

Ephesians Devotional
Monday, March 20

YOUR CALLING

EPHESIANS 1:1-6

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

DEVOTIONAL

Do you know that God has a specific will for your life?

Psalm 139 says that, "God knit you together in your mothers womb". It goes on to say that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made" and "all my days have been written in your book".

We are not just objects of happenstance living half hazard lives. Instead God has already pre-ordained a wonderful story for you to live out.

Paul was:

1. Called to be an apostle (he had a particular gifting)
2. Called to Ephesus (he had a particular people God was sending him to)
3. Called to preach grace and peace from God (he had a particular message to share)

In the same way each of us have:

1. A specific spiritual gifting on our life (Ephesians 4, 1 Cor 12, Romans 12)
2. A specific people we are called to (Perhaps, it is your sphere of society i.e. education, the arts, business, or entertainment. Or perhaps, it is people of a city you are called to L.A., Milwaukee, Miami; or perhaps, it is a people of a different nation like Indonesia, Turkey, or Thailand)
3. Each of us are called to preach the gospel, but we have different aspects of God's message that we emphasis depending on what God has done in our life. (For some it is joy; for others it is freedom from depression; for others it is racial reconciliation.)

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. This morning spend some time thanking God for calling you.
2. Ask God to speak to you about the specific gifting He has given you.
3. Ask God what people or place He has called you to in this season of your life. And then conclude your prayer time praying for these people to come to know Jesus!

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lastly, pray as we are in the season approaching Easter that God would begin calling many who don't know him to himself in our city and specifically bringing many lost to salvation through our church!

Ephesians Devotional
Tuesday, March 21

FREE PEOPLE

EPHESIANS 1:7-10

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

DEVOTIONAL

If you are wanting to go deeper in Bible study, today's reading from the book of Ephesians is a great place to start! There are some pretty deep topics here about the expansive impact of Christ's redemption, the power of His blood, and God's purpose for all humanity.

The Message Bible rephrases Ephesians 1:7 this way:

'We are a free people – free of penalties and punishment chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!' (v.7, MSG).

As believers, we are called to be a "free people." This is why we have hope. Jesus has died for us and purchased our freedom. Today's reading describes this freedom that is offered by Jesus.

The freedom Jesus offers us includes:

- Redemption: That word "redemption" is the word used in other ancient texts to describe the purchase and release of a slave. It's a weighty word. Jesus has redeemed us from being enslaved to sin, evil and the devil.
- Forgiveness: Removing the stain and effects of the sins of our past.
- Purpose: God has "purposed" something for us "in Christ." Discovering your divine purpose is one of the lifelong joys of any Christian. As St. Anselm put it, *"the will is most free when it finds itself in God."* God will make the "mystery of his will" known to his people.
- Restoration: Eventually, what Jesus purchased on the cross will lead to the restoration of all things, things in heaven and things on earth.

RESPONSE

- Where are you in your journey to freedom?
- Do you need redemption? It may be time for you to finally give your heart over to Jesus Christ.
- Do you need forgiveness? Respond to this devotional by giving your past over to God. He wants to restore years wasted and lost by sin's destruction.
- Are you lacking purpose? Set aside some time today to listen to God and ask him for clarity regarding your purpose.

Ephesians Devotional
Wednesday, March 22

THE HOPE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

EPHESIANS 1:11-14

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, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 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, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

DEVOTIONAL

In this journey through the book of the Ephesians, a major theme of study and exploration will be hope. Hope is universal. Everyone needs hope. Regardless of one's income, age, or background, hope is required to sustain one's longevity through the different seasons and pressures of life.

Most people will hope in something. Some place their hope in circumstances. Others hope in themselves. In our nation today, we see a lot of misplaced hope in celebrity, wealth, and politics.

The Bible, however, is clear that Jesus Christ is hope for all humanity. The apostle Paul declares in the above passage that he, and others, put their "hope in Christ." Our hope in Christ is an eternal hope. It is a hope that looks beyond earth and towards heaven.

Paul goes on to say that the Holy Spirit provides us our "guarantee" of the final hope that is to come through Jesus' redemption. The Holy Spirit "seals" us letting us know we belong to God. How does this happen? The Holy Spirit seals and secures us by placing God's presence in us.

Whenever you are lacking hope, the best thing to do is to run to God's presence. The Holy Spirit's presence in our life today reminds us of the inheritance that God will bless us with tomorrow.

RESPONSE

What can you do to practically get into God's presence today?

Ephesians Devotional
Thursday, March 23

A HOPE-FILLED PRAYER LIFE

EPHESIANS 1:15-22

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. 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, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

DEVOTIONAL

Victor Frankl, in his autobiographical account of survival as Jewish doctor during the horrors of the WWII Holocaust, makes a startling observation about the power of hope. In that crushing environment, Frankl observed the extraordinary power of people to withstand all kinds of pressures. Despite illness, abuse, neglect, and starvation, Frankl observed that hope, above all else, had the power to keep men alive.

It is true that hope brings life. This spiritual principle is essential to understand if you desire to be a person of prayer. To pray effectively, fervently, and with longevity, one must be a person of hope.

Today's Scripture reading contains one of the premier prayers written by Paul in the New Testament. It is a prayer for the people of God to be hope-filled. Why has Paul committed himself to such intentional prayer? He wants the church to know the "hope to which they have been called."

