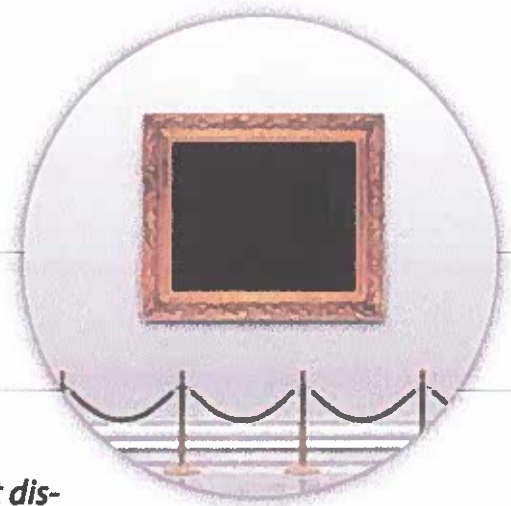


God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Leader's Guide

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We want to be useful, and in Ephesians 4, Paul teaches us about how God wants to use each one of us and to set us apart for him.

We have an innate desire—even a need, you could say—to be useful and to be used. Most disgruntled employees are disgruntled because they feel that their employer isn't maximizing their skills. Ask any player in the NFL if he would rather be the highest paid back-up or the lowest-paid starter, and the overwhelming majority would certainly say, "Put me in, Coach, I'm ready to play."

Scripture: Ephesians 4

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, PreachingToday.com

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to Leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Paul talks about our usefulness in Ephesians 4. He says, "As a member of the body of Christ, you have been given a special gift, a special grace, a special ministry, that Jesus designed especially for you."

Whether your gift is or isn't obvious at this point, it does exist. To help you maximize your gift (or ministry), Paul teaches that God has given you a team of leaders whose job it is to bring your gift to full fruition in the service of Jesus Christ and his church.

Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. What do these titles mean? These terms didn't mean the same thing then (or, rather, didn't have the same connotation) as they do now. But all four offices are crucial to the ministry of God's people. You need this team of leaders to help you become fully functional in your service to him.

Ephesians 4 is also about unity. But a team cannot function as a team without coaches or leaders to give them guidance. Your coaches—your team of leaders—consists of these four offices.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How would you define each of the following?

- apostle
- prophet
- evangelist
- pastor-teacher

Where did you get your definitions?

How can each of these people help you use your gifts?

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Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God gave all four offices for your good.

Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

Let's look at each of these offices.

Apostle. Most often, *apostle* refers to a person having a special type of authority. Paul described himself as an apostle, emphasizing that his primary qualification was that he had seen the Risen Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1). So, in New Testament times, the title of *apostle* applied to a limited group of believers with unique authority in the church.

Near the end of the fourth century, when the Council of Carthage convened to determine which books would comprise the New Testament canon, they chose the 27 books we use today based on, in part, the books' apostolic authority—the fact that there was sufficient reason to believe that Paul's letters were truly written by Paul, the books of John were truly written by the apostle John, and so on.

As a believer, you are accountable to the apostles and their teaching—in other words, the Bible. It is the voice of authority in your life. It has the final say over what's right and wrong.

Prophet. First Corinthians 14:3–4 says, “But everyone who prophecies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort ... he who prophecies edifies the church.” That's the role of the prophet. So, as it turns out, those doom and gloom guys who keep making terrible predictions that never seem to happen—they're not even close to what the true biblical gift of prophecy is. The best word to associate with the role of prophecy is challenge. Prophets challenge people to be more holy, but they do it in a way that strengthens and edifies their listeners.

We need prophets—people who are spiritual enough to speak from God's perspective, who will say what needs to be said, who challenge us to excel in our relationships with God, but who have the gifting to say it in a way that brings strength, encouragement, and comfort.

Evangelist. One commentary defines an evangelist as “someone who focuses on proclaiming the gospel and its relevance.” The author added, “Such activity could be addressed to either believers or non-believers.”² God gave evangelists to the church because the church—just like the world—needs to be pointed to Jesus.

