

TEAR DOWN
THESE WALLS

EPHESIANS INTRODUCTION

I owe my faith to the book of Ephesians.

I was 17 years old, searching for a sense of purpose and significance in my life and sitting in a somewhat “boring” sermon, when I encountered the full weight and importance of grace. It wasn’t that I hadn’t heard about grace before. But this time, the concept of grace captured my heart and altered the entire trajectory of my life. I’ve never quite recovered from grace ever since.

Grace is one of the key themes in the letter to the Ephesians. In fact, some have summarised the entire book with the phrase “Peace through grace”.

The United Nations believes itself to be “the world’s best hope for peace and security”. We believe the church is!

Don’t believe it? All you have to do is read God’s vision for a new humanity from the letter to the Ephesians. In it, God describes what he has done, through Jesus, to create one new humanity and deal with the division that keeps people apart. God has torn down the dividing wall and a new humanity has emerged on the other side of his gracious initiative.

The central theme of Ephesians is God’s new society—his new humanity. The letter gives us a beautiful trinitarian sketch of who we are: the family of God the Father, the body of Jesus Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. In a world that views the church as an increasingly outdated, even dangerous organisation, Ephesians help us see God’s vision for his church and how we can live into that.

Our prayer for this series is that we will ground ourselves and live consistently with our identity “in Christ”. As we see the incredible riches of all that God our Father has done for us, we pray that the Holy Spirit will produce holy living in our personal lives, loving unity in our church family, and a compelling witness to our world.

For his glory

Matt Sparks

Lead Pastor // Anchor City

TIPS FOR ENGAGING DISCUSSION

1. You are an Air Traffic Controller, not the Pilot

Your main role is facilitating discussion, not preaching or lecturing. The less you speak the better! You want to create a safe space and trusting environment in which everyone feels like they can contribute.

2. Establish Group Norms

Discuss expectations, especially around listening to one another and respecting each other's perspective. We want this to be a safe environment for people to be real with one another and explore faith.

3. Know Your Group

Consider the different personalities and learning styles in your group. Be aware of who dominates discussion, and who doesn't contribute. Understand people's barriers for learning and work out strategies to include everyone

4. Foster Inclusivity

Invite, but don't force participation. Don't put people on the spot. Cater for different learning styles: use a whiteboard, ask people to draw something from the passage, do a role play, split into smaller groups, time for personal reflection, etc. Be creative!

5. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Simple questions get simple answers (Yes/No). If you want better answers, you need to ask better questions! Example: What struck you from the passage? What did you notice? Why do you say that? Tell me more about that.

6. Silence is your Friend

Don't be afraid of awkward silences. People need time to reflect and gather their thoughts, so leave space and time for this! Avoid answering your own questions. Rather, simply repeat the question, or ask: 'Any thoughts?'

7. Affirm People's Input

Acknowledge and thank people for their contributions. Never reject an answer. If it's clearly in the wrong direction, then ask a follow up question: What makes you say that? What verse did you get that from? What do others think?

8. Dig for More

Don't be content with just one answer from one person (even if it's a good answer!). Ask follow up questions: What do other people think? Why is that? Tell me more!

9. Be Flexible

The goal isn't to get through all the questions in this Study Guide, but to facilitate an open discussion to help people understand God's Word and apply it to their lives. Allow tangents, disagreements, and debates. Separate disagreements from conflict. Trust is the basis for robust conversations.

10. Keep the Group on Track

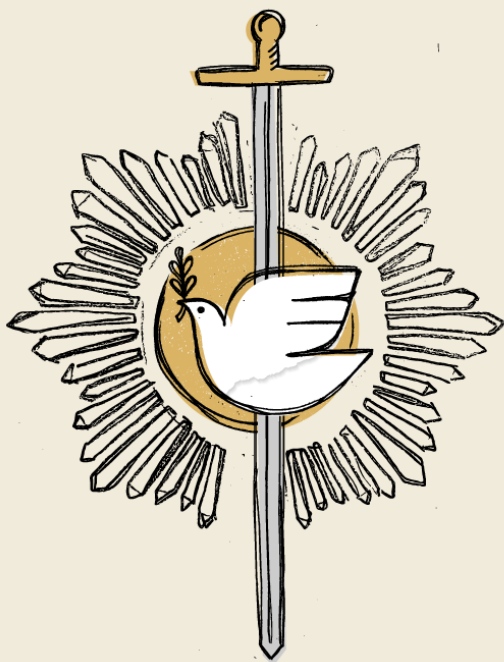
Don't be afraid of tabling/parking tangents around periphery issues: "This is really important. Let's come back to this another night where we can give it the attention it deserves!" Keep bringing the group back to the main point or big idea (this obviously assumes that you've done some preparation and know what the main point of the text is!). Summarise where you've been and what you've found.

