

**200
DAYS**

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EPHESIANS

A

DEVOTIONAL

A LITTLE ABOUT THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

[THEME] The glory of the church of Jesus Christ.

[KEY VERSES]

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (3:20-21)

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (4:4-6)

[BACKGROUND]

[AUTHOR] The author identifies himself as Paul (1:1).

[PURPOSE OF THE BOOK] To strengthen the believers in Ephesus in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the church, the body of Christ.

[WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN] Approximately A.D. 60, from Rome, during Paul's imprisonment there.

[TO WHOM IT WAS WRITTEN] The church at Ephesus, and all believers everywhere.

[HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS] Ephesians is a letter about the church - the body of Christ. The church is described here as...

- A. A body (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; 4:16).
 - B. A building (Ephesians 2:19-22).
 - C. A bride (Ephesians 5:25-27; 5:32).
1. Paul first went to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila and reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue. (Acts 18:19)
 2. On his second trip he taught John's disciples the correct Gospel. (Acts 19:1-7)
 3. Apollos also preached in Ephesus. (Acts 18:24-26)
 4. Paul preached for three months in the synagogue (Acts 19:8)
 5. Paul taught in the School of Tyrannus for two years (Acts 19:9-10)
 6. Alexander the Silversmith opposed Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:33)
 7. The letters to Ephesus, 1 Timothy and Revelation makes at least three letters written to this church.

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[OUTLINE]

1. Greetings (1:1-2)
2. The Divine Purpose: The Glory and Headship of Christ (1:3-14)
3. Prayer that Christians May Realize God's Purpose (1:15-23)
4. Steps Toward the Fulfillment of God's Purpose (2-3)
 - a. Salvation of Individuals by Grace (2:1-10)
 - b. Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through the Cross (2:11-18)
 - c. Uniting of Jew and Gentile in One Household (2:19-22)
 - d. Revelation of God's Wisdom through the Church (3:1-13)
 - e. Prayer for Deeper Experience of God's Fullness (3:14-21)
5. Practical Ways to Fulfill God's Purpose in the Church (4:1-6:20)
 - a. Unity (4:1-6)
 - b. Maturity (4:7-16)
 - c. Renewal of Personal Life (4:17-5:20)
 - d. Deference in Personal Relationships (5:21-6:9)
 - i. Principle (5:21)
 - ii. Husbands and Wives (5:22-33)
 - iii. Children and Parents (6:1-4)
 - iv. Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)
 - e. Strength in the Spiritual Conflict (6:10-20)
6. Conclusion, Final Greetings and Benediction (6:21-24)

[HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL]

1. Each time you sit down to meet with the living God remind yourself that you are in the Presence of God. Find a place away from distractions to do your devotional. Turn off anything that might distract your time with God.
2. Open with Prayer and thank the Lord for all He has done and for who He is.
3. Ask for Guidance from the Holy Spirit to direct your time in the Word.
4. Read the passage listed in the devotional.
5. Take the time and interpret what the passage is saying. Read the passages surrounding the section if need to understand the context of the verse.
6. Read the devotional and take the time to look up any Scriptures that might be listed.
7. Apply what you have read. Ask yourself, how will God's Word change my life today?
8. Pray that God would give you the discipline to apply what you have learned today to your life.
9. Throughout the day look up the additional scriptures listed and study them when you have time. Don't just spend a few minutes in the morning with God but allow time throughout your day to be in the Word.

[DAY 1] | *Written by: Keith Seymour junior high coordinator*

BECOME WHO YOU ALREADY ARE

[EPHESIANS 1:1-10]

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—**to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

CAN I LET YOU IN ON A SECRET?... COME IN A

little closer... Are you ready? Here goes: Often times, I find myself asking God for things I *already* have. Before you dismiss me as a crazy man, hear me out. I'll give you an example. Sometimes I pray for God to make me holy like Him. I pray for Him to give me the ability to overcome whatever struggle I'm dealing with at the time in hopes that He will magically dump some power on me to help out.

Can I tell you another secret that I bet you didn't know? Are you ready? Here goes: *You are a Saint!* I find it refreshing that Paul starts his letter to the church members in the city of Ephesus by addressing them as saints. If you're anything like me, you might not always "feel" like a saint but rest assured that our true identity is not dependent on how we feel at any given time but rather what God's Word proclaims! Just as he starts off the letter calling us saints, Paul goes on to tell us that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ and that He has chosen us to be holy and blameless in His sight before He even created the world! It's not a matter of us praying to be Holy (like I often do), it's understanding who we *already are* in Christ. Don't believe it? Paul even says in Philippians 3:16 that we need "*to live up to what we've already attained.*" I'm sure God sees me asking to be holy is as useful as me praying for Him to give me an arm (obviously, I have two already). After

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studying this passage, I couldn't be more wrong in how I approach my struggles. We actually have every spiritual blessing in Him and stand holy and blameless in His sight through the work that Jesus did on the cross. It's not a matter of praying for God to help us to not sin. It's realizing that when we sin, we are acting contrary to who we are!

There was once a famous artist named Paul Gustave Dore who lost his passport while traveling in Europe. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to one of the guards. Giving his name to the official, Dore hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass. The guard, however, didn't buy his story since many people attempted to cross the border by claiming to be people they weren't. Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. "All right," said the official, "we'll give you a test, and if you pass it we'll allow you to go through." Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch several people standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was definitely who he claimed to be. His work confirmed his word!

Are your actions matching who you already are in Christ the same way Dore's work matched his word? Do you really live like you are holy and blameless in God's sight because of the work of Christ? As a result of understanding your identity in Him, God desires for you to become who you already are.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Philippians 3:16, 2 Peter 1:3-4, Ephesians 2]

God, as I continue this study in Ephesians, reveal to me more and more my identity in You. I pray that I will live up to what You've already given me through Your son, Jesus Christ and become who You've made me to be. Give me Your view of sin and help me to live like I am truly holy and blameless in Your sight. I pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

PROOF OF PURCHASE

[EPHESIANS 1: 11-14]

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.***

I'VE NEVER OWNED ANY CATTLE...

I've never lived on a farm, or known any cowboys. I didn't even play Cowboys and Indians when I was a kid. However, I do know that there has always been a need, even in the Roman Empire, for farmers to identify their livestock. What happens when cows are allowed to roam free in the countryside? What if they wander off or if a neighbor's cows end up mixed with another owner's? How can you tell that that's your cow? Well, cowboys would rope the cow, tie its legs together, and apply a brand on its hide. While it may sound inhumane to you, it is a common way for farmers to mark or identify their cattle as their own. In fact, the U.S. government recognizes a brand as authenticity of ownership.

If you've accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, then the moment you believed, you were branded by the Holy Spirit. You were "*marked in [Christ] with a seal.*" There is proof of your conversion, proof of the Holy Spirit taking up residence inside of you because He leaves His mark. This mark, invisible to us, but evident in the way we live our lives for the Lord, shows that we are "*included in Christ,*" that we are part of the Body of Christ. This brand does not fade away, but shows that we belong to Him eternally. Romans 8 says clearly that NOTHING can separate you from the love of God: "*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing...*"

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What does being branded as Christ's own mean for you? Well, the Scripture says that the seal is also a "*deposit guaranteeing out inheritance!*" So, not only does being branded by the Holy Spirit show who you belong to- the loving Creator of the Universe, the One who gave His life for you- but it also guarantees that you will get all the wonderful things promised to you as a Child of God. This inheritance far exceeds anything we can even glimpse here on earth, blessings beyond measure. And this inheritance, as 1 Peter 1 tells us, is imperishable, doesn't fade away, and is reserved in Heaven for you.

