

# Study Through the Bible

## **Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian**

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# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians

### Why read this book?

People who care about nutrition often read the labels before buying packaged foods. Why? They're on the lookout for additives and ingredients that may be hazardous to their health. In a similar way, Galatians warns against mixing legalism and human works into the simple gospel. It describes artificial spiritual additives and their toxic effects. This book offers a spiritual health check—a clear explanation of what it means to be saved by faith.

### Who wrote this book?

Paul, the apostle.

### To whom was it written?

To Christians in Galatia, a Roman province in the central part of what is now called Turkey.

### When was it written?

Probably around A.D. 48 to 53, less than 25 years after Jesus Christ's ministry on earth.

### Why was it written?

To denounce and correct false teachings that had infiltrated the churches Paul and Barnabas had earlier established. False teachers insisted that Gentile Christians keep the ritual laws of the Jews. Paul, stinging from their personal attacks against him, also wrote to defend his integrity as an apostle and to reassert his love for the Galatians.

### What to look for in Galatians:

Galatians will take you back to the basics—what the gospel is, how you receive it and how you can apply it in your daily life. Paul uses several techniques (his own conversion story, an illustration from the life of Abraham and even sarcasm) to persuade the Galatians to return to the pure gospel.

*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



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# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

### Live Under God's Full Blessing

*God blesses those who rely on him rather than on themselves.*

There are two ways to try to please God. One is by human effort in keeping a moral code. The other is by trusting in Jesus Christ for the gift of righteousness and in the Holy Spirit for the ability to do God's will. Those who trust in themselves are under God's curse, while those who trust in God are under his favor.

As Christians, we believe we are saved by faith alone. But we often live as though God accepts and loves us based on our obedience to a biblical moral code or performance of certain spiritual disciplines. This study calls believers to rely not on human effort to please God, but on Christ and the Holy Spirit for righteousness.

**Scripture:**

Galatians 3:1-14

**Based on:**

"The Essence," Series Builder by Craig Brian Larson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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**PART 1**

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

A news article about the religious history of the Chicago area began with this paragraph about Zion, a small town north of the city: "Rev. John Alexander Dowie left little to chance a century ago, when the charismatic preacher founded the city of Zion as a carefully ordered religious utopia: He immediately outlawed sin."

It was both a great idea and a foolish presumption. God had already outlawed sin from the beginning, of course, thereby proving that pure legalism can't produce godly people. Rev. Dowie should have known that the law only confirms that we're sinners.

We should make laws, but laws don't change hearts. Only Christ can change hearts and form "law-abiding" spiritual citizens.

*(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.com,  
Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Chicago Tribune, 9-22-00.)*

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] Why don't laws change behavior?
- [Q] How have you seen legalism expressed?
- [Q] What type of legalism do you fall into?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Our Christian life begins—and should continue—with faith in Christ, not human effort.

Some try to live the Christian life by the principle of human effort rather than faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the special pitfall of those who take God seriously, those who are religious. We understand that we are saved by trusting in Christ, but we fall back into trusting ourselves.

For a Christian to revert back to trying to gain God's approval by keeping a moral code would be like a person who wins a vacation cruise, but then insists on cleaning the deck every day to earn it. God blesses those who rely on him rather than on themselves.

Read Galatians 3:1–5.

- [Q] Why does Paul call the Galatians foolish and bewitched?



**[Q]** How would you answer Paul's question, "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"

**[Q]** What's wrong with the following statement?

"I'm not Mother Teresa, but I'm not Charles Manson either."

*(Boxer Mike Tyson, arguing unsuccessfully during his application for a boxing license from Nevada state officials; Reuters, 1-30-02.)*

### **Teaching point two: Abraham is the prime example of those who are blessed and justified through faith, not law keeping.**

God delights in our faith. It glorifies him. There is an inherent blessing in faith. First there is the ultimate blessing of faith for salvation. Then there are the blessings that come when we believe all the promises of God.

**[Q]** Read Genesis 15:1–6. What was God's promise to Abraham? Did any conditions come with the promise? What does it mean that Abraham believed God and that God credited it to him as righteousness?

**Leader's Note:** *Abraham lived before the Ten Commandments, but God spoke to him and he believed what God said. God saw his heart and declared him righteous.*

**[Q]** Read Galatians 3:6–9. How do we become children of Abraham? How are those who have faith blessed through Abraham?

**Leader's Note:** *Many centuries later, Abraham's offspring resulted in Jesus, whom we have faith in and are thus blessed.*

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us understand our helplessness in changing our own lives.*

**Activity:** *Give three people the following statements in writing. Ask them not to show them to anyone else, but to stand in a row and read their statements aloud, one at a time. Ask the rest of the group to vote on which one is the real Abraham. After the vote, ask for volunteers to explain their choice.*

- ◆ *My name is Abraham. I lived an exemplary life. I always obeyed God in every matter.*
- ◆ *My name is Abraham. I tried to do what is right, but I failed. I lied about my wife being my sister, and I slept with my wife's maid to help fulfill God's promise about an offspring.*
- ◆ *My name is Abraham. God rewarded me because of the amazing sacrifices I made. I was even willing to sacrifice my own son.*

*The middle one is the true Abraham. The first one is not true, because Abraham made many mistakes. The third one is not true, because God chose to bless him before Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac.*



### Teaching point three: Those who seek to be justified by keeping a moral code are under a curse.

Steve McVey, president of Grace Walk Ministries, says this:

Realize that you can't keep your promises. That may seem like a strange first step toward the goal of keeping promises, but it's true.

