

A Vibrant Hope For the Future

(Gal. 3:26-4:7)

(26) the actual results of this passage from the reign of law to grace through Faith in Jesus Christ.

The final verse of this chapter Paul list three of them.

0. Through faith in Christ all who believe becomes “sons of God” that is, those who have passed through spiritual infancy into full maturity as justified persons.

Before, the person was under the la. Now under grace. Before under the curse. Now he or she is the recipient of God’s paternal favor.

In (v.25) emphasis falls on the {pantes} “you ...all”.

(27) this new relationship is not something natural to men, as thoughpo0 all automatically were or became God’s sons.

True, God has a relationship to all men as Creator.

We can only become children of God only through union by faith - in Jesus Christ.

- Baptism signifies this transforming identification with Christ.
- No one is saved by baptism - it an outward sign of the union that already exist through faith.
- To be “Clothed with Christ” means to become like Christ.

2. Through faith in Jesus all who believe become one with each other.

There is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male, nor female, but all are one in Christ. One does not lose his or her identity by becoming a Christian, it means that having become one with God as His children, Christians now belong to each other that distinctions that formerly divided them lose significance.

3. Through faith in Jesus all who believe also become one with those who have been saved by faith throughout the long history of salvation. By union with Christ, believers becomes "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

The legalizers - physical seed - believers enter into the promises by entering into him, thereby also becoming spiritual seed to God.

The three dimensional attachment - height, breadth and length.

- Height - through reconciliation to God who, is a God above us.
- Breadth - through Christ we are united to all other believers
- Length - we join the long line of believers throughout the whole course of time.

(27). "Baptism" speaks of identification.

Heir of God

(4:1-7)

At this point Paul dwells on their status, showing that whereas they were previously slaves, they had now become sons of their Heavenly Father.

(1) in Judaism a boy passed from adolescence to manhood shortly after his twelfth birthday, at which he became a son of the law.

In the Greek world - the minor came of age later, about 18.

In the Roman law - the age took place - the father had discretion in setting the time of his son's maturity.

When the child was a minor in the eyes of the law - his status was no different from a slave, even though he was the future owner of the estate.

Ephesians: You are God's Masterpiece

In Ephesians; we will find our identity - we will discover who we are - who we are meant to be - what we are meant to do - and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ.

Lesson 1 -God wants you to know Him

Part 1 Identify the issue:

From the beginning He has wanted you to be a member of His family:

[Q] what evidence do you find - that wanted you to be a part of His family from the beginning?

{Q} How can we be “holy and without blameless” in His sight when we obviously still do things wrong;

(v.4) “even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”

(7) “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of or transgressions according to His grace.

[Q] What does it mean to you that God has adopted you into His Family?

[Q] How is the Holy Spirit our guarantee or security of things to come?

(vv. 13-14)

- (Vs 13) “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”

- (Vs 14) Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of Him, to the praise of His glory.

- (Begin)
- Teaching point 2: Your security comes from understanding who Christ is.

Read notes:

In (vv.15-22) .com

- Paul Prays for their (and our) spiritual enlightenment.

He is teaching us how to get connected to God — how to go beyond mundane religious existence into a vital spiritual experience of the power of God.

Read- when you made a decision to follow Jesus Christ, you did much more than obligate yourself to a creation moral standard of living.

*We became permanently connected to the source of all sources;

He is Lord and our Savior

He is All Powerful

He is All Knowing

He is Love

Knowing God means knowing Jesus.

[Q] If someone ask you who Christ is, how would you answer?

[Q] What would it mean to have “Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him Better” (v.17)?

[Q] What does it mean that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. (vv.19-20)?

- Teaching point 3: Your confidence comes from understanding who you are in Christ.

When we know Christ — when we have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of Him, as Paul phrased it — then we can begin to make sense of who we are in Him.

Look at (v.18) - the word inheritance refers to the Father's inheritance, not ours.

What will God inherit ? He will inherit "the saints" — that is, the church. You and me.

This God's plan.

[Q] What does it mean to you that you are God's inheritance ?

[Q] Look again at (verses 19b -23). What do these verses say about Christ?

[Q] How does realizing how great Christ is affect your own confidence in Him?

Eph. 2 "God Wants To Change You"

Identify the Issue

God wants you to bury the past.

Those who have given their lives to Christ and have successfully left behind their old way of life. — Hallelujah

- This begins with a decision to follow Jesus. It involves saying , Lord, I want to turn my back on my old way of life and follow you. Come into my life and forgive my sins. Give me the strength to live for you.

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Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point 1: God will give you the power to leave your past behind and to come alive spiritually.

