?"
(v. 17, see also Jeremiah 17:7-8, John 15:9-10)
13. Do your prayers reflect trust in a God who is *able*? How does this prayer challenge you to deeper trust?

Memory Verse: "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." *Ephesians 3:17b-18*

Prayer Guide: Lord, help me to grasp the extent of Your love.

LESSON SIX: EPHESIANS 4:1-16

OPENING QUESTION: *In what situation have you seen unity at work?*

1. How important is unity to you?

When are you tempted to sacrifice unity for something you value more?

2. What is the basis of spiritual unity? (vv. 4-6)
3. Read John 17:20-26. What requests in Jesus' prayer reveal the importance of unity?
4. What are the qualities God's people are told to strive for and how does each promote unity? (vv. 1-3, 15)
5. How is it possible to develop these qualities? (see also 2 Peter 1:3-9)
6. What gifts does God give to the church and for what purpose are they given? (vv. 7-12, see also Romans 12:4-13)
7. How does God want people who are gifted with leadership to serve the church? (v. 12)
8. What are the evidences of a healthy church? (vv.12-16)

9. What happens to the church when Christ is not central?

Ephesians 4:14

Revelation 2:1-7

Revelation 3:14-22

What changes do each of these passages urge?

10. What does it mean to speak the truth in love?

Where in your life do truth and love need to work in greater partnership?

11. What grows a person or a church to full maturity? (see also John 15:4-14)

12. As you reflect over the entire passage, where are you most challenged to grow into spiritual maturity?

Memory Verse: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
Ephesians 4:3

Prayer Guide: God of Truth, make us one.

LESSON SEVEN: EPHESIANS 4:17-5:20

OPENING QUESTION: *What habits keep you healthy?*

1. Describe a transformed life.

Ephesians 4:22-24

Ephesians 5:1-2

Ephesians 5:8-10

2. How does Jesus make such life transformation possible?

Ephesians 4:20-24 (see also Ephesians 4:3-5)

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 5:1-2

3. What are the results of godless thinking?

Ephesians 4:17-19

Romans 1:21-25

4. How can a mind be changed and thinking be altered?
(Ephesians 4:22-23, see also Romans 12:2)

5. What thinking is alienating you from God and others?

6. What are transformed people to discard from their speaking?
How are they to speak?

Discard

Speak

Ephesians 4:25

Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 4:31-32

Ephesians 5:4

Ephesians 5:12

Ephesians 5:19-20

What is most personally convicting? Where can you practice the speech that God requires?

Note: Jews understood idolatry to be the root of all sin and greed as the motivation of all sins.

7. What sins are to be shed and why is it so important to do so?
(Ephesians 4:26-28, 5:3-7, 15-18)

What sin is the Lord calling you to shed?

8. What practices from this passage will allow you to live the “life of love” Paul urges in
Ephesians 5:2?

Memory Verse: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. *Ephesians 5:1-2*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus, transform me into Your image.

LESSON EIGHT: EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

OPENING QUESTION: *What is one thing you learned about marriage from your parents?*

Note: The Greek word for *submit* literally means to “arrange under.” In contrast to the word *obey*, *submit* implies a voluntary yielding to another.

1. What role is submission to play in the life of all believers?

Ephesians 5:21

Galatians 5:13

Philippians 2:3-4

1 Peter 5:5-6

2. How do these verses about submission challenge your thinking?

3. When is submission inappropriate? (Acts 4:19, 5:29)

4. What role did submission play in Christ’s life?
(see Luke 22:42, John 4:34, Philippians 2:5-7)

Note: Paul does not challenge the Roman social order. In his time one third of the population were slaves. He gives perspective on how Christians are to live out their faith within a pagan social structure.

5. How was God’s love for His people described like a marriage in the Old Testament?

Isaiah 61:10

Isaiah 62:4-5

Hosea 2:19-23

6. How is Christ's love for the church described like a marriage?
(Ephesians 5:23-33)

What response to Christ is called for from His bride, the church?

7. How is a woman to love her husband? (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; see also 1 Peter 3:1-6)

8. How is a man to love his wife? (Ephesians 5:25-33, 1 Peter 3:7)

9. If you are married, how can you love your spouse as Christ loves the church?

10. How are children to be loved in ways that helps them to obey and honor their parents?
(Ephesians 6:1-4)

What are the implications of this in a child-centered society?

11. What principles and practices about work and service can you glean from Paul's words to slaves and masters?

Memory Verse: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." *Ephesians 5:21*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus Christ, overflow Your love through me.

LESSON NINE: EPHESIANS 6:10-24

OPENING QUESTION: *What is one thing you do when you know something difficult lies ahead?*

1. Why do you think it is important to recognize that life is a battlefield?

What happens if you don't?

2. How did God strengthen His people in the midst of battles?

Genesis 15:1

Exodus 14:13-14

Deuteronomy 1:29-31

1 Samuel 17:47

2 Chronicles 20:15-17

Psalms 18:28-36

Note: The battle Paul describes is not a struggle against human enemies but against powerful spiritual forces of evil.

3. What equips you for battle? (vv.10-13, see also 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
4. How is God Himself described as a warrior with armor in the Old Testament? (Isaiah 11:5, 59:16-17)

Note: the armor described by Paul is that of a heavily armed Roman foot soldier although their spiritual associations are drawn from the *book of Isaiah*. (Snodgrass)

5. What equips you for spiritual battle?

14a

14b

15

16

17

17b

18

What are the dangers of going into battle unequipped?

6. What role can prayer play in spiritual battles? (see also Ephesians 3:18)

What role does it play in yours?

7. What protection does being “alert” provide? (see also 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8)

How protected are you?

8. How does Paul want the Ephesians to pray for him and what does this reveal about Paul?

9. How does Paul’s prayer request help you reshape yours?

10. Why was Tychicus being sent?

11. How does Paul conclude his letter?

What encouragement is this to you?

Memory Verse: “Finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” *Ephesians 6:10*

Prayer Guide: Lord help me stand firm.

EPHESIANS REVIEW LESSON

1. Which verses in the study have been most important to you?
2. What have you learned about Jesus to help you love Him more?
3. How has your understanding of your identity been enlarged as you see yourself in Christ?
4. How has your thinking about the *church* been challenged?
5. Is there any “futile” thinking” you have discarded as a result of the study?
6. Are there any changes you have made in your lifestyle?
7. Are there any changes you have made in the way you pray?

What answers to prayer can you thank God for?

8. How has God encouraged you through this study?