Consider this question: If we could keep our promises, wouldn't we have done it by now? How many times have we made the same promises? Let's face it; rededication to keep promises won't work. If it did, we wouldn't find it necessary to keep rededicating ourselves. Many of us have struggled with promise keeping for one reason: We have focused on our performance more than on Jesus Christ. We have tried to keep our promises, but the Bible teaches that effective Christian living doesn't come by trying. It comes by trusting Christ to express his life through us. He is the only One who can successfully keep promises.

Before we can be effective promise keepers, we must become promise receivers. The Bible is clear about God's promise: the One who has given us his life will be the One who lives it for us. Only Jesus Christ can effectively live the perfect life. He lives inside believers today and wants to reveal his perfect life through us.

*(From MEN OF INTEGRITY, Vol. 1, no. 2.)*

**[Q]** Read Deuteronomy 27:26, Deuteronomy 21:23, and Galatians 3:10–14, in that order. Why are we under a curse if we try to gain favor with God by observing the law? Who took the curse for us? What does it mean to live by faith?

**[Q]** Read Leviticus 18:5. Why would God ask us to do something he knew we couldn't do?

**Leader's Note:** *The Law was meant to lead us to Christ by revealing God's goodness and our sinfulness.*

**[Q]** Read Habakkuk 2:4 and Ephesians 2:8–9. How do we become puffed up and have wrong desires if we rely on our righteousness instead of faith? What is God's solution to this problem?

#### PART 3

### Apply Your Findings

"Only one person in the Bible receives a direct promise of heaven—a thief."

—Philip Yancey, *CHRISTIAN READER*, Vol. 33, no. 4.

Richard L. Dunagin of Denton, Texas, writes:

At their school carnival, our kids won four free goldfish (lucky us!), so out I went Saturday morning to find an aquarium. The first few I priced ranged from \$40 to \$70. Then I spotted it right in the aisle: a discarded 10-gallon display tank, complete with gravel and filter for a mere five bucks. Sold! Of course, it was nasty dirty, but the savings made the two hours of clean up a breeze.



Those four new fish looked great in their new home, at least for the first day. But by Sunday one had died. Too bad, but three remained. Monday morning revealed a second casualty, and by Monday night a third goldfish had gone belly up. We called in an expert member of our church who has a 30-gallon tank. It didn't take him long to discover the problem: I had washed the tank with soap, an absolute no-no. My uninformed efforts had destroyed the very lives I was trying to protect.

Sometimes in our zeal to clean up our own lives or the lives of others, we unfortunately use the "killer soaps" of legalism and moralism.

*(From LEADERSHIP, Vol. 6, no. 3.)*

**[Q]** With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most?

- 1) I try my best to live the way God wants me to, but I often fail.
- 2) I often fail, but I confess it and ask God for his power to live as he wants me to.
- 3) I've given up trying because it's hopeless.
- 4) I have no trouble keeping God's commandments.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

**[Q]** What is one area where you have relied on your own efforts for God's acceptance? How can you surrender that area to God and live by faith?

**[Q]** Think of one person you know who struggles with trying to live the Christian life in his or her own power. Pray for an opportunity to talk to this person about what you learned in this lesson.

*—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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*(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.com,  
Lee Eclow, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Chicago Tribune, 9-22-00.)*

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching point one: Our Christian life begins—and should continue—with faith in Christ, not human effort.**

**Teaching point two: Abraham is the prime example of those who are blessed and justified through faith, not law keeping.**

**Teaching point three: Those who seek to be justified by keeping a moral code are under a curse.**

**PART 3**

## Apply Your Findings

**[Q]** With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most?

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Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **The Way to Spiritual Vitality**

*If your Christian life feels like duty and drudgery, here is the secret to a dynamic relationship with God.*

Galatians 3:15–25 explores the purpose of the law in light of the promise of Christ. Paul explains that dependence on human effort can only distance a person from God. Faith in Christ and his promises brings us close to God and into full spiritual life. Christians today will experience the fullest riches of Christian vitality when they live by faith in Christ and all God's promises, with obedience to the law of Christ flowing from that faith.

This study helps us discover the joy of living under Christ's grace even when we fail to live up to the law.

**Scripture:**

Galatians 3:15–25

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**PART 1**

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Why do people try to relate to God based on human effort? Some are trying to assuage their guilt by good works. Some are well meaning but deceived. They have been taught the main tenet of human religion: that we must be good to gain God's approval. Some trust in themselves more than they do in God. Some, in pride, want to earn and deserve salvation.

Paul's overall purpose in Galatians is to refute the error of legalism being taught by Judaizers from Jerusalem. This form of legalism taught that to be saved a Christian needed not only to believe in Christ but also to keep the law of Moses. Paul's purpose in this text is to teach that believers in Christ are not subject to the law of Moses because of the preeminence of God's covenant with Abraham, a covenant based on faith in God's promise.

Galatians 3:15–25 tells why faith in the promised "Seed," not the keeping of the law of Moses, has always been the basis for a relationship with God.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] What kind of religious tradition were you raised in? Were you taught that your relationship with God depended on human effort?
- [Q] What's wrong with believing in Christ, but also keeping the law of Moses?
- [Q] Why are humans so attracted to rules?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Our inheritance in Christ depends on God's promise, not on our keeping the law.

