

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 5:1-14 Reading Guide

Overview

It seems impossible. Maybe you read Paul's command, that believers are to be imitators of God, and you want to give him the same incredulous side-eye that you sometimes see in a young child when you ask them to do something new. You want me to slide down *that*? You want me to climb *what*? There's just no way that's going to happen.

It sounds a little crazy, the command to imitate God. *I'm supposed to imitate the God who descended on Sinai and, in so doing, shrouded the mountain with his holy presence so that to even touch the place would mean death? I'm supposed to imitate the God who struck an entire people with plague and hail and darkness and hail in order to free his people from bondage? You mean I'm supposed to imitate the God who confronted Job in a whirlwind, who caused Isaiah to fall down like a dead man, whose glory left its radiance on Moses such that he shined and had to hide his face from the people of Israel?!*

Yes. Be imitators of God. But then we read two things. First, we read that the command to imitate God is a call to live in such a way that we seek to embody the love of Christ. And, second, that this love that we're called to imitate is ours as God's beloved children. This isn't the Lord putting a toddler in the cockpit of a jet and expecting him to know how to fly that plane. It's the Lord helping a stumbling and staggering child learn to walk by placing his hands on ours, by picking us up when we fall, by teaching us to take one step, then two, then slowly letting go with a joyful smile and the raised arms of a proud father as we learn to walk just as he does. And there is grace as we go. There is grace as we stumble along the way toward holiness. There is grace as beloved children. There is grace.

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*"Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

Supplemental Passages

1 Peter 1

As weighty a thing as the call to imitate God is, the concept is not unknown elsewhere in Scripture. We see here, in 1 Peter, a reminder that the transformed identity of believers should lead toward holiness. This challenge to pursue holiness is framed by the reminder that believers are beloved, dependent children who live from, and not for, God's love in their lives.

Isaiah 60

It's likely that the hymn that concludes this section of Ephesians was influenced, at least in part, by Isaiah 60:1-2. The whole of Isaiah 60 speaks of the promised redemption and restoration that the Lord will accomplish for his people, and it beautifully fits with the call throughout Ephesians to walk as those who have been transformed by the grace and power of our faithful God. He has made us a new people, recipients of his mercy.

Suggested Songs

- "King of Kings" by Hillsong Worship
- "Gratitude" by Brandon Lake
- "All I Am" by Phil Wickham
- "Christ Be All Around Me" by All Sons & Daughters
- "There Is Mercy" by CityAlight

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What is your first response to the command to be imitators of God? Why is it important to note that this command is followed by the phrase "as beloved children"?
- 2) Paul contrasts unholy speech with thanksgiving in 5:4. Why is thanksgiving so important in our pursuit of holy living?
- 3) How might you cultivate thanksgiving in your home and/or your life group? Think of specific, practical ways to do so, both personally and in community.
- 4) In 5:8, Paul doesn't simply contrast being "in darkness" with being "in light," but rather he refers to believers as those who "were darkness" but are now "light in the Lord." It's who we are. Why do you think Paul makes this connection with our identity?
- 5) Light transforms and heals. How have you experienced the healing and transformative power of acknowledging your sin to the Lord and others and walking in repentance?
- 6) Are there areas of your life, particularly areas of sin, that you have kept hidden from others? How might the Lord be inviting you to bring those into the light so that you might experience grace and freedom?