² Snodgrass, p. 204.

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Pastor-teachers. In the Greek, these words are combined to refer to one office. Actually, the word *pastor* means *shepherd*. Jesus described himself as a shepherd. He promised to lead, guide, feed, and protect his sheep. He even said that when one of us is lost, he will seek us, find us, rescue us, and carry us home. Jesus is the great shepherd. So a pastor-teacher is to love you and teach you the Word of God.

[Q] The Bible is our “apostolic authority.” We are accountable to it. How can we put ourselves under its authority? Who helps hold you to that authority today?

[Q] Who in your life is a prophet (has the ability to see with God's perspective, and can say what needs to be said in a way that will strengthen, encourage, and comfort you)?

[Q] Who, as an evangelist, points you and unbelievers you know to Jesus? Who reminds you that Jesus is, always and forever, the only answer you'll ever need? Who has the ability to help you cut through the clutter and confusion of life with the simple message that Jesus loves you?

[Q] Who is your shepherd (pastor-teacher)? Who nurtures you in your faith? One person on the list is probably your pastor, but there should be others.

God has a plan for you, a ministry for you. He has given you a special gift to accomplish it. Maybe your ministry exists within the parameters of the local church, serving in one of our established ministries. Or maybe it exists beyond our boundaries—in the workplace, or in your neighborhood, or even halfway around the world.

You are useful. You can be used by God. He has a place for you to serve him, and he has given you the grace you need to do it. He has also given you a team of leaders to help you accomplish his work in your life. Look to their leadership and do what God has called you to do.

Teaching Point Two: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your thoughts.

Read Ephesians 4:17–24.

The objective of this text is to teach you how to experience absolute transformation from your old way of life to your new way of life. Paul addresses three areas that we need to focus on in order to experience change. The first of these is our thoughts.

This idea has been repeated by teachers and philosophers throughout the ages:

The most important things in life are the thoughts you choose to frame.
(Marcus Aurelius)

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What we think about when we are free to think about what we will—that is what we are or soon will become. (A. W. Tozer)

A person is what he thinks about all day. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The mind is like a clock that is constantly running down; it has to be wound up daily with good thoughts. (Fulton J. Sheen)

Good thoughts are blessed guests, and should be heartily welcomed, well-fed, and much sought after. Like rose leaves, they give out a sweet smell, if laid up in the jar of memory. (Charles Spurgeon)

Change your thoughts and change your world. (Norman Vincent Peale)

And Paul says it in this text.

Here are some thoughts and attitudes from Scripture that can empower you to change your thoughts:

Things are working out for the best. (Romans 8:28)

Christ will finish in me the work he has begun. (Philippians 1:6)

God has turned his back on my sin. (Isaiah 38:17)

God will never turn his back on me. (Hebrews 13:5)

I belong to God, and that will never change. (Ephesians 1:5)

I have access to everything I truly need. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

My future is bright. (Ephesians 1:18)

Living in God's love is the key to living in power. (Ephesians 3:19)

This is why a daily devotional is so crucial in a believer's life. Our mind needs to be saturated with God's wisdom; we need to get into the habit of thinking his thoughts. Change your thoughts; it's the first seed of change.

[Q] Thoughts are often out of control and as natural as breathing. How can we change them? Name some ways that have worked for you or others you know of.

[Q] Looking at the list above from Scripture, which would be most useful in helping you change your thoughts?

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Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us understand how to change our thoughts.*

Activity: *Advise the following people how they can change their thinking about their circumstances, using the verses above.*

Joan doesn't understand why she lost her job. (Romans 8:28)

Rob gets so discouraged that he isn't growing in Christ fast enough. (Philippians 1:6)

Marcie feels so guilty for betraying a friend, even though she has asked God and the friend to forgive her. (Isaiah 38:17)

Darla feels like God is far away, even though she's doing everything she can to follow him. (Hebrews 13:5)

Thomas worries all the time that God has abandoned him because he has some sin issues he can't seem to shake. (Ephesians 1:5)

Ann, a single mom, worries all the time about whether she will be able to pay the bills. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Pete is afraid his poor health will never get better. (Ephesians 1:18)

Matt can't seem to move past his addiction. (Ephesians 3:19)

Teaching Point Three: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your words.