11. Drive Towards Application

We don't study the Bible to simply learn facts about God, but to know him relationally and be transformed by him to live a life of worship and love. What does this mean for you? What will you do? Who will you tell?

12. Respect People's Time

Plan the structure of the night. Start on time, so you can finish on time!



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A NEW IDENTITY

Ephesians 1:1–14

Pray for God to reveal himself and transform your lives as you study his word.

How do you think one of your 5 might answer this question: “What’s the purpose of life?” And how would you respond to this question?

Read Ephesians 1:1–2.

As we begin studying this letter, what do we learn about its historical context (1:1)—who wrote it, who it was written to?¹ What themes does Paul include in his introduction (1:1–2)?

Read Ephesians 1:3–14.

Verse 3 is a heading for everything that follows in this section (3–14) which is in fact one super-long sentence in the original Greek. What do we learn about Paul’s purpose in writing this theological exposition of God’s grace (cf. “to the praise of his glory” in verses 6, 12, 14)?

¹ Read more about Paul’s apostolic call in Acts 9:1–19, and his history with the Ephesian church in Acts 19.

Theology (knowledge of God) should always lead to *doxology* (worship). Why is this principle so important? How could we go wrong?

Paul goes on to outline in rich detail at least six of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ.² Lead your group in an activity unpacking the details of each blessing (similar to the table below). You might like to do a whiteboard session all together, or split into smaller groups assigning different verses.

Theology <i>Who is God? What has God done?</i>	Identity <i>Who are we?</i>	Living <i>How should we live?</i>
v4 God has chosen us (cf vv 5, 11–13)	We are Holy	Holy Living
v5 God has adopted us	We are Sons (and Daughters), We are Family	We are secure in God's love, we love one another like a family
v7 God has redeemed us	We are forgiven	No Guilt
v9 God has revealed his will	We know God's plans	Live in light of God's purposes
v10 God has prepared an inheritance for us	We are Heirs	Hope for the future, Contentment in the present
V 13 God has given us his Holy Spirit	We are secure	Assurance

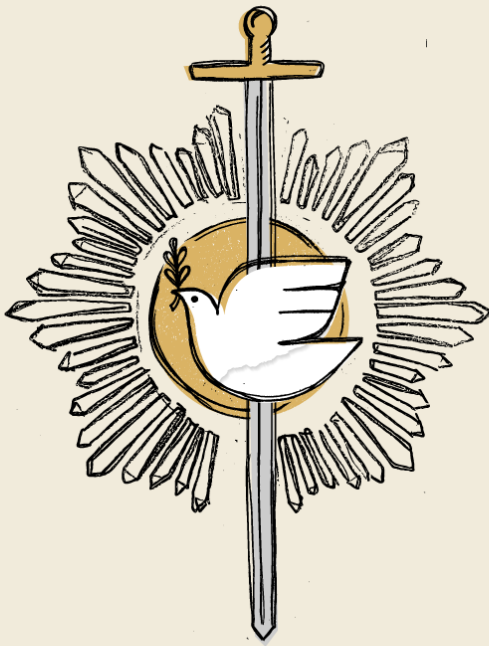
What areas of your life is the Spirit convicting you to bring into conformity with your identity in Christ?

Everybody struggles with the doctrine of predestination and election. What is your experience grappling with this doctrine? What does Paul say about predestination and election (verses 4–5, 11–14)? What is the point of predestination in Paul's theology? How is this good news?

In this opening section, Paul talks a lot about God's will and plan, and that God has revealed his will to us. What is God's plan for the world (1:10)? How does this compare with what you or others might think about the purpose of life?

Theology should lead to doxology. In light of these amazing truths we've been studying about God and our spiritual blessings in Christ, it is right to respond in praise and worship. Get a guitar out, and lead people in a time of prayer and worship.