Several keys to a "hope-filled prayer life" are found in Paul's prayer, listed below:

- Giving thanks - Paul says he "has not stopped" giving thanks. Thanksgiving, the Bible says, is our entrance to God's presence (Psalm 100). When we give thanks we are reminded of what God has already done, and thus provided with faith for Him to do more.
- Perseverance - Paul "keeps asking." Perseverance in prayer is a lost art that the church must recover to have the hope to influence the world. There are many reasons for delayed answers to our prayers, but we will never understand them all. Our role is to keep asking and trust in the character of God.
- Revelation - Hope does not come from positive thinking, good ideas, and is most certainly not based on our circumstances. Enduring hope can only come as the result of a word from God. When we receive revelation from God, we are taught how and why to pray. This gives us confidence that God is working on our behalf.

- Belief in the power of God - Paul states that God's power is "for us who believe." As believers we have access to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead — the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Belief in the "age to come" - Paul's prayer concludes with a change of focus from the present day to the age to come. The hope of heaven, and of God making everything right in eternity, provides the believer with spiritual endurance today. In heaven today, Jesus is seated "far above" every other spiritual power.

RESPONSE

Which of the above 5 Principles might be the most helpful for you today so that you might grow in hope-filled prayer?

Ephesians Devotional
Friday, March 24

HOPE FOR ALL

EPEHSIANS 2:1-5

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved.

DEVOTIONAL

Wow. Totally dead. Not even “mostly dead,” but all-the-way dead.

No exceptions.

Every single human being – which, of course, includes you and me – were dead and on our way to hell! (Sorry, there’s no delicate way to say that!) We walked in sin; we followed Satan, whether we knew it or not, and we did whatever our minds desired to attempt to make ourselves happy and fulfilled. And because of that, the Bible says we were “children of wrath.” That means we deserved, and were going to receive, the penalty for our sin: death.

But God, because He’s so full of mercy, and because of how much He loves us, saved us from that! Instead of being all-the-way dead, He made us all-the-way alive, just like Jesus is alive after His resurrection!

That’s good news! That’s GRACE!

So, it’s like this:

God’s wrath... We *get* what we deserve.

(We’re not under this any more, if we follow Jesus!)

God’s mercy... We *don’t* get what we deserve!

(As in, we don’t get hell!)

God’s grace... We get what we *don’t* deserve!

(As in, we get Jesus and relationship and fulfillment and Heaven!)

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Thank God for revealing to you that you were a sinner and needed His forgiveness.
2. Thank Him for His mercy and grace, and for the life in Jesus He has given you.
3. Pray for someone you know who needs to receive God’s salvation in this same way.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray that many people will come to our Easter Sunday services so they can hear the good news of Jesus’ willingness to forgive their sins, and that they would choose to follow Him.

Ephesians Devotional
Saturday, March 25

FORGIVENESS AS A GIFT

EPHESIANS 2:6-10

...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

DEVOTIONAL

Yesterday's news was pretty good – saved from God's wrath and given mercy and grace instead!

But it gets even better!

We are raised with Jesus! Romans 6 says that just like Jesus was raised from the dead by God, "we too might walk in newness of life!"

We are "in Christ" to such an extent that the Bible says we're seated with Him in heavenly places! Man, that's too good to be true. And it also promises that our future is going to have "immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness..." Thank You, Jesus!

But one of the main points here is that it wasn't because of the good things we did that God saved us. There was nothing we could do to deserve His forgiveness. God's forgiveness is a gift – a *really big* gift!

And because of this forgiveness, God has created us as a brand new person, to do good things to bless others. These good deeds will never make us deserving of His forgiveness; instead, we do good things to help others *as a result of* how thankful we are for His awesome forgiveness.

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Thank Him that He placed us in Jesus, and for the promise of a future that's indescribably better than we could ever ask for or imagine!
2. Ask God to help you do good things for others out of a thankful heart.
3. Wait on God for a person He wants you to bless, and a specific idea of something you can do to bless that person. Then go do it!

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray that our church will be full of people who do good things to bless family members, friends, the people of our city, and our neighbors.

Ephesians Devotional
Sunday, March 26

ALL ARE HIS CHILDREN

EPHESIANS 2:11-16

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

DEVOTIONAL

Almost every one of us in All Peoples Church are Gentiles! Why? Because we're not Jews!

In the New Testament Jewish mindset, there were Jews – and then there was everyone else. And “everyone else” was on the outside.

The outside is a terrible place to be. No one likes to be excluded.

But for a while, even Jews who had decided that Jesus really was the Messiah, and believed His claims about Himself – that He was the Son of God; that He had died on the cross to save people from their sins; that He was alive after His resurrection – Even Jews who believed all that, still believed a person had to be a Jew, or become a Jew, to be on the “inside.”

But that's the good news, that there is NO ONE ineligible to be saved by Jesus and made a part of the family of God! No matter where you're from, what you've done, or who you were in your past...

Jesus has broken down every wall of separation between humans and God, and every wall of separation between humans and other humans.

The family of kids that God has adopted are ALL on the inside! We're all in the family! He's got a lot of kids!

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Thank God that He made a way, through Jesus death on the cross and His resurrection, to break down the wall of sin that separated us from Him!
2. Ask Him to reveal to you, at a deeper level, how amazing it is to be an adopted child of His!
3. Pray for someone you know who isn't a part of God's family yet, and pray for the opportunity to tell them how great it is to be one of God's children.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray that people of all kinds, no matter what they think might make them an “outsider” to the church, would come to our Easter service and hear the truth of the gospel. Pray for someone you could invite to Easter, and assure them that *everyone* is welcome at All Peoples Church!

