

Gospel at depth: Bible Reading Guide

*alive*  
*ephesians*

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# alive ephesians

***"Ephesians is  
the most sublime  
and majestic  
expression of the  
gospel"  
– Lloyd-Jones***

Right across the Roman Empire, people with no previous knowledge of God were rapidly being made aware of His existence and His merciful offer of forgiveness through the preaching of the gospel. But as this message of salvation spread like wildfire across the land,

there came a growing need for the newly formed churches to come to terms with exactly what their conversion meant. When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church in Ephesus it was to fill this very need; to give believers a vivid image of their new identity as Christians.

The result is one of the most spectacularly profound texts ever written. Paul paints a stunning picture of the cosmic plan of God to unite all things in His only Son Jesus Christ. He calls believers to recognise that God has graciously included them in His cosmic and eternal plan of salvation. He did this by uniting them to Jesus; the source of all life, the head of the church and the One who is triumphant over all powers and authorities.

Ephesians invites us to stand in awe of the new identity we have received in Christ, to marvel at His glorious grace and to rejoice at His immeasurable love. Ultimately Paul wants you to see that your identity has been dramatically changed... you are no longer dead but you are alive!

## Day 1 – Read Ephesians 1:1-10

### *lavished with grace*

I know a man who oversees a thrift shop where they sell second-hand clothes in an attempt to provide low cost clothing to the community. However, he tells me that the majority of the customers drive BMWs or Mercedes Benz. While there are some exceptions, rich people can be some of the stingiest people. We can all probably think of a rich person we know who is tight, who skimps and saves everywhere in order to maintain their opulent lifestyle.

***God doesn't skimp! He is rich in grace and lavishes forgiveness on us, holding nothing of His glorious plan back.***

Unfortunately sometimes we can be tempted to think of God in the same way. Maybe we view God as sitting in Heaven, clothed in luxury and perfection while life here on earth is filled with trial after trial. If God is so good, so abundant in everything... why doesn't He share some of it with us? Especially when we face times of hardship it is easy to think of God as stingy and hardhearted towards us.

But at the start of his letter to the Ephesian Christians Paul outlines the opposite: God is incredibly generous! In an opening sentence that seems to keep building and building he tells us that God has given us every blessing imaginable. And it is not as if God just gives us a little glimpse or taste of these blessings... verse 8 tells us that He has lavished these blessings on us.

Like parents who shower their firstborn child with present after present at their first Christmas, God showers the

gracious gift of a full and complete salvation on His children. Right throughout the text Paul highlights and praises God for His unbelievable generosity and grace.

***Salvation: ALL planned by God, ALL worked by God, ALL for the glory of God; yet we get ALL its blessings.***

However, the crescendo of this bounty of blessings is that we have been included in God's cosmic plan for all creation. He has revealed to us the mystery of His will. God's salvation plan is the thing we get most excited about, the thing that captivates our hearts and minds, and here we see that God's purpose is not to hold back from us, but to give it all to us.

## Questions

1. The text says that God has, "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing". From this passage, make a list of every blessing that God gives us in salvation...
2. What things in your life make it hard for you to see these blessings?
3. Some people struggle to trust that God really has their best intentions in mind. How does this passage give us hope?
4. What is one way that you could share the truth of this passage with someone who doesn't know Jesus?

## Day 2 – Read Ephesians 1:11-14

# *an inheritance of glory*

In almost every part of our culture, from the classroom to cartoons, from home to Hollywood, we are told that we have the freedom to do whatever we want in life. So strong is this sentiment that perhaps one of the things that grates

***God has  
destined you  
for a glorious  
inheritance;  
thus salvation  
rests on His  
power not  
yours.***

against us the most is being told we don't have a choice. So when we read in the Bible words like "chosen by God" or "predestined" we start to get a bit edgy, thinking that somehow God is forcing us into something we don't have a choice about. Or worse still, that He is forcing some people out of salvation without giving them a choice. And yet here are these words in the first chapter of Ephesians.

Yesterday you may have even listed God's choosing of you or His predestining of you as one of the spiritual blessings we have received in Christ (v3-5).

There is obviously a lot of theological debate about these terms and what their significance is for the Christian. My goal in these readings is not to create theological controversy but I think we should at least wrestle with what Paul means. There are two parallel truths that run side by side in this passage:

1. The eternal plan of God which was in His mind from before the foundation of the world to include people in His glorious inheritance (v3-5, 11).
2. The means by which people are included in this inheritance is by their belief in His gospel (v13).

