

## 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 4:1-6 Reading Guide

### Overview

It's a powerfully instructive thing to invite young children to help with the process of cleaning up after a meal, aiding with yard work, or helping to scrub a bathtub. In one sense, they might make a bit of a mess in the process of helping, stumbling with a plate of food in their hands or scattering more leaves than they rake, but they are learning and, in a very real way, learning what it means to grow as they help. Of course parents or others are there for support and oversight, for instruction and care, but participation is a crucial way that children grow in their understanding of the part that they play in their family economy.

In some ways that picture helps us understand how Paul is exhorting believers in this passage. He is not saying that, somehow, believers have to prove to God that he didn't make a mistake by adopting them into his family. He isn't arguing that Christians need to demonstrate their worth to God, convincing him that he didn't waste his grace on them for nothing. Rather, following Paul's beautiful prayer and call to praise the Lord that concluded Ephesians 3, he transitions to invite believers to live out the transformation that God, in Christ, has accomplished in them. More specifically, Paul challenges believers to labor to maintain the Spirit-born unity that God has wrought amongst those who confess Jesus as Lord. We don't create the unity — that's something God does in us. But we, stumbling alongside him, learn the language and rhythms of the family of God by participating in them with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

## Supplemental Passages

### **Galatians 5:13-26**

In another portion of a Pauline letter, here we are reminded of the profound significance of selfless love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as the work of the Spirit to bring about whole-life transformation in us. Note that the fruit of the Spirit passage in Galatians 5:22-24 bears similarity with Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4 to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

### **1 John 4:7-21**

The Apostle John speaks of the correspondence between God's love for us and our love for others. There is a clear line that he draws which can help inform our understanding of Paul's encouragement to "walk worthy" in Ephesians 4, as John reminds us that we love our brothers and sisters *because* we have been loved by God in Christ.

## Suggested Songs

"Christ Be All Around Me" by All Sons and Daughters

"Just a Closer Walk with Thee" by Don Wyrzten

"Graves Into Gardens" by Elevation Worship

"At the Table" by Josh Garrels

## Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What words or phrases connect this passage with previous portions of the letter? Is there anything about these verses that seem to indicate that Paul has transitioned toward a new topic?
- 2) How would you define the unity that Paul mentions here? How does what he said earlier, in 2:11-22, help us understand what he means when speaking about this unity?
- 3) Paul specifically mentions humility, gentleness, and patience as central to maintaining unity amongst believers. Why do you think he elevates those terms/qualities?
- 4) What, in your opinion, are some of the most prominent threats to unity in the church (both at Summit and the Body of believers more broadly)?
- 5) How can you, within your life group, seek to live out the exhortation here to pursue unity? How does your group model this kind of unity amongst diversity?