Mark Moring, editor of MEN OF INTEGRITY, writes:

It was late, and my young sons, Peter and Paul, had been in bed for at least an hour. My wife and I had just returned from our Bible study group, and I snuck into the boys' room to say good night.

"Dad, can I have some ice cream?"

"No, Peter, it's late, way past bedtime."

"But Dad, you promised."

He was right. Peter had asked for ice cream earlier in the day, but we didn't have any. And I had said, "I'll get some for you later, I promise."



Dinner came and went. We cleaned up the kitchen; the boys picked up their toys. The sitter arrived. And my wife and I left for Bible study. I'd forgotten all about the ice cream. But Peter hadn't. So, even though it was after 10 o'clock, I hopped in the car, drove to the convenience store, got a half-gallon, and hurried home.

Peter and I enjoyed that chocolate-vanilla swirl together. After all, I had a promise to keep.

*(From MEN OF INTEGRITY, Vol. 1, no. 1.)*

Read Galatians 3:15–18.

- [Q] Have you ever had to break a human covenant (contract)? Was it difficult? Why?
- [Q] Why would God's covenant with Abraham be more impossible to break than a human one? Did God's promise depend on Abraham's actions? See Genesis 12:7.
- [Q] According to Galatians 3:18, what does our inheritance depend on? What does that mean?

### **Teaching point two: The law was intended as a temporary revealer of sin until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ.**

Robert C. Roberts writes:

There's something comfortable about reducing Christianity to a list of do's and don'ts, whether your list comes from mindless fundamentalism or mindless liberalism: you always know where you stand, and this helps reduce anxiety. Do's-and-don'ts-ism has the advantage that you don't need wisdom. You don't have to think subtly or make hard choices. You don't have to relate personally to a demanding and loving Lord.

*(From The Reformed Journal, Feb. 1987; CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol. 31, no. 9.)*

Read Galatians 3:19–20.

- [Q] According to these verses, what was the purpose of the law?
- [Q] Should we obey or ignore Old Testament law?

**Leader's Note:** *The law was never intended to take the place of faith. Instead it helped the Israelites understand what sin is. Until they understood sin, they were not able to understand God or their need of a savior. However, the Old Testament law shows us what God sees as important. We do not have to keep every law, but are called to an even higher standard—the spirit of the law, which is to love God and others (Matthew 22:37–40).*

- [Q] Who is the "Seed" in verse 19? Who are the angels and mediator in this verse?

**Leader's Note:** *The Seed is Christ. The Jews believed that angels gave the law to Moses, the mediator.*



**Teaching point three: What the law lacks the power to do—impart righteousness and life—the promise can do through faith in Christ.**

Vic Pentz recounted this story in a sermon:

About a year and a half ago, I bought a new navy blazer at Nordstrom. It was one of those cases you may have gone through where you buy an item of clothing and the more you wear it, the more you realize you don't like it. My blazer wasn't the right color, and to make matters worse, it attracted lint like it was going out of style. After wearing it pretty regularly for six months or so, I stuck it in my closet and didn't wear it for a long time.

Tucked away in the back of my mind all the while was that famous Nordstrom unconditional-return policy. I thought, *I've had this thing for a year and a half. I've worn it lots of times, and there's just no way they're going to take it back.*

About two weeks ago I decided I had nothing to lose. I pulled the blazer out, threw a lot of lint on it to make it look bad, and took it down to Nordstrom's men's department. I walked in, and immediately I felt nervous. I felt like I was about to pull a scam of some sort, but I played it straight. I walked right up to the first salesman I saw and gave this little prepared speech. I said, "I am about to put your famous unconditional-return policy to its ultimate test. I have here a blazer. I've worn it lots. I've had it for a year and a half. I don't like it. It's the wrong color, and it attracts lint like it's going out of style. But I want to return this blazer for another blazer that I like." Then I stood there.

I couldn't believe it. This guy with a big handlebar mustache just looked at me and shook his head. He said, "For heaven's sake, what took you so long? Let's go find you a blazer." Ten minutes later I walked out with another blazer that was marked seventy-five dollars more than I paid for the one that I brought in. It was perfect for me. Didn't cost me a penny.

God is like Nordstrom. God makes all sorts of outlandish promises that we cannot bring ourselves to believe. When we get up enough courage or we're desperate enough, we finally take him at his word. He looks at us and shakes his head. "For heaven's sake," he says, "what took you so long?"

*(From "A Twinge of Nostalgia," PREACHING TODAY, Tape No. 88.)*

Read Galatians 3:21–22.

- [Q] How is the whole world a prisoner to sin?
- [Q] Why can the law never impart life?
- [Q] How do you view the keeping of the Old Testament law?
1. I need rules; otherwise I don't know how to behave.
  2. Rules make me feel like breaking them more than keeping them.
  3. I need some rules, but only a few.
  4. Without rules my life would be chaos.



Discuss as a group how each member feels toward rules. When can rules be beneficial? When are they harmful?

### **Teaching point four: Faith in God's promises energizes obedience and brings the empowering of the Holy Spirit.**

Some movements still teach that to be fully accepted by God, Christians must keep parts of the Old Testament law of Moses, such as certain dietary laws and Sabbath-keeping.