As hard as it is for us to reconcile these truths together, we have to somehow hold them in tension. Is salvation on account of God's predestining choice or is it on account of a human response to the gospel? Well it is both! The fact it is both actually prevents us from drifting off into theological extremes that cloud our understanding of salvation.

The fact that salvation is by God's plan, design and choice reminds us that we are not the masters of our own destiny; it is God who acts and wills us towards salvation. It prevents us from becoming proud, thinking that our salvation was a result of our wise choice. The fact that we must actively respond to the gospel prevents us from seeing salvation as unemotional and fatalistic; it makes the gospel call a call of urgency.

***Having the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation means God has sealed His promise with Himself.***

Ultimately Paul tells us that the inheritance God has destined us for is sealed in us by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. This again reminds us that God is the author and giver of our salvation, but requires us to be active in our reception of it as we move under the Spirit's conviction.

## **Questions**

1. How does the thought of being predestined by God sit with you? Is it comforting, challenging or both?
2. What does the need for human belief in the gospel mean for the way in which we evangelise?
3. How does having the Holy Spirit provide us with a foretaste of our inheritance in Heaven?

### Day 3 – Read Ephesians 1:15-23

## *measuring the immeasurable*

One of the most common objections to Christianity is that it sets you up to live a boring life. As a result, Christians can slip into thinking that we must argue against the “uncoolness” of Christianity; that part of our mission in this world is to prove we are not dorks.

The problem with this is that often we look to the world and see what they paint as exciting and then try to find aspects of Christianity that match or show how it is fine for Christians to do these things as well. The result is a Christianity that has sold out to appear cool but only managed to produce a half-baked imitation of the world.

If Christianity is going to beat the charge of boredom then it will not be done through cheesy T-shirts, café churches and Facebook memes. The best way to proclaim the wonder of Christianity is simple: we need to be genuinely excited about everything that Christ has to offer. Too often our attempts at coolifying Christianity actually betray our own lack of real excitement for following Jesus.

***Our job is not to make Christianity captivating but to allow Christ to captivate us.***

Paul did not need to airbrush Christianity in order to soup-up its appeal; he simply proclaims the wonder that it truly is to follow Christ. When outlining his hope for the Ephesian Christians, Paul pauses his explanation in verse 15 and spends 8 verses expounding how ecstatic he is to be following Jesus.

Paul desires for the church to understand the full nature of their salvation:

- The hope of a glorious inheritance
- Christ's immeasurably great resurrecting power
- That Christ is the highest of high authorities, the name above all names and everything is under His feet
- That Christ is the Head of the church and we are united to Him as His body and receive everything He offers us.

***Christianity:  
measuring the  
immeasurable  
greatness of  
both the  
majesty of  
Christ and the  
hope He has  
given.***

There is no doubt that Paul longs not for the church to coolify Christianity but to be gripped by just how awesome it really is. See Christianity is not a boring life of rule keeping and withholding joy; it is actually an amazing journey of measuring the immeasurable greatness of Jesus Christ and fathom the unfathomable hope that He has given us who believe. When the church is gripped by this reality and joyously takes up this pursuit of Christ, then no one will

accuse us of boredom.

## **Questions**

1. Have you ever found your faith boring? Honestly, what aspects of Christianity least excite you?
2. Paul's desire is for a greater comprehension of who Christ is and what He has done? What are some ways you can dive deeper into these truths?
3. How can you best express the exciting and joyous nature of following Jesus to your friends/family?

## Day 4 – Read Ephesians 2:1-10

### *saved by grace*

My kids love the Madagascar movies. In the second movie the animals are digging for water but all they can find is diamonds and gold. When the hippos pull another shovel of precious mineral out of the ground the animals sigh with frustration. The humour lies in the fact that the animals have no idea about the jackpot of riches they have pulled out of the ground. Here they were surrounded by a matchless treasure but to them it was rubbish because they did not know the extent of its value.

Sometimes we can be guilty of this when it comes to our salvation. We sit around the church and we mouth words about it during the singing time, listen to our pastors and bible study leaders talk about it and occasionally read about it in Scripture but for some reason it never really captivates us. From what Paul says here one reason we haven't fully come to grips with the depth of our salvation is that we greatly underestimate (or perhaps forget) just how terrible the sin we were saved from is.

Paul describes the sinful condition as: dead, lost, bankrupt, enslaved and destined for destruction under God's wrath. Not the kinds of words we want to associate with ourselves but we have to come to grips with how accurate they are.