Ephesians Devotional
Monday, March 27

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

EPHESIANS 2:16-22

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

DEVOTIONAL

Citizens of the United States have the right to free speech, public assembly and a host of other freedoms and responsibilities. As citizens of heaven, through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, we have rights as sons and daughters of God that include:

- Full acceptance in God's kingdom never to be deported.
- An inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade (1 Peter 1:4).
- The riches of peace, hope and joy for all eternity.

You are also a member of God's household and a part of the very dwelling in which God lives by His spirit. Imagine, you, are being built together with fellow believers to be a place where God's spirit dwells. This occurs in the future kingdom in heaven, but is also true on earth where we join together for God's purposes. God reveals Himself to the world through His temple built by human lives.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- 1) Thank God that he has made you a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and that you have the full rights thereof!
- 2) Ask God to reveal to you what part of his inheritance you have neglected to enjoy and apprehend.
- 3) Also, ask God to continue building you together with other believers in order to host His presence for the world around you.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, thank you that you have called us at All Peoples Church into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Peter 1:4). Continue to build us together in such a way that San Diego experiences your presence in profound ways and becomes a place that sees a relational revival that transforms nations.

Ephesians Devotional
Tuesday, March 28

A MYSTERY REVEALED

EPHESIANS 3:1-6

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.

DEVOTIONAL

When we hear the word mystery, it can carry the idea of something that is cloaked or shrouded from view. Many times it is something that cannot be found out. God's idea of a mystery is quite different. It is something hidden in His heart that He has chosen to reveal at the perfect time. God revealed many mysteries through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. One such mystery is that every tribe and tongue of people are invited to be members of God's household — not only the “chosen people,” the Jews.

We have all become “chosen ones” through the blood of Jesus. Jesus said in John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”* Being chosen by God is not based upon your political heritage, your ethnic roots, or your socioeconomic status. It is based on the precious blood of the Lamb of God who chose you above His own comfort and rights. This is good news for all who choose to respond to the mystery that has been revealed in the last days.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- 1) Ask God to reveal to you more of the mysteries in His heart that have been revealed through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- 2) Thank God for choosing you to be a member of His household and part of His eternal plan.
- 3) Listen to God for words of affirmation and healing in any area that you have felt rejected and “on the outside” during the course of your life. Invite Him to heal you in those areas and receive His love.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

God, thank you for revealing your mystery to us in Jesus that we are also chosen ones who are members of your household. May we at All Peoples Church radiate that love to the world around us and see many others accept their place as members of God's household.

Ephesians Devotional
Wednesday, March 29

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

EPHESIANS 3:7-13

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.

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus coming to earth was not a knee-jerk reaction on the part of God. Man's sin, though it grieved God profoundly, did not catch God by surprise. God has had an eternal purpose which was in His heart before the creation of the entire world. That purpose of God is to reveal Himself and His wisdom through people — the church. He accomplished this purpose by redeeming His people through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the Old Covenant, the nation of Israel (the Jewish People) was the only community that God used as an instrument to display His wisdom and glory to the world surrounding them. However, through Jesus' victory over death, God has now ordained the church, a people from every tribe and tongue, to be make known the riches of His wisdom.

The nation of Israel had access to God through a code of laws and sacrifices, which were imperfect and unable to permanently deal with guilt and sin. On the other hand, the church through the blood of Jesus has access to God that is perfect and without hindrance. Let us marvel at the fact that God reveals Himself through us as the church as we come to Him.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- 1) Thank God that He is accomplishing His eternal purpose through the church, His Bride.
- 2) Ask God to reveal to you more clearly the part you have been given to play as a member of the church.
- 3) Wait on God to show you someone to encourage today and call out their gifting as valuable.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, may we at All Peoples Church display your wisdom and glory to the world around us in San Diego. Anoint us to to approach you with confidence and help us to bring people from every nation tribe and tongue to Jesus in our city and throughout the nations of the earth.

Ephesians Devotional
Thursday, March 30

THE ABILITY OF GOD

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

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.

DEVOTIONAL

Now to him who is able...

The Power of God

- I. Paul knelt before the Father in humility knowing that when he is weak, through God, he is made powerfully strong.
- II. The word — power — in Greek is “dynamis”, literally where we get our word for dynamite. In God's glorious riches, he has blasting power to make your inner being strong and dwell in your heart.

The Love of God

- I. God's love goes beyond knowledge, but it can be grasped and you can be filled.
- II. Think of a tree's roots going down deep and being established slowly to make the trunk and branches strong. The more we explore the depths of the love of God the stronger we are. We aren't tipped over at the slightest trouble or storm. It takes time but with every depth and dimension we get rooted in God's love. There is a direct correlation to another ring added above to the trunk which is the fullness of God.

The Ability of God

- I. I think as humans we probably imagine more than we ask. Imagination is immeasurable but finite. Humans have a limited ability to do what we imagine, but God is able.
- II. If we can imagine it in God's kingdom, we should ask for it and know that God is able to do it without measure. There is no end to his measuring stick.

Do you believe that God is able?

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Pray that your inner being would be strengthened with dynamite power through his Spirit.
2. Pray that you would be rooted, established, and filled with God's love.
3. Ask for your needs to be met by a God that is able to do immeasurably more than you could ask or imagine.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray for our church, that God's power would be at work within our church and that Jesus Christ would have the glory at All Peoples Church and throughout all generations.

Ephesians Devotional
Friday, March 31

CALLED TO ONE

EPHESIANS 4:1-7

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.