Don't take this important truth for granted. When you accept Christ, you are branded as His own, a proof of purchase that Christ bought your freedom with His blood. Have you truly understood this truth? That if you have made the decision to follow Jesus, that there is no turning back? No losing your salvation? Focus today on the promise He has made to you. Focus on the inheritance that you have been given.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 Timothy 2:19, Romans 8:9-16, Matthew 19:29, Hebrews 9:15-17, 1 Peter 1:3-5, Romans 8:35-39]

Father, thank You so much for loving us. Even when we forget how holy and worthy You are, how You have given us an inheritance as Your children, You choose to continue to call us Your own. Thank You for the precious blood of Jesus, who saves. God, help me be tuned in to the fact that the Holy Spirit is living in me, and that He has left His mark on me- calling me Your Own. Help me live a life that shows others that invisible mark- a life that is pleasing to You, a life that is an act of worship. Lord, I thank You that You have promised us eternity, and that the promise does not fade away. Help us look toward that inheritance with joy, gratitude, and expectation- that we may shine You here on earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

UNDER HIS FEET

[Ephesians 1:15-23]

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.***

IF YOU WERE TAKING A TOUR OF A BRITISH

Museum one of the things that you could see is a wall statue of an Assyrian King placing his foot on the neck of a bowing opponent. The wall statue is displaying a scene that was common in the ancient times. Whenever a king conquered another kingdom the defeated king would allow the conquering king to place his foot on his neck. This was a sign and a symbol to show that the conquering king has full authority and dominion over his kingdom. They were now “under his feet”.

While we may have a powerful president who is in authority over our country, he is not in authority over the world. In fact, the only person who has been given that title is the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 20-21 we see that God placed him at his right hand and is “*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given,*” To even further symbolize the authority that Christ has verse 22 says that “*God placed all things under his feet*”. The Lord Jesus is superior to every ruler or authority, now and forever.

Here’s the thing though, while it is true that Christ is the authority over the universe and everything is “*under his feet*”, Christ has chosen not to exercise his complete authority....yet. Up to this point in history Christ has not made everyone bow before Him and worship and serve Him

alone. This is why men and women today still deny and resist God. However, rest assured the Bible talks about a day when He will no longer leave it up to man to decide if they are going to submit to God. Philippians 2:9-11 says; *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*. What a site that will be!

I can't imagine how difficult it would have been for king who was just conquered to bow before the king who just defeated him and allow him to place his foot on his neck. That shows complete submission. That word submission basically means to yield or surrender yourself to the will or authority of another. You know, if we truly recognize Christ as the ultimate authority our life then we should be daily bowing our knee, and allowing Him to place his foot on our neck. In doing so we are saying “God I recognize you as my authority and as my authority I willingly submit my will, my desires, to do your will, your desires” Hard prayer and attitude to have? Yes. Will my Christian walk grow tremendously if I do this? You better believe it. So what in your life are you having trouble submitting and giving over to the Lord? Would you be willing to submit that area of your life over to the Lord today?

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Hebrews 2:8, Colossians 1:15-20, Philippians 2:1-11, Romans 12:1-2, Isaiah 55:8-9]

Lord Jesus I want to recognize today that You are in complete authority over all things. You are in control of every star, ever animal, every sea creature, and every human. Lord I want to willingly submit my desires, and my will to You. I submit them over to You so that I can accomplish Your desires and Your will. I ask Lord, that You would grow my understanding and knowledge of the things You desire for me in my life. Help me to do them. Help me to submit to You in every aspect of my life. I'm thankful Lord that You are in complete control and I praise you for that! In Jesus' name- AMEN.

SALVATION BY FAITH

[Ephesians 2:1-10]

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD PEOPLE

say, “I’m going to heaven because I’m a good person and I do nice things - I try not to swear, I donate money to the poor, and I do volunteer work.” In the secular world, there is a concept that humans can achieve anything on their own, if they put their minds to it. The world celebrates “rags to riches” stories and individuals who overcome hardships as wonderful testaments of human spirit, ability, and independence.

While these stories can be inspirational and even motivational, Paul is very clear in his letter to the Ephesians that we are saved from eternal damnation only by grace through faith alone. In Genesis, Abraham was considered just because he believed in God. Furthermore, in Hebrews it says it’s impossible to please God unless we first believe that He exists.

Verse 2:9 tells us that actions and deeds do not get us into heaven. We can help every elderly lady cross the street and donate all of our money to charities, but God perfectly designed salvation so that no man can boast about what he has done on this earth. It’s impossible to earn our salvation no matter how hard we work. If that were possible then Jesus’

death on the cross was all in vain. This shows us that it is a gift of God not from ourselves so that truly no one can boast.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:13: *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

Paul makes it very clear that our source of strength comes from God, not ourselves! He is the one in charge of this universe and He is the One that makes things possible, including your salvation. Jesus says in Mark 10:27: *“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”* So it is not about us and what we can do for ourselves.

But then, are we to not care about doing good deeds and living a godly obedient life? Absolutely not! Paul goes on to tell us in verse 10 that we were created by God to do just that – good works. God has already prepared us for this since we were made by His workmanship. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit causes a change within us so that we desire to do good. James explicitly tells us in the book of James that faith without works is dead.

Therefore, it is important that we do not buy into the philosophies of this world that say we will get into heaven if we are good people. Remember, God wants the glory and He deserves the glory, so let’s not boast in ourselves, but glorify God in all we do!

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: James 4:17, Romans 3:28]

Father God, we give You all the glory and praise in this world. Thank You for the wonderful gift of eternal life by sending Your son to die on the cross for my sins. I know that because of this loving, sacrificial act, I can get into heaven through grace and faith alone. Please help me to transform my life and to live it out in the godly way that You have prepared for me. Help me to do good works, but not to rely on them for eternal life as that only comes from You. Amen.

FINALLY PEACE TOGETHER!

[Ephesians 2:11-22]

*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. **He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

THE PROBLEM WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

church was that they had built in prejudices and understanding of the Old Testament. The first century church was almost entirely Jewish. It seemed difficult to impossible for a non Jew to get to heaven. They thought the Gospel was only for the Jew. However, God stepped in and changed everything. God instead offered salvation to all people as we read in Acts 11.

This is some of what the Church at Ephesus was dealing with. God has already told the mostly Jewish apostles or evangelist that this wrong perception had to change. Look at verses 19-22 specifically and see how this applies to us directly. We are divided over other dumb things. We don't "like" people because they are not our "type." Sometimes we don't like folks because they were mean to us one time, or many times. However Paul elevates our position in Christ to "*fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household...*" He ruins any reason for division when he says that we are all members of God's house. It's pretty hard to get around that kind of talk, right? Notice in verse 20

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“with Christ Himself as the Chief Cornerstone...” Picture our house being built on Christ Jesus himself. All of us inside depending – trusting our foundation. We wouldn’t go out and depend on a parachute instead that would be stupid. We want to depend together on Christ our cornerstone.