***To see the  
full glory of  
God's grace  
we must  
remember  
where we  
were without  
it: trapped,  
enslaved &  
dead!***

But Paul's desire is not to depress us but rather to reveal to us just how amazing the treasure of our salvation actually is. He wants us to see that even though we were

***My good works were bankrupt and unable to save but God saved me out of His richness for His good works.***

completely bankrupt when it came to saving ourselves, that God graciously gifted salvation to us out of the riches of His mercy and love. And the salvation He gives completely covers and redeems our sinful condition. Where there was death there is life, where we were lost and separated there is unity with Christ, where there was the threat of wrath there is now the promise of exaltation and where our works were bankrupt we are created for His works. However deep the void our sin hollowed out in us, it has been filled to overflowing by God's grace.

If thinking about your salvation has become dry, then perhaps you should reconsider just how terrible a state you were in before you were saved. Then you might see a much larger picture of the work Christ did to save you.

### Questions

1. Do you view your past sin as mistakes or as offensive displays of your bankruptcy and death?
2. List ways in which Christ has filled the void of your past life of sin and death?
3. Paul says we are saved **FOR** good works not **BY** good works, what does this look like practically for you?

## Day 5 – Read Ephesians 2:11-22

# *the unity in community*

In 1994 the world was shocked when news of a horrifying massacre in Rwanda hit our TV screens. In 100 days over 500,000 people were killed in what was a bloody culmination of years of civil unrest between two tribes. The Hutu government used the assassination of their president and propaganda to turn Hutus against Tutsis resulting in the systematic genocide of staggering numbers of Hutus. One of the saddest things in this conflict was that the church joined in the racism and Christian Tutsis were part of the death squads that killed Christian Hutus. One Hutu minister lured Tutsis into his church on the premise he would provide them with asylum before ordering bulldozers to crush the building, killing 2000 of them.

Such hatred between believers seem abhorrent to us, especially when the cause of the hatred is racism. Racism is one of the attitudes that even the most tolerant of people just can't stomach and yet here it is alive and kicking in a church of all places. But it was not the first church to struggle with racial division. In fact in the early church the racial divide between Jews and Gentiles was the cause of so much tension that the Apostles were constantly called to address it.

Paul did not want racism to take hold in the Ephesian church, so in order to sever the root of racism Paul outlines a stunning truth.

***Racism cannot exist in the gospel community: Christ's blood creates the community not your bloodline.***

Paul tells the church in Ephesus that God planned Jesus' death to create racial unity not division. He goes so far as to say that this is one of the primary actions of the cross; to bridge the Jew/Gentile divide! Yesterday we saw that

***The brilliance of the Church is not in its structure but in its foundation; Jesus Christ & His gospel of peace!***

salvation is not by works but by grace. If this is the case then surely racism has no place in the community that has been created by this grace.

Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis for the church not race, gender, social status, education, political persuasion, Apple or PC users or any other basis on which we divide humanity. Anyone who has entered through faith in this Jesus has been made part of His new community.

The church is the only community whose identity does not rest on its form or structure in any given cultural setting. Her identity lies in her foundation which is the same the world over; Jesus Christ and His gospel of peace.

## **Questions**

1. We view racism as a pretty extreme ideology and would never ascribe to it, but when Australia is one of the most multi-cultural nations of earth, why is the church often so white middle-class?
2. How readily do you go out of your way to engage people of varying ethnic backgrounds?
3. What can you and/or your church do to become more multi-cultural?

## Day 6 – Read Ephesians 3:1-13

# *the church: god's wisdom*

I once led a youth group in which one particular family were regular attendees. The kids and the mum came every week to church and youth group but the dad never came. I wouldn't have been surprised if the dad wasn't a believer, but the kids always spoke of their dad's faith so it was always confusing that he didn't come. Eventually I met him and in conversation he told me that he didn't need the church. He had his faith in Jesus and that was all he needed. Since that time I have met heaps of people with a similar mindset. "I love Jesus but I don't love the church."

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he encourages them not to lose heart or give up on the church. But the threat to their identification with the church was not boredom,

***Christian:  
Think you  
don't need  
church?***

***Church is how  
God proclaims  
His wisdom to  
the universe.  
It is bigger  
than you!***

individualism, busyness, being burnt in the past or anything like what keeps people from church today. They were under heavy persecution! If anyone had a legitimate reason to steer clear of church it was people who could be killed for going – yet Paul calls them to stay connected to the church!

He does this by sharing with them what God's plan for the church really is – and it is much bigger and more majestic than any one of them!

Paul paints the church as the community that bears that gospel; the message of Jesus Christ. Therefore the church is how God reveals everything that is close to His heart to this world. He frames this around the word "mystery" and while this word brings up connotations of fathomless problems that cannot be solved, Paul uses it to speak of something that was hidden in the past but is now revealed.