² Note the rich trinitarian structure of Paul's thought: these blessings are given to us by God the Father, in Christ the Son, secured by the Holy Spirit. There is also a clear theological timeline of these blessings: past blessings (predestination/election), present blessings (adoption, redemption, forgiveness, revelation), future blessings (conformity to Christ, inheritance).



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PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL WISDOM

Ephesians 1:15–23

Pray for God to lead you into a deeper relationship with him.

As you reflect on your life of prayer, what are some of the themes you identify? What do you pray for?

Read Ephesians 1:15–23

What is the reason for Paul's prayer ("for this reason" 1:15, cf 1:3–14)? How does theology (what we know of God) impact our life of prayer?

What has Paul heard about the Ephesian church (1:15)? How does he respond?

Spend time calling out the good fruit of faith and love you see in one another's lives, and give thanks to God for these signs of grace.

What is the major focus of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (1:17–18)?

What does it mean to know God? How is knowing God different to, for example, knowing chemistry? How can we know God better?

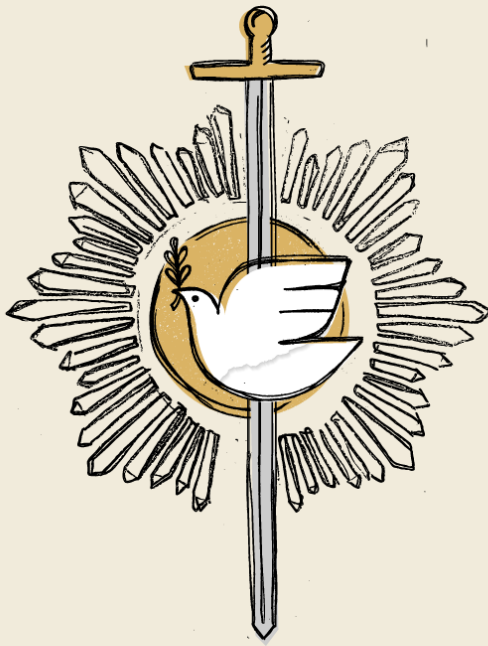
What specific blessings does Paul want us to know? What would our lives look like if we truly lived into these blessings?

Paul's prayer, like his opening exhortation, is noticeably trinitarian. Why is this significant? How can we cultivate this trinitarian shape in our prayers?

Paul spends additional space explaining God's power "for us". How does Paul describe God's power (1:20–21)? How does it compare with other worldly and spiritual powers? What does this mean (cf 3:16–21)?

What do we learn about Jesus in Paul's prayer (1:20–23)? What is Jesus's relationship to the church and the world? How should these truths shape our prayers and our lives?

Leave plenty of time for extended prayer at the end of your session. Let Paul's prayer shape your own, in its trinitarian shape, theological foundation, and personal focus.



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GOD'S MASTERPIECE

Ephesians 2:1–10

Pray for God to continue changing you to be more like Jesus.

What difference has Jesus made in your life?

Read Ephesians 2:1–3.

What is Paul's diagnosis of our situation outside of Christ (2:1)? What symptoms does he point to (2:1–3)? Who does he include (2:3a)? What is the prognosis (2:3b)?

We don't feel dead, and we look around and people don't seem dead. Is this a harsh diagnosis? What does Paul mean? How do these verses describe you? How do the world, the flesh, and the devil still influence people today?

Read Ephesians 2:4–9.

What has God done about the situation? What motivated God to act?

What does Paul mean that we are “seated with Christ in the heavenly realms” (2:6, cf 1:20)? How can that be so when we’re seated here in this room?

On what basis are we saved (2:5, 8–9)? What is grace? Why can’t we work for this? How do you see works-based tendencies in your life and our culture?

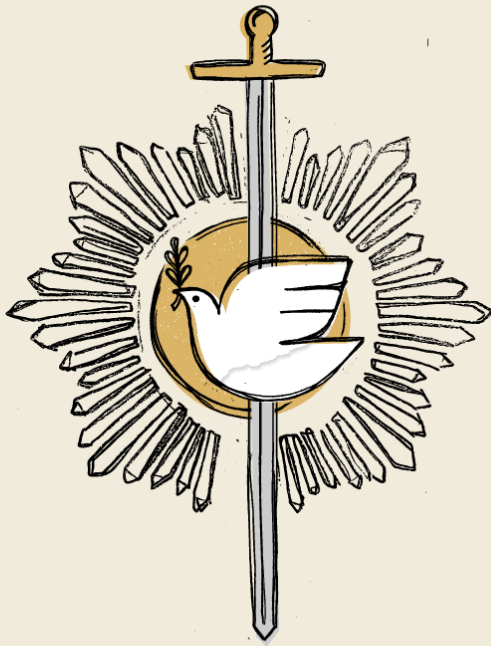
Why does grace exclude boasting (2:9)? Who gets the glory, and why?