DEVOTIONAL

People love simple. Simple directions (thanks Siri), simple menus (who doesn't love In-N-Out's menu?), even simple text messages (hence the creation of emojis). Let's be honest a lot of us have a one track mind. Jesus was even asked which one commandment was the greatest that they needed to follow. David writes about the one thing that he was seeking, which was to dwell in the house of the Lord. I'm sure a lot of you reading this are wondering, "What is the one thing I need to take away from this devotional?"

The author here makes it simple. We all have an incredibly worthy calling from God that is different from the next person, but there is a common thread of unity that brings us all together. We are called to One. We are all filled with the same Holy Spirit that was in Jesus, which unifies us all. The body of Christ, the Church, is one even though we worship at different buildings and in different styles. The hope we have in Heaven is all the same. The Lord we follow is the same One that saved us all. Our faith, our baptism, our God and Father are why we can literally go to another country and be unified with a fellow Christian that has a different skin color, food craving, language spoken and culture. All because of the One that is over all and through all and in all. We are called to One.

Are you working towards peace and unity? How can you be humble and gentle today?

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Ask God for help to live a life worthy of what He has called you to.
2. Pray that you would be humble, gentle, and patient and that you would bear with your family members, friends and people in your lifegroup with love.
3. Ask God for a peace to work in your life for you to keep the unity of the Spirit. That you would be One.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray for All Peoples Church that we would be one. As we come from different neighborhoods and countries, speak different languages, and are all different ages, God would do a supernatural work and we would be called as One.

Ephesians Devotional
Saturday, April 1

NEW EQUIPMENT

EPHESIANS 4:8-12

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...

DEVOTIONAL

Growing up in Texas, football was life. As I got older, one of the biggest reasons I was looking forward to middle school, was I was finally allowed to play tackle football. I had dreams of scoring touchdowns, being the star quarterback, and taking my team to a championship game. None of those dreams panned out, but football does give us a devotional lesson about this passage. The middle school I went to was brand new, so the football equipment was brand new. The purpose of having good equipment isn't just to enjoy the new equipment or brag about it to other schools. The goal is that it would help us work better and harder so that we could be a better team and win games. When you have broken or missing equipment you don't practice as well which puts you at a disadvantage to win games.

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, he not only saved people from Hell, but he gave gifts to people. These gifts were given like equipment to a football team. Not to brag that we have the gift of prophecy or evangelism, but to take that gift and use it like equipment to help others work, train, and serve. God gave gifts to some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers so that the church can be like a team. One that can get better and be built up and be strong in order to live the calling we have. God's team will win.

What gifts has God given you? Are you using those gifts like equipment, and if so, are you using them to help others around you get better? Do you see your gifts like a gift from God in order to make the church strong and built up?

PERSONAL PRAYER

1. Spend some time thanking God for what he did for you and how generous he is towards us.
2. Ask God to give you gifts and show you your areas of strength.
3. Pray that you would use your gifts to equip others for works of service.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray that our church would be a church that uses our gifts and where everyone serves, and that our church would be built up, strong, and ready to live in our calling.

Ephesians Devotional
Sunday, April 2

IT'S TIME TO GROW UP!

EPHESIANS 4:13-16

...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.

DEVOTIONAL

1. Maturity Matters

When we begin our walk with the Lord, we are essentially infants in our faith. But God's desire for us is to mature every day. (v13) Perhaps you have been a Christian for a long time, but don't feel secure in your faith. God wants to help you grow up in Him and have peace.

2. You can conquer your circumstances (v14)

Maybe you're in a challenging season. The circumstances of life, and opinions of other easily toss us around, and our faith can be battered like a boat on a stormy sea. But God shows us some secrets to become stable, and mature despite the storms. We often ask God to remove the problems, but today He wants you to have the ability to overcome them!

3. Speak up!

Instead of reacting to life's circumstances like an infant, God wants us to respond with truth. "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow..." (v15) What we chose to say in times of challenge makes a huge difference. Instead of complaining or negativity, God is calling you to speak the truth over your circumstance. Do you have a promise or favorite verse? Speak it out loud in your house, in your car, in your office. Those words have power-because they are God's truth.

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The word of God is like rain drenching dry ground and creating new life! If you've felt dry perhaps the answer is to speak truth over yourself. Write a verse on a card and put it on your mirror or in your car so that during this 28 day devotional you can speak truth every morning. Walk around your house and speak the truth out loud. Read your Bible out loud or worship alone and let the truth rain down on your circumstances.

As each of us matures, the amazing thing is that the Church flourishes and "grows and builds itself up in in love", this is our desire and how we will see our community revived.

Maturity is a process, and you may still have those days where you react like a child, but as you immerse your life in truth, you will soon see transformation.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Lord, help me to speak truth today. Let me not be tossed around by the waves of life, but keep me anchored to your truth. Speak your promises to me and let me hold to them.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, we ask you to mature our church. Help our youth to resist the temptation to waver in their faith, put truth and conviction in their hearts. Help our college students to speak up for truth on campus. Help our business people bring clarity and wisdom to their workplaces. Give our families peace today and let our parents speak truth to the next generation.

Ephesians Devotional
Monday, April 3

THE LIFE OF GOD

EPHESIANS 4:17-19

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. 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. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

DEVOTIONAL

When you walk with Jesus, you experience the very 'life of God' (v18). Perhaps today you've already experienced the opposite — frustration, dissatisfaction, worry. But Paul teaches us, and insists on it 'in the Lord' (v17) that the life of God is our true identity, and we 'no longer live' as we used to. He lists some of our struggles:

- Futility of Thinking (trying to plan our path, worry, obsessive thoughts)
- Hardening of Hearts (lack of joy, no desire to worship or pray)
- Loss of Sensitivity (ignoring your conscience/Holy Spirit, judgmental, critical of others)
- Sensuality (sexual addictions, ungodly relationships)
- Impurity (crude humor, love of the world)
- Continual Lust for more (dissatisfaction, unhealthy priorities, eating disorders)

Maybe you can relate to some of these struggles, that's ok! God Himself listed them for a reason, to encourage you today, there is a life free of their grip. Today bring your struggle to God, receive forgiveness and make a choice to cut this out of your life.

