

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 4:7-16 Reading Guide

Overview

Can you imagine telling a child that it's time that they learn how to change a tire, pointing toward a bag filled with various tools, and then walking away with a simple, "now figure it out!" That's absurd. As children grow into maturity, and begin to develop the skills and aptitudes that are a part of growing up, it's crucial that parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors, other trustworthy adults who walk alongside them in life, all take the time to equip and instruct these children so that they know *how* to grow.

That's the image we see in Paul's description of how the Lord equips the church to grow in Christ in this passage. He begins with a reminder that Jesus simultaneously bears power and authority over all things by virtue of his resurrection and ascension, while also equipping the Church with gifts so that they might grow together in unity. The Church grows into ever increasing Christlikeness as believers grow into Christ's likeness together.

God created the Church, and He's a good and perfect Father. He God didn't leave the Church on their own to figure it out. He's gifted the Church with specific functions of leadership that serve to equip EVERY BELIEVER to participate in God's desired growth in Christ. Would we celebrate that faithful, intentional design of the Lord for his Church. Would we recognize the vital role that we ALL play in the growth of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says,

*"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."*

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:7-16

Supplemental Passages

Psalm 68

Christ is victorious and, in that victory, he gives gifts like a victorious king to his people. That's the imagery that Paul borrows from Psalm 68 as he utilizes Psalm 68:18 to demonstrate the victory of the risen Christ. But as we read through the whole of Psalm 68, it's clear that Paul is also drawing on the whole Psalm, which tells of a victorious God's faithful generosity toward his people. That is certainly true as Paul speaks of the victorious Christ's provision for the growth of His Church.

1 Peter 5

While Peter is speaking explicitly about only elders here, embedded in his words are several reminders that correspond with our passage in Ephesians. Here we see the ultimate authority of Christ coupled with the role that leadership is to play in equipping all of the saints for the work of ministry. Additionally, we are reminded that we have a real adversary who opposes Christ and seeks our destruction. We must, then, continue to grow in Christ together.

Suggested Songs

"You Hold It All Together" by Maverick City
"Build My Life" by Housefires
"The King in All His Beauty" by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa
"Let Everything We Do" by Sixteen Cities

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) How does Paul describe Jesus in 4:7-10?
- 2) Paul lists five leadership functions in the Church (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher). As you understand those functions, how might each serve to benefit the growth of the Church?
- 3) How do you see Paul's description of the gift of leadership and the role of every believer in the growth of the Church demonstrated in Summit's Values and Distinctives? (You can follow this [link](#) for a reminder on what those are!)
- 4) How can, and should, the structure and function of your life group reflect this diversity of leadership and mutual participation of everyone for the growth of others?
- 5) What does it mean, practically, to "grow into Christ?" (4:15)
- 6) Why do you think Paul emphasizes love (4:16) as central to how we grow together in Christ?