Read Ephesians 2:10.

What do we learn about who we are in Christ and our new purpose? Some of us might struggle with negative self-worth (even self-hate). Do you believe you are God’s masterpiece? How does this identity change our self-perception?

We’re not saved by works, but for works. What’s the difference? Why does it matter? What motivates our good works?

Spend time thanking God for his grace and for the new life we have in Christ. Pray that God would empower you to do the good works he has set before you.



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Ephesians 2:11–22

Pray for God to help you to understand and apply his word.

Describe your experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or hostility.³

Read Ephesians 2:11–12

Paul describes the former situation of Gentiles (non-Jews). What does he say? Why was this the case?

Read Ephesians 2:13–18.

Paul outlines a great reversal for Gentiles. What is their new situation in Christ? What are the blessings we now experience in Christ?

³ Leaders: this could be an important moment for people to share vulnerably their stories of racial abuse or discrimination. Be sensitive in creating a safe environment for people to share and receive support.

How does Paul describe Jesus's work? We often think of the cross reconciling humanity to God (vertically). How does the cross make peace between Jew and Gentile (horizontally)?

How does Paul's message here speak into our current cultural moment regarding race and racism?

Paul describes each member of the Trinity being involved in giving us access to God. How does this work? Why does it matter?

Where are you experiencing relational conflict? How can we be a peacemaking community?

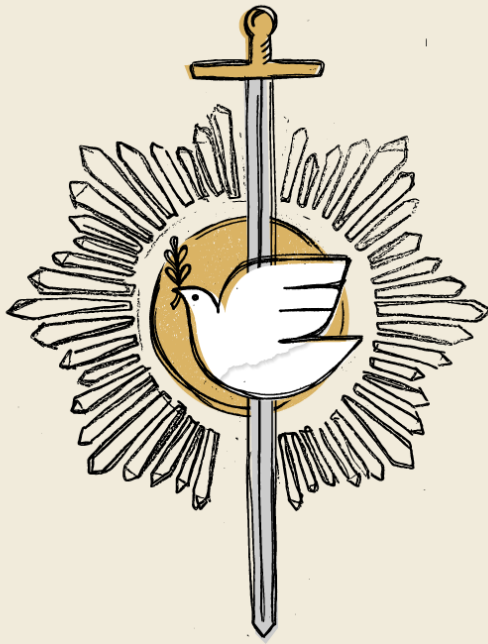
God's purpose is to create "a new humanity" in Christ. What are the marks of this new humanity? How is it different from the status quo?

Read Ephesians 2:19–22.

Paul outlines the key building blocks of the church (2:20). How do we keep building on this foundation today?

What do we learn about our new identity in Christ (citizens, family, temple)? How should this shape how we live?

Pray for God to work reconciliation, peace, and unity in our world, church, and relationships.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

TELLING SECRETS

Ephesians 3:1–13

Pray that God would reveal himself afresh to you.

When have you been in a situation where you've doubted the credibility or suitability of a leader? What factors undermined your confidence in them?

Read Ephesians 3:1–13.

Paul seems to interrupt his thought in verse 2, only to return to it in verse 14. What is the reason for this digression (3:13)?

In light of his suffering and imprisonment for the gospel, Paul feels like the Ephesians may doubt his credibility as an apostle and therefore of the gospel he preaches. How does he defend his apostolic calling and ministry? What does he appeal to as the basis of his apostolicity?⁴

⁴ Note the repetition of the themes of grace/gift and revelation.

Why doesn't Paul appeal to his own qualifications/giftedness/charisma? How does his status as "less than the least of all the Lord's people" (3:8) impact his apostolic office? How does this encourage any weakness or self-doubt you have as you consider God's call on your life?

What is the mystery God has revealed to Paul? Why is this so important for his apostolic credentials? Why should the Ephesians (and we) listen to Paul?