Commit during the rest of this devotional series to renounce it every day and choose the opposite. If your struggle is impurity, give up an unhelpful TV Show and use that time to pray or worship instead. Very soon you will notice the difference in your spirit and begin to experience 'the life of God'.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Pray about your main struggle today, ask the Lord for the grace to give it up today and start taking steps to choose the opposite each time you are tempted.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Ask God to purify our church, pray for others in your Lifegroup asking for them to conquer their struggles.

Ephesians Devotional
Tuesday, April 4

A RELIEF FOR THE WORN OUT

EPHESIANS 4:20-24

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

DEVOTIONAL

The Christians in Ephesus were struggling to give up their old lifestyles and sinful habits. I think we can all relate to that. How often we turn to sin, instead of the presence of God - thinking it'll satisfy us. But Paul tells us we need to be 'made new' in our attitudes, and put off our 'old self'.

This requires a decision and effort. Sometimes we are just too tired to change, and choose what we've always done. But what if our weariness comes from these things? The Greek word for the 'old' self here is 'palai', one of its meanings is 'worn out'. What if these old habits are actually what's wearing us out? Habits of: speaking negatively, unforgiveness, anger, bringing up the past, actually wear us down. But relief comes when we embrace a new attitude and discover we are made to be like God!

PERSONAL PRAYER

Give all your weariness to the Lord today, confess your need of Him and ask for His help to receive a new attitude. Bring the struggle from yesterday to God again, and receive fresh strength to face it.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray for our Church to look-out this Easter. Pray we'd notice all those who are wearied by sin today, and instead of judging them we would reach out, and bring them into our church family this Easter.

Ephesians Devotional
Wednesday, April 5

GOD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

EPHESIANS 4:25-28

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. 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.

DEVOTIONAL

Yesterday, we looked at what it means to put on the ‘new self’ filled with righteousness and holiness. As Paul continues the thought, he covers a few topics with very clear, practical instruction we can all learn from.

On speaking truth, we are to put off falsehood, or in other words, “STOP IT!” In order for members in the body to function for the larger purposes on this earth, we must function as our ‘new selves’ and choose to speak the truth and build each other up, no matter what.

On anger, notice he doesn’t say you can’t get angry, but rather; be careful what’s motivating your anger and how you respond. Satan doesn’t go to sleep when you do at night – so take your anger to the Lord quickly! Don’t let Satan plant a root of bitterness while you sleep. You’ll sleep more peacefully too!

Lastly; stealing. God gives us the strength & power to work, so we don’t have to steal. Better yet, he empowers us to work hard and even be a blessing to others!

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank God for His righteousness in us, that enables us to speak truth, deal with anger properly, and work hard to bless those around us.
- Ask God if there are areas of your life that need greater alignment with the ‘new self’ we are given when we are born again.
- Pray for God to highlight people or opportunities for you to glorify God through your hard work or calling out the Godly truths in someone.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, may we at All Peoples Church be known by our relentless encouragement as we speak truth and build others up inside and outside of our tribe. Fill us with your strength as we labor for your Kingdom’s advancement here on earth.

Ephesians Devotional
Thursday, April 6

KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

EPHESIANS 4:29-32

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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

DEVOTIONAL

What we speak with our lips is extremely powerful and is a powerful tool for building up others. As it says in Luke, “out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”.

Before digging deeper, we must pause and acknowledge that it’s easy to get caught up thinking there’s a list of words or actions we need to follow in order to be a ‘good Christian’. God’s bigger than that, and He is all about transformation of the heart, first and foremost – your desires and dirty mouth will follow suit!

Let’s back up to a few verses back and anchor to the fact that God graciously took our sins on the cross and beckons us to exchange our old self and for a new self. A new nature, even! A nature that’s rooted in righteousness, not sin.

With *that* as our context, speaking encouraging words and getting rid of things like bitterness and malice is simply part of walking in our Godly identity. And we grieve the Holy Spirit when we chose our old self, not because He can’t handle our sin, but it hinders the work He wants to do in and through us.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank God that he bought us with a price so that our sins, and our sinful nature, could be overcome and replaced.
- Ask God to highlight areas of your life that you have difficulty speaking positively about, and ask Him to fill you with His perspective toward that situation. You may also take some time to walk through forgiving offenses.
- Pray for God to highlight a practical way for you to build others up, TODAY!

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, may we at All Peoples Church be recognized as family members who build each other up. Anoint our lips to encourage others as they need, guided by the Holy Spirit. Fill us with your righteousness as we are transformed into your likeness.

Ephesians Devotional
Friday, April 7

THE WAY OF LOVE

EPHESIANS 5:1-5

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. 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. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 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.

DEVOTIONAL

Recently we experienced a touching moment in a Lifegroup. The opening question was "What did you want to be when you grew up?" As our family Lifegroup has many children, they participated to, but answered the question in the present tense sharing what they wanted to grow into. The boys in the group gave a normal answer for young males — NFL players. But that night a new boy was with us. He gave an answer that surprised people. "I would like to be an editor". It was an unusual career to hope for. But then the group would find out why he said that. His father, who he dearly loved, had passed away only a year ago. This boy, out of love, wanted to "follow his example". It was deeply moving.