See this desire to be unified together in the terms used in verses 21-22 *“in him... joined together”, “in him... built together..”* From another example Paul says we should picture ourselves together with Christ, joined to Christians and Christ, built with Christians and Christ Himself- and maybe most exciting we are *“in him.”* In Christ Jesus the one who loved us died for us and daily walks with us – wants us to be *“In him”*. Today as you walk out of your house and head to school think of being *“in Him”*, with Christ as the main cornerstone to your life, depending completely on Him as your support. Expand your thoughts to imagine other believers together – built – joined with you into God’s house! If there are believers you see from church imagine them as your fellow citizens here in a very foreign country where we don’t and never will belong. Rise up to walk as a person *“in Him”* would walk. God is holding you – a strong foundation that will not fail you.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 Corinthians 12, Hebrews 10]

Lord, please help me to see You as my cornerstone I depend on. Help me to reach out to my brothers and sisters who are members of the same household. Help me to see my life as “in you” – surrounded by your security and love and enjoying all of this with my fellow strangers here in a strange land. Amen.

EVERYONE LOVES A SECRET

[Ephesians 3:1-6]

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

MYSTERIES OR SECRETS OFTEN EVOKE GREAT

intrigue in our minds. Once we find that someone knows something that we don't, or that something is hidden from us, we instantly desire to know what it is. The TV show "Lost" continuously fascinates me. It is filled with mystery and I don't always know why things are happening, but eventually the writers reveal parts of the mystery and I see what the show is all about.

In chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul explains a mystery that had previously been hidden. God exposes the mystery through revelation in the New Testament, that the Jews and Gentiles would be unified and made one in Christ.

In verse 1 of chapter 3 Paul is going to pray that believers in Christ would understand and apply this truth of the unity in the body of Christ to their lives. When we get to verse 2, Paul stops and decides to explain this mystery again, to make sure that everyone understands this truth clearly before he goes on to pray that they would apply it to their lives. Chapter 3 verses 2-13 become a parenthesis that Paul picks up again at Chapter 3 verse 14. Paul is recapping and explaining the truth of the mystery he has already talked about in the previous chapters in hopes that the church would fully understand the great truth of our unity. In essence, he is saying that we must mentally understand the reality of truth before it can have any impact upon our lives. This is consistently true in our lives as Christians. We must understand what the Bible says about something before we can try and apply it to our lives, or put it

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into practice and allow it to impact us.

The mystery of unity was the very reason for which Paul was imprisoned. This mystery was something that God had chosen to reveal at exactly this point in history. Paul explains that in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are one. The New Testament continually stresses that there should be unity within the church of Jesus Christ. The church is made of all kinds of people, young and old, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, and so on. The point is, though, that although we as believers may seem so different from one another, we are, in reality, all ONE IN CHRIST. We are unified primarily in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As believers we all have the common experience of salvation and forgiveness by placing our faith in Jesus Christ's work on the cross.

Striving for unity in the church should be our goal. This does not just involve avoiding causing disruptions, fights, or arguments with other believers, but it is primarily an active process. We are to seek to bring about unity. God has given all believers spiritual gifts in order to encourage and create greater unity. We should be looking for opportunities to serve one another and look to the interests of others and not ourselves (Philippians 2:3-5).

Paul tells us in verse 2 that he himself is an administrator or steward of God's grace. God has also gifted each of us so that we may administer God's grace and love to others (1 Peter 4:10). By seeking out ways in which we can encourage, teach, love, correct, and pray for others we will bring about a closer unity among believers.

[FOR FUTURE STUDY: Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 3:11]

Lord Jesus, we stand in awe of Your wisdom and understanding. We are comforted that You have a plan for all of history and are thankful that we are privileged to be a part of the mystery of the church that has now been revealed. Thank You for making us one in Jesus Christ and unifying us in you Lord. I pray that as believers in Christ we would seek to be active in serving others around us with the gifts You have given us in order to bring about a greater unity. May our love for one another and unity be a testimony to an unbelieving world. Amen.

MYSTERY MEMBERSHIP PLUS BENEFITS

[Ephesians 3:7-13]

*I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.** I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

SO PRECEDING THIS PASSAGE, PAUL LAYS OUT

what this mystery is that was revealed to him through God's grace: that believing Jews and Gentiles are united as equals into one body, the church, of which Jesus Christ is the head. Paul points out in verse 9 that before time began this mystery was kept hidden in God. That means that no man, no angel, no created being on earth or in the spiritual realm, knew of this mystery until God chose to reveal it at this specific moment in the existence of time. Paul explains in verse 10 what God's intent was, what His purpose was in revealing the mystery: to show the holy angels in heaven His great wisdom and they praise Him for it.

Doesn't that just blow your mind? It's incredible to know that (1) one of the greatest mysteries in all eternity, which God chose to reveal at this particular moment in history, includes us; and that (2) the holy angels in heaven are learning the wisdom of God through observing us, the church. According to 1 Peter 1:12, the angels long to look down into our lives to see how God's wonderful plan of salvation is carried out.

Does our mystery membership come with benefits? Absolutely! Paul explains in verse 12 that through our faith in Jesus Christ we have free, unlimited, unrestricted, undisputed access to God. Imagine what it's like being on the V.I.P. list and having backstage passes at a larger-than-life rock concert. Not only do you get to share in all of the amazing privileges and luxuries that come with being on the V.I.P. list, but you

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also get to meet the band up close and personal! In a similar but infinitely greater way, we the church are on God's V.I.P. list, which means we get to enjoy the glorious and unsearchable riches of Christ; and we are given unlimited passes to enter into His presence.

So how exactly do we approach the Living God? We pray. In prayer we may boldly enter into His presence at any time with full confidence, without fear and without doubt, because we know that in Christ we are righteous before God. When we come to Him, He welcomes us. When we pray to Him, He hears us. When we present our requests to Him, He gives us a wise and loving answer; and His peace guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

It is an amazing privilege to approach God with freedom and confidence. We're talking about God, the Almighty Creator who spoke the world into existence. He allows us to approach Him directly and without hesitation. Now that's personal, isn't it? Are you going to stay out in the crowd and look at God from a distance, or are you going to take advantage of the unlimited passes He's given you in Christ to come into His presence and enjoy fellowship with Him?

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Ephesians 2:14-18, Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22]

Father, thank You for the marvelous privilege You have given me in Your son Jesus Christ: that I may approach You with freedom and confidence and speak plainly to You in prayer. Thank You for loving me and for giving me the opportunity to know You. Keep me humble in heart and draw me near to You so that I may pray in the Spirit on all occasions. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

TO BIG TO FAIL

[Ephesians 3:14-21]

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

FREDDIE MAC WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST

mortgage lending corporations in America. In fact, Freddie has helped put 34 million families in homes over the past ten years. They had \$794 billion in assets – more than Microsoft, Ford, McDonalds, Coca Cola, and Wal-Mart combined. When the economy started to falter, many subscribed to a now infamous quote: “Freddie Mac is too big to fail.” Then things fell apart. With hundreds of thousands of homes in foreclosure, the government had to step in and buy out Freddie Mac. Freddie was not too big to fail.

The apostle Paul did know of something that is too big to fail, and he wanted the Ephesians to be absolutely sure of it. That is his prayer for them in these verses. He wanted them to realize just how great, how powerful, our God is. Have you noticed that God’s incomparable attributes have been a theme of the book of Ephesians? Look back at verse 1:19, which talks of God’s “*incomparably great power for us who believe*” and His “*mighty strength*”. Then again in verse 2:4 mentions God’s “*great love*” for us, and says that He is “*rich in mercy*”. And again, verse 3:8 states that Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles “*the unsearchable riches of Christ.*” Paul had a big message for the Ephesians, and it is just as important for us to get that message 2,000 years later. In those 2,000 years, God has not yet failed, and He never will.