What do we learn about the blessings we now enjoy in Christ?

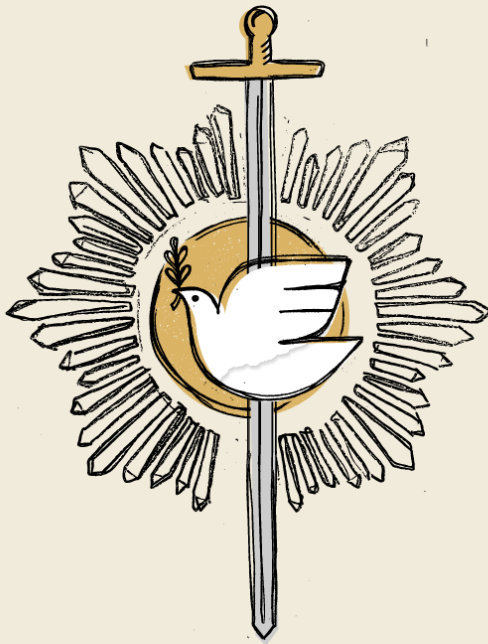
What do we learn about God's purposes for the church? What does this mean? How does this expand your vision for our life together as the church?

What/who is an apostle?⁵ Why is it so important that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (2:20)?

What do we learn here about how to manage our disappointments when life doesn't go well for us, or when people fall short of our expectations?

Pray that God would help you to continue trusting Jesus and give you confidence in the gospel message despite any difficulties or disappointments you may face.

⁵ There is an important distinction here between the Apostles whom Jesus commissioned to be eye-witnesses of his resurrection and any ongoing apostolic gifting God gives to his church (Ephesians 4:11). The church is built upon the testimony of those first Apostles, recorded in the New Testament, which is God's final authoritative word of revelation. This is not to say God doesn't continue to speak and reveal himself, simply that the apostolic testimony in the Bible handed down throughout history is the foundation of our faith, against which all other teaching is measured.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

PRAYING FOR POWER

Ephesians 3:14–21

Pray for God to fill you with a rich experience of his love.

Describe your experiences of prayer. What kind of things do you pray for?

Read Ephesians 3:14–21.

What is the reason for Paul's prayer (3:14, cf 3:1)? How is Paul's prayer related to the message of God making peace through Jesus (chapter 2)?

What truths about God undergird Paul's prayer?

How does/should theology impact your life of prayer?

What does Paul pray for the Ephesian church?

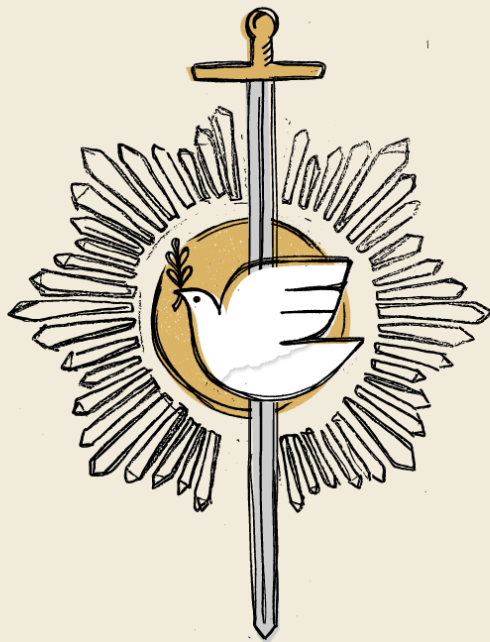
What does Paul's prayer reveal about the Christian life?

If Paul's prayer was answered in your life, what difference would it make?

What can God do? What can't God do?

Nothing is impossible for God! Take some time in personal reflection to write down a list of *impossible* prayer requests. Invite anyone who feels comfortable to share what is on their list.

Facilitate a time of extended prayer. Let these truths about God saturate and shape your prayers and fill you with confidence.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

GROWING UP TOGETHER

Ephesians 4:1–16

Pray for God to keep growing you in love and unity and maturity.

We're halfway through Ephesians. Well done! What has impacted you so far? How would you summarise the main message of Paul's letter?

Read Ephesians 4:1–6.

4:1 is a major turning point in the letter as Paul shifts from doctrine to practice. In light of all that he's said to the Ephesians about what God has done for them, what is his main instruction about how they should live (4:1)? What marks this kind of life (4:2–3)?