That thing, which he also calls the "manifold wisdom of God", is that salvation is available to all (Jews & Gentiles) through the one Jesus Christ. So to keep oneself from church is not only to disconnect oneself from the way in which God has chosen to work in this world, it also contradicts the reality that this gospel community is for everyone who believes. The church is not about you; it is so much bigger!

***The "mystery"  
of God's plan  
is no longer  
mysterious,  
it's been  
revealed:  
Salvation is  
available to all  
through  
Jesus!***

## **Questions**

1. What things are likely to keep you from connecting to a local church?
2. Compare them to the task of proclaiming the manifold wisdom of God to the universe. How do they compare?
3. What can you do to increase your participation in the mission God planned the church for?

## Day 7 – Read Ephesians 3:14-21

### *a joyful pursuit*

I used to coach high school students in track & field. Many of them had immense talent and were likely to represent the state. However, as they got older other pursuits such as school work, part-time jobs and hormones began to creep into their life and compete for attention. One by one the promising athletes were faced with a decision: do I continue to pursue athletic excellence or something else?

Unfortunately their decision was often made on the basis of what would be most enjoyable. So when they realised that years of hard training, early mornings, injuries and numerous competitions was nothing compared to hanging with friends at the beach, partying and exploring their sexuality; one by one they gave up.

***Telling yourself you are doing the hard yards for Jesus might mean you think He is a hard taskmaster.***

Sometimes I think we can view pursuing Christ in a similar way. We know it is good for us, but it is perceived as the less fun option. So to embrace the Christian life means a noble but joyless pursuit. Sometimes we even try to convince ourselves that by choosing Christ we are deliberately choosing the harder and therefore more spiritual option. Eventually however, we end up like my young athletes; lured by the fun

the world has to offer and convinced that Christianity can't measure up.

Paul's greatest prayer for the Ephesian Christians was that they might pursue Christ with their whole life. But he certainly did not encourage them to do this by selling it as the hard but noble option. Rather, he described it as a never ending journey of trying to measure the immeasurable breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love for us.

***Living your life to comprehend the measureless love of God has for you in Christ will bring measureless joy & satisfaction.***

Paul pictures Christianity not as a hard slog up a mountain of pain (even though he himself was no stranger to suffering), but rather as a pursuit where you are constantly being amazed and overjoyed by a fresh discovery of the magnitude of God's grace. Perhaps it is time for us to think less of Christianity as a joyless path of pain and more of it as a passionate pursuit of joy!

## **Questions**

1. What aspects of Christianity are most likely to make you think of it as a hard boring slog?
2. One reason we think of the Christian life as boring is because we still consider the alternative to be so enjoyable. How can we develop a hatred for our old life of sin?
3. How can we communicate to others just how joyful our pursuit of Christ is?

## Day 8 – Read Ephesians 4:1-6

# *one lord, one body*

Do you remember back to your school days when your teachers would get up on assembly at regular intervals and remind you that even when you left school for the afternoon, you were to make sure your uniform was worn correctly and your behaviour was exemplary? Who could forget? Well we know now that their reasoning wasn't a pathetic attempt to control even more of your life, but rather it was all about maintaining the reputation of the school. If you wore the uniform of the school you must act in line with the ethos of the school.

Well when it comes to our salvation Paul points out that there is a need to act in line with the ethos of our salvation; we must act in a manner worthy of the calling we have received from God. But in order to know what it means to live a life worthy of our calling, we need to first understand exactly what kind of calling we have received.

***One God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; namely one path to salvation.***

Paul describes our faith as a series of elements that are all unique and alone: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father God. The point he is trying to make is that all people who have received salvation have walked exactly the same path, empowered by the same God. Each individual story might look different, but the underlying salvation is exactly the same. There is only one group of saved people; one church.

Therefore when we look at the visible outworking of a life that is worthy of the calling we have received, we should not be surprised when we see what it includes: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, love & unity. If there is only one way to get saved, only one God doing the saving and only one church that results, then the only manner worthy of our salvation is unity.

***All are saved  
the same  
way thus  
the only way  
worthy of  
this grace is  
unity.***

And yet truly being united with one another is a constant struggle for us. And I am not just talking about organisational unity at a denominational level, I am talking about the daily challenge of being united to our fellow believers on a personal level. So often our pride, superiority complexes or desire for attention prevent us from really embracing all that God has for us in the church. The challenge of unity is not a side issue for Christianity; it is possibly one of the most central! It is time that we examined our hearts to see if we are walking in a manner worthy of our salvation.

### **Questions**

1. How does our pride prevent us from embracing unity?
2. What are the dangers for a church that doesn't fully embrace unity?
3. Why is it important to be reminded about the fact that we all came to salvation through the same means? How can we remind one another practically of this?