When we have a revelation of how loving the Father is, it places in our hearts the desire to be like him. Paul encourages us to actually imitate him.

How do we do that? By living a life of love. The primary way to live a life of love is to lay down our lives for others. True love is expressed not as much through gushing emotions as so often depicted in movies and popular songs, but in sacrificing yourself for others.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Ask God to show you a way that you can "lay down your life" for someone today.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Ask God to make us a church that is marked by our service to needy people and to our city as a whole. When that happens we believe more and more people will be inspired to join us because we are living a life of love.

Ephesians Devotional
Saturday, April 8

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

EPHESIANS 5:6-10

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

The other evening I sat on a plane next to a very kind man. As we began a discussion, I learned that he was from the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) church. We had a very gracious conversation. I had many questions for him and when he learned I was a non-denominational, Christian pastor he had many questions for me. On numerous topics we saw eye to eye (both of us believed in the Bible). But then as we began talking about what happens after this life it became clear that there were huge differences.

He began to tell me of how the Book of Mormon teaches that "we can become Gods". And he shared that "we like God, along with our wife, can reach a certain level where we begin to create spirit beings in heaven". He told me, "actually, I know it sounds blasphemous to a Christian". With gentleness, I said, "Yes, I actually believe that is a demonic deception because, that is what Lucifer (Satan) wanted. To become like God himself. That is simply not in the Bible."

I came to find out that the reason this kind, intellectual man had become a Mormon was that his father had passed when he was a young child. Although his mother had belonged to a christian denomination previously, it was Mormon missionaries who had been the ones who came and visited her in her time of grieving and spent time ministering to her. When they taught her she could be "a God, married forever with her newly deceased husband", it touched her heart. They were there for her and had a comforting message (although it was false hope) and thus she opened her heart to their extra-biblical revelation.

The scripture says "let no one deceive you with empty words". No one wants to be deceived. But sadly, things like this can often happen. There are many people that are teaching non-biblical beliefs. The beliefs can make us feel good for a moment. But that is why Paul gives us this warning.

In fact it says God's wrath is coming. Why? Because God hates for people to be led away from his goodness and love.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Ask God if there is any deception you are believing in your life because it brings you comfort.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Pray for unbelievers you know that do not yet believe in Jesus. Pray that our city would be one in which many people walk away from false religions and into the truth of the gospel of Jesus. And pray that Easter Sunday would be a day where many come to an understanding of the truth.

Ephesians Devotional
Sunday, April 9

BEING A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

EPHESIANS 5:11-16

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is the light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

DEVOTIONAL

Remain in Jesus Constantly and the Light of Your Life Will Dispel the Darkness Around You.

Prophecies about Jesus such as that in Isaiah 9:2, stating that “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light” were fulfilled in the person of Jesus, who said of himself, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Jesus also said in that same verse that, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Traditionally, coal miners in West Virginia have mined coal deep underground in shafts and tunnels, where there is no natural light. Nonetheless, they have been able to illuminate their pitch-dark surroundings and carry out their work by wearing headlamps.

The effect of sin has been to make darkness the natural state of the world. We who know and follow Jesus, however, bring his light with us and dispel the darkness wherever we go. So, like a coal miner wearing his headlamp, as we follow Jesus we carry his light into our circumstances and “will never walk in darkness.” The key to our ability to illuminate our surroundings is that we “follow” Jesus and walk in his light and in his Spirit.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank God for putting the light of Jesus in your heart.
- Ask God for more passion and love for Jesus today so that you can shine brighter.
- Ask God for wisdom to live your life carefully, so that your light can dispel the darkness wherever you go.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

In 1993, 50,000 Christian men intent on becoming “Promise Keepers” filled up Colorado University’s Folsom Field football stadium to receive teaching on being godly men. At an evening service in the stadium commemorating the end of the event, the stadium lights were doused, pitching the stadium into total darkness. Then a single candle was lit down at the speaker’s stand. The light from that single candle was shared with another man, then with another, and so it went until within 10 to 15 minutes, the entire stadium was lit by the light of 50,000 candles. It was a dramatic demonstration of how the body of Christ can light up the world by using “this little light of mine” in community.

Let's pray for new-found passion for the church to be the church, such that our individual lights become a great shining torch as we band together in community to shine the light of Jesus in San Diego and around the world.

Ephesians Devotional
Monday, April 10

BE WISE, NOT FOOLISH

EPHESIANS 5:17-21

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

DEVOTIONAL

The Lord's will for your life is for you to be wise and successful and in these verses he gives you the blueprint for doing so.

In verses 11-16 we were exhorted to live in the light and to be wise. The word "therefore" at the beginning of verses 17 to 21 signals the conclusion of the matter for how we should live in the world so as to be wise and successful in God's eyes.

1. Don't be foolish (Eph. 5:17). The book of Proverbs contrasts the wise man and the fool. The fool says in his heart, "there is no God" (Ps. 14:1 and 53:1). But "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). "For whoever finds [wisdom] finds life and receives favor from the Lord" (Prov. 8:35). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Prov. 1:7).

2. Don't live for the moment (Eph. 5:18). A drunkard is a compelling example of someone who lives for the moment. A temporary buzz leads to unawareness and insensibility, irresponsible and sinful conduct, a hangover, regret, and then a need to repeat the destructive behavior. Fulfillment is unattainable.