What does Paul repeat in 4:4–6? What is he trying to say? And how does it relate to his instructions in 4:1–3?

How can we maintain our blood-bought unity in Christ? Why is this so important? Where are there areas of conflict or division that we need to address? What does it look like in practice for us to work for unity?

Read Ephesians 4:7–16.

Note the repetition of grace/gift in 4:7–11. What has Jesus given to/for the church (4:11)?

What is the purpose of church leaders? Who does the work of ministry?

What leadership principles do we learn here? Why do we need a diversity of gifts in leadership?

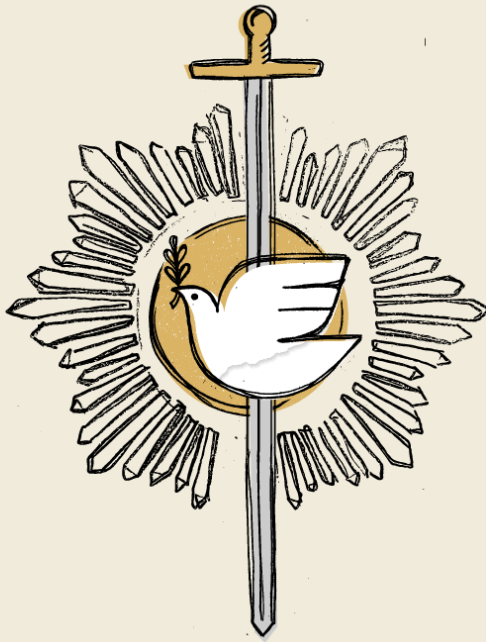
How does Paul describe God's purpose for the church here? What is he moving us towards?

How does Paul's body metaphor help us understand the nature of the church?

How does God build his church?

What does a healthy church look like according to Paul? How can you contribute to the health of our church?

Pray for God to grow you up together into Christ.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

THE OLD WAY MUST GO!

Ephesians 4:17–32

Pray for God to keep transforming you into the likeness of Jesus.

What are some of the ways your life has changed because of Jesus?

Read Ephesians 4:17–19.

After instructing the Ephesians how God wants them to “walk” (4:1), he now tells them how not to walk (4:17). How does Paul describe the way of the Gentiles? What is the connection Paul draws between mind, heart, and behaviour? Does this description of humanity outside Christ resonate? Why/why not?

How do you feel about prohibitions/negative commands in Scripture? What theological realities from Paul’s letter underpin his command?

Read Ephesians 4:20–24.

What do we learn about the dynamics of spiritual change? What is the relationship between God's work and ours in our transformation?

How should our new identity in Christ impact how we now live? Why do we find it so difficult for the truth we believe to impact our daily lives?

Read Ephesians 4:25–32.

What things does Paul identify that belong to the old self/new self that we are to put off/on (cf Galatians 5:19–26)?

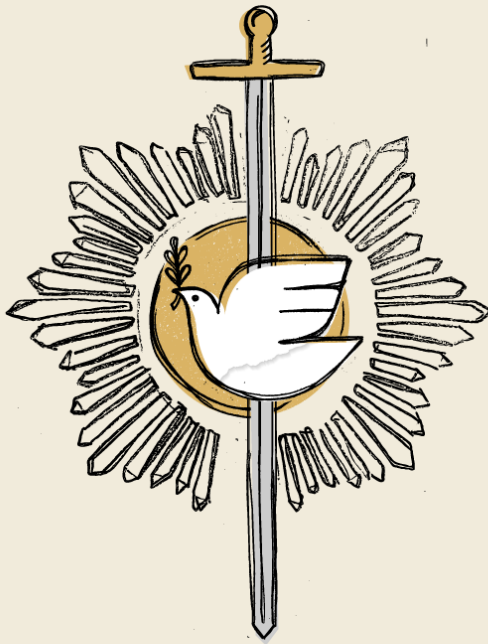
Paul focuses on our talk (cf James 3:1–12). What characterises negative/positive speech? Why is controlling the tongue so difficult? How can we cultivate godly speech?

Paul also focuses on anger and bitterness (cf Matthew 5:21–26). What's the difference between healthy anger and sinful anger? How do you see anger and bitterness in your life?

How does the gospel impact our relationships?