Read (Eph. 2:1-10)

Notice the three words: carving, desires, and thoughts. These words reveal the pyramid of power of the old way of life.

For some sin is not just an occasional slip-up; it's a constant, never ending carving — one that leaves you completely powerless.

How do you get rid of it?

How do you bury the past? (Verse 3) gives us a hint in this “pyramid of power.

Our craving is born out of our desires - and desires are born out of thoughts

If you want power of sin, then you have to attack the source of its stronghold: “your thoughts.”

Change what you think about, - when you change what you want to think about, you change your destiny.

We have a tendency to identify ourselves more with our sinful past than with our sanctified future.

When we think like, I have no control over my temper ... I am powerless over food ... I'm basically a dishonest person - those things may have been true in the past, Paul says, but past in the past.

He wants to change you through and through. In order for Him to change you, you have to change the way you think.

Change what you think about.

*Do not dwell on the situation -instead dwell on the solution.

*Change what you want to think about.

This is the kind of thing that makes me very mad and lose my temper.

Say this is the thing that used to make me very mad and lose my temper.

If you want to bury your past, you have to kill it first. The only source of life the past has in your life is in your thoughts.

Change what you think about, and you change your destiny.

Don't answer this out loud.

[Q] what on thing would my spouse want to change about me?

My Children - My siblings -Co-workers

[Q] How might thinking the following be useful in conquering this thing?

This is the kind of thing that makes me mad and lose my temper, but not anymore.

This very thing Christ is changing in me.

Teaching point 2: God wants to Custom Design your Future;

Focus on - (verses 6-10).

Imagine the heavenly realms that Paul made reference to in verse (6) as they appear at this very moment. There is Jesus, sitting on His throne. There is seated with Him, is a group of Christians. If you look closely, you'll see it's not just the superstar Christians sitting with Him; the stumbling Christians are there also. Look closer. There YOU are. In the heavenly realms, with Jesus.

How did you get there? Is it because of something you did? Something you didn't do? No. You are there because He brought you there. You're alive spiritually because He made you alive spiritually.

This spiritual life that he gave to you gives you a capacity through and through by making you into a brand new person.

Good works aren't enough to save you. But God wants you to do good works to bring Him glory. Look at (vs.7)

In other words, God wants your life to be an example of His goodness. He wants your life to reflect all that He can do in a person life.

- Verse (10) makes clear that God has a custom-designed future for you.

(Jer.29:11). "For you are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

There are things that you can do—that only you can do—that will bring Him glory throughout the ages. It's hard to imagine, but it's true.

[Q] What difference does it make to your everyday life to know that you are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?

[Q] What are some things about you that are unique, that no one else does quit the same way you do?

[Q] What are some things about your past that are unique - even things you have struggled with-that God may want to use to reveal His goodness?

Teaching point Three : God wants to use community to help you be all you can in Christ.

An article in Reader's Digest explained how roots of trees — even trees of different species — can be linked together.

By being linked together, each can draw from the resources of every other tree in the forest. The trees furthest from the water can draw from the trees that are closest; the tree lacking nutrients can draw from the trees with an abundance. Each tree has access to all the resources of the forest.

Some of the redwood trees in California are 2,500 years old and stand 300 feet tall.

The roots of the trees don't go as deep as some might expect, but they're all intertwined. The way the trees' roots are locked together gives the trees additional stability in high winds.

It works the same with the Church. When you're connected to a group of people, the storm is not as likely to knock you down.

We belong to one another. We are not connected only to believers in this room; we are connected to all the believers in this city. In this state. Throughout this country. Across this continent. Encircling this planet. As we gather together, think of all the other Christians throughout the world who are together right now, worshiping as we are worshiping in Bible Study.

Across this planet at this very moment, millions and tens of millions of Christians have come together for the same purpose that we have come together—to worship the name of Jesus Christ.

We are connected to them. We belong to them, and they belong to us. Just as we share our strength with one another here, we need to do all we can to share our strength with the global church.

- Read (Ephesians 2:11-22)
- (.v.13) “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (14) For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in His flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, (16) and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross, by which He put to death their hostility.”

[Q] How does this passage demonstrate that in the kingdom of God, we are all on level ground?

[Q] How does remembering that Christ is our (v.20) cornerstone help us to accept those in the church who are not like us, or who disagree with us?

[Q] What are some ways that community can help you transform to be more like Christ?

[Q] What habits do you need to Change in order to be more involved with other Christians?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God has plans for you. Big plans. He wants to show the world the incomparable riches of His grace, and you're the one He can use to do it.