3. Be filled with the Spirit and live in view of eternity (Eph. 5:18). Our body will perish; our spirit will live forever. Living in the Spirit prepares us for eternity but also sets us up for success in this life. "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). "The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

4. Speak to one another as filtered through the "music of heaven": psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). This simply means that we should see and treat each other through the eyes of God and his truth about himself and us.

5. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19). Relate to the Lord through a happy, musical heart. Always have a song in your heart ready to sing to God. He loves to hear the songs of your glad heart sung to him, even if you can't carry a tune.

6. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eph (5:20). A grateful heart prepares the way for the Lord. Welcome his presence in your life by having a thankful heart.

7. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). Christ gave everything for us. In turn, he asks us to yield one to another out of reverence for what he did for us. It is the way of peace and harmony in the body of Christ.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank God for a blueprint for a successful life and ask him for grace to obey those commands.
- Take time to reflect on how well you're doing today, in light of this blueprint; confess your failings and ask for God's help to do better.
- Take a moment and wait on God for how you can be wise in his eyes today.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

As a body, let's ask God for a greater willingness and ability to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, to promote unity in the Church and to make us more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Ephesians Devotional
Tuesday, April 11

RELATIONAL REMEDY

EPHESIANS 5:21-27

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

DEVOTIONAL

Spirit-guided relationships work. That's right. There is a key to wonderful relationships. Here it is...my relationships work when my primary focus is keeping Jesus at the center of them. If I come to my relationships only wishing to be served, it all breaks down quickly or eventually. That's why God calls us to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Jesus at the center again. He helps us to "submit to one another."

In this scripture, we see how Jesus calls wives and husbands to live, but there is a word for all of us here. For the wife, she is to submit to her husband like the church does to Jesus. For the husband, he is to love his wife like Jesus does His church.

Wow! Those seem like impossible tasks, right? And they are...unless Jesus is at the center of this husband-wife relationship. Jesus at the center of the husband's mind as he follows the Bible and the Holy Spirit daily to learn to love and lead his wife like Jesus. Jesus at the center of the wife's mind as she learns how to follow her husband's leadership and pray for him, learning daily to believe God's Word and hand are trustworthy, even in the midst of her husband's shortcomings.

For all of us, Jesus is our central model. How do you know if Jesus is at the center of your relationship? Well part of the answer is right there in the text. That word "submit" in verse 21 is hypotasso or to "put yourself under." Ask yourself if you're putting your needs over or under the other person's needs? It could be that simple. But the ultimate way to answer this question is to look at how Jesus lived. It says He loved us by "giving himself up."

This is the story of the cross. Just let it sink in - Jesus laid down his life - on the cross - up to his last breath...for His church. If we have asked Jesus into our heart, that's me and you. That measure of love is overwhelming and awe-inspiring.

Husband, give yourself up again for your wife, like Jesus does.
Wife, submit yourself again to your husband, as you do to the Lord.

All of us, let's do it together. How can you put another's needs above yours today?

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank Jesus for giving Himself up for you because of His great love for you.
- Ask Jesus to help you to put other's needs above your own today, like He does.
- Wait on God for someone specific to put first today.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Jesus, make our church a people who are so sacrificial for one another that our neighborhoods, city and the nations come to know Jesus because of our love.

Ephesians Devotional
Wednesday, April 12

AS YOUR OWN BODY

EPHESIANS 5:28-33

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

DEVOTIONAL

Not all of us are married.

But for those of us who are, verse 33 is the "word" on how to be a godly spouse! In fact, even if you're not married, this is the best way to treat anyone in your family or God's family — with sacrificial love and respect.

It's the wonderful directive to love others as you love yourself. Except here, He uses the image of your own body (and Christ's body too) to make it simple for us.

You know if anything comes directly at your eye, you immediately — almost involuntarily — protect your eye. Or when you are hungry or thirsty, you do almost anything to feed your stomach till the ache goes away.

That's how Jesus loves His church. And that is the type of care and protection God calls us to in our marriages. It's how he calls us to love all people in His church, but he calls marriages to a special standard because of the level of covenant there. The covenant requires special honor.

For the spouses reading this, how can you protect and care for your spouse anew?

For those not married, who do you know in the church (Jesus' body) that you can protect and honor right now?

Maybe it's someone in your Lifegroup that needs you to be a listening ear. Maybe it's a single parent who needs a helping hand. Or a couple whom you could give free babysitting to so they can go get that long awaited date night.

Spouses, let's love our spouse so well that the world notices.

All of us, let's care for and protect God's body just like we do our own, with a sacrificial love and respect that makes the world want to learn all about it.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Lord, make me mindful of others' needs, just like I am aware of the needs of my own body. Give me wisdom to see how to care for others in Your body, the church.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the unity in our church and the churches of this city. Bless us with even more unity in our church and city, as we lean into one another's needs, by Your grace.

Ephesians Devotional
Thursday, April 13

THE FLOURISHING FAMILY

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

God is the Father of all. And He is the Father of family. That means he knows how it was designed. In fact, He designed it. :)

In this passage, we see the secrets to how our families can stay radiant and alive...to be a family where each person prospers. If we keep to these secret codes and specifically, if parents will consistently remind their family of them, our families will flourish.

Children, obey your parents with highest honor. If you do this, not only will life go well for you, but your life will be extended! God promises to bless them with life!

Fathers, do not exasperate your kids, but bring them up in the training of the Lord. Bring them up. That means to nourish with how to live and how not to live. To lift them with forward-moving, path-defining, God-breathed training and instruction from the Word of God. That's what kids were made for — to be nourished to flourish.