You might like to split into smaller groups for a time of confession, repentance, and prayer. What bad fruit do you see in your life that you need to put off? What characteristics of the way of Jesus is God pressing on your heart to put on?

Pray for one another, that God would continue to renew you, and give you the will to live in his way.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

LOVING & LIVING LIKE JESUS

Ephesians 5:1–21

Pray for God to help you understand what is pleasing to him.

How would you respond to someone who said: “It doesn’t matter how you live—God loves you just as you are”?

Read Ephesians 5:1–2.

What theological realities undergird Paul’s instructions? What do we learn about our new identity in Christ?

What is God like (cf 1 Peter 1:15)? In what ways should we imitate him?

How does Jesus’s love fuel our love?

Read Ephesians 5:3–7.

Why is “sexual immorality” such a big deal (cf 1 Corinthians 6:9–20)? What does it look like for us to walk in the way of Jesus with our sexuality in our cultural moment?

What warnings does Paul attach to these commands? How might we deceive ourselves?

Read Ephesians 5:8–16.

Paul introduces the metaphor of light and darkness for our identity and new life in Christ. What point is he trying to make? What does it mean to “walk as children of light” (5:8)?

How careful are you about how you live (5:15)? How can we become more intentional and proactive in our character formation and godliness, instead of being mastered by sinful reactions?

Read Ephesians 5:17–21.

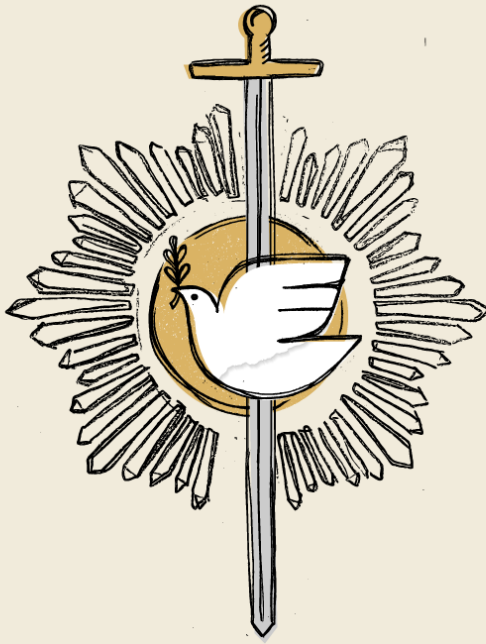
What marks the spirit-filled life (5:18–21)? How does this compare to what you might have expected?

What reasons do we have to be grateful? How does gratitude change us? What practices of gratitude do you have?

What does mutual submission look like in practice? Why might we find this difficult?

What area of your life have you been challenged to intentionally focus on developing as we’ve looked at Paul’s call to be imitators of God?

Pray for God’s help to walk in the light.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

A PICTURE OF MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:22–32

Pray for God to help you live under Jesus's Lordship.

What are the prevailing relationship principles of our culture? How does our society think partners in a committed relationship should relate?

Read Ephesians 5:22–24.

What is Paul's instruction to wives? How does the relationship between Christ and the church help us understand what Paul envisages?

How does verse 21 help us understand these verses?⁶

⁶ Significantly, the original Greek has this command hanging off and dependent on the main verb "Submit to one another" in verse 21 (so it literally reads, "submit to one another ... wives to your husbands"). Submission in marriage is a subset of the mutual submission required of everyone who has been filled with the Spirit.

Why does this teaching grate against us so acutely?

How has this teaching been abused? Should wives submit to husbands who do not love like Jesus? How do we rightly apply it and live it out?

Read Ephesians 5:25–32.

What is Paul's instruction to husbands? How does the relationship between Christ and the church help us understand what Paul envisages?

Which is the harder command—to husbands or wives?

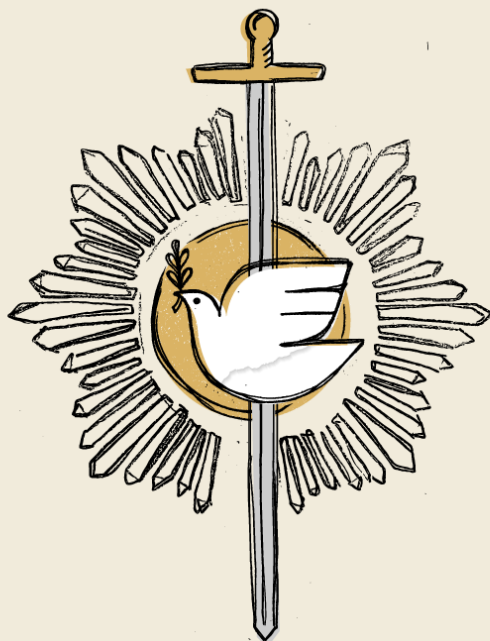
This week's passage is especially focused on marriage, and you may not feel like it's relevant if you're single or dating. What do we learn about what Jesus has done and is doing for us, regardless of our relationship status?