So how big is your God? Sure, you know that God is everywhere, all-knowing, and all-powerful. But do you live your life like you believe that?

People who live like they believe in Paul's all-powerful God are different in three ways. First, their God is too big to fail. There is no problem in life that God cannot conquer – not your upcoming test, or your situation with your parents, or your social dramas, or your deep dark sins that no one else knows about. Do you live your life knowing that God cares and can conquer those problems?

Second, if your God is as big as Paul's, you will live with Christ first in everything. When someone lives their life believing in an awesome God it is obvious to everyone around them. That person radiates God's love to everyone they talk with. Jesus will come up in a casual conversation. Those around that person know that they are more than just a good, moral person, that person is a *Christian*.

Finally, those who truly believe in a God that is too big to fail take big risks for God. Another missionary, William Carey once said, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God." If you never attempt anything beyond the ordinary, it is not possible to see the power of God.

Take a moment to evaluate your life. Do you trust that God can handle your problems, large and small? Do those around you see that you are totally committed to God? Do you attempt seemingly impossible tasks, and see God working through your actions? If not, you may want to think about the size of your God.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Matthew 22: 37-39, Romans 16:15, 2 Corinthians 9:8, 1 John 4: 9-12]

Father, thank You for being bigger than anything that we can possibly imagine. We cannot comprehend the fullness of Your love for us. Thanks for loving me that much. I pray that You will expand my views of You so that I will not limit how big You are. God grant me a glimpse of understanding of how deeply you care for me so that I may show the same devotion back to You. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY

[Ephesians 4:1-8]

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."*

IN COLLEGE, I LIVED WITH THE SAME THREE

girls all four years of school. We became a family. God blessed me so much to give me three college roommates who loved the Lord. Two of the girls I connected with right away. And then there was Melissa. She and I did not click at all. She was very competitive with me and at times I found her to be abrasive when she got frustrated. I would get irritated with her and the tension and stress we were creating was tearing apart the house.

While Paul was struggling in prison, he wrote to the church in Ephesus to encourage them as a body of believers. He starts off in verse one by reminding them that they are Christ's children, and with this awesome privilege comes a responsibility to live a life that brings glory to God. How do we go about doing that with one another in the church? Verse two and three tells us to make every effort to be humble, gentle, patient, understanding, forgiving and peaceful towards one other. Notice Paul did **not** say, "Oh when it's convenient or if the opportunity pops up, try to be nice and care about another person." NO... he said make an effort. Here's a fact: we are imperfect, sinful people, trying to love our brother/sister in Christ who is also imperfect and sinful. I totally understand that unity is not easy. We don't always see eye to eye. Sometimes a person's personality really annoys you. But instead of focusing on that person's weakness or faults, find a way to connect with them. They struggle the same way in school, at home, and on the field as you do. Make the effort to encourage one another to stand firm in their faith (1 Corinthians 15:58). Remind your brother/sister in Christ to

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keep their eyes fixed upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), to resist temptation, to trust the Lord in their life and to be a light in a world of darkness (Matthew 6:14). Remember, we are all united by one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God! Who in the Rock ministry can you reach out to and encourage? If you have a conflict with someone, will you make every effort to resolve it in humility and love?

Back to the college story: Melissa and I had to make an **effort** to resolve our conflict with one another. We agreed to meet at a local coffee shop and talk through our frustrations and mis-understandings. That night, we began to understand and love one another as we became real about our weaknesses and what was going on in our lives. From then on, we made every effort to be humble with one another, to love each other in spite of our weaknesses, and pray with one another. Today, I praise the Lord above for His work in our lives and for the joy of her friendship.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Philippians 2:1-11, Romans 12:8-16]

Heavenly Father, our King of Kings and our Lord of Lords. Father we praise Your holy name and thank You for Your grace and faithfulness towards us. Thank You Father for Your Son, Jesus Christ, and His death on the cross for our sins. Thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide and help us while we are here on the earth. Help us of Lord, to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than ourselves. Help us to make every effort to love one another in the church and encourage one another to stand firm in our faith. Change our hearts to be more humble, gentle and patient with each other. And we pray this through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

TRUTH IN LOVE

[Ephesians 4:9-16]

*(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

HOW DO I REALLY LOOK? THIS IS A QUESTION,

when asked by a woman, that no guy ever really knows how to answer. On one hand, he should always complement the woman and build her up, but on the other hand, he simply may not like what she chose to wear. What is a guy to do?

Truth is something that must be handled gently. Truth can be painful, injuring everyone in its path, or it can be fearful, so worried about saying something hurtful that nothing is ever really said. Speaking truth in love is totally different than just saying the right thing.

The key in this passage is speaking the truth IN LOVE. The love spoken of here is agape – that uniquely self-sacrificing love shown to us by God in Christ Jesus. William Barclay tells us that all Greek words for love (other than agape) have to do with the heart and emotions. Those kinds of love are spontaneous, whether it is falling into romantic love or the familial love of blood relations. In contrast, agape has to do with the mind and will. Barclay directs us to Matthew 5: 43-48 to better understand this love. There Jesus tells us to love our enemies. Why? In order that we should be like God who, "no matter what a man is like, God seeks nothing but his highest good". As God's children, we seek

others' good, no matter how much we might be insulted, hurt or abused by them.

Abraham Lincoln was accused of treating his opponents with too much courtesy and kindness. When it was pointed out that his whole duty was to destroy them, he answered, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" Speaking the truth in agape means never seeking revenge or unnecessarily hurting others. It means speaking without bitterness or hate and seeking only their best.

Speaking the truth means bringing God's word into other people's lives. Jesus did that by becoming human and living with us (John 1: 14). In a similar way, we must "embody" God's word if it is to have any real relevance to our brothers and sisters. First we become truth and then we convey it. In fact, the word "speaking" is not in the text. Literally, as John Stott puts it, it is "truthing in love" and includes maintaining, living and doing the truth.

As Jesus said, the truth makes us free, and this is no less true when we speak it to each other. We must encourage, rebuke, exhort, and correct each other, but always in love. Christians who are told only what they want to hear or what makes them feel good, will never grow up spiritually. Be thankful for any friend whom you can count on to tell you like it is, without fear of a broken relationship. In fact, because there is one body and one Spirit (4: 4), we should be able to freely speak and hear the truth without fearing broken relationships.

Ask yourself, am I speaking love to others when I am at school? When I am at home? You may find more opportunities to share Christ's love with others than you first thought.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21, Philippians 3:8-12, Colossians 1:9-10, 1 John 2:12-14]

Lord Jesus, I long to be like you in every way. May I become an instrument of Your truth and love in the lives of those around me so that together we can grow up in You. Thank you for the opportunity to minister to everyone around me in how I speak and show love. May You find me faithful in how I represent You. It's in Christ's name that I come before You and pray. Amen.

I LIKE THESE NEW CLOTHES

[Ephesians 4:17-24]

*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

WHEN I WAS WITH MY FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS

a few months ago, I was out with my parents and they suggested that I should get a new pair of jeans. How often are we so comfortable in things that are old, we forget about what is new? As I looked at my old jeans and didn't see anything wrong with them, but on closer examination I noticed they were torn and worn out. And so it is with our old life prior to a new found relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ. Upon further look at our lives before believing in Christ were torn and broken.