## Day 9 – Read Ephesians 4:7-16

### *the gift of leaders*

I once worked a pretty boring job where we had a supervisor who basically sat on his stool all day and did nothing. He just read his paper and shouted an order here and there. He never encouraged and always criticised, so we never got the impression he was there for our good; we thought he was only there for the money.

If you spend enough time under a leader like this it is easy to become sceptical of all leadership. We can begin to think that all leaders use their position to promote themselves at the expense of those under them. This is a problem when it changes how we view church leadership. Maybe you see your pastor always up the front, making decisions and always being the focal point of the Sunday service and so you see him as self-seeking and proud. The result is that we hang back from the pastors at church because we are less likely to follow them and support their leadership.

***Jesus gifted  
the church  
with leaders  
for our good;  
so we might  
be strong,  
mature &  
united.***

But Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that their leadership was actually a gift from God. He says that when Jesus ascended to Heaven that He gave the gift of the Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers to the church. I don't know if you ever thought of it like this, but your pastor is God's gift to your church! Now as a pastor I can tell you that this is more daunting for me than it is for you because I am supposed to be God's gift for *your* good not mine.

The passage tells us that the goal of Jesus' gift of leadership was to build up and unite the church. He longs to see His church strong, stable and united so that they won't be tossed back and forth by all the whacky winds of teaching

***The church is led by those who minister the Word so the church is unable to be swayed.***

that exist in this world. He doesn't want you to fall into the traps of false teachers so He gives you leaders who can help you to stand strong.

If you look at four leadership roles that Jesus gave to the church you will see a common thread. Apostle, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers are all primarily ministries of the Word. The Apostles took the message of the gospel to the world and preserved its purity,

the prophets spoke God's word in season, evangelists proclaimed the gospel and called people to believe and the pastor-teachers taught the gospel at depth to grow the disciples. Each role is inseparably connected to a ministry of the Word. Since people mature in Christ by hearing His Word, it is this connection to Word ministry which makes them the perfect gift in order to mature the church. The good purpose for God's gift of leaders is that you will be matured through engaging with His Word.

## **Questions**

1. How do you view your pastor? With cynical contempt or with supportive appreciation?
2. Is your pastor free to minister the Word to your church or is he snowed under with other tasks?
3. What is one practical thing you can do this week to encourage and support your pastor in his role?

## Day 10 – Read Ephesians 4:17-24

### *The new self*

A common question is: “Can you respond to the gospel and then live like Satan and still end up going to Heaven?” It sounds like a pretty philosophical question... I mean surely no one really lives like Satan! But in reality this question has an important practical application.

Sure no one really lives like Satan; especially if they claim to have responded to the gospel. But there are people who come to Christ and then refuse to change areas of their lives they know to be sinful. So maybe a more practical phrasing of the question would be: Can you be a Christian homosexual? A porn-watching Christian? A Christian wife-basher? A Christian exotic dancer? Ultimately, can you claim to receive the gospel and then let your life be defined by your sin?

***All of us  
bring the  
baggage of  
sin when  
we come to  
Christ...  
how many  
of us let it  
go?***

This was a problem in the early church because the Gentiles being saved came from incredibly pagan backgrounds where sin was a deeply ingrained part of their culture. Prostitution was almost inseparable from Pagan worship practices, greed and the oppression of the poor was rife. People were generally ignorant of God. When these people came to Christ they brought with them significant baggage of a lifestyle marked by sinfulness.

When Paul addresses the past lives of the Ephesian Christians he is clear that life change is not only necessary,

but it is actually the fruit of the gospel. Paul never asserts that people have to change their lives in order to get saved... but he does assert in numerous places that saved people's lives will change.

***Growing holiness is the fruit of receiving Christ! In Him our old self is gone & a renewed self is being put on.***

Paul actually affirms that the life changing nature of gospel salvation was central to the gospel: the removal of the old self and the implantation of a new self. The old self bore the image of our hardhearted sinful rejection of God, but our new self actually bears the image of the God who graciously saved us!

So can you receive the gospel and then continue to let your life be defined by your sin? Paul's answer is a resounding, "No!" Some people say that those who willingly continue in their sin after

coming to Christ have an over-inflated understanding of grace. But the reality is that they have radically underestimated grace. They have failed to see that grace is powerful it removes the old self and impart a new self! Grace changes everything... including you!

## **Questions**

1. What stops us from fully experiencing the life changing power of the gospel?
2. Have you really let go of your old sinful self?
3. How does this passage change the way we present the gospel to people?

