

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 6:10-24 Reading Guide

Overview

Many famous movies have those speeches. You know the ones. Someone gets on a horse or stands up in front of a beleaguered gathering of troops and offers some strikingly poignant words — especially when you consider the fact that they always seem to be off-the-cuff — that help rally those troops to heretofore unknown heights of military glory. Paul's conclusion to Ephesians is not precisely that, but that will at least get us in the ballpark as to what Paul is driving at with this final exhortation and conclusion.

We should not be surprised that Paul is speaking of spiritual opposition. He's acknowledged as much along the way, from his statement in chapter 2 that the Enemy is active in this world, to his reminder just verses before (in chapter 5) that prior to trusting Jesus the Ephesians (and all believers, for that matter) were darkness, participants with the Enemy in his opposition to the Lord and his Kingdom. But Paul has been dropping other hints along the way, as well. Specifically, hints about the victory and authority of the risen Christ over all powers and authorities, including those who stand presently arrayed against the Lord and his people (1:19-22). Paul is sending a letter, not offering a speech, and there are many intrinsic links throughout these final verses to what has come before, encouraging us to see that Paul desires the readers/hearers to be prepared while inviting them to mull over everything that he's already shared to be true about God, about their new identity as a community of faith, and the task of being people of light in the midst of darkness.

Believers are to stand as one, holding the spiritual weapons of the Lord, standing together to not simply endure the onslaught of the Enemy and his ilk but to participate in the forward movement of God's Kingdom. We do so knowing that victory is not just foreseen, but finished. Christ is not simply some courageous field general leading us to a stirring win over the forces of darkness, but he is seated above all things, his work completed, inviting us to trust that even when we feel wounded and bruised from the weapons of the world, he has already won the victory and stirs us to fight on in the battle. He has given us everything we need. He is our strength and security. And together with the people of God throughout the ages, we stand.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Ephesians 6:10-24

Supplemental Passages

Isaiah 11; 52:7; 59:17

These passages tell of the Lord (and his Messiah) who dons armor and weaponry that resemble the spiritual armor of God that Paul speaks of Ephesians 6. Based on Paul's previous use of Isaiah in Ephesians, it seems likely that he had passages such as these in mind as he called believers to stand against the Enemy by putting on the whole armor of God.

Matthew 4

Prior to the start of his public ministry, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where, following forty days of fasting, he was tempted by Satan. As we consider, practically, what it means to put on the armor of God so that we might stand against the attacks of the Enemy, Christ's example is a powerful one for us to meditate on together.

Job 1-2

The account of Job offers a startling glimpse at the activity of the Enemy in an attempt to destroy the Lord's people. Job's faithful response, especially in these early chapters, is also instructive as we seek to put on the whole armor of God so that we might stand.

Songs to Consider

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” by Martin Luther
“Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me” by CityAlight
“Desert Song” by Hillsong Worship
“Christ the True and Better” by Keith Getty/Matt Boswell/Matt Papa
“Lion and the Lamb” by Leeland

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Ephesians 6:10 calls us to “be strong **in the Lord and in the strength of his might.**” In light of what Paul will say about putting on the armor of God and standing against the Enemy, why is it important that he begins with this reminder?
- 2) Take a moment to read through the Isaiah passages mentioned above. Where do you see the armor of God from Ephesians in those verses? Why might Paul be pulling this imagery from these passages in Isaiah?
- 3) How does the Enemy attack the Church, collectively and individually? How does he most frequently seek to attack your faith?
- 4) Take some time to consider each element of the armor. How, practically, can we appropriate each piece? For example, what might it look like to put on the belt of truth each day?
- 5) Paul seems to connect prayer with our “putting on” the armor of God. Why is prayer important in our stand against sin and temptation?
- 6) Even though Paul is in prison, he concludes his letter on a hopeful note. Think back over the whole of Ephesians — why might Paul, despite his circumstances, be hopeful? How does the message of Ephesians invite us to hope no matter our present circumstances?