Many Christians who believe they are saved by faith alone actually live as though God accepts them and loves them based on their obedience to a biblical moral code, such as the Ten Commandments, or their performance of spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, tithing, and service. Galatians 3:15–25 teaches the priority in the sight of God of faith in his promises. Christian spirituality is based on faith in God's promises, which precedes and energizes obedience to the law of Christ.

Many sincere Christians lack spiritual vitality. Obedience to Christ has become drudgery. Often this spiritual lethargy results from an effort to obey the law of Christ without the underpinnings of faith in God's promises and a dependence on the Holy Spirit. When faith is weak, obedience falters. When we rely on our own strength, obedience fails. Faith in God's promises energizes obedience and brings the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 3:23–25.

**[Q]** How can we be held prisoners by the law?

**[Q]** How does the law lead us to Christ?

#### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us realize that the law can never make us good.*

**Activity:** *Provide everyone in the group a section of the newspaper that covers crime. Ask them to look for a story of someone who broke the law. Give each person the chance to share a brief summary of the story they found, and ask them:*

1. *What law was broken in this crime?*
2. *Do you think the person in this story knew he/she was breaking the law?*
3. *Why do you think the law failed to stop their crime?*
4. *What hope is there for them now?*

*When everyone who wants to has shared, ask them how this relates to our efforts to please God by our deeds and what our approach should be instead.*

### **PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

Pastor Ron Lee Davis shared this illustration:



In the second book of *The Chronicles of Narnia, Prince Caspian*, Lucy enters Narnia again, and she hasn't seen Aslan, this lion figure who represents Christ, in a long, long time, and so they have a wonderful reunion. Lucy says to Aslan, "Aslan, you're bigger now."

Aslan says, "Lucy, that's because you are older. You see, Lucy, every year that you grow, you will find me bigger." For many of us, every year we grow, we find him bigger in his grace and in his goodness and in his faithfulness and in those promises that he has given us upon which we can depend all the days of our lives.

*(From "Rejoicing in Our Suffering," PREACHING TODAY, Tape No. 74.)*

**[Q]** How do we practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, service, etc., without becoming burdened by them?

**[Q]** How does faith in God's promises energize our obedience to Christ?

**Leader's Note:** *If we are acting out of duty rather than affection for God and his promises, we will become weary.*

**[Q]** How can the Holy Spirit help us to remain vital in our walk with God?

**Leader's Note:** *When we are at the end of our strength, we need to trust God to breathe new life into us through the power of his Holy Spirit.*

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

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**PART 2**

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**Teaching point one: Our inheritance in Christ depends on God's promise, not on our keeping the law.**

**Teaching point two: The law was intended as a temporary revealer of sin until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ.**

**Teaching point three: What the law lacks the power to do—impart righteousness and life—the promise can do through faith in Christ.**

**[Q]** How do you view the keeping of the Old Testament law?

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3. I need some rules, but only a few.
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**Teaching point four: Faith in God's promises energizes obedience and brings the empowering of the Holy Spirit.**



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## **Apply Your Findings**

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# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **A Vibrant Hope for the Future**

*Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams.*

Do you have anything to look forward to? Does living in the kingdom of God after you die sound boring? Good News! Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams! When we unite with Christ, he qualifies us for the full rights of God's children.

This study describes the vast implications of being a son or daughter of God. In Christ, the heir of Abraham, we too become heirs of Abraham and inherit aspects of the promises given to Abraham. We transfer from the guardianship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Best of all, we are heirs of God himself; we actually have the full inheritance rights of being God's child. God wants us to live not like slaves but like his children.

**Scripture:**

Galatians 3:26-4:7

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The movie *Princess Diaries* tells the story of Amelia Thermopolis, an average, awkward teen whose estranged grandmother (Julie Andrews) comes to America to give Amelia the biggest news of her life.

Amelia visits her grandmother at her opulent mansion in San Francisco. A butler leads Amelia to the grand living room, where she stands amazed as several servants bustle about. Suddenly, all the servants stand at attention as Amelia's grandmother enters the room. The contrast between Amelia and her refined grandmother is painfully apparent. After some small talk, Amelia, feeling uncomfortable, asks her grandmother, "What is it you want to tell me?"

Her grandmother answers, "Something, I believe, that will have a very big impact on your life." They walk outside to talk, and her grandmother begins to explain. "Amelia, have you ever heard of Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi?"

"No," Amelia responds. Her grandmother tells Amelia he was the crown prince of Genovia.

Amelia is as baffled as she is indifferent and shrugs her shoulders. "What about him?" she asks.

Her grandmother says, "Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi was also your father."

Thinking her grandmother is only joking, she laughs, rolls her eyes in disbelief, and says, "If he was a prince, that would make me a—"

"Exactly," says her grandmother, "a princess. You see, you are not just Amelia Thermopolis. You are Amelia Mignonette Thermopolis Renaldi, the princess of Genovia."

Amelia can hardly speak as this new revelation sinks in. "Me...a...a...a princess?"

### Discussion starters:

**[Q]** Amelia changed the way she viewed herself when she discovered she was a princess. How does the way you view yourself and your future affect how you live? In what ways does being a child of the King change how you view yourself?

**[Q]** Name some things most people look forward to in life. What do you look forward to?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Christ qualifies you to inherit Abraham's promises.

Paul says in Ephesians 1:18, "I pray also 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 the saints." It is important for us to know the hope to which God has called us, and Paul



connects this hope with our inheritance. Our hope will increase as we understand the inheritance rights and privileges that come with being a child of God.