How does submitting to Jesus's headship free us to flourish?

When put together, imagine how this relational dynamic might lead to a flourishing marriage. What does it look like to live this teaching out in practice?

How do healthy marriages illustrate the gospel and bear witness to the world?

Pray for healthy gospel-centred relationships across our church.



TEAR DOWN THESE WALLS

GENTLE FATHERS & LOVING BOSSES

Ephesians 6:1-9

Pray for God to keep shaping the attitude you bring into your home and workplace.

What were the dynamics in your family of origin? How did people relate to one another? What was healthy/unhealthy?

Read Ephesians 6:1-4.

What relational dynamics does Paul imagine between parents and children?

Why is parenting with gentleness and intentionality so difficult?

What does it look like for parents to raise their children in the instruction of the Lord? What has worked well from your own experience (either in your family of origin, or in your parenting)?

Advanced question: How does Paul use the Old Testament law in verses 2–3? What does this reveal about the place of the law in our lives?

What is your workplace culture like? What experiences have you had of good/horrible bosses?

Read Ephesians 6:5–9.

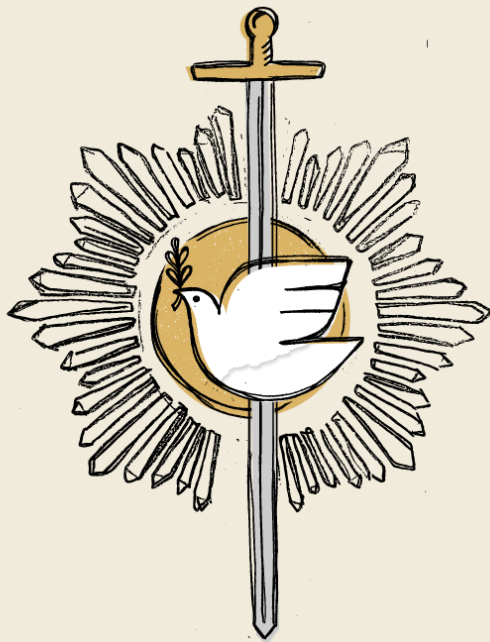
What is Paul's instruction to bondservants? How would you respond to the charge often levelled against Paul from his household codes that he is misogynistic and endorses slavery?

What attitude should bondservants have towards their work and their master? And a master towards their bondservant? How might this have been radically counter-cultural in a first-century context?

What (if any) application does this have to our 21st century workplaces?

How do you view your work? What attitude do you take to work? What impact should living with Jesus as Master have on your 9–5?

Pray for God to keep shaping the attitude you bring into your home and workplace.



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WE STAND UP TO THE DEVIL

Ephesians 6:10–24

Pray for God to give you a right awareness of spiritual reality.

What kind of challenges do you face in your apprenticeship to Jesus?

Read Ephesians 6:10–12.

What do we learn about who we struggle against? Why do we find this teaching so difficult to believe in our cultural moment?

“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he doesn’t exist.” Discuss.

How is the devil working today?

Paul's repeated command and hope for the Ephesians is that they will *stand*. Where do you sense your weakness or susceptibility to fall?

Where do we find strength to stand?

Read Ephesians 6:13–18.

Discuss each item of the armour of God. How do we defend/attack? What does it look like in practice to “put on the armour of God” and stand against the devil?

Discuss a particular struggle that was shared above. How would wearing the armour of God help in this situation?

“The church is not a cruise ship; it's a battleship”. Discuss.

How can we live each day with a “wartime” mentality—an active awareness of our spiritual fight, and our need to stand?

As you reflect on our series through Ephesians, what have you learned? How would you summarise the message of Paul's letter? How has your life been transformed?

Pray for God's help in the specific areas of your life where you are struggling.