In the first part of these verses from Ephesians 4:17-19, the apostle Paul writes *"...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do..."* In other words, put off your sinful past and all the way you were when you had *"...separated from the life of God"*. The verse goes on to describe our former life with words such as *'ignorance', 'hardening', 'indulgence',* and *'impurity'*. Those attributes must be put aside or buried as read in Romans 6:4, *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*

But, we are no longer *'Gentile sinners'*, as we read in 4:20-21 when we now live according to the riches and newness of life. Our old lives may have seemed just fine for a while but we lacked all self control. Now that Christ has shown us the truth we realize that we no longer have to

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live as we were apart from God. As you and I walk away from the old self, let us allow our Father to clothe us in righteousness. For verses 22 and 23 are asking us to “...put off our old self,” and “...put on the new self...” But one may ask, how does this happen? Or, how is this accomplished?

Part of the answer lies in guarding our hearts and minds and renewing them each day in God’s Word. There is a war going against this renewing of the mind and it’s not what you might think. Look at what God’s Word says in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.”*

Just like men and women prepare for battle in our military, we as Christ followers must be ready to do battle every day putting off those evil desires daily. Prayer, Biblical fellowship, time in God’s Word will help lead us to victory by continuing to put aside those old clothes for the new ones God lavishes us with. Also, by reminding ourselves of this battle that continues each day, we are better equipped to handle each attack. Know that the enemy will come, but to his surprise, we are we are clothed in righteousness!

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Galatians 2:20, Romans 6:6, Isaiah 61:9-11, Colossians 3:8-10, 2 Corinthians 5:16-17]

Father God, I thank You continually for the weapons of truth You give Your saint whom You have called out of darkness. May each day be filled to blessings of knowing You through Your Word and through each other. May I daily put off my old ways to honor You and be set apart for you Kingdom purposes. Your grace astounds me as I realize that only You are able to change my mind to thoughts of You and Your amazing love for me. Your truth brings renewal and peace in my heart. Help me Lord to be set apart from the world and living each day as a living sacrifice to You. Amen.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

[Ephesians 4:25-32]

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

EVERY DAY WE ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY

to make a difference in someone's life. Every time we open our mouth to speak, we send forth words which have an effect on those around us. Our words, which come *"out of the overflow of the heart"* (Matthew 12:34), will either cause a positive or negative reaction - our words are rarely neutral.

Knowing the power of our words ought to cause us to use them with great care. Ephesians 4:29 says *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*

This means that every time we speak, we have the opportunity to encourage and minister. With just a few moments of our time and very little effort, we have the opportunity to brighten someone's day, to ease their burden, and possibly draw them closer to God. This precious opportunity must not be taken lightly; *"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken"* (Matthew 12:36).

Though our careless words are eternally forgiven, they are also a reflection of our heart. If we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our heart ought to be filled with devotion, and our words should be filtered through a desire to bring Him glory and honor. I'm afraid we will

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one day be deeply ashamed to see how much damage our words have caused.

We seldom realize how harmful and discouraging our words can be: *"Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I was only joking!'"* (Proverbs 26:18-19). Sarcastic and joking words are *"deadly arrows"* which are never useful for *"building others up."* Over time, this mode of communication is sure to destroy a relationship.

Before we speak, we must carefully listen. What is the real question? What are the real needs? *"He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame"* (Proverbs 18:13). We may only be given the opportunity to speak a few words, but we can make every effort to use our words wisely; *"The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil"* (Proverbs 15:28).

Our words are a powerful gift. Let's honor our Heavenly Father by effectively using this gift to encourage. Let's speak so those who listen may benefit and be built up in their faith. Let's continually encourage one another to draw closer to our Heavenly Father and never squander the opportunity of our words.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Psalm 141: 3, Zechariah 8: 14-17, Colossians 3:8, James 3:6-8]

Father, may You help me to use my words to encourage those around me. May my speech be seasoned with salt and love so that I may be a representative of Your Truth. May our love for one another be evident in our speech and actions and may we represent just a portion of how much you love us. In Christ's name, Amen.

WHO'S LIFE ARE YOU IMITATING?

[Ephesians 5: 1-7]

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

AS A YOUNG GIRL, I WAS QUITE THE IMITATOR -

from haircuts to fashion, from attitudes to actions – I was watching the world around me and drinking in its' influences. While some of the things I would imitate were beneficial, clearly others were leading me down a path where I was looking to be accepted by the world. In today's culture, we are bombarded with images and people that the world thinks we should emulate but the problem is that the world is modeling behavior and attitudes that are far from the role model we SHOULD be imitating – Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we continue our study of Ephesians, let's look at a passage today that gives us guidance and instruction on how we are to live our lives and who we are to be imitating. Paul, as he writes to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 5:1 spells it out with great clarity, *"Therefore, be imitators of God..."* Without confusion, Paul tells us as believers that we are to be imitators of God, because we are His dearly loved children, by living in obedience to Him and reflecting Him in our thoughts and actions.

According to the dictionary, an imitator is someone who follows another like a pattern, model or example. There are many things and people that we imitate in this world but the Bible is clear, we are to imitate God and Him alone. Under close examination of Christ's example throughout Scripture, it begs us to take a hard look at our own lives to see if we are truly living a life that imitates God.

Keep going...there's more. Look back and read verse 2. Jesus Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice on the cross that so that we could know life through Him – demonstrating the most incredible act of love. Living a life of obedience to God should be our response of love because of what Jesus Christ did for us and in turn, we ought to love others with the love God has for us. Are you living a life of love? Would others see that demonstrated in your actions?

God has given us a detailed blueprint in His Word of the things that should be absent in our lives if we are truly imitating Him. Continuing on in the passage, verses 3-7 outline the very things that we are to rid our lives of including greed, sexual immorality, obscenity, foolish talk – none of those things have a place in the life that is truly looking to imitate God. We are a reflection of God to the world around us, a living example of Christ in a public forum, and we must be set apart for Him in all things. I Peter 1:15-16 says, *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy because I am holy.’”*

We are to be imitators of God, and Him alone and yet Satan would love for us to get distracted by imitating the things of the world. In order to be imitators of God, we need to know the one we are imitating. The only way to truly know God and His character is to spend time with Him – through filling your mind with His Word and coming before Him in prayer.

What do you need to do today to be an imitator of God? When your friends and family look at you, do they see someone seeking to imitate God or someone looking to imitate the things of this world? My friend, it is never too late to change behaviors, attitudes and habits that put off your old self and clothe yourself with Christ so that you are a reflection of Him.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: I Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 2: 1-5]

Father God, thank You for the incredible gift of salvation and for being the perfect example for me. My hearts desire is to imitate You and only You without being swayed by the deception this world throws at me. You know my challenges, my heartaches and the desires of my heart - there is no one in the world I would rather imitate than You. Create in me a desire to live a life of obedience and love so that my life is a fragrant offering to You. Amen.

[DAY 14] | *Written by: DJ Corkey the rock worship leader*

INVISIBLE

[Ephesians 5: 8-14]

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. **Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.** For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

“DARKNESS” – THE ABSENCE OR DEFICIENCY OF

light; obscurity, concealment; the lack of knowledge or enlightenment; lack of sight; blindness; a scary word. Imagine a life without sight and completely devoid of light. I dare say I would choose the gift of sight over the gift of hearing, even in my deep love and passion for music. However, my gift of sight would be useless if not for light. Light is what gives the eye its ability to see. Light is to the eye what oxygen is to fire; fuel. Light is, in essence, revelation; ever revealing what darkness endeavors to make invisible. The purpose of this short devotional is to remind you that God created you to be a VISIBLE Christian.