Bernie May tells the story of an airline captain who flies overseas routes and also runs a small filling station near his home. Between trips to Europe and the Middle East, he gets a kick out of changing plugs and points and talking to the folks while pumping gas.

One Saturday morning, dressed in his greasy overalls, he walked down to the local hardware store to pick up a wrench. "What's new?" the storeowner asked as he rang up the purchase. "Ah, I'm thinking of taking the Cairo run this month," the captain said. "I enjoy flying to London and Frankfurt, but I think the change of pace will do me good." He paid for the wrench and left.

Another customer, curious, asked, "Who's the world traveler?" Rolling his eyes, the storeowner nodded toward the departing pump jockey. "Some nut who runs the gas station down the street. Thinks he's an airline pilot!" Both men got a good laugh out of that one.

Like that airline pilot, we are more than meets the eye.

*(From "Under His Wing," LEADERSHIP, Vol. 4, no. 3.)*

Read Galatians 3:26–29.

**[Q]** What does it mean that we are sons of God? According to verse 26, how did we become sons of God?

**Leader's Notes:** *For Paul's analogy to make sense at that time, he used the word "sons," not "sons and daughters," because in that culture only the sons inherited what belonged to the father. So in that sense, we all become sons.*

**[Q]** Did Christ erase all ethnic, economic, and gender distinctions? (v. 28) Why or why not? What does this have to do with the point Paul is making?

**Leader's Note:** *This verse helps us see that we all come to Christ in the same way.*

### **Teaching point two: Christ redeems you from the guardianship of the law.**

What difference does attitude make in our performance? Imagine a teenager has the job of painting the house and sees it as drudgery, finishing it as quickly as possible with little interest in the outcome. His parent inspects the job to see if he did it correctly, then makes him repeat any places he missed. When the child is an adult, he inherits the house. By this time it needs painting again, but he is delighted to work on it because he knows it will increase his property value.

Read Galatians 4:1–5.

**[Q]** Compare our analogy of the teenager with the verses we just read. What difference does it make that in Christ we receive our full rights as sons?

**[Q]** What does it mean in verse 4 that "the time had fully come"?

**Leader's Notes:** *Jesus wasn't early or late, but right on time. God brought him to earth when mankind would be ready to hear his message.*



### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us realize that knowing the end result of something affects our attitude as we go through it.

**Activity:** Ask someone who doesn't attend your study if they would be willing to receive a phone call during your study. Explain to them this exercise ahead of time. Ask for a volunteer to call that person during the study. It will work best if the volunteer does not know the person they are calling. Tell them to ask only the following questions and then to say goodbye and hang up.

1. How old are you?
2. What gender are you?
3. How long have you been coming to our church?
4. Have you ever been arrested for any kind of offense?
5. Do you get along well with others?

When they've completed the call, ask them how they felt when they were asking the questions (probably awkward). Then ask if it would have helped if they'd known that the person they were talking to was volunteering to work in the nursery (for most people that would help because they would understand why they were asking the questions). Ask the group how this applies to the fact that we are heirs of Jesus Christ.

### **Teaching point three: Christ gives you the full rights of an heir of God the Father.**

*Uncorked* is a movie about an ambitious, self-absorbed man's futile search for wealth. Ross (played by Rufus Sewell) is determined to sell a priceless family wine collection to buy a local manganese mine, which he hopes will earn him great wealth. His eccentric Uncle Cullen (played by Nigel Hawthorne) is unimpressed by his nephew's materialism.

Ross broods about how to get his brother and uncle to sign over the estate to him. When that fails, he inveigles his girlfriend in an unseemly plan to murder his Uncle Cullen. But in his moment of madness he restrains himself and is remorseful about his self-centeredness. While he apologizes to his uncle, he indicates he will be finding a place of his own.

Cullen acknowledges his nephew's contrition and smiles. "Well, let me tell you something," Cullen says. "You already have a place of your own. You already own Sachell Farm."

Unwilling to believe what he is hearing, Ross runs to the family safe. Upon opening it he discovers the deed to the estate has had his name on it all along. Ross wonders aloud if this all could be true.

Cullen calls attention to a blue folder that is also in the safe. His nephew looks into the folder and pulls out a key. With a flash of insight, Ross runs to the entrance to the mine. The key fits the lock. Amazingly the mine he has longed to own was already in the family. It was a birthright he could only accept as a gift, not earn or buy.

Read Galatians 4:6–7.



- [Q] How did God send the Spirit of his Son into our hearts?
- [Q] What does it mean that the Spirit calls out “Abba, Father”?
- [Q] The following well-known people in the Bible gained a new identify because they became God’s heirs and followed a new calling. See if you can recognize them by these descriptions:
1. I own my own small business. On a lousy day, Jesus helped me improve my profits. I decided to follow him. Although I wanted to be loyal, I had trouble. In spite of that, God used me to establish his church.
  2. Although I was my father’s favorite child, I never received a dime from him. I ended up going to a whole new country, wound up in prison, but eventually gained a high position in the government of that country.
  3. I became a scholar of the Jewish faith and prided myself in my knowledge of Jewish law. Because of my loyalty to my faith, I made it my goal to wipe out a sect that was gaining popularity in Israel. Instead, I became one of the most ardent followers of that sect.
  4. Even though I was an immigrant, I became a respected member of the ruling party of the country I lived in. However, when I came under suspicion of loyalty, I was given a death sentence that I miraculously survived. After that, God was freely worshiped in my country.
- 1) Peter: Jesus filled his nets with fish when he’d caught nothing. Although he denied Christ three times, God used him to plant the church. 2) Joseph: Sold into slavery in Egypt, falsely accused and thrown into prison, he eventually became second in command in Egypt. 3) Paul: Studied under one of the most respected Jewish rabbis and persecuted Christians. Converted and became the early church’s greatest evangelist. 4) Daniel: Taken into captivity, he rose to great power but was thrown to the lions when he prayed to God instead of worshiping only the king. Was delivered and continued to influence the country.

### PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

On September 2, 1945, the documents of surrender officially ending World War II were signed by the Japanese and designated representatives of allied nations. General Douglas MacArthur officiated the ceremony aboard the USS Missouri and was the last to sign on behalf of the United States.

MacArthur, flanked by his military colleagues, took his Parker fountain pen and simply signed his first name, “Douglas.” He then passed the pen to General Wainwright, who signed “Mac.” MacArthur then handed the pen to General Percival, who signed “Arthur.” This unusual procedure was MacArthur’s way of honoring the two United States generals who had suffered severe persecution as prisoners of war. They had persevered, and now they were allowed to share in the glory of victory.



In Romans 8:17 Paul describes the future of those who persevere in the spiritual battles we fight this side of heaven. He calls them joint-heirs. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ will also share in his glory.

*(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.COM, submitted by Greg Asimakopoulos, Naperville, Illinois.)*

- [Q] After doing this study, what do you think is our inheritance?
- [Q] Why is it better than anything else the world has to offer?
- [Q] What does it mean to share in Christ's sufferings? His glory?

*—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon*





# Study Through the Bible

## Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### **A Vibrant Hope for the Future**

*Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams.*

Do you have anything to look forward to? Does living in the kingdom of God after you die sound boring? Good News! Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams! When we unite with Christ, he qualifies us for the full rights of God's children.

This study describes the vast implications of being a son or daughter of God. In Christ, the heir of Abraham, we too become heirs of Abraham and inherit aspects of the promises given to Abraham. We transfer from the guardianship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Best of all, we are heirs of God himself; we actually have the full inheritance rights of being God's child. God wants us to live not like slaves but like his children.

**Scripture:**

Galatians 3:26-4:7

**Based on:**

"The Essence," Series Builder by Craig Brian Larson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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Visit [www.PreachingTodaySermons.com](http://www.PreachingTodaySermons.com)

**PART 1**

**Identify the Current Issue**

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**Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Christ qualifies you to inherit Abraham's promises.**

**Teaching point two: Christ redeems you from the guardianship of the law.**

**Teaching point three: Christ gives you the full rights of an heir of God the Father.**



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*(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.COM, submitted by Greg Asimakopoulos, Naperville, Illinois.)*

*—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon*



## Ephesians: You Are God's Masterpiece

▼ Click on a study title you'd like to see ▼

**2** HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

**3** INTRODUCTION

**4** Study 1: **GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIM**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*

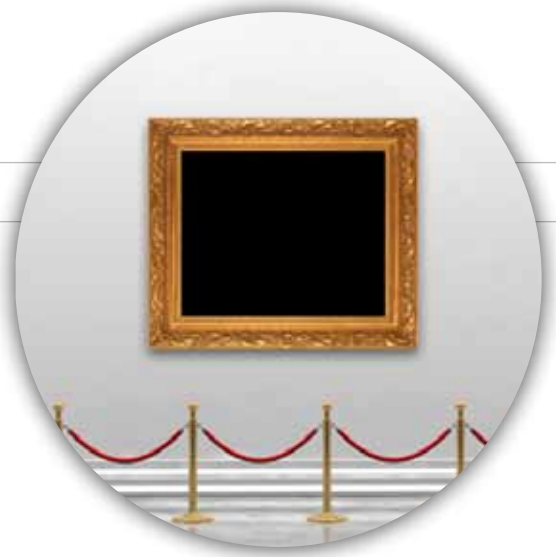
**13** Study 2: **GOD WANTS TO CHANGE YOU**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*

**22** Study 3: **GOD WANTS YOU TO FIND YOUR MISSION**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*

**32** Study 4: **GOD WANTS YOU TO BE USEFUL AND HOLY**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*

**43** Study 5: **GOD WANTS YOU TO BE A GOOD IMITATION**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*

**55** Study 6: **GOD WARNS YOU ABOUT THE WAR ZONE**  
*Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide*



## How to use this resource for a group study

# How to use this resource for a group study

*This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.*



- 1** Make enough copies of the Participant's Guides for everyone in the group. If you would like your group to have more information, feel free to copy the leader's guide for them instead.
- 2** Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.
- 3** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.
- 4** When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 5** Begin and end the session in prayer.

## Introduction

# Introduction



## Why read this book?

The greatest adventure in life is not an exotic safari, a booming business success, or a love relationship with that perfect someone. Rather, it's discovering the purpose for our lives. This letter answers the question men and women have asked throughout all time: "Why am I here?" The answer may startle you, considering the standard talk-show ideas of our age. It has to do with eternity, making peace with God, and identifying with Christ. Interested? Read on. The adventure is only beginning.

## Who wrote this book?

The apostle Paul.

## When was it written?

Sometime during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, around A.D. 60 to 62.