## Day 11 – Read Ephesians 4:25-32

# *community as it's meant to be*

When I was studying education at university there came the moment when all the theory you learnt had to be put into practice. It was one thing for us to have sat in lecture theatres and classrooms learning how to communicate to teenagers and how they were supposed to respond to us; but it was a whole other thing to stand in front of 30 of them and actually do it. At the end of the day however, this was the only way to learn... you can't learn to teach in a vacuum!

When it comes to the new life that we have received in Christ the principle is basically the same... you can't live the Christian life in a vacuum. The Bible goes as far as to say that the new life you received must be lived in community. In fact your new life will find its greatest expression in community!

***Our life  
should  
reflect the  
grace we  
received:  
true, kind,  
encouraging  
& forgiving.***

Paul has already explained that the action of gospel salvation is not just to forgive you of your past sins but give you the power to overcome sin... to put sin away... to see it defeated in your life. Now he goes on to explain what a community that is gradually overcoming sin will look like; and it is freaking amazing! Not only is the gospel amazing for its grace, but also in the fact that what we receive is the very life of Christ; and Christ Himself was the truest and most beautiful expression of humanity ever. Therefore, the kind of people the gospel creates are those that display community life as God intended it to be.

It is a community marked by people who:

- Are honest with one another as there is no need to preserve or protect our reputations anymore because we are accepted for who we are – faults and all.
- Deal with the hurt they cause one another with dignity, humility and forgiveness, where anger doesn't lead to sin because Christ has paid the price for sin and absorbed the anger of God.
- All contribute to the life of the church through hard work so that no one sponges off the others and people in genuine need can be cared for.
- Build one another up rather than tearing one another down with hurtful language so that the grace of God is communicated in word and deed.

***To grieve a Spirit-bearer is to grieve the Spirit Himself.***

Ultimately the desire of the hearts of those in this community will be to please the Holy Spirit who has sealed the believers for redemption and is the glue that holds the community together. To knowingly grieve one who bears the Spirit is to grieve the Holy Spirit Himself.

### Questions

1. Being part of a community can seem to make things worse for us (more people to think about, more chance of hurt). Why does God create us for community?
2. How should we respond when the church we are part of looks nothing like the community spoken about in this passage?
3. If grieving a fellow Christian grieves the Spirit, perhaps there are some people you need to settle accounts with before the sun goes down?

## Day 12 – Read Ephesians 5:1-14

# *be imitators of god*

Bruno Mars sings to his girl: “You are amazing... just the way you are” in such a way that makes young ladies everywhere wish they had a lover like him. Deep down inside we all want to be loved for who we are. If someone claims to love us and yet tries to change us, we feel betrayed... “if they really loved me they would accept me for who I am.”

***To claim that true love must never want people to change is to radically misunderstand true love!***

But we need to acknowledge that this is our pride talking. We don't like the thought of anyone telling us we need to change. So when we hear that God saves us by grace alone we can be tempted into thinking that God is the ultimate Bruno Mars... that He thinks we are amazing just the way we are! The problem is that while God loves you in your sin He doesn't love your

sin... God doesn't want you to stay in your sin... He wants to change you, grow you and perfect you!

Now some people might think that this goes against His grace... How can God love us and yet expect us to change? Well a father can claim to love his child but, if he sees that child embracing a lifestyle that is destructive and dangerous without stopping them (because he thinks if he tries to change them he is not acting out of love), then he has misunderstood love. The reality is that to truly love someone is to desire the best for that person and to seek to bring the best out in them – and this always means change!

God knows how destructive a lifestyle of sin is and so while He looks at you in your sin and loves you as a sinner... He doesn't want you to stay that way! This is the greatest act of kindness and love imaginable... God wants more for you than a life of crippling sin. God doesn't just save you from the penalty of sin but from its power as well.

So how you live matters greatly to God. At the end of the day the way you walk shows who your Father is. If you continue to walk in the ways of darkness outlined in this passage then surely you look like a child of darkness. But if you walk in the light you show yourself to be a child of light; that the salvation you have received permeates all of your life.

***Christian don't be deceived; how you live matters to God! It shows if you are a risen child of light or still dead in darkness.***

To remain trapped by the deeds of darkness is to continue as if you are dead... but to imitate God by walking in the light of holiness reveals that you are alive; that you have been risen by the resurrecting power of Christ and that He is shining on you.

## **Questions**

1. Verses 6-7 seem to indicate that there are deceivers who will try to convince you to stay in your sin. Who might these deceivers be? Have you ever encountered one? How can we avoid partnering with them?
2. Think through some practical ways you can show the power of Christ's resurrection in your life.
3. How could you share the truth of this passage in a way that might reach someone who isn't yet saved?

## Day 13 – Read Ephesians 5:15-21

### *under the influence of the spirit*

One of the most awkward and uncomfortable situations you can find yourself in is to be in the company of a drunk. It might be OK when you sit back at a distance and watch an intoxicated bogan make a fool of themselves at the footy or the cricket; it might even give you a bit of a laugh. But nobody wants to sit next to them! The reality is that drunkenness leads to some of the most inappropriate, anti-social and depraved behaviour in our society.

The reason drunkenness has such an impact is because

***The problem with drunkenness is not alcohol itself but a rejection of the Spirit's lead.***

alcohol is a drug that very easily takes control of people by causing their inhibitions to disappear and numbing their consciences. The result is people giving in to their sinful desires. Therefore fits of rage, vulgar insults, self-harming behaviour and sexual experimentation seem to follow those who indulge in drunkenness everywhere they go.

Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that drunkenness should have no place in their lives. This was not because he was an anti-alcohol killjoy teetotaler... it was because he saw drunkenness for what it was. Drunkenness is handing control of your life over to your sinful desires instead of being led by the Spirit. At the heart of drunkenness is a rejection of the controlling influence of the Spirit in favour of sinful passions.

Paul clearly says that being controlled by (or filled with) the Spirit is incompatible with drunkenness. Yet in so many ways being filled with Spirit is a lot like being drunk; they are both issues of control. Paul is comparing two sources of control in the life of a person; sinful desire fuelled by alcohol and Jesus Christ fuelled by the Holy Spirit.

***The control of our life must be given to the Spirit & it must be shown in our gratitude to God & our love for others.***

Drunkenness results in inappropriate, anti-social and depraved behaviour because the source of the control is our sinful desire to selfishly get a hold of everything that we want. So drunks trample all over everyone to get the enjoyment they crave. In stark contrast being Spirit-filled looks like selflessness, laying down our pride and embracing love for one another with thankfulness to God.

It doesn't have to be alcohol; if the community of God hands control to anything other than the Holy Spirit they will cease to be the community of God and dive into selfishness. Only the Spirit can lead us to true community.

## **Questions**

1. It is easy to tell when somebody is drunk. How can you tell that someone is filled with the Spirit?
2. What are the blessings of a whole community under the influence of the Spirit? How is it different to communities in the world?
3. What makes Spirit-filled people powerful in evangelism?

## Day 14 – Read Ephesians 5:22-33

### *married for the gospel*

I once chatted to a lady who had a faithful ministry to abused women. First hand she got to see and feel the gut-wrenching pain that these women endured and she had the privilege of ministering God's grace to them in their time of need. However, one side effect of her ministry was that she became increasingly sceptical of the biblical teaching on marriage. She could not reconcile how God could ask women to put themselves in an incredibly venerable situation which could easily be abused. She came to see any form of submission as weak, negative and oppressive. She therefore rejected the concept of headship and submission outlined in this passage.

***Show one another Christ in marriage: wives His courageous submission & husbands His sacrificial love.***

While this woman's experience in ministry explained her scepticism, we should never let our culture or experiences hijack the way we interpret Scripture. The biblical concept of headship and submission in marriage is not given to humanity so that men can walk all over women; it is actually given as a way of preaching the gospel to one another in marriage.

When a woman is called to submit to her husband, she is not called to a weak and oppressed doormat existence. She is actually called to imitate Christ. When Christ submitted to His Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane, He was not bowing to an oppressive tyrant; He was actually doing the

strongest and most courageous thing that anyone has ever done. God calls wives to this courageous inner strength evidenced by their faith in God and their love for their husbands through their willing submission.

***Marriage is beautiful, intimate & joyous because this is the relationship God offers us in the gospel.***

Furthermore, a wife is not being forced to submit to an oppressive tyrant. She is actually being drawn into submitting out of her free will by the kind of love her husband is called to love her with. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Out of love the husband must sacrifice his life to give his wife everything she needs for a holy and satisfying life. He must, like Christ, initiate and lead her in love so that she will be all God intended her to be.

At the end of the day both husband and wife surrender their rights to God and each other as they seek to live out an intimate, beautiful and joyous marriage. This is exactly what a marriage is supposed to display. Marriage is all about the spectacular relationship that exists between Christ and the church.

## **Questions**

1. How does the concept of a woman submitting to a man sit with you? What about a man sacrificing for his wife?
2. What can a married couple do to prevent this relationship becoming an abusive power struggle?
3. How can married couples preach the gospel to one another and those around them through their marriage?