The U.S. military is notorious for running operations under cover of darkness. Because of the use of night vision and infrared optics they are able to see and not be seen. Special Forces groups use darkness so effectively they are in a sense “invisible” to their third world enemies thus creating an unrivaled tactical advantage. My good friend Matt is a Special Forces Army Ranger and has completed three tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. He said this, “Darkness is our number one deadliest weapon”. When I ask people if they could pick any one super hero power to possess, one of the top answers is “invisibility”. I think the weirdest answer I’ve heard for that question is “to be completely hairless all the time”, but I’ll save that story for the next devotion series. Anyway, back to invisibility. Here is my blunt application to these thoughts; many of you are living an invisible Christian life, immersing yourselves in darkness, surrounding yourselves with blind fools

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(Proverbs 13:20, 2 Peter 3:17), hiding your secrets in the shadows (Romans 2:16), and in a very real sense have become an effective weapon against God (Romans 2:17-24). The scary part is you may be lying to yourself and not realize this applies to you. The sad part is you are comfortable, and you have befriended this darkness that makes you “invisible”.

Understand this; your soul is not the U.S. military. You were created to thrive in the light, **as light**. If you have truly accepted the grace of Christ on the Cross, invisibility is not an option (Ephesians 5:8). Ephesians 5:11 states that the deeds of darkness are “*fruitless*” and we are to have nothing to do with them. **Fruitless** means unproductive, useless, and futile. So this verse essentially means that having anything to do with darkness is contrary to the purpose for which you are designed; for goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9). Some of you may be thinking something like “you don’t understand, you don’t know my friends and how hard it is to be those things”. Let me say this, **if you believe the Word of God is true**, you will find confidence and boldness in the passages of 2 Peter 1:3-4. If you don’t believe in God’s Word as truth, you will continue to make excuses and live in darkness.

I leave you with this final thought. It is addressed to those who may not necessarily be participating in “*deeds of darkness*”, but you’re not exactly shining either. When I go to bed at night, I need complete darkness to be able to fall asleep. Even the little light on my phone bugs me so I often cover it with a book or something. Once it’s completely dark I don’t fall asleep instantly. I have to lie there for a while, but I will eventually fall asleep. The point is this; if you spend enough time in the dark, you will fall asleep. God did not create our souls just so we could go hide in the darkness, close our spiritual eyes and sleep our lives away. Now read Ephesians 5:14 again...WAKE UP!

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Proverbs 4:18, Isaiah 60:1-3, John 12:44-50]

Jesus You are the Light of the world and Your Word is a lamp unto my feet. May You create in me a thirst to know You intimately so I will begin to think like You think. May You give me boldness in the darkness I walk in every day and make me shine like the sun. Lead me away from evil. May the things of this Earth grow dim and dull in my eyes, and may You guide me to Your throne in heaven as Your pure and faithful servant. I adore You. I long to live in Your Light. Amen.

WISE LIVING

[Ephesians 5:15-21]

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

HOW WOULD GOD VIEW YOUR LIFE?

Are you wise in your decisions, your selection of friends, and your time? These are important questions to ask yourself as you begin the study of these few verses. Wise living is an extremely important topic to the Lord. Proverbs is an entire book dedicated to the benefits of wisdom and the destruction of foolishness. Wise living begins with a holy fear of the Lord (*"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding..."* Psalm 111:10), and ends with a desire to serve Him above anything and everything this world has to offer. As Christians, we are to live a life set apart, a life that is clearly different from those who do not know the Lord. Are you living a set apart life? To know the answer to that question, in part, read on.

A few questions to think about today...

How does wise living start based on verse 15?

What does it mean to live carefully?

Why is it important to be wise? (verse 16)

What does it mean to make the most of every opportunity? (See Colossians 4:4-6)

Are you sharing the good news at every opportunity? Will you commit to doing so today, with the Lord's strength?

What is the Lord's will for you? Look at Romans 12:1-2, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 5:16-18.

According to these verses, how are we NOT to live? To what does getting drunk on wine lead? Debauchery means “unrestrained self-indulgent behavior.” What are the affects of living in this manner?

In contrast, how can you be “*filled with the Holy Spirit*” (verse 18)? Remember that when you become a Christian, you receive the Spirit and are sealed with Him (Ephesians 1:13) – He never leaves you; however, being filled with the Spirit is conditional. Being filled with Him must be an ongoing experience – by obeying God, and asking the Spirit to direct you life are some of the ways to be filled with Him. What are some other ways?

How does verse 19 and 21 tell you to treat others?

How can these verses become a practical application in your life?

For the closing of your devotional take this time and praise our living God who created you and filled you with His Spirit by reading through Psalm 100.

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Proverbs 1:7, 22, Galatians 5:16-26]

Lord, thank You so much for telling us exactly how to live a life filled with wisdom and one that is honoring to You. Thank you for knowing us so well that You knew we would need numerous accounts in scripture to teach us how to be wise. Help us, with Your strength, to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. Help us to be filled with the Spirit by giving You the best part of our day and the most of our day. Give us an insatiable desire to spend time with You so we are ready to always give a reason for the hope we have within us. May we apply these verses to our lives and become more devoted to You as a result of this study. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

COPY THIS

[Ephesians 5:22-33]

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. 31"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

“ARTISTS NEEDED!” READ THE CAPTION IN THE

back of the magazine. Followed by instructions to freehand duplicate a cartoon character provided below the headline, and an address where to mail your submission. Your aptitude as an artist would be based on how well you could reproduce the example provided.

In the verses above Paul sets a very high standard to be duplicated in marriage: *“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*

Submission and Love – two tall orders that we can look to Jesus Christ for our example. In regards to submission Bible scholar William MacDonald writes, “Every well-ordered society rests on two supporting pillars - authority and submission. There must be some who exercise authority and some who submit to that rule.”

This principle is so basic that it is found even in God Himself, in the three persons of the Trinity: *“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3)*

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Even in the Godhead one person exercises authority and the others willingly submit to that rule. The same must be true in the home. God ordained the place of headship be given to the man, by creating Adam then Eve. It is important to emphasize as MacDonald writes, "Submission never implies inferiority. The Lord Jesus is submissive to God the Father, but in no way is He inferior to Him. Neither is the woman inferior to the man. In many ways she may be superior – in devotedness, in sympathy, in diligence and in heroic endurance...Nothing could more exalt the role of the wife than comparing it to the role of the church as the Bride of Christ."

As for husbands, note that they are not told to keep their wives in subjection, but to love them.

As John MacArthur writes, "The supreme responsibility of husbands is to love them with the same unreserved, selfless and sacrificial love that Christ has for his church. Christ gave everything He had, including His own life, for the sake of His Church and that is the standard of sacrifice for a husband's love for his wife."

The result of God-honoring husband wife relations, and the command in the next chapter for children to submit to their parents, is summed up in the following quote by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "When home is ruled according to God's Word, angels might be asked to stay with us, and they would not find themselves out of their element."

This is quite a contrast to what many believe today that "The secret to a successful marriage is not to be at home too much."

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Colossians 3:18-25, 1 Peter 3:1-7]

Lord Jesus, thank You for the depth of Your love and sacrifice for us. For humbling Yourself and becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Help me to duplicate Your attitude and example in all areas of my life in regards to authority, submission and love - now, as a child and student, and later in life, as a parent and spouse. Please help me to submit to Your authority and rely upon Your Word on a daily basis. Amen.