Even when you fail, He doesn't give up on your future.

Because God not only has a plans for you, He knows you can become like Jesus. He is sure of this because He has the power to change you through and through.

He'll bury your past, because He wants to change you; He'll give you new life, because He wants to change you; and He has custom-designed a future for you, because He wants the world to see the change.

God Wants You to Find Your Mission

I'am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

Part 1 Identify the Issues

By the apostle Paul's own admission, he was an enemy of God and f the church.

He persecuted Christians and did all he could to stop the growth of the church.

Then suddenly, his life changed. He was walking on the road to Damascus when a bright light from heaven blinded him and a voice spoke to him, saying , "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

"He asked, Who are you?"

The voice responded, I AM Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are prosecuting.”

From that day on, Paul was a new man. He wasn't perfect; he still made mistakes and committed sins, but his life took a new direction, and the world hasn't been the same since.

You can change just. as dramatically by adopting the same attitude as Paul:

I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

[Q] What was your conversion experience? Tell us about it.

[Q] When you decided to follow Christ, did you also have a sense of mission

(I now have something important to do) ? If so, what was it ? If not, why do you think you lacked a sense of mission?

[Q] Why would it be good to recognize that you are not, an important person, but that you have an important job to do ? What is the difference ?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point one: Live with a sense of purpose.

The Bruce Springsteen example;

During his concerts there is a time when the band stops playing and he screams - “I ‘m just a prisoner of rock and roll.”

In the very same way, He gave his Life to preaching the gospel. In (Romans) he referred to himself as a “bondservant” or “slave” of Christ.

In Ephesians he called himself “the prisoner of Christ Jesus.” (3:7)

He said, “I became a servant of this gospel.”

Paul was consumed with a mission. His purpose in life wasn’t just to be a religious person and preach in church on Sunday. His purpose was to save souls, change lives, and bring about worldwide racial equality through the ministry of the church.

Paul was Jewish, and like most Jewish men of his time, he grew up with the notion that there were two types of people in the world: Jews - God’s chosen people and everyone else.

He recognized that he had a purpose in life — to tell Gentiles about Jesus and bring them into the church. This made him unpopular in certain circles, but never let go of the mission to which God called him.

What about you? What is your mission? God has given you a purpose. That purpose isn’t created to serve you — you are created to serve the purpose.

We need to get past the idea that we deserve or need an easy life. Instead, our attitude must be, “I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do, and I will serve my purpose.

Read {Eph. 3:1-3}.

[Q] According to this passage, what did Paul see as his mission?

* What did it cost him to stay on this mission?

[Q] Sometimes our mission changes as we grow and mature.

How has your changed?

What is your mission at this point in your life, and why?

Teaching point Two:

Live with a sense of humility and wonder.

Some of the things Paul said about himself are surprising.

He called himself a slave, a servant, and a prisoner for the Lord.

In Timothy, He called himself the chief of sinners.

In Romans 7 he referred to himself as a “wretched man.”

In (Ephesians 3:8) he says, “ I am less than the least of all of God’s people.”

From a theological standpoint, Paul knew this statement was inaccurate. He knew better than anyone that all individuals are equal in God’s eyes.

In fact, equality was the very heart of his message.

He knew God shows no partiality, and he himself, was no worse than anyone else.

Yet, Paul chose to look at himself from this perspective because he knew it was necessary for him to keep his ego in check. He refused to allow himself to be important in his own eyes.

Paul was just like we are. If we're not careful, we will act like we are the center of the universe.

That's why Paul adopted this attitude: I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

A religious satire magazine called "The Door" published an issue on the subject of racism

To give the readers an idea of what it is like to be the object of discrimination, they sent out photocopied issues of the magazine with a letter explaining that they had inadvertently printed too few magazines this time and had ran out of copies. They said that the printed copies went to the top priority subscribers and they would have to accept the lesser-quantity photocopy .

All the readers got the same letter and photocopied issue, but many to them didn't get the point. One pastor wrote a letter saying,

"I have never been treated with such disrespect — I demand a letter of apology."

In contrast, Kenneth Blanchard co-wrote a little book called {The One Minute Manager}, ended up being on the bestseller list of the New York Times; he became a celebrity in the business world. Later he said - he realized that he had two choices. One was to take all the credit for his success or to take the path of wonderment. He

asked himself “why has this happened to me, and what can I learn from it?” As an observer. Of his own success, he was better able to manage the pitfalls and challenges that came with it.

Paul lived his life with a sense of wonder. He said, “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you.” And

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of His power.”

The word Paul repeatedly used to describe God’s work in his life was “grace”

Grace literally means an undeserved favor.