## To whom was it written and why?

To encourage believers in Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey) to think of themselves in a whole new way. Instead of people once involved in idol worship, illicit sex, and foolish philosophies, Paul wanted them to think of themselves as people "in Christ"—people with a radically new identity (2:12–13).

## What to look for in Ephesians:

In this book you'll learn about God's intentions for his people, and you'll gain insight into the nature of the church. Notice the various word pictures describing the church and how Paul stresses the unity of all believers. The last half of the book offers practical ways to live in unity with God and one another.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*

## God Wants You to Know Him

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

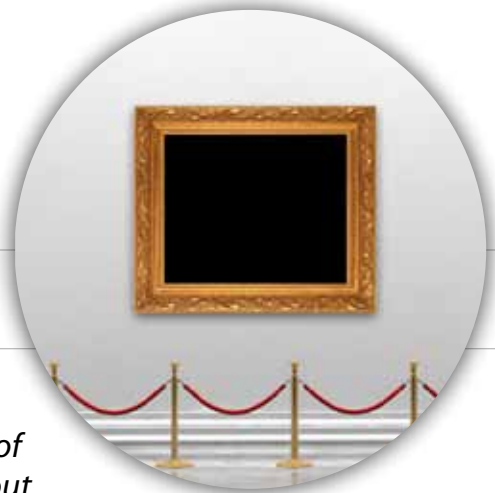
# God Wants You to Know Him

*God chose you, so that you would choose him.*

*Some of us relate to God in a timid way. We cower and want to run away, yet are afraid of being abandoned. We don't have a clue about what it means to be part of God's family. In Ephesians you will find your identity. You will discover who you are, who you are meant to be, what you are meant to do, and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ.*

Scripture: [Ephesians 1](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



## God Wants You to Know Him

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Steve May shares this story:

Quincy was on death row when I first saw him. As I walked the long corridor past the dozens of others facing an imminent demise, Quincy watched me through the bars of his cage. Right away I knew he was the one I had come for. I paid the animal shelter \$50 and took Quincy home with me.

Adjusting to life with the May family wasn't as easy for him as I thought it would be. He must have been abused in the past, because he cowered every time I approached him. And even though we saved him from the gas chamber with the intention of feeding him, playing with him, loving him, and even spoiling him, he tried to run away two or three times.

When he got past the desire to run away, he began to develop other problems. Acute separation anxiety, for one. I guess he decided that since he no longer wants to leave, surely we must. Every time we pack a suitcase, Quincy goes a little nuts. He shadows my wife's every step (he's still a little afraid of me), and if she steps outside—even for a moment—he sits at the door and whines. Clearly, Quincy has some abandonment issues to deal with.

If I could speak Quincy's language, I would say to him, "Relax. Everything is going to be okay. You are part of our family, and we will take care of you. Whatever happened in the past is past. You're with us now. Your life is different. Enjoy it." That's what I would say if I could speak dog. Unfortunately, I don't. I've tried saying it to him in English, but I don't think he gets it. So, for now at least, Quincy remains just a little neurotic.

In the church, I have met a few Quincys. In fact, there have been times in my own spiritual life when I have related to God exactly the way Quincy relates to us: Timid, cowering, wanting to run away, yet afraid of being abandoned—and not having a clue about what it means to be part of God's family.

#### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** Do you have any difficulty in trusting God with your life? If so, in what specific ways?

- Why do you think it's difficult for you to trust God with these things?

**[Q]** Which of the following best describes how you see God?

- Kind and caring



## God Wants You to Know Him

### Leader's Guide

- Strict and exacting
- Awesome and holy
- Generous and giving
- Mystical and mysterious
- Close and intimate
- Far away and unreachable

Why did you pick the ones you did? What does that tell you about how you see God?

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To help us to understand God as he truly is.*

**Activity:** *Looking at the options in the last question, go through each one and discuss how each of them could be true from what we know of God in Scripture. Then go through each of them and discuss how each one could be twisted in such a way as to be false and to misrepresent God.*

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: You belong to God, and that will never change.

A million centuries before Genesis 1:1, God knew that you would be where you are today in your job, in your relationships, in all areas of your life. For some, it's been a rough ride. There have been mistakes and disappointments along the way, and you've fallen short of God's glory more times than you want to admit. Many of you have regrets; many of you have wanted to give up. But God's love for you has never changed. From the beginning, he has known that your life would bring you to this place today. Even though your past may be littered with failure upon failure, it doesn't change the fact that God loves you, chose you, and believes in you. You have been on his mind from the very beginning.

Ephesians defines our relationship with God in permanent terms. Read Ephesians 1:1–14.

You've been on God's mind from the beginning. We all know what it is like to be the last chosen and the least talented in at least one area—academically, athletically, musically, and so on. But there is an area where we never need feel that way: our relationship with God. Probably all of

## God Wants You to Know Him

### Leader's Guide

us have wondered, at one time or another, *If they could do it all over again, would they choose me? Would they hire me? Would she marry me?* Maybe some of you have even thought, *If God could do it over, would he save me again?* Some of you believe that you have been such a disappointment to God that he would probably have been better off not to have saved you in the first place. The message of Ephesians 1 is the exact opposite. The message of Ephesians is that God accepted you into the body of Christ not because he had to, but because he wanted to.

You are part of his plan. From the beginning, he has wanted you to be a member of his family.