A COMMANDMENT WITH A PROMISE!

[Ephesians 6:1-4]

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

WERE YOU TEMPTED TO SKIP OVER THIS WHEN

you saw the words *"Children, OBEY your parents"*? How many of us ignore these very verses in Scripture? When I was asked to write this devotional I thought the passage I'd been assigned must be a mistake. I figured it'd make much more sense to give someone with two Jesus-loving non-divorced parents this particular assignment since I didn't grow up in a Christian home. Wouldn't it be easier for them to talk about obeying their parents?

First of all, the verse doesn't say *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord"* as long as they are Christians. It also doesn't say *"Children, honor your father and mother"* only when they are 100% perfect in their own actions. Mind you, just because parents love the Lord doesn't make them perfect either, right? Many of you are growing up with terrible things happening at home and God will use ALL of the hurt experienced by His children for your good and for HIS glory! He hasn't missed a single one of your tears. But God's instructions have great purpose; this is His design and the God of Peace very much likes order. In the verses prior in Ephesians we're given additional instructions for families; wives are to submit to their husbands, husbands are to be the head of their household and love their wives as Christ loves the church, and now children...obey and honor your parents. This is the way God intended, and when we follow His commands it opens the road to blessing, every time.

A few years ago I was convicted of this commandment when I realized I was bitter towards my parents in certain areas. That conviction led to repentance and serious prayer in asking God to help me honor them and ultimately, love them more like Christ. What's transpired since has

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been remarkable. One of my non-believing parents since inquires TONS about Jesus and pays much closer attention to who God is in my life now. It's also given me more peace in our relationship; my job is to follow God's commandment (as long as that obedience to parents doesn't go directly against God's Word) and for that I can depend on the power of the Holy Spirit! The rest...I can lay at the foot of the cross and trust in my Savior.

We ALL fall short and therefore every family, even those passionately following God together, have their "issues!" Until Jesus comes back we live in a broken world and this includes broken families. I love my family and wouldn't trade them for the world, but even more than that, God in HIS Sovereign design placed me and you exactly in the family HE wants us in! Honor and obey your parents, and ultimately, you are honoring and obeying your Father in Heaven. Trust Him that He knows what's best for you, and, remember that this is *"a commandment with a PROMISE—that it may go well with you!"* Colossians 3:23-24 reminds us, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Colossians 3:18-21, Proverbs 6:20-23, Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16]

Father, thank You for Your Word, which gives us everything we need to live life to the FULL in Your Son Jesus, without whom we have nothing. Help us to live as YOU call us to through Your Holy Spirit working within us, convicting us and changing us miraculously by the power of the Cross. Father I thank You for this commandment to honor and obey our parents whom YOU gave us. Help us to do so, by Your grace, and in turn align our hearts and lives with Your Word and Your will. We love You Lord and thank You for everything you give us! Help us to live and love like You—for Your glory! In Jesus' name, Amen.

A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD AUTHORITY

[Ephesians 6: 5-9]

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. **Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men**, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.*

MANY OF YOU WILL GO INTO SCHOOL

tomorrow morning and do work in class and think “this has NOTHING to do with spiritual things,” and many of you will be asked by your mom or dad to do a chore around the house and you will say to yourself “this has NOTHING to do with God.” See sometimes we separate our Christianity from everyday life. God is teaching us here in Ephesians 6:5-9 that these things we do have EVERYTHING to do with our relationship with God. In this section specifically he is talking to slaves and masters telling them not to separate being a slave and obeying your master with your relationship with God.

Now some of you will immediately say “well this doesn’t apply to me today. I’m not a slave.” Oh but it does. First of all slavery was different back then, it was estimated that half the Roman Empire at that time were considered to be slaves, about 60 million people. Some of these slaves were doctors, teachers, and some were even in charge of disciplining children. So the idea of a “slave” is probably not what you had in your mind. They were slaves because the Roman Empire took over their people group and were now their authority, yet some of them were doing pretty prestigious jobs.

Over time some of these slaves came to know Christ and began to say “forget my earthly master! God is my master!” And yet God says “that is not the attitude. The right attitude is that you should be the greatest slave around, the most obedient slave. So Paul addresses them and says “ok if you are a slave, and you have an earthly master, serve him like you are serving the LORD.”

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So my question to you is, “what is your current “job” right now?” Are you a student? An athlete? A son or daughter in a family? Some of you are all 3 of those things or at least 2 of them. So as a student, do you work as diligently as you can as working for the Lord? Or do you try to conform to the type of homework your friend does. As an athlete at practice do you obey your coach and respect him as if Jesus himself were coaching you? As a son or daughter in your family, do you respect and honor your parents as if they were God himself?

Paul makes a riveting statement in verse 7 where he says, “*Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men...*” True or false: you work hard even when no one else is watching? True or false: you genuinely care about working to get the best grades you can and honor your parents not to make your parents happy or your teacher happy, but to make God happy? True or false: no matter what you do, cleaning your house, doing your homework, you do it with ALL of your heart?

Think about this for a minute...according to Paul this means that when you turn in that homework assignment, it is as if you are literally turning in that assignment to Jesus... or when you vacuum or clean the house for your parents, it is as if you are getting it ready for Jesus Himself to come over for dinner...how differently would you consider your work for the authority God has placed in your life?

The truth is, He wants us to have the best attitudes as Christians, the most diligent student in the classroom, the most respectful son or daughter to our parents, the one who gives the best effort on the football and soccer field, not to appease a coach, parent, teacher or earthly master, but so that YOU make your message attractive, it’s all about God!

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: Titus 2:9-10, Colossians 3:23]

Lord, thank You for showing me the importance of honoring the authority figures in my life. Help me to remember that all the things I do in life are for You. Help me to obey and honor those You have placed as my authority so that I can please You. Help me to stand out in my school and around others by the ways that I respect my teachers and parents and diligently work with all of my heart because I am doing this work for You. Amen.

PREPARE FOR WAR

[Ephesians 6:10-20]

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

IF YOU HAVEN'T FIGURED IT OUT BY NOW, THE

Christian life is less like a playground and more like a battleground. When we became a Christian we were drafted. We might not have chosen to fight, but the war's knocking at our door. And we face a powerful enemy who desires to not only hinder the work of the Lord but to also take us, the individual soldier, out of combat. He's a crafty little devil (pun intended) who uses schemes and deception, including every sin, immoral practice, false ideas, and worldly temptation to undermine Christ's church and turn us back to sin. Though we cannot see our enemy, we are constantly surrounded. And let's get something straight, ignoring the enemy doesn't make him go away. C.S. Lewis once said that there are equal and opposite errors that we can fall into regarding Satan and his demons. One is to act like they don't exist, and the other is to be overly interested in them.

As we walk this fine line between extremes and prepare for this struggle, we realize that in and of ourselves, we are unequipped to battle an enemy who is considerably more powerful. But as any good soldier knows, you don't go into a fight unprepared. And here's the beautiful part, God has not only given us the Holy Spirit, but He also

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provides his saints with sufficient armor to thwart the enemy. At the time Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians, he was conveniently chained to a Roman guard in full armor and knew his readers were certainly familiar with these soldiers and the equipment they used. Basically this set him up for an obvious object lesson. In verse 13, Paul instructs the believer to put on the full armor of God so that we will be able to resist and stand firm against the Devil. According to John MacArthur, the term “*put on*” that Paul uses conveys the idea of permanence, indicating that the armor should be the Christian’s sustained, life-long attire. In other words, we should never be caught out of uniform.