## Day 15 – Read Ephesians 6:1-9

# *gospel centred relationships*

Our generation is the generation of individuality and rights. We are told time and time again that we have the right to freely choose our own path through life and that we should not let anyone hold us back. So when we hear that the gospel brings freedom and fullness of life it is easy for us to think that this only intensifies our sense of individuality.

***Gospel at work in the home: Parents train their children graciously & children joyfully obey.***

However when Paul writes to the Ephesians about the practical implications of the gospel for daily life, we see that he actually encourages people to submit. In chapter 5 we have already seen that we are to submit to one another (v21), and wives are to submit to husbands (v22). But in chapter 6 his call to submission continues.

I don't think I have ever spoken to a teenager who hasn't longed to break free from the rules and expectations they feel their parents are choking them with. This normally results in raised voices, irrational arguments, stand-offs and slammed doors. But Paul declares that this is not the way of the gospel. Children are to honour and obey their parents. As difficult as it might be, if children are going to honour Christ, they must also honour their parents.

Furthermore Paul also calls slaves to obey their masters. Now many see this passage as the Bible supporting an archaic and barbaric tradition, however rather than

supporting slavery Paul is simply acknowledging that it was a reality in this era and the gospel had something to say about how slaves were to respond to their masters. Instead of revolting against their masters in pursuit of freedom, slaves were told to work diligently and obediently for the good of their masters, as if they were working for the Lord. In our culture, we don't encounter slavery but most of us are contracted to some kind of earthly boss in our place of work. The gospel would demand therefore that we work diligently and obediently for their good.

***Regardless of  
our earthly  
status our first  
audience is  
God.***

There are two reasons Paul can call us to submit:

1. With every call on children or employees to submit there comes an equal call on the parents and bosses to lead graciously. They aren't permitted to abuse their role through provoking anger or harsh and threatening behaviour.
2. The call to submit does not contradict the gospel call to freedom. In fact it is the freedom the gospel gives that enables us to freely submit. It is only when we are confident of our standing in Christ that we can abandon our cultural bias of individuality.

## **Questions**

1. Is there someone (parent/boss/leader) who you find it hard to submit to? How can the gospel help you submit?
2. How do you think this passage applies to adult children?
3. How can your submission preach the gospel in your home/workplace?

## Day 16 – Read Ephesians 6:10-24

### *suit up for battle*

If you are stressed out by traffic, the easiest way to remain calm is to take public transport. If you are scared of thrill rides then stay away from Dreamworld. But if you are petrified of attacks of the Devil the easiest way to avoid them is the keep silent when it comes to the gospel.

***If you want to avoid the Devil; stay away from speaking the gospel.***

In verse 20 Paul acknowledges that the predominant reason that he is calling for the Ephesian Christians to put on the armour of God is so that “I may declare it [the gospel] boldly, as I ought to speak.” The implication here is that spiritual warfare happens most when you are partnering in gospel ministry.

In many ways while the Devil is our enemy, we are not his enemy – God is! His enmity towards us is solely on the basis that we belong to God and bear God’s message of hope to this world. So if you never seek to promote the gospel, the Devil will more than likely consider that you are an irrelevant battle not worth fighting and he will leave you alone. He knows that if the gospel reaches the ears of his captives that many will be set free, so if you are already holding that gospel back he has already had a win with you.

Paul doesn’t want Christians sitting on their hands and playing into Satan’s trap... he wants us to suit up and embrace gospel ministry knowing that this will bring us into conflict with Satan. But rather than expecting us to head out into certain death, Paul tells us that God has provided a cache of armour that is everything we need to see victory!

Truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God and prayer form the most effective body armour ever created. But the thing we have to realise is that these pieces of armour do not need to be collected or earned one by one; they are actually already included in the gospel package. When you receive Christ you receive this armour!

Where the Devil brings lies, the gospel is truth; where the Devil flaunts our guilt, the gospel brings righteousness; where the Devil brings doubt, the gospel gives us faith; where the Devil comes to destroy, the gospel saves us, where the Devil stands against us, the gospel gives us incisive power; where the Devil pulls us away from God, the gospel gives unhindered access to God in prayer.

***The gospel covers your feet not your butt. It's for standing & striving, not sitting.***

The thing we need to see here is that the gospel is your shoes! It covers your feet not your butt! It is for standing and striving, not for sitting! So if you sit back and do nothing with the gospel, chances are you haven't understood it. Yes, gospel ministry will put you in the line of fire, but the gospel you minister has given you everything you need to be victorious!

## Questions

1. Have you ever sensed the Devil pulling you back from speaking the gospel? How did you respond?
2. Which of the armour do you feel you need most at the moment?
3. How can the church encourage one another to keep speaking the gospel even when evil attacks come?