He didn’t fool himself into thinking that he was doing God’s a favor by serving Him.

He had a sense of wonder about the calling God placed on his Life.

There are two temptations we must resist.

The first is an attitude of smugness - thinking we’re really something and that God is lucky to have us on His team.

The second is an attitude of Why me? complaining about our lot in life:

Why couldn’t I have been born rich? Or Handsome? Or talented? Life seems to be unfair.

As we look on our lives - we are to have a sense of wonder - we need to ask why did God put me here?

[Q] Are you more tempted to smugness, thinking God is lucky to have you on His team, or to complaint, thinking that not fair? Why do you think you are tempted toward that.?

[Q] What habits or traits do you have that show you are tempted to act like you are the center of the universe?

[Q] How might you describe yourself in terms of humility, as Paul did in this message?

[Q] What are some ways you feel wonder at what God has done in and through you?

[Q] Why can we approach God with freedom and confidence in spite of our flaws (.12)?

Teaching Point three:

Live with a sense that God's love is your life.

Read (Eph.3:14-21).

God has it all. He owns it all. As (Psalm 50) says, all the animals of the forest, the cattle on a thousand hills, every bird, of the mountains ... “the world is Mine, And all that is in it” (Psalm 50:12).

He can give you anything He wants — money, possessions, prestige, success, a life of privilege. But look as what He most wants to give you, according to (Eph. 3:18-19).

He can give you anything, and He wants to give you most of all the ability to know His Love.

Love is God's greatest resource. He takes love so seriously that He define Himself by it. The Bible says God is Love. To experience the fullness of God in your life - which includes experiencing His Power at work within you — you need to develop at least an inkling of the awesomeness of His Love, although in this lifetime we will only, at most scratch the surface of understanding God's love.

God love you far more than any parent could love a child. As Augustine said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."

Paul's prayer is that you will grasp this. God's greatest resource is His Love.

[Q] What has most helped you grasp God's love for you?"

[Q] What can you do to better experience God's love in your everyday life?

[Q] How might this passage be a prayer that helps you to experience God's love?

[Q] How does this love motivates you in your mission?

Apply Your Findings

Living in God's love is the key to power. To the extent that we understand His love, we experience His power.

What kind of Power are we talking about here?

Power over sin. Power over weakness. Power over fear. Power over shame. Power over despair. Power over rage. Power over lust. Power over greed. Power over pride. Power over doubt. Power over guilt.

These are the things that beat us down. These are the things that make our lives miserable. We don't have to live under their tyranny any longer.

God promises His power. It's available to you. To receive His power, you only have to yield to His love.

Do you want to experience the power of God so that you can move past your sin and gain His mission for your Life?

Then get immersed in the Love of God;

Pray on it . Think about it. Meditate on it. Contemplate on it. Believe it. Receive it.

When you know His love, you will experience His power and find your mission.

Eph. 4

God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

We want to be useful - Pau teaches us about How God wants to use each one of us and to set us apart for Him.

Part 1. Identify the issue

Paul talks about our usefulness in Ephesians 4. "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.

Leader guide:

Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelist, 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 them 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?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Leader's guide

Teaching point one: God gave all four offices for your good.

Read (Ephesians 4:1-16).

{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 (1Cor. 9:1). (1Cor.15:5-8)

(Luke 6:12 - 16) (Matt.10:1)

So, in New Testament times, the title of an 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 cannon, the 27 books we use today based on, in part, the books' apostolic—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 soon.

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 is 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."

Prophet means (1Sam. 9:9) "Pro" - "does not mean beforehand,"

As it does in the word "provide" but it mean "in place of" the remainder of the word "prophet" is from the Greek "premier,," which means "to speak." So then a prophet is "one who speaks in place of another."

Prophecy is not merely prediction. - the common idea is that prophecy is a matter of foretelling. Prophecy, in the non-predictive sense, is declaring a truth by the inspiration of God. Prophecy, in the predictive sense, is declaring of the future which can only be by the direct inspiration of God.

(Isa. 2:1) "The Word that Isaiah saw).

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 truly 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 strengthen 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 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."

God gave evangelist to the Church because the Church — just like the world - needs to be pointed to Jesus.

{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 is lost, He will seek, us find us, recuse 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.

(1Tim.3:1) (Acts 20:28) (1Tim.5:17) (Psa.111:9)

Discussion of Titles - Offices

[Q] The Bible is our “apostolic authority.” We are accountable to it.

How can we put ourselves under its authority? Who help holds 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 will 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?

Any others than your pastor.

God has a plan for you, a ministry for you. He has given you a special gift to accomplish it.

Maybe your ministry exist within the parameters of the local Church, serving in one of our established ministries. Or maybe it exist beyond our boundaries - work place, 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.

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

Read (Eph.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 is our Thoughts

Participants guide:

This idea has been repeated by teachers and philosophers through out the age:

- The most important things in life are the thoughts you choose to frame.

(Marcus Aurelius)

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

*A person is what he thinks about all say. (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 Peal)

- And Paul says it in this text. Here are some thoughts and attitudes from Scripture that can empower you to Chang your thoughts:

- things are working out for our best. (Rom.8:28)
- Christ will finish in me the work He has begun. (Philp.1:6)
- God has turned His back on my sin. (Isa.38:17)
- God will never turn His back on me. (Heb.13:5)
- I belong to God, and that will never change. (Eph.1:5)
- I have access to everything I truly need. (2Cor.9:8)
- My future is bright. (Eph.1:18)
- Living in God's love is the key to living in power. (Eph.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 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.

Optional activity:

Purpose: To help understand how to change our thoughts.

These verses of scriptures can help you can change your thinking about your circumstances.

*Joan doesn't understand why she has lost her Job. (Rom. 8:28)

"And we know that all thing work together for good to them that love God, and to them who are called according to His purpose."

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

"Being confident of this very thing. That He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ."

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

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption for Thou hast cast all my sins behind my back."

*Darla feels like God is far away, even though she doing everything she can to follow Him. (Heb. 13:5)

"Let your conversation be with out covetousness and be content with such things: ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

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

"Having predestination us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

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

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

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

"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

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

"And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

- 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 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 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 come to mind.

This matter of watching our words need 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 ? What do you most often talk about to others about ?

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

Here's a principle we can 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 counts, 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 the candy store, or a paper clip from work, or never returned something 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 Ephesians? Actually, they were probably a lot like us, and they wouldn't consider themselves liars and thieves any more than we would.

But Paul used the extreme example to define the kind of transformation that needs to take place in our behavior.

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 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 change. It's not just a matter of doing good, through and through.

This is how you destroy the enemy: with your thoughts, 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 up lifting word, you sow a seed in the core of your being. Every time you act with generosity and kindness, you sow a sees of transformation.

These things — our thoughts, our words, our actions, — are more than just the surface level elements of our lives. They are seeds of change.

ACTION POINTS:

Which area of your life most needs transformation? Your Thoughts? Your words? Your actions? Share your answer with the class.

Ephesians 5

God Wants You To Be a Good Imitation

You Imitate God By loving people.

Paul tells us to do something that's seemingly impossible: Be Imitators Of God.

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Examples of movie actors being imitated.

Brando one of his classic lines "Stella!" "Or I could have been a contender!"

Dana Carney - facial expressions - George Bush Sr. "Not gonna do it; wouldn't be prudent."

Some imitations are good, but they're no substitute for the real thing.

There is more to imitating a famous actor than just repeating their best-known lines with their accent.

In the same way, there's more to imitating God Than just talking the talk.

Some people think that if they just quote enough Scriptures enough times in enough conversations, they'll be branded as godly.

Quoting Scripture is, of course, a good thing, but there is more to imitating God the just repeating his best known lines.

So how do we imitate God as Eph. 5:1 says we are to do so?

Discussion Questions:

[Q] What first comes to your mind when you hear "Be Imitators Of God...?"

[Q] In what ways is it important to imitate God?

[Q] How do you think we should go about imitating Him?

(Read 5:1-2)

That's how you imitate God: You love people.

Love is not a feeling, it's an action. Love is something you do.

The Bible says that God Loves us, and He demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom.5:8). So when Paul talks about imitating God By walking in love, he's not talking about a feeling, he talking about showing an action.

Let's look at some actions that demonstrate God's love to the world.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: You Imitate God By forgiving others.

Read (Ephesians 4:32-5:21).

Look again at verse (32). You imitate God by forgiving others.

Mohandas Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." He may not have been a Christian, but he understood this aspect of forgiveness: It requires strength.

The inability to forgive is a sign of weakness; the ability to forgive is a sign of power. That's because forgiveness isn't easy or human. It doesn't come naturally to us.

C.S. Lewis said, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive “

If you're married, there no doubt that you have something to forgive. If you have children, parents, or siblings, you have something to forgive.

If you have a boss or employees, you have something to forgive. If you serve in ministry or volunteer in any area of the church, you have something to forgive.

In the course of human events, it is inevitable that offenses will come; we all find ourselves facing opportunities to forgive. The question is: What will you do about it? Whose example will you follow? Who will you imitate?

When you are struggling with the need fo forgive someone, ask yourself a couple of questions:

If I did what this person did, would I forgive me? While you may not be guilty of the same offense, you are guilty of an equal offense. (See 1Jn.1:8 & Jas.2:10.)

[Q] Why are some offenses so hard to forgive?

[Q] What was the most difficult offense Jesus had to forgive?

[Q] How can we get past our feelings of bitterness to forgive someone else?

[Q] What is the difference between forgiveness and trust? Are they the same?

Does one automatically mean the other? How might you forgive someone that you don't trust?

Leader's Note: Forgiveness is freely given, but trust must be earned.

[Teaching Point Two: You Imitate God By suffering for others.]

- Look at verse (2). Because of His love for us, Jesus denied Himself—His own rights and even His own will—and gave Himself for us.

Just as forgiveness requires strength that is beyond us, so does self-denial. It is not easy to say no to yourself, and yet, that is what God has called us to do

(Matt. 16:24). “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.”

- You will never be called upon to suffer for others to the extent that Jesus suffered for you, but you will be inconvenienced .

You will have to take calls when you don't want to take calls, run errands when you don't want to run errands, Give when you don't want to give.

The willingness to suffer for others is saying, “I'm not the center of the universe; the world doesn't revolve around me.” If Jesus (who truly is the center of the universe) can adopt that attitude, so can you!

This willingness to suffer for others is not about suffering that happens to you—

that you have no choice about. It's about self-denial, a choice that you make.

And that's why it takes strength to do it, because—like Christ—You are giving yourself up willingly. When we choose to suffer—or even be inconvenienced—for the sake of others, we demonstrate God's love.

Do you want to imitate God's love? Serve others. Ian Maclaren said,

“The world cannot always understand a person's profession of faith, but it can understand service.”

[Q] How do service and self-denial demonstrate love so completely?

[Q] What did Jesus give up to come to Earth?

[Q] Name the ways that Jesus served others while He was on Earth.

[Q] What circumstances are the hardest for you to serve in (home, work, church, etc)?

[Q] Who do you think God is calling you to serve sacrificially?

Teaching Point Three: You Imitate God By being careful, perceptive, and filled.

In Ephesians 5, Paul tells us several times to “be” a certain way—not “do” certain things.

Why the distinction? What is the difference between “being” and “doing”?

When Paul tells us to “be” a certain way, he’s talking about attitude and habits

that we need to adopt and exhibit around the clock. He’s talking things we

need to do—but we do them because they are so much a part of who we are

that these attitudes and habits just flow out of us.

(Being always leads to doing.)

There is an unbreakable connection between being and doing.

One substantiates the other.

Do you want to BE generous? Then DO generosity—in other words, give.

Do you to BE compassionate? Then DO compassionate things. There is an

unbreakable connection between being and doing. And the more you “DO.”

The more you will “BE,” So, in Ephesians 5, when Paul says to “BE,” he’s saying: Do these things again and again and again, until they become so entrenched in who you are that they are apart of your very nature.

Look at (vs.15). You tell someone to “be careful” when they’re about to face something dangerous, or when they’re about to encounter something important.

And that describes every day of our lives. Paul’s phrase in the original text has a “seize the moment” connotation to it—this day, this hour, this moment, is important. Seize it. Maximize it. Redeem it. Live it for all it’s worth.

We should approach every day with a certain amount of caution, because there is spiritual danger all around us. When the pressure to succeed is mounting and you start to think about cutting some ethical corners, be careful.

When that person in the office says something subtly flirtatious, be careful.

When you come home on edge and as soon as you walk in the door your spouse says the wrong thing, be careful. Danger lurks at every turn of the day. Be careful. Approach each moment of each day with caution.

But at the same time, we should also approach each day with anticipation, because each day is an opportunity to accomplish something great for the kingdom of God.

Look at (vs.17). Usually when we talk about God’s will, we are referring to major decisions, such as who does God wants me to marry, where does God want me to work, and so on. That’s not what Paul is talking about here. He is referring to what God wants us to do on a daily basis, how He wants us to live.

It does no good to have a grand vision for your life if you don’t understand that living the Christian life is a day by day process.

Look at (vs.18). Paul's command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is an indication that when it comes to being Spirit-filled, the ball is in our court.

It up-to us to activate it. How? You ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit, to give you as much of Him as you can have. Then you yield yourself to Him,

surrendering your will to His will. And you receive His Spirit, because at that moment He fills you with His Spirit. You don't have to wait for a feeling or any kind of sign, because the proof of His Presence is not in your emotions, it's in the reliability of His Word.

It is God's will that you be filled with the Holy Spirit. If you ask Him to fill you with a heart yielded to Him, He will fill you—guaranteed.

Bill Bright teaches this concept on spiritual breathing: As we go through out the day, becoming aware of impurities in our life, we "exhale" them by confessing them to God.

And then we "inhale" His Presence in our lives by surrendering ourselves to His Control, asking to be filled with His Spirit.

[Q] How can you live each day carefully and cautiously? Give practical examples.

[Q] How can you live each day immersed in God's will? What does that look like in daily life?

[Q] How do you know when you are filled with the Holy Spirit? How does your life reflect His presence?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: to help us understand what it means to live daily in God's presence.

Activity: assign each group one of the following:

- Live carefully and cautiously.
- Live immersed in God's will.
- Lived filled with the Holy Spirit.

Teaching Point Four: You Imitate God by being good to your spouse and family.

Read Ephesians (5:22-6:4).

There are at least three ways to be a good husband:

0. Accept your role as a leader (vv.22-23). This reference to Christ is a comparison, not a job description. You're the leader of your family, not their Lord and Savior. This is what it means: Your wife needs (and wants) you to be a strong and courageous leader. Not a bully, not a dictator, not a caveman, but a strong and courageous. There is not a women in the world who wants to be married to a

weakling. There not a women in the world who wants to be married to a coward. She needs you to be strong. Your family needs you to be strong. They need to be able to look to you for leadership. This has noting to do with chauvinism; it has everything to do with character.

You're the leader. Do you know what an effective leader does? Here's a great quote: "Good leaders inspire people to have confidence in them. Great leaders inspire people to have confidence in themselves."

When Sam Ewing made that statement, he was talking about business—but he could have been talking about marriage.

This is your job as a leader: bring out the best in your wife and children. Inspire them to be the very best that they can be.

2. Accept your role as a Lover (vv.25-29). Pauls tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How much did Christ love the church? Enough to die for it. Who makes the sacrifices in your household? Do your wife and the children structures their lives around yours?

Do they have to yield their wants and needs to yours? Are you the center of your little universe? Who makes the sacrifices at your house? If a sacrifice is to be made, you're the one to make it. You do with out-not them.

Men, if you were to make a list of all the words you hope would describe your personality and character, the word nurturing probably wouldn't make the first five. But it should, because there is no way to describe the way you take of yourself. When you're hungry, you eat. When you're tired, you sleep. When you get a headache, you take aspirin. When you get a chance to watch a base ball game, you watch it. That's nurturing in a nutshell. In the same way you take care of yourself,

you need to take care of your wife. In the same way that you love yourself, you need to love your wife.

Think about what your wife needs. Her needs are different from yours, they're every bit as important. You might not need conversation at the dinner table, but maybe she does. You might not need to have your hand held, but maybe she does. You might not need to hear words "I love you," but maybe she does.

3. Accept your role for a lifetime (v.31). It is clear that God takes this matter seriously. Marriage is a life time commitment. You want to be a good man, a good father, a good husband? Then you've got to recognize that this is the role of a lifetime. That means you've got to be willing to stay.

[Q] if your wife is present in the group, get together with her and discuss the following.

If she is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find time to discuss them with your wife.

- is there any area in which I am abdicating my leadership?
- I need your help in fulfilling my role in the following

ways: _____

—

- How can I better love you? What would make you feel love?

What about being a good wife?

Throughout the book of Ephesians, Paul has been talking about unity; now he brings it down to the most practical level possible—unity in the home, unity in the family.

The main focus of this passage is not the role of the woman; it is the role of the man. Anyone who thinks Ephesians 5 is just about a wife submitting to her husband is missing the point.

It's primarily about the husband role. However, Paul does mention some things the wife needs to do.

Paul says all believers are to submit to one another (v.21), and wives are to submit to their husbands (v.22). Wives are to submit to their husbands in the same way that we all to submit to one another. Now men, is there anyone you submit to in the way that could be described as subservient, or blind obedience? Of course not.

It's true that Christians men submit to one another in the sense that we (at the proper time) yield ourselves to the influence and leadership of our Christian brother—but we're nobody slave.

So wives, your command to submit is not a command to become your husband puppet.

Paul is not suggesting that your husband make all decisions for you. You are still responsible for your own actions and your own decisions. That's why Paul included the qualifying phrase. "as to the Lord." If your husband, or boss, or parents, or any person of influence demands something of you outside the parameters of Christian discipleship, you have an obligation to draw the line.

So, what does it mean to submit to your husband?

We know it's not being subservient, so what is it about?

Wives are to submit to their husbands in the way believers submit to one another, so how do you do it?

Here are three ways you can submit to yours husband.

0. Listen to his counsel. If you're like most wives, sometimes you just want to pour out your troubles and have your husband listen with an understanding ear. And if your husband is like men, as soon as he hears your trouble, he starts giving advice on how to fix it. When your husband starts offering simplistic advice to make the problem go away, listen to him.

He probably has insight into your problem that you don't have, not because he's so much brighter than you, but because he has the right balance of distance from the problem and familiarity with your situation to speak with some amount of wisdom on the subject.

2. Look to his leadership. If your husband is good at doing something, by all means let him do it. Let him be the leader in this area, and don't challenge him every step of the way.

Trust his judgement and yield to his leadership. (Don't you already yield to the leadership of other knowledgeable people? Don't you trust their judgement? Try it with your husband.)

In a marriage this should go both ways.

What about decisions you make together, such as moving to a new city, buying a new house or car, or deciding which church you will attend, etc?

Who gets the final say? A husband who unilaterally makes decisions for the family without taking into consideration how that decision will impact his family is an irresponsible man. When it comes to major decisions, each couple needs to decide for themselves how they will be reached. And they must remember that the question is not “What’s best for me?” or “What’s best for you?” The question is. “What’s best for us?”

0. Respect your husband (v.33). Some wives treat their husbands like one of the children.

They rarely make reference to any of their good qualities, but talk a lot about their faults.

Remind yourself of what he does well. And while you’re at it, remind him from time to time.

[Q] if your husband is present in this group, get together with him and discuss the following. If he is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find a time to discuss them with your husband.

- How can I better listen to your counsel? When do I cut you off and not let you give your opinion?
- When do I challenge your leadership and make it impossible for you to lead?
- How do you are decision? How can we make decision together?
- Do I show you respect? If not, how can I do that better?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Imitating God isn't impossible, or He wouldn't have commanded us to do it . It's possible, but we can't do it in our own strength. We need to rely on Jesus to help us.

One thing you will learn as you practice imitating God is that you get better at it. Just like Dana Carvey's impression of George Bush became more and more convincing over the years, our imitation of God's love becomes more like his .

We get better at it.

Action Point:

Do you want to learn to imitate God ? Then begin to say no to yourself and yes to others. Make a list of who you need to forgive and who you need to serve.

Think of one action that you need to take daily to serve someone else.

Ephesians 6. God Warns You About the War Zone

We are engaged in spiritual battle, and without God's help, we will lose.

Ephesians 6 talks about work and armor of God. What do these have to do with each of other? You live in a war zone. Your life is a battle - field. Every moment throughout the day there are things happening around you that cannot be seen with the natural eye, but are, nonetheless, all too real. We are in the mist of spiritual warfare.

Part 1 Identify the Issue

We weren't made for the pursuit of pleasure, or pursuit of happiness. We were created to work. (Idea goes all the way back to Genesis1.) Christians understand that we don't work merely for work's sake or for the glory of ourselves; we work for the glory of God.

Your thoughts, struggles, fears, doubts, and goals are in the mist of a fierce battle.

From the time you wake up in the morning until your head hits the pillow late at night, you are engaged in combat — in a war hard fought and not easily won, a war in which the casualty count can include every person you come into contact with, day in, and day out.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: You engage in spiritual battle and win when you show your boss respect and pour yourself into your job.

Teaching Point Two: When you put on the full armor of God, you can stand against the enemy's strategies.

Teaching Point Three: in the full armor of God, we can stand our ground against the enemy — and keep standing.

Wearing the belt of truth, we can stand firm in truthfulness and sincerity of heart.

Wearing the breastplate of righteousness, our personal holiness will be seen in doing good.

Wearing feet fitted with readiness, we can go and fight or serve the instant God opens an opportunity.

Wearing the shield of faith, we are protected from anything the enemy throws at us.

Wearing the helmet of salvation means mediating on all God has done for us and has planned for us.

Wearing the sword of the Spirit, God gives us specific words to live by.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Action Point: make prayer your first resort "before you do anything, pray.

When you get up in the morning, before you interact with your family, pray just a quick prayer: God help me help them get their day off to a great start."

When you walk into your workplace, pray a quick prayer: God help me do your work today for your glory. And help me treat my coworkers with dignity and respect.

Before you make a phone call, before you speak to a client, before you go to a meeting, pray. In traffic pray. In stressful situations, pray. In every event throughout the day, pray. On all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, Pray.