

## Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

## Ephesians 4:25-32 Reading Guide

### Overview

We live in a world of dichotomies. You're either right or left. You're either a Fox person or a CNN person. You're pro or anti-vaccine. You're blue or you're red. And within that world, outrage is the only language that some folks seem to speak. *I'm just going to make my point louder than you and if I do that then I win, no matter whether I have to step all over you in the process. Everyone who disagrees with my perspective on anything is perceived as the enemy.*

But do you ever stop and wonder if there is another way? Is there another way to engage people, to utilize our words, to think about the world, that is shaped by grace and peace? Or is my life destined to sound like a perpetual shouting match? Is there a way to view people as those who bear inherent worth and dignity regardless of their views on *x, y, or z*, or am I stuck quickly labeling folks as either friends or enemies? Is there a way for the Church to embody this different kind of life, to swim against the cultural current together, to be a people who model grace and peace and sacrificial love, both in how we engage the world and in how we care for one another?

There is another way, and Paul reminds us of that as he builds upon his call to put off the old self and put on the new self which has been created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24). Here, Paul calls Christians to live in light of the inside-out transformation that the Lord has accomplished in them. Would we be a people whose words and actions demonstrate the hope and joy that is ours in Christ. Would we be a people who are known by grace and peace in a world of conflict and division. We are a grace-shaped people whose lives are now, in Christ, meant to give expression to the power and transforming beauty of the resurrection. May it be so at Summit Church.

**25** *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

**Ephesians 4:25-32**

## Supplemental Passages

### **Zechariah 8**

In Ephesians 4:25, Paul quotes Zechariah 8:16 almost word-for-word from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). While the ESV translation is a bit different, the gist remains the same. This passage describes God's promise to vindicate his people and to one day dwell with them in harmony. Paul, then, picks up on this broader theme in our Ephesians passage by inviting believers to recognize that this call to live a transformed life is based on the Lord's faithful fulfillment of that promise in Christ (and the people of God whom Christ has redeemed).

### **James 3**

There are some who argue that Paul and James disagree about the nature of works and faith when, in truth, they both make the argument that a Spirit-transformed life will, with certainty, bear fruit through good works. Just as Paul, in Ephesians 4:25-32, commands the Ephesian believers to live distinctly, specifically as it relates to their words and wealth, so too does James exhort Christians to see that how they speak to (and about) others must be shaped by the grace of God at work in their lives.

## Suggested Songs

"Only a Holy God" by CityAlight  
"Praise The King" by Corey Voss  
"Great Things" by Phil Wickham  
"O God of Our Salvation" by Matt Boswell

## Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) How do you most frequently experience division and conflict in your everyday life? Where else do you see it in the broader culture?
- 2) Why is the "Therefore" of 4:25 important? What connection is Paul inviting us to make?
- 3) Why do you think Paul engages our words and our wealth in this passage? How does our experience with these two topics/areas of life reflect the state of our hearts?
- 4) Are there passages in Scripture that demonstrate the righteous anger of God? How does God's anger often differ from our anger? Why do you think Paul puts a "time limit" on our anger?
- 5) When considering our words, what are some questions that rise from this passage that we could ask ourselves, or one another, to make certain that we are seeking to build up and extend grace?
- 6) How does Paul define kindness in 4:32 and how might that differ from our culture's understanding of kindness? How might Paul's Christlike kindness be costly for us?