Read Ephesians 4:25–32.

We all need to learn to encourage one another. We must remember that our words carry tremendous weight. Words can be destructive. The philosopher C. J. Ducasse said, "To speak of 'mere words' is much like speaking of 'mere dynamite.'"

God wants his church to dwell together in unity. Simply put, he wants us to get along. In order to do that, we have to learn to watch what we say.

Paul said to speak truthfully to one another; he also said don't use abusive language. Have you ever noticed that some people have a hard time reconciling those two? They seem to think being honest means saying whatever mean thing comes to mind.

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This matter of watching our words needs to be taken seriously by the church. It's an essential part of displaying your new nature in Christ. Don't use foul or abusive language—no matter how right you are or how wrong they are. Don't use foul or abusive language—even if they used it first.

[Q] How has your language changed since you've come to Christ?

[Q] What is conversation for you? A chance to tell others what you like? What you think? What you know? What you want? What do you most often talk to others about?

Conversation should be seen as something more than an opportunity to speak your mind. Paul says to look at it differently. Look at conversation as an opportunity to say something helpful to someone else.

Here's a principle we can all try: "When I talk to you, I talk about you." Doing this helps put a lid on criticism and gossip. It also gives us the chance to minister to our friends, rather than just chat with them.

If you want to display the new nature Christ has given you, change your words—because your words are a seed of transformation.

[Q] How can we change the deeply ingrained habits of our words? Give practical ideas.

Teaching Point Four: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your actions.

A preacher stood up in front of his congregation and asked, "Have any of you here, at any time in your life—even in childhood—ever told an untruth? And white lies count, by the way." Of course, everyone raised their hand. Then he asked, "And have any of you here ever taken something that didn't belong to you—like a piece of bubble-gum from a candy store, or a paper clip from work, or never returned something that you borrowed?" Everyone raised their hands. "That's good," the minister said. "I just needed to know who my audience is. I see that I'm surrounded by liars and thieves."

That seems to be what Paul is saying. In verse 25 he tells us to put away falsehood, and in verse 28 to stop stealing.

Liars and thieves! Is that his audience? Is that the kind of person who attended church in Ephesus? Actually, they were probably a lot like us, and they wouldn't consider themselves liars and thieves any more than we would. But Paul uses this extreme example to define the kind of transformation that needs to take place in our behavior.

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The thief must become a philanthropist. This is transformation. A thief thinks only of himself, and acts only on his own behalf, regardless of the pain it may cause others. He's looking out for number one. A philanthropist, however, looks out for the well-being of others, and he takes care of them in addition to taking care of himself.

In your relationships, in your ministry, in your work life, look for ways to live win-win. Take care of yourself without hurting others; take care of others without hurting yourself.

[Q] What actions of yours need to change? It can be a negative action you need to drop, or a positive action you need to adopt. Share one of them with the group.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

In Paul's words, we see the essence of transformation. There's something that goes deeper than our thoughts, words, and emotions—it is the core of our being. When we talk about transformation, that's what we want to see changed. It's not just a matter of doing good; we want to *be* good, through and through.

This is how you destroy the enemy: with your thoughts, with your words, with your actions. Every time you think a godly thought, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you speak an uplifting word, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you act with generosity and kindness, you sow a seed of transformation. These things—our thoughts, our words, our actions—are more than just the surface level elements of our lives. They are the seeds of change.

Action Point: Which area of your life most needs transforming? Your thoughts? Your words? Your actions? Share your answer with the group, and pray for one another about what you have shared.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon