Rest and GO
10 Week Devotional Ephesians
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Dear Nyack Community,

Friends and interns of the Office of Spiritual Formation have written these devotionals and we invite you to join our 10 week Bible Study as we look into the book of Ephesians. We will look at a different passage each week, spending time to really understand what the letters are saying to us. We have provided 5 days of readings with accompanying notes and questions to aid you in your study.

On Mondays in chapel starting October 7, faculty members from the School of Bible and Christian Ministry will be preaching on a chapter from the book of Ephesians. Be sure to check the chapel schedule, so you don’t miss these sermons to complement your study.

We encourage you to use your own Bible and journal. If you do not own a Bible come see us at the Office of Spiritual Formation and we would be happy to give you one.

- Week 1: Ephesians 1:1-14
- Week 2: Ephesians 1:15-23
- Week 3: Ephesians 2:1-10
- Week 4: Ephesians 2:11-22
- Week 5: Ephesians 3:1-21
- Week 6: Ephesians 4:1-16
- Week 7: Ephesians 4:17-32
- Week 8: Ephesians 5:1-21
- Week 9: Ephesians 5:22-6:9
- Week 10: Ephesians 6:10-21

Our hope is that you will dig into the Word of God, "so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith!" (Eph 3:17) Enjoy!

With love Wanda Walborn, Director of Spiritual Formation
1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.
1:1-2 Paul starts by addressing those who are “in Christ”: all the believers in Ephesus. He wishes grace (unmerited favor) and peace (from having assurance of grace) – both of which can come only from God.

1:3-4 Paul repeatedly mentions “in Him” or “in Christ” throughout this epistle. He expresses our unity with God through Christ, united because God chose us; God made the decision to have us be with Him before even creation. Our purpose is to be holy (set apart) and blameless (without blemish). This unity implies that just as Christ was crucified, so our old selves also have been crucified, thus restoring us to be blameless and holy.

1:5-6 A son that was adopted in the Roman culture received all the rights as one who was born into the family. To be adopted as sons through Jesus implies that we receive all the rights of true heirs of God, not seen as second best. Jesus is described as the “One he loves” and since we are adopted as sons, that same adoration goes towards those in Christ.

1:7-9 The definition of redemption here means a freedom by payment of a ransom. The blood of Christ was the payment, setting us free from the penalty of sin. However, the blood of Jesus has given us forgiveness as well as God’s wisdom and understanding to know this mystery, a truth once hidden but now revealed. The redemption brought us out of punishment and bestowed us with His wisdom to understand who He is.

1:10-12 All believers will receive the inheritance in the Kingdom come, but Paul specifically addresses the Jews here, who were first called to believe in God.

1:13-14 Here Paul addresses now the Gentiles who are also to receive the inheritance. Thus this inheritance is not only for the Jews but for all who trust in Christ. Though it were the Jews who were first called to Christ, now all can have the seal of the Holy Spirit: the promise of redemption. This is our guarantee.
1. Paul speaks of being adopted through Jesus Christ, speaking to a culture that would understand that being adopted receives all the same rights as being a blood heir. How deeply has this truth sunk in for you? What does being adopted as heirs through Christ mean to you on a personal level? What are the things in your life that sometimes cause you to question this full adoption?

2. Though the blood of Christ has redeemed us (paid the ransom) many of us still live enslaved to sin, as if we are still taken hostage by it. What are some areas where you feel you are still chained? Have you experienced a time when you felt the depth of the freedom Christ bought for you? If not, ask God to help you experience that right now.

3. Paul makes it clear from the very beginning that the promise of the Holy Spirit is offered to all – Jews and Gentiles. No one person is excluded from the redemption that God offers through Christ. What does it mean to you that God has chosen you, for exactly who you are?

4. This introduction speaks of our place in Christ being reserved and predestined since before creation. Has the truth that God has chosen you before the creation of this world become true for you? Read over these verses and let God speak to you about His desire to choose you.

It is interesting that through his trials in the physical, especially given his current situation being in prison, Paul would tell the Ephesians that we don’t battle things in the flesh but in the spirit.

King David is one of the greatest examples of one who knew the battle was more than just the physical. When he was just a young shepherd, he went against Goliath with just a few stones and a slingshot. It was he who defeated the giant. I cannot help but wonder how differently things would have happened had David been consumed by looking at just the physical enemy in front of him.

So often it is easy to see our battles and our struggles for what they look like in the physical. A bad thought, a bad day, a bad situation. Yet David knew the battle was deeper and not only that, he knew his God was stronger and would equip him. David did not even wear the armor of King Saul but went wearing, in the spiritual, the armor of God.

What would it look like if each morning while putting on your clothes, you prayerfully put on the armor of God? Putting on each piece and devoting the day to the Lord? Perhaps take this next week to devote each morning to doing that and see what happens!
“I Put On Christ” Lyrics - Laura Hackett

Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins
That He might deliver us from this present evil age

For the battle is raging, the Devil is raging
And I don’t want to be sleeping while the battle is raging

For my spirit is willing though my flesh gets tempted
Rise up my soul and start praying
Cause I don’t want to be defenseless, yeah

I don’t fight as one who beats the air,
Give me eyes to see and ears to hear
I don’t fight as one who beats the air
Give me eyes to see and ears to hear oh God

I put on Christ make no provision for my flesh
Put on the whole armor of God, leave no open door to darkness
And I take the scroll; eat the scroll
Open up my mouth and speak forth Your Word
I take the sword of the Spirit

Blessed be the Lord my rock
Who trains my hands for battle, trains my hands for war

I don’t fight as one who beats the air,
I have eyes to see and ears to hear

It doesn’t have to be a blind battle cause I have the mind of Christ

Reflect on these lyrics and what they mean to you in conjunction with the passage this week.
“For Christianity does not begin with a big DO, but with a big DONE. Thus, Ephesians opens with the statement that God has ‘blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ (1:3), and we are invited at the very outset to sit down and enjoy what God has done for us – not to set out to try and attain it for ourselves….In walking or standing we expend a great deal of energy, but when we are seated we relax at once, because the strain no longer falls upon our muscles and nerves, but upon something outside of ourselves. So also in the spiritual realm, to sit down is simply to rest our whole weight – our load, ourselves, our future, everything – upon the Lord. We let Him bear the responsibility and cease to carry it ourselves.”

(Watchman Nee, “Sitting, Walking, Standing”, 13)

So much of growing in intimacy with God depends on how much we rest and lean on Him. How much of your relationship with God right now is filled with resting and how much is filled with doing? Why do you feel the need to “do”?

**Week One - Thursday**

Ephesians 1:1-14

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
Week Ten - Tuesday
Ephesians 6:10-21

1. When we realize that the battle that we have is not one of the flesh but one of the spirit with Satan and the evil powers, how does this change our perspective on our current physical sufferings?
2. If armor is meant to be worn completely together, how are we cultivating in our season a way to gain the armor we need for battle? (Think through what the pieces of the armor are.)
3. Prayer is the most important aid that we have in battling the forces of evil and Satan. Why?
4. Which piece of armor do you feel you really “need” the most right now? Truth? Peace? Faith? Read through the passage again and ask the Lord to highlight to you areas where you feel you need His armor and protection.

Week One - Friday
Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul’s letter to the Church of Ephesus is a letter that can be sent to any church today. He begins his letter asserting the redemption through Christ offered freely to us. Before Paul goes on to talk about what a Christian life is or how to stand against the enemy, he starts with the promise of redemption and who our God is. Before we can understand how to practically live a Christian life, we have to know and rest in who God is first, and what He did first. Ultimately our relationship with God rests in His doing, not ours. It always begins with Him.

In the movie “Taken”, Liam Neeson plays a father whose daughter has been kidnapped, to be forced into sexual slavery. Liam Neeson’s character rushes quickly from his home, traveling to another continent, to find his child. He exhausts every resource in order to save his daughter, risking his life throughout the entire movie to not only deliver her, but to bring her home safely where she belongs.

So much of this movie makes me ponder how we have become slaves to sin and this world, stolen away from God’s original and perfect plan. Yet our Father made the decision that He would not sit back and watch us be enslaved. Christ left His perfect home and kingdom to come to earth to where we are, to deliver us and to ultimately bring us home safely. Christ not only risked His life, but freely gave it away. He not only left His home, but His Kingdom; to not just offer us a new home, but make us heirs to this Kingdom. Receive your inheritance in Christ.
Ephesians 1:15-23

Read the passage with the notes

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

6:10-13 Paul is explaining something that we sometimes lose sight of and that is the fact that our current physical battles in life are also very rooted in the spiritual battle that we face daily. When we realize that we are engaged in a spiritual battle, against forces that seek our destruction, we rely on a strength that is not of our own to combat this evil. The realization of Christ as this strength enables us to battle in both the physical and the spiritual.

6:14-17 Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation, Sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The full armor of God as described by Paul is one that cannot protect if only worn one piece at a time. Putting the full armor of God on will protect and enable a sense of boldness as we know that we are secure and strengthened, much like a knight who readies himself for battle. He must put on his armor to ensure his safety and in the completion of putting on this armor, he feels the strength and boldness to run into battle. We will also feel this boldness to do battle against the powers of evil as we become fully equipped with the full armor of God.

6:18-20 The activation of the armor for God comes through the intense and constant prayers that we lift up for ourselves and for one another. We are equipped and strengthened in the armor of God when we pray in the Spirit. Much like that of a general who rallies his troops to battle when they approach him for his commands; we are the servant army before the Lord praying, “what will you have us do?” The Lord’s answer will be the commissioning of us to boldly move forward proclaiming the wonderful mystery and hope of the gospel.

6:21 Paul leaves no questions unanswered as he always does sending someone to aid those he has left behind.
10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

1:15-17 Paul expresses his joy over the believers but also makes it clear he continues to keep them in his prayers, mainly to grow in knowledge. Paul affirms once again who God is and continues to pray for wisdom and revelation of who God is. This is not so much a prayer to gain knowledge about God, but for a shift of their complete understanding of who God is, to understand His very character.

1:18-19 The prayer continues to have eyes enlightened for three reasons: hope (what we can rest our hope in, resting in who God is), inheritance (the fullness of what we are to receive in Christ through the adoption), and power (His power that He bestows upon us who believe).

1:20-21 Christ not only was raised from the dead, the lowest place, but raised to the highest place: the right hand of God in heaven. Jesus was seated in that highest place to reign over every natural and supernatural thing. Jesus has accomplished all things and now sits, resting in the heavenly places.

1:22 Here is the fulfillment of the prophetic promise made in Genesis 3:15 of the seed of Eve to crush the feet of Satan.

1:23 Just as Jesus is the head of the church, the church and Christ complete one another. Christ has conquered death in the past, will reign over all from now into the future, and is currently the fullness and the head of the Church.
Week Two - Tuesday
Ephesians 1:15-23

1. Hope, inheritance, and power. These three entities speak heavily of the promises God has promised us. When we claim these three things from God, it shifts the entire way we live. How can this truth shift your daily life?

2. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Genesis 3:15

Jesus has fulfilled this promise and crushed the head of Satan, yet we often live as if the battle has not been won. Identify areas in your life where you sometimes feel the battle has been lost or is losing, and ask God to give you “eyes of understanding” in these areas.

3. The church and Jesus complete one another, and yet sometimes they seem so separate. Rather than pointing out what is wrong or what others have done wrong, what can you do to further manifest the fullness of Christ and the church?

Week Nine - Friday
Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9

When we look at the different relationships that are described in Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9 we notice that there are 3 particular types of relationships; Intimate (marriage); Honoring (Parent/child); and Obedient (Master/Servant). These three relationships make-up 3 important aspects of our lives that if we are doing well in our relationship with Christ, it will translate well into our relationships with others.

1) In a marriage relationship, it is not about control it is about Love, do we Love Christ? If so what are the things that we do in this relationship with Christ? There is a carnal side to human relationships but this is not what Paul is driving at. Paul refers to the way that we love one another as Christ has loved us. When we can Love Christ in the same way that He loves us, we can do the same to others.

2) In a Parent and Child relationship, there is absolute trust. We rely on God our Father to provide for our every need, knowing and having peace in the understanding that He wants only good things for us and would never seek to belittle us nor provoke us to evil. Likewise in our relationships with our parents and those we acknowledge as parental figures in our lives, we must honor them in the same way with the same trust that we have in God our Father. Our parents are the stewards that God has entrusted us to for a season, we must trust that they will carry out their assignment well.

3) Lastly, in an Obedient relationship, we are completely submissive to our Lord. We have full confidence that God will not mistreat us and that He will give us work that will produce pleasure in His eyes and He will reward us with His approval and love. When we serve our bosses and those who hold authority over us as we serve the Lord we meet this relationship aspect that Paul talks about. Being submissive isn't about power like the world around us would lead us to believe; being submissive is more like Obedience when we work in that Obedience and submissiveness as unto the Lord.
"You have to love your children unselfishly. That is hard. But it is the only way."
- Barbara Bush

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."
- Nelson Mandela

“When over the years someone has seen you at your worst, and knows you with all your strengths and flaws, yet commits him- or herself to you wholly, it is a consummate experience. To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

Reflect on the relationships in your life and if Christ is central in them. Is Christ there in how you treat others in your life?
“[To have Faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you.”

- C.S. Lewis

In knowing God, do you trust Him? In trusting Him, do you obey Him? Take a moment to ponder where you are in trust and obedience towards God.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body, 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bond servant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
1. Husband/Wife, Child/Parent, Employer/Employee. These are all relationships that we will inevitably interact with in our life time. According to Paul there is a correct way if our focus is on Christ. Is our focus on Christ? If not where is it and why?

2. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Paul affirms that God saw from the beginning that humankind was destined to work better in community with each other. The picture of a marriage is that earthly reflection of our relationship with Christ. What are the voices that drive us from this truth?

3. Mutual submission has to do with mutual respect. Mutual respect is only established through cultivating relationships with one another. What are some intentional ways we can cultivate this?

What’s interesting about this part of Ephesians is that Paul is not praying just for us to gain knowledge of who God is, but also what we are to receive in God. Ultimately when we understand all that God gives us, it furthers our understanding about who God is, coming full circle that it all comes down to knowing God’s character.

Growing up I always heard about Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” painting. I have seen it referenced in the media and have even seen mini replicas. I always thought it was a beautiful painting, but a few years ago when I went to the Museum of Modern Art I was finally able to see the real thing with my own eyes. I was stunned. I had no idea what an impact it would have on me to really behold and breathe in its beauty in real life. Now, whenever I see references to that same painting, there is a greater appreciation and even a deeper knowing of the painting that I did not possess before.

There is something about really seeing and witnessing and knowing something first hand. We can all hear stories about God and hear about who He is, but when really get to know Him ourselves, intimately, breathing in His beauty and gazing at who He is, something shifts. It no longer depends on the stories of others or references but there’s a deeper knowing that affects how we see, hear, and to believe. This is why Paul prayed so intently for the church to receive wisdom and revelation to know God. Not just wisdom and revelation about their jobs or families or education but about WHO God is. Ask God for that wisdom and revelation right now so that you too can have a moment to stand and behold His beauty for yourself.
As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

5:22-30 What Paul is talking about in this passage is a unified submission; one to another as Husband and Wife. Christ did not come to earth to be served but to serve. (Mark 10:45) As both men and women who are called to model the same heart and character as Jesus Christ our Lord, we should always look to how we are to mutually serve one another. This is not to say that Jesus was undistinguishable from the rest of the church, because he was. The implication here is that both men and women play a truly important role that neither can exchange nor should for the role of the other. Neither of the two roles (Husband or Wife) holds any higher authority to the other because under the authority of Christ they equally serve in their own roles.

5:31-33 Paul identifies what God commission in Genesis 2:24 in these verses, affirming what God saw in the Garden of Eden; that it was not good for man to be alone. It was for this reason that woman was made and because of this reason that a man will leave his father and mother and become one with his wife.

6:1-4 Paul talks about the order of headship in these first four verses to chapter 6. Children can not provide for themselves nor should they order or demand that their parents do what they want. Our understanding that God our Father knows what we need and would seek to give us good things is the affirmation to these verses. As children still under the headship of our earthly father and mother, we should understand and know that they see our need and will only give us what is good and not bad. To make sure that this is truly the case Paul gives a strong warning to Fathers (and Mothers) to not provoke children to anger but bring them up in the Lord.

6:5-9 We can not take the imagery of bondservant and master in that same context that it was originally used in the 1st century. This passage closely resembles in our time that of the working relationship between employer and employee. To the people that we work for, we are to be respectful; not just in the public eye but in your daily life. The mutual aspects of respect in this passage bring us to see who we are really serving in order that we may serve those around us better.
Read the passage with the notes

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

2:1-2 Paul reminds us where we’ve come from. All of us remember when we began our relationship with Christ! Paul also Acknowledges, however, that the devil is at work in the world as well. He refers to him as, “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.”

2:3-4 Breaking things down further, Paul reiterates the point he makes in Romans about living in the world but not being of the world. Reminding us that we are able to do so because of God’s love and the great mercy that he extends to us!

2:5-6 Because God has extended such great love and mercy to us we become truly alive and find our identities in and through Christ. Paul adds a third ingredient, grace! It’s through such great love, mercy and Grace that we as followers of Christ are able to move beyond the condemnation of the devil. Understanding God’s forgiveness and deepening our relationship with Him causes us to become more like Him.

2:7-8 Paul goes on to importantly explain the simple truth that everyone can receive this amazing love that God offers and there is nothing that we have to do to get it. It’s through experiencing God’s love, grace, mercy and cultivating a relationship with Him that we want to become more like him and serve Him.

2:9-10 The word in the Greek for God’s handiwork can be directly translated as “we are God’s poem.” The good works that we are to do are much bigger than moral behavior; He wants us to be active co-creators! Being creative and experimental, using the skills and the gifts that God has given us for His Glory!
1. Look back at your life “big picture.” How have you experienced God’s love, mercy and grace in your life? What were some of the small moments that you may not have recognized at the time?

2. When you take a step back and look at your life “big picture” how does it change your perspective on life and how does this practice help you to see God at work in the here and now as well as in the past?

3. This passage highlights a huge doctrine of our Christian faith—salvation by grace through faith. Though many of us know this mentally, we have a difficult time knowing this emotionally and spiritually. There is a fine line between faith and deeds and earning love. Why do you feel so many of us still continue to strive for God’s adoration for us?

Oftentimes, in a family there’ll be at least one child who bears a striking resemblance to their father or mother—so much so that friends of their parents will start conversations with them without realizing that they’re talking to the child. Not only will the child look like their parent, but they’ll also pick up on their mannerisms as well so they’ll drive like them, walk like them and talk like them, all without really trying. And if the child wants to be mischievous, they could deliberately imitate their parent by dressing up like them or impersonating them over the phone and fool people watching or listening.

As children of God we’ve all inherited godly characteristics. There is a sense in which we should be laboring to be like Christ, but because we’re God’s children, imitating Him comes much more naturally to us than it does to others who aren’t believers. The point is that as difficult as things like forgiveness and self-control can be to practice, because we’re God’s children, we’re very capable of doing them—which is why God expects them from us. So the next time you come across a temptation that you think is too difficult to resist remember that, at least in some sense, imitating God is as easy as imitating your parents.
Week Eight - Thursday
Ephesians 5:1-21

“I Want To Be Faithful” Lyrics - Vineyard

So many times I failed and I have turned away
But I will never leave for You are so faithful.
I can just see in You all that is just and true,
Less of me; more of You, I am Your servant.

I want to be faithful to You, I want to be true Lord
Whatever you say, I will do, I will obey.

Help me to walk in truth, never to stray from you
Lead me in righteousness, I want to follow.
Teach me to lose my life, that I would be found in You.
Better to lose it all, to be found in Jesus.

Reflect on these lyrics and what they mean to you in conjunction with the passage this week.

Week Three - Wednesday
Ephesians 2:1-10

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

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
"Because salvation is by grace through faith, I believe that among the countless number of people standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands (see Revelation 7:9), I shall see the prostitute from the Kit-Kat Ranch in Carson City, Nevada, who tearfully told me that she could find no other employment to support her two-year-old son. I shall see the woman who had an abortion and is haunted by guilt and remorse but did the best she could faced with grueling alternatives; the businessman besieged with debt who sold his integrity in a series of desperate transactions; the insecure clergyman addicted to being liked, who never challenged his people from the pulpit and longed for unconditional love; the sexually abused teen molested by his father and now selling his body on the street, who, as he falls asleep each night after his last 'trick', whispers the name of the unknown God he learned about in Sunday school.

'But how?' we ask.

Then the voice says, 'They have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

There they are. There *we* are - the multitude who so wanted to be faithful, who at times got defeated, soiled by life, and bested by trials, wearing the bloodied garments of life's tribulations, but through it all clung to faith.

My friends, if this is not good news to you, you have never understood the gospel of grace.”

— Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out
1. Paul encourages us to forgive one another the same way that Christ has forgiven us. This a lot easier said than done. Is there anyone in your life that you struggle to forgive? What is making it so difficult to forgive them?
2. Paul tells us to not take part in behaviors such as coarse joking, obscenity, sexual immorality, foolish talk or greediness. Which of these or other behaviors not listed do you struggle with the most?
3. What do you think it means to be “sleeping”?
4. Based on this passage, being filled with the Spirit leads to worship. Whether it be musically or not, being filled with God leads to worshipping God. How much of your day to day is filled with worshipping God?

In the classic fairy tale “Cinderella”, a woman goes from a lowly servant who sleeps in the fireplace to a queen who receives the fullness of a new kingdom. A simple story, yet so powerful when we realize what the girl is pulled out of and where she is now seated. Cinderella did not do anything to receive the palace and wealth, she was simply herself and that was more than enough for the prince who could look past her exterior and see who she was meant to be.

When I think of the words that we are saved by grace through faith, I realize there are two parts to this. We are saved solely by the grace of God, but it requires our faith to receive that. What if Cinderella spent every morning waking up and telling the prince she did not believe she was where she was, and that she did not deserve to be a queen? What if she continued to sneak out at night and sleep in the fireplace despite her new place with her prince? Faith is simply believing and receiving. Faith leans on knowing that Christ is really that good; that He would travel from Heaven to Earth to redeem us and prepare a Kingdom for us. It does not rest on ourselves, but that our King would see past our dirt and smudges from the fireplaces in our lives, and see us for how He originally created us to be—fearfully and wonderfully made.

Are you receiving this new wealth, or do you continue to sleep in the fireplace claiming that as your portion?
Read the passage with the notes

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 12 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

13 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 14 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, 15 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 16 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 17 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 18 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 19 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 20 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 21 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

5:1-2 We’re told to imitate God the same way that children imitate their parents. This verse comes immediately after 4:32 where Paul says to forgive one another the same way that Christ forgave us. Therefore, the clearest way of imitating God is to forgive others when they wrong us the same way that God forgives us when we wrong Him.

5:3-7 Paul says that there shouldn’t even be a hint of sexual immorality among us and that we shouldn’t be making crude jokes. Which means things like racial slurs and “that’s what she said” shouldn’t be a part of a Christian’s vocabulary because they’re foolish and crude and don’t build anyone up, which was the point of the previous chapter.

5:8-14 When someone is in a romantic relationship with another person, they want to do everything to please that person. So they’ll find out what food they like, what clothes they like, what movies they like etc. so that they can please them. In the same way, when we’re in a relationship with Christ, we should find out what He likes. Fortunately for us, He tells us in His Word—all we have to do is look hard enough. Some examples of what pleases God are verses like Isaiah 58:6, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” and 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.”.

5:15-16 People will frequently complain that they don’t have enough time to do this or that. However, every person is given the same 24 hours every day. The difference is in how we choose to use those hours. Paul is warning us to not waste our time doing things that are unproductive or that are flat-out sinful. Instead, we should be looking for opportunities to do what God wants us to do every day.

5:18-21 Ephesus was the center of worship for Dionysus, the god of wine. Worship rituals focused on fertility, sex and intoxication. When someone was drunk, it allowed Dionysus to take full control of that person’s body and make them do his will. Paul is emphasizing that instead of being filled with wine in order to do the bidding of a false god, we should be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to do the will of God. The will of God, as Paul says in these verses is for us to thank Him for everything and to submit to one another.
Read the passage with the notes

1 Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 2 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. 3 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 4 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 5 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 6 Therefore do not be partners with them. 7 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 8 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. 9 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 10 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 11 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 12 This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

13 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 14 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 15 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 16 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 17 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 18 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 19 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

2:11-14 Before Christ came there was division between those who were “the circumcision” and “the uncircumcised.” Israel was the chosen people of God and the rest of the world was not. Then Christ came and broke down the walls between the Jews and the Gentiles, granting everyone the opportunity to be a part of Christ’s family by giving himself on the cross. Restoring hope to the world.

2:15-18 Paul reiterates that Christ’s coming, preaching and dying on the cross created a new world order that no longer segregated the Jews and the Gentiles but brought them together. Thus establishing peace and becoming one family in and through Christ.

2:19-20 Those who were formerly living outside of Christ have now been accepted and received as family. Going deeper, all have been accepted and can hold on to the foundation laid by “the apostles and prophets” and “Christ Jesus himself the chief cornerstone.” Living in God’s household comes with the responsibility of living a life that displays a faith in Christ and a yearning and striving to be more like Christ everyday.

2:21-22 We are the church, not buildings that are visited by people a few times a week. We are holy temples of the living God. Through cultivating our relationship with God we discover our God given skills, gifts and callings. God brings us all together to work alongside each other to further His kingdom.
1. How have you gone about identifying the gifts and skills that God has given you? If you have not identified them yet think about how you might start identifying those gifts and skills. Who can you call out the seeds the Lord has planted in you?

2. If you have already identified these gifts and skills how have you used them to further God’s kingdom? What are some new ways that you could start using your God given gifts and talents to further His kingdom?

3. Despite scripture calling us to be one, unified body, they say that Sunday 11AM is the most segregated time in America. Why are we still so segregated when it comes to our houses of worship?

4. Paul was telling the Gentiles that despite not being a Jew, they are invited into Christ’s plan. This would have been huge news for them. Was there a time you felt disqualified from God’s love? What made you feel that way and what truths can you claim today to continue to fight those lies?

In the movie Captain America, Steve Rogers is injected with a serum that transforms him into a supersoldier and he uses his enhanced abilities to fight evil and protect American citizens. In the same way, when we become Christians, God empowers us to do things we were never capable of before. He commands us to abstain from sexual immorality, to tell the truth and to forgive because He knows He's given us the power to do that. When we understand what God has given us, we're able to live the life He's called us to live.

As powerful as Captain America is, he didn't stay alone. In the movie The Avengers, he joins several other superheroes and they work together to fight off alien creatures invading Earth from another world. Each of the heroes are dangerous by themselves individually, but when they come together they become a greater force for good. In the same way, as Christians, we were never meant to be our own individual spiritual superheroes. It's God's intention that we serve each other, love each other and work together to bring God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven. Imagine how much the Kingdom of God would advance on Earth if Christians were building each other up instead of fighting each other and how powerful of a witness that would be to nonbelievers. It's this unity that God is aiming for. Are you an individual trying to make it on your own or are you teaming up with other "heroes" to reveal the Kingdom?
“There is a twilight zone in our hearts that we ourselves cannot see. Even when we know quite a lot about ourselves—our gifts and weaknesses, our ambitions and aspirations, our motives and our drives—large parts of ourselves remain in the shadow of consciousness. This is a very good thing. We will always remain partially hidden to ourselves. Other people, especially those who love us, can often see our twilight zones better than we ourselves can. The way we are seen and understood by others is different from the way we see and understand ourselves. We will never fully know the significance of our presence in the lives of our friends. That’s a grace, a grace that calls us not only to humility, but to a deep trust in those who love us. It is the twilight zones of our hearts where true friendships are born.”

Henri J.M. Nouwen

Reflect on who in your life is able to identify the “twilight zone” in you and how they can aid you in casting off your old self and embracing the new.

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—
12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 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 groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 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. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
There are many great differences between the small southern town of Hopewell, Virginia, and the giant metropolis of New York. But there was one thing that was exactly the same. To my surprise, there is a direct relationship between a person’s grasp and experience of God’s grace, and his or her heart for justice and the poor. In both settings, as I preached the classic message that God does not give us justice but saves us by free grace, I discovered that those most affected by the message became the most sensitive to the social inequities around them. One man in my church in Hopewell, Easley Shelton, went through a profound transformation. He moved out of a sterile, moralistic understanding of life and began to understand that his salvation was based on the free, unmerited grace of Jesus. It gave him a new warmth, joy, and confidence that everyone could see. But it had another surprising effect. ‘You know,’ he said to me one day, ‘I’ve been a racist all my life.’ I was startled, because I had not yet preached to him or to the congregation on that subject. He had put it together for himself. When he lost his Phariseeism, his spiritual self-righteousness, he said, he lost his racism.” - Tim Keller

Something happens in our hearts when we truly experience God. The same grace He shows us, we long to show others, crossing barriers and dividing lines. How this transformation happened for you yet?

Ephesians 2:11-22

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. 20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
1. Paul commands us to put off the old self and to refrain from lying, sinful anger, stealing, sexual immorality and other sins. What sins are you struggling with right now? Take time to bring these before the Lord and know that even though we struggle with ourselves, the Lord still delights in us and the journey we are making to a “new self”.

2. Paul says to put off the old self and to put on the new self. Identify specific habits that you can attribute to your "old self". What are some specific ways you can start putting off this old self? What attributes of a “new self” do you feel are currently being cultivated in you right now?

3. Paul tells us to not say anything that's unwholesome, but to instead say things that build one another up. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to make fun of someone and how difficult it is to give them a genuine, well thought-out compliment? Are there people in your life who are difficult for you to be kind to? Why is it so much easier to gossip or to be rude to people than to encourage them?

Christ came to save the whole world not just a select group of people. He brought the Jews and Gentiles together and formed a single family with Christ as the “cornerstone.”

Have you ever been in a situation where you became very aware of your skin color or ethnicity? As if you were the only one different, and that in turn made you feel like you did not belong? In the classic Dr. Seuss children's novel, “The Sneetches”, there are a group of characters who have stars on their bellies. There are other Sneetches without stars and thus there was a dividing line. The star bellied Sneetches were seen as more elite and more desired. The characters go back and forth paying a man to add stars and remove stars on their bellies. By the end of the story both sets of characters erase the dividing line and no one is seen as less or excluded.

“The Sneetches” is a powerful story about discrimination and dividing lines. In the story the characters simply “wizen up” but in real life, it was Jesus who erased the dividing line. None of us are foreigners or lower class in His Kingdom. Despite what you've gone through or what you've been told, you, exactly as you are, are invited into God’s Kingdom and seen as first class.
Week Five - Monday
Ephesians 3:1-21

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,
that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.
In reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,
which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,
and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.
His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,
according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.
For this reason I kneel before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

4:17-19 In the previous section, Paul describes what the church looks like when it's healthy and is fully functioning the way it ought to. He goes on to say that God wants to help us "reach unity in the faith" and mature until we attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Paul continues on in this section to implore us not to live sinful lifestyles. The idea, then, is that we should abstain from all forms of sin, not just because sin is bad in and of itself, but because the unity and fulfillment God has prepared for us is so much better.

4:20-28 Paul emphasizes the role that we have to play ourselves in the fight against sin. So he says to "put off the old self" and "put on the new self" and to "put off falsehood" and speak the truth instead. The entire book up to this point has focused on everything God has given us and done for us (i.e. spiritual blessings in Christ, being saved by grace, being taken from aliens to citizens etc.). So because of what God has given us in the spiritual realm, we're now empowered to live the lives He has called us to live in the physical realm. We can resist sexual temptation, for example, because one of the spiritual blessings we have is self-control.

4:25-32 Furthermore, Paul's focus isn't on personal piety here, but on the unity of the church as a whole. So he urges us to speak the truth because we're members of one body, to work instead of steal so that we can give to those in need and to not gossip, but to build each other up instead. He ends the section by targeting several sins that cause division in the church including bitterness, anger, slander, hatred and un-forgiveness. Personal piety is good, but God is aiming for something greater here—unity in the church.
17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. 20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

3:1-6 Paul explains that God has given him insight into the mystery of Christ and the responsibility of sharing that insight. That mystery is that Gentiles can be part of the body of Christ. We take it for granted that we're not Jews yet still children of God and equal heirs. This is mysterious because we don't deserve God's grace.

3:7-9 Paul explains that God has given him the responsibility of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, even though he feels that he's unworthy of the calling because he's "less than the least of all God's people". So a person unworthy of God's grace is called to minister to others who are unworthy of God's grace. When we feel unworthy of something God has given us to do it may be because He wants us to minister to others who struggle with feelings of unworthiness.

3:10-16 Paul urges the Ephesians not to mourn his current state, but to understand his present sufferings are for the glory of God. Praying on one's knees was that the common posture so Paul was emphasizing his fervent prayer for the people.

3:17-19 The mystery of Christ is a mystery because we'll never fully understand why God deals with humans the way He does. The mystery is that Gentiles are allowed into God's family even though we don't deserve it. But if we don't deserve God's grace, why does He give it to us in the first place? Because He loves us. This may be why Paul ends his prayer in this section by asking that the Ephesians would be able to grasp the immeasurable depths of God's love. This is not just a prayer to understand, but a prayer to do. If we are united in one single family, we need to treat each other as such.
1. Do you feel unworthy of something God has given you? What is that thing that you feel unworthy of? Why do you feel unworthy to receive it? There is a difference between realizing our depravity but also staying in a place of worthlessness and shame. What would it look like if you freely accepted your depravity but joyfully claimed your worth in this area?

2. Do you feel unworthy of something God has called you to do? Is that unworthy feeling based on how big the calling or how small you feel? In the scope of things, does it matter if we know that any calling God gives us is God-sized and yet it is His trust in us that enables us to do it?

3. The calling God has given us is fueled when we study how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God’s love is. It surpasses our knowledge and goes deeper to a place of knowing beyond ourselves, but knowing Christ’s power in us. How much do you use this “fuel” and how much do you use your strength? Have you felt there are moments when you are resting on just fumes?

In most businesses, there are various people who are skilled at different things that contribute to the project. For example, if one company was going to construct a building, they would have various workers on their team. There would be an architect, a manager, a financial chair, a project coordinator. Then of course there would be construction workers, each doing a different job whether it be scaffolding or deconstructing. It makes sense, no one would be able to do the whole job alone. What would the building look like with only the architect? It would simply stay on paper.

It is so logical, yet so often we try to be church by ourselves or with others just like us. We try to grow in our disciplines and journey by ourselves, journaling but not sharing and processing with others. Or we are walk the journey with those we know will agree with us, not being challenged or sharpened.

And then there is the church. What would the church look like with only the preacher or only the choir? Just as a construction team needs others to get the project done, so do we need one another to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Are you surrounding yourself with others to sharpen and stretch you, or are you staying comfortable?
“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.”

- Henri Nouwen

“One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organizations do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always.”

- A.W. Tozer

Church is so much more than simply attending building on Sundays. Do you have people in your life that you feel are the church for you?

Ephesians 4:1-16

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
Week Five - Thursday
Ephesians 3:1-21

“How Deep the Father’s Love For Us” Lyrics - Stuart Townend

How deep the Father’s love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure

How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One, bring many sons to glory

Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers

It was my sin that left Him there until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

Reflect on these lyrics and what they mean to you in conjunction with the passage this week.

Week Six - Wednesday
Ephesians 4:1-16

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

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

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?) He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Take time to slowly read this passage again, asking God what He wants to bring your attention to today.
1. Identify situations where it would be difficult to behave in a way worthy of the calling. What are some ways that you might be able to hold yourself accountable in these difficult situations?

2. What does it look like for the church to be a “mature” body? Where do you feel your local church is in its growth towards maturity? What can you do to contribute your gifts to that body to bring it into further maturity?

3. Where are you in your personal growth with God today? Are you an infant, tossed back and forth by waves, or a mature body? Why is it necessary than for us to mature with the body?

Paul acknowledges that he doesn't deserve any of God's grace because of the things he's done. And yet God blessed him with supernatural insight into the mystery of Christ, inspiring him to write two thirds of the New Testament and drenched him with so much of the Holy Spirit that his handkerchiefs cast out demons (Acts 19:11-12).

In the movie Man of Steel, Clark discovers his powers and where he's come from. He never asked for his powers or did anything to deserve them. He has them simply because he's a Son of Krypton. There's a scene where his father Jor-El tells him, "You've grown stronger here than I ever could've imagined. The only way to know how strong, is to keep testing your limits." In the same way, we never asked for God's blessings and we certainly didn't do anything to deserve them, either. But we have them simply because we're His sons and daughters.

God gave Paul the ministry of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles and used him to transform the ancient world. He's given each of us different gifts and ministries as well and wants to use us with just as much earth-shattering power, regardless of how unworthy we feel of it. He's telling us the same thing Jor-El told Clark—to test the limits of the grace He's given us. The only difference is that in our case there are no limits to what God has given us and what He can do through us because He's able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.
Read the passage with the notes

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

“When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

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

4:1-2 Up to this point in scripture, Paul has spent a lot of time explaining how much Christ has done for us. Now there is a calling involved. This calling is not about deserving or trying to live up to what Christ has done for us, because we don’t deserve anything. This calling is about understanding the way we should live because of what God has done for us. When we understand what Christ did for us combined with cultivating relationship we develop a desire to live like Christ. He then goes on to list some attributes of what it looks like to live out that calling.

4:3-6 This is not a journey that we are called to be on alone. God did not create us to be loners. We are to enjoy fellowship with fellow followers of Christ, supporting each other in the good times and bad, striving towards the future. We do this because God is over all and works through all things.

4:7-10 Just as God expects us to live a life worthy of the calling we are expected to use the “special gifts” that Christ has given us. Christ who died descended and then ascended has given us these gifts to spread the “Good News,” striving to bring bits of heaven to earth anticipating His return.

4:11-13 God has given each of us at these spiritual gifts listed. None of them are more important than the other. Rather they are equally important, necessary and vital to furthering the kingdom of God.

4:14-16 Maturing in our spiritual gifts helps us to mature in our faith. This will not only strengthen the body in its current state, it also helps those who are still new in their faith to grow stronger, creating a wonderful cycle. We grow in our faith and become more like Christ through the way that we act along and in community. Maturing in our different spiritual gifts helps the whole body to grow.