One of the key phrases in this passage that can’t be neglected is “*the full armor.*” That means we clothe ourselves with everything from the Belt of Truth to the Breastplate of Righteousness, Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of truth to the Helmet of Salvation. We must even arm ourselves with the Shield of Faith and the Sword of the Spirit. It would be idiotic for us to neglect any part of God’s provision. Satan is always on the prowl looking for an unguarded area where he can gain a stronghold.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Knowing that Christ has already conquered Satan, and that the spiritual armor and weapons are available, by faith we accept what God gives us and go out to meet the foe. The day is evil, and the enemy is evil, but ‘if God be for us, who can be against us?’” When the conflict reaches its fiercest intensity, the only way we will be found standing firm when the smoke clears is if we have taken up the whole armor God provides. We are never out of reach of our enemy, so we must never be without our armor.

[FOR FUTURE STUDY: 1 Peter 5:8-9, Romans 13:11-14, James 4:7]

Father God, I thank You that You have provided us with the means to stand firm in the face of evil. Help us to daily put on the armor You have given us so that we may never be caught unprepared. Our enemy is a formidable foe but he is no match for You. Thank You that the victory was already won through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, where death and sin were conquered forever. We love You Lord and pray this in Christ’s name, Amen.

[DAY 20] | *Written by: Keith Seymour junior high coordinator*

GO AHEAD, MAKE MY DAY!

[Ephesians 6: 21-24]

*Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. **Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.***

A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK, MY WIFE AND I

accompanied my father-in-law to the dealership where he wanted to buy a brand new pick-up truck. After helping him with countless hours of research on different models, he chose and test drove the new, shiny truck that he so desired. We bargained with the dealer and finally reached a deal that he just couldn't turn down. After printing off the paper work to finalize the new purchase, only one thing remained—signing on the dotted line. Much to our surprise, when my unsuspecting father-in-law signed the paper work, all the salesmen in the entire dealership starting cheering and clapping for him. This was not just a half-hearted golf clap out of obligation. No, this was a full blown, standing ovation applause with ball-game whistles and everything! They even started shaking his hand and patting him on the back as they congratulated him. As I watched his response in utter amazement, I couldn't help but see his ear to ear smile as he soaked in this glorious moment.

If you've ever been encouraged, you know what I'm talking about. It's that uncontrollable grin when you receive a compliment on your new outfit or when someone you respect says "well done." This reason of encouragement is why Paul is sending his good pal and fellow missionary back to Ephesus. The phrase "that he may encourage you" can literally mean "to cheer you on." Paul's desire was that Tychicus would cheer the church on in their faith just as all those salesmen cheered on the new owner of that brand new truck. Pause a second now and think of a time when someone encouraged you in your relationship with God. What qualities did that person have that made

[EPHESIANS DEVOTIONAL]

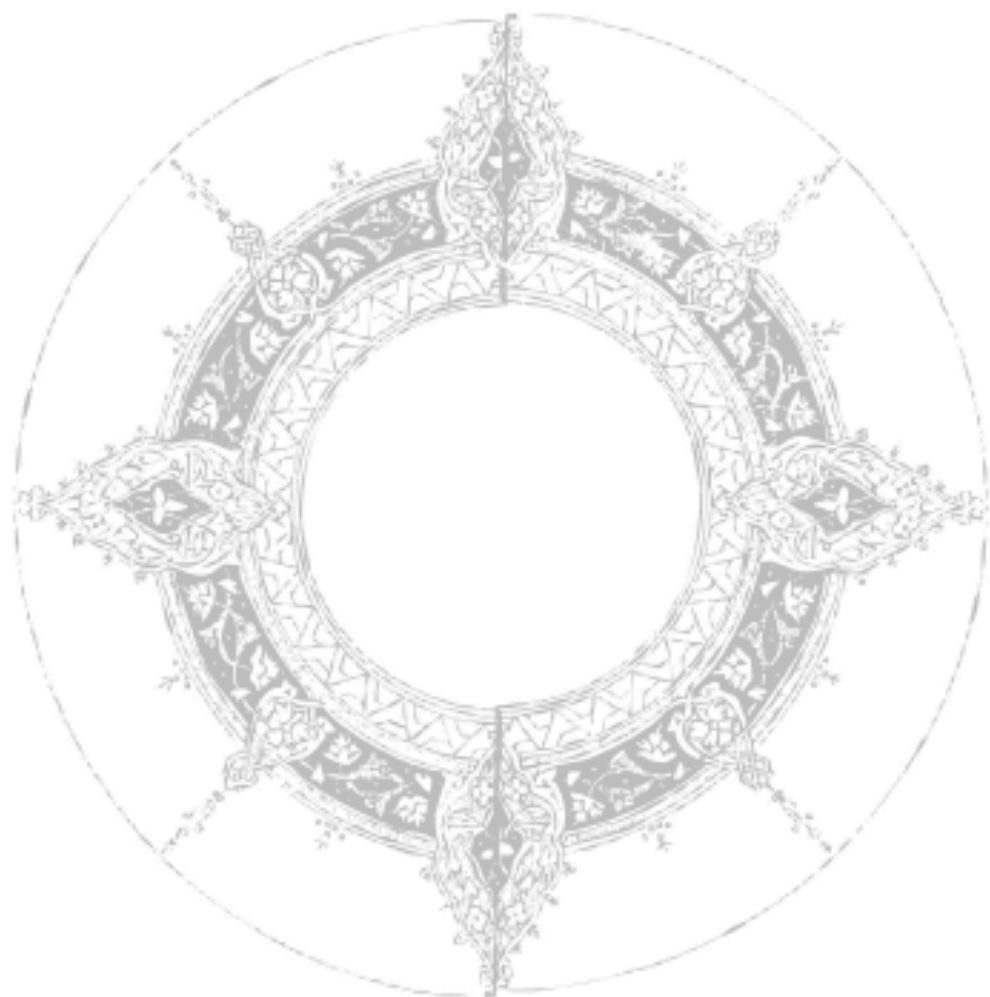
their words encouraging to you?

It's important to note that Paul mentions certain qualities of Tychicus before he says he's coming to encourage the church in Ephesus. Paul states up front that Tychicus is a faithful servant in the Lord. The idea here is that someone who encourages others does so by leading by example. In other words, because Tychicus was a faithful servant in the Lord, he will be able to offer words of encouragement to the believers in Ephesus. Although there are many Christians that could "talk the talk" very few can match their actions with the words they say.

If your closest friends were to write about you, would you be known for being a faithful servant in the Lord? Could others count on you to cheer other Christians on in their faith? There is an old saying that says "with words you can make someone's day or ruin someone's year!" Have you been making other peoples' day or ruining their year? Are there things that you've said to others that were discouraging rather than encouraging? Remember what Paul says earlier in his letter to the Ephesians in 4:29- "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." God desires for you to cheer others on in their faith this week and restore relationships that might have been torn down by your words as you become more of a faithful servant in Him!

[FOR FURTHER STUDY: James 1:26, Romans 1:11-13, Colossians 2:1-3]

Heavenly Father, I thank You for your Word and how it applies to me even today. I ask that You will help me understand more and more what it means to be a faithful servant of Yours and to encourage other in their faith. I pray that You will restore relationships that might be damaged in my life because of words and help me to be more conscious of what I say to others. I pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



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