

EPHESIANS

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 5

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is a “must-have” item that you could live without but don’t want to? Why does it make your daily life better?

WHO IS THE REAL ENEMY?

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:11-12)

At the end of his letter, Paul connects back to his earlier discussion of the powers (Eph 1:20-21), but now he depicts the Church in an active struggle and resistance against their influence! As Tim Mackie puts it, “Paul wants his communities to know that their real enemy is never another human but the larger social, economic, political, and religious forces that govern and shape human existence.”

Yet, how often do we treat people like the enemy? From political figures to our most intimate relationships, we tend to point the finger at others. But Paul wants us to remember something crucial: we are a family.

After painting a beautiful picture of what it looks like to live in unity as the new family of Jesus, laying down our lives for one another as brothers and sisters, Paul reminds us that the enemy of that unity is the influences around us that seek to divide. Humans make dumb and selfish decisions, facilitate injustice, create violence, and unleash unspeakable darkness. But at the end of the day, we are not each other’s true enemies. The true enemies are the same powers at work in the world that whispered to Eve in the Garden, which first called her to distrust God and taste the fruit.

Take a moment to discuss this idea with your group. In what ways and over what issues does the Church tend to point fingers at one another? How does Paul's view of the enemy change your perspective on what it means to fight for peace and unity in the Church?

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Eph. 6:10-20

How do we stand against that kind of enemy? One that isn't exactly tangible and visible, but is in the very air we breathe? (Eph. 2:2). We put on the armor of God.

Speaking of that armor, let's take a look at what that is. Paul describes the items we equip ourselves with, including: The belt of **truth**, the breastplate of **righteousness**, the shoes of the gospel of **peace**, the shield of **faith**, the helmet of **salvation**, and the sword of the **Spirit (the Word of God)**. Do you notice a common theme? They are all attributes of Jesus! Our war is not with other humans, and therefore we don't prepare for battle with the typical weapons of this world.

Paul is telling us to put on Jesus. He's like the clothes we wear, in a sense. As we follow him, we become like him, and that is the only thing capable of defeating the evil of this world. How do we prepare for battle then? By living in community with one another, reforming our minds through the Scriptures, and by adopting Spiritual habits that help us grow and mature into the people God created us to be.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. Paul seems to think that mutual submission plays a major role in creating unity in our communities. How did Paul's discussion of mutual submission in chapters 5-6 change the way you think about your close relationships?
3. Re-read Eph 6:9 and discuss the idea that there is no partiality with God. How could this truth impact the way that members of our church relate to one another? How could it impact the way that our church relates to our surrounding community?
4. Read Ephesians 6:5-9. What might Paul's wisdom toward servants and masters have to teach us about the nature of power dynamics still at play in our modern context? What does mutual submission look like in the environment where we work?
5. In Eph 6:18, Paul reaffirms the importance of praying for your community of believers, which has been a consistent theme throughout the letter. During week

one, you spent time praying for one another, and it seems fitting to end this letter where we began. Spend a few moments praying with and for one another. Start by sharing at least one thing your group can pray for you. Then, either take turns praying for one another or elect one person to pray for your entire group.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Paul depicts Scripture as the Sword of the Spirit. In other words, when we put on the armor of God, we get on the offensive by burying the truth of Scripture in our hearts to help us cut down the rival arguments and philosophies.

Jesus is the perfect example of this. He quoted Scripture throughout His life, including when the enemy came to tempt Him in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11). The great Christian thinker Dallas Willard even argued that Scripture memorization might be the most important spiritual discipline because “[The words of God] become a power, a substance, that sustains and directs us without our even thinking of them, and they emerge into conscious thought and action as needed.”

As we wrap up our time in Ephesians this week, reflect on what you have read over the past few weeks. What verses from Ephesians have transformed your mind, moved your heart, or given you strength? Pick one passage (it doesn't have to be long!) to commit to memory this week. If you are new to Scripture memorization, here are a few helpful tips:

- **Index Card:** Write the verse(s) on an index card and carry the card around with you so you can work on memorizing in your free time.
- **Record Yourself:** Try recording yourself on your phone reading the verse(s). Listen back to the recording while you're driving, working out, cleaning your house, grocery shopping, etc.
- **Make It Visible:** Tape the verse(s) to the bathroom mirror or to your car dashboard and work on it as you go about your day. You can also put it as your desktop or phone background. You'll honestly be surprised by how much that helps.
- **Repetitive Writing:** transcribe the verse(s) by hand. Rewrite the verse(s) over and over or use hand-lettering or other creative illustrations or pictures as a way of putting it in your mind.
- **Repetitive Recitation:** Read the verse(s) out loud in 2-minute increments and repeat (while allowing some time for your mind to rest).