We were told in the previous chapter that the father is the head of the family. So the head has to obey what God tells him here in verse 4. And the kids are to obey what God tells them in verses 1-3. Everybody has something to obey in a family.

And if we obey God's words, despite how we feel, we will be blessed. How can you obey God your Father today?

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Thank God for being such a perfect Father.
- Thank God for his commands that make family a place of blessing, and not exasperation.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

God, I pray over our Easter season that many families would be changed and transformed as people come to know Jesus and begin to obey Your word!

Ephesians Devotional
Friday, April 14

CHOOSING OUR HEART POSTURE

EPHESIANS 6:5-9

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites.

DEVOTIONAL

Behaviors are so important because they help us practically work out what God is doing internally in our hearts. Sometimes our behaviors alone can cultivate a desire in other people's lives to know Jesus.

Maybe few of us can relate to what it would feel like to be someone's slave (praise God that slavery has been abolished in our country and we long to see it abolished everywhere), but most of us can relate to having a boss or authority that brings leadership and direction. Scripture says we are to obey with deep respect. But what if you don't really respect your boss in life?

If we can go beyond our own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions and ask God for respect to serve our boss as if we are serving Jesus himself. In turn, we will be rewarded. Maybe you are someone that has actually wanted a new job because of how awful you are treated by your boss. I want to encourage you today to grab ahold of the behaviors we are encouraged to live out in Ephesians 6. In doing so, faith and power are released in an atmosphere. If you have been believing for a heavenly atmosphere at your work, this may be a next step in seeing breakthrough, especially when no one is watching.

In the same way bosses, who are of no greater value to the Lord but the same, need to treat their employees with deep respect as unto the Lord. You can often tell the type of manager a work place has because of how all the employees are acting. A boss who has deep respect and value for their employees, provides an atmosphere in which they can thrive.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Ask God today if you are carrying disrespect in your heart for a boss, authority, employee or someone you've been given leadership to oversee? If so, ask God to forgive you of what you're holding in your heart against them and to replace it with a Godly love for them and a desire to be more like Jesus. Sometimes this can be more complicated or emotional than just repenting and moving on. However, it is right to keep our hearts in a place of tenderness by repenting for the judgements or disrespect that can creep it on either side.
- Ask God to give you a new mindset today that allows you to live out kingdom behaviors of respect despite the way you are being treated. This will change atmospheres and allow for people that are around you to see the love of God that's in your heart worked into your behaviors.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, we recognize today that we need Your power for everything we do. Would you fill us today with Your power to treat the relationships in our life with deep respect and honor.

Ephesians Devotional
Saturday, April 15

GOD'S ARMOR

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

DEVOTIONAL

This passage of scripture is admonishing us to protect our lives with God by living out each one of these pieces of armor. God's strength never wanes but ours can go up and down.

It's important that we learn to find strength in the Lord, not in different vices. Or even at times we can turn to a relationship as our primary strength over God. Although God uses friendships and relationships in our lives to bring healing, deep encouragement, and so much more, there is a strength that comes from God that we must learn to receive in order to push through and see breakthroughs in our lives. Every aspect of the armor is important and works together. It's imperative that we pay attention to each aspect of the armor so we can be equipped in our battles. Sometimes we get stuck in just paying attention to the fight in front of our eyes without realizing the greater fight is in a realm that we cannot see with our natural eyes so we must by faith live out the full armor of God to fight the battles in the spiritual realm in order to see breakthrough in our natural realm.

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Write out every piece of the armor on one side of a notecard and how you can live that out on the other side
- Pray that you will learn to rely on the strength of God and stand in His mighty power in the circumstance that is in front of you
- Pray for eyes to see beyond the natural realm and trust that wearing the full armor of God is important in protecting your life with God and seeing battles won

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord, we ask that we would be a church that finds our strength in you! We believe that wisdom and power are Yours and we need it in all that we do. Help us to remember that every aspect of the armor is important for us to live out so that our lives with you will be protected and your kingdom will take ground. Let the people of our city hunger and thirst for You today. Amen!

Ephesians Devotional
Sunday, April 16

PRAYING TOWARDS GOD'S WILL

EPHESIANS 6:19-24

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

DEVOTIONAL

Paul is in chains, but that is not going to stop him from being a part of God's kingdom coming on earth. He has resolved that whatever the persecution in front of him, he will preach the gospel. He wasn't asking for prayer to get out of his chains but prayer for his words to be from God and that he would speak fearlessly. Wow! But he knows he needs prayer. God says in Isaiah 56:7 — "for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." We must be a people that pray in all circumstances. Let's ask God if we are praying for the right thing today. Perhaps you have been praying to be released from a situation that makes you feel stuck, but maybe there is another prayer like Paul's that you should be praying instead. Maybe we need to be asking God for words to be given us, or power instead of fear. (I want to make sure and give a disclaimer that I am not talking about situations of abuse. We would encourage anyone in a situation of abuse to seek immediate help.) Sometimes there are circumstances in our lives that God allows in order to bring an internal freedom that never would have come if circumstances had not allowed. God desires freedom for you and there is nothing too hard for God!

PERSONAL PRAYER

- Worship to a song and halfway through start declaring the goodness of God and thanking Him for His faithfulness.
- Ask God to give you a prayer for your current circumstances.
- Ask God for His words and His power to fill you.

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER

Lord help us to be a church that wants Your will to be done and not our own. We repent for ways we try to take control of situations in our lives so we can get the outcome we want. We repent for walking in fear instead of faith. Release faith and desire in our hearts to see Your will be done.