**[Q]** What evidence do you find in Ephesians 1:1–14 that God wanted you to be part of his family from the beginning?

**[Q]** How can we be “holy and blameless” in his sight when we obviously still do things wrong (v. 4)? (See verse 7.)

**[Q]** What does it mean to you that God has adopted you into his family?

**[Q]** How is the Holy Spirit our guarantee or security of things to come (vv. 13–14)?

**Leader's Note:** *Guarantee is a business term that refers to pledge or earnest money that is paid up front to ensure that full payment will be made later. It's like a deposit. For example, a man might make a deposit on a piece of land to give the seller assurance that he intends to come back later and pay for it in full. Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit is that deposit, that guarantee.*

*You know the work that the Holy Spirit does in your life—the conviction that you have about sin, the desire to live a holy life, the part of you that is deeper than emotion that is drawing into a relationship with God—that's the Holy Spirit's work.*

### Teaching Point Two: Your security comes from understanding who Christ is.

As a follower of Jesus, the first step in understanding who you are is understanding who Christ is. You cannot experience a powerful, dynamic walk with God if your head is full of misconceptions about who he is and what he does. Those who believe in a weak and ineffective God will lead weak, ineffective lives. In order to fully experience God, you must come to know him.

This is why, in the second half of the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul prays for their (and our) spiritual enlightenment. He is teaching us how to get connected to God—how to go beyond mundane religious existence into a vital spiritual experience of the power of God. Read Ephesians 1:15–23.

## God Wants You to Know Him

### Leader's Guide

When you made the decision to follow Jesus Christ, you did much more than obligate yourself to a certain moral standard of living. Instead, you became permanently connected to the source above all sources, to the power above all powers, to the name above all names. Jesus is not just our teacher. He is our Lord and our Savior. He is not just powerful, he is All Powerful. He is not just wise, he is All Knowing. He is not just loving, he is Love. When we connect to him, we connect to all that he is.

We are often held back by a limited view of who God is. It's difficult to rise above your situation if you're not fully convinced that God is bigger than your situation. It's difficult to experience power over the darkness in your life—the darkness of fear, doubt, and sin—if you are not fully convinced that God has the power and the desire to deliver you from darkness. It's difficult to experience the abundant life if you're not fully convinced that Jesus came to give you abundant life. In order to fully experience God, you have to know him.

Knowing God means knowing Jesus. He is the ultimate power in the universe. That means that he is more powerful than any force, any person, any presence, or any thing at work in your life. Your enemies are no match for his power. Your fears are no match for his power. Your problems are no match for his power. Your sin is no match for his power. He has the power to conquer death, and through him you can have the power to conquer life.

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

- What do you base that on?

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

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

**[Q]** Who would you pray a similar prayer for? Share it with the group, and have a quiet moment to pray this prayer for someone you know and love.

### Teaching Point Three: Your confidence comes from understanding who you are in Christ.

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

Look again at verse 18. At first glance, it seems Paul is talking about our inheritance—heaven, forgiveness, salvation, etc. But the word inheritance refers to the Father's inheritance, not ours. What will God inherit? He will inherit “the saints”—that is, the church. You and me.

## God Wants You to Know Him

### Leader's Guide

This is God's plan. He sent his Son into the world to die on the cross for our sins, so that all who come to him will be saved and will become members of his church. (We're talking about the universal church, not a specific church.) When you become a member of his church, the process begins in which he makes you pure and holy and blameless—a process which he guarantees he will complete. And when his work in you is done, he will receive you as his inheritance, his precious possession to be treasured throughout the ages. This is what God's people mean to him. This is who you are in Christ.

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

**[Q]** Look again at verses 19b–23. As a group, list all the things these verses tell you about Christ.

**[Q]** How does realizing how great Christ is affect your own confidence in him? Give an example.

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God's power is available to you—his resurrection power. It is available for your benefit—to make you more like Jesus. That's because you are God's treasured possession. His plan is that you will become pure and holy and blameless—just like Jesus. That's what he sees in you.

The first step in understanding who you are in Christ is understanding who Christ is. The result of understanding who Christ is, and understanding who you are in Christ, is that you will experience his resurrection power. Power that will change you from the inside out. Power over sin. Power over despair. Power over fear. His power is available to you.

**Action Point:** Share with the group one area that you feel you need power in. Pray for each other concerning these things, using the words of Ephesians 1.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants You to Know Him

Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

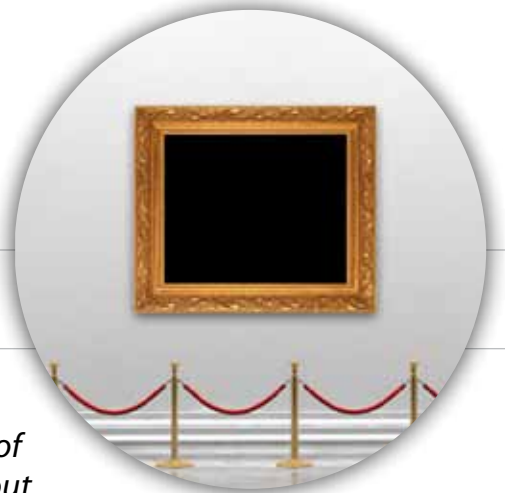
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### Participant's Guide

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- Awesome and holy
- Generous and giving
- Mystical and mysterious
- Close and intimate
- Far away and unreachable

Why did you pick the ones you did? What does that tell you about how you see God?

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### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God's power is available to you—his resurrection power. It is available for your benefit—to make you more like Jesus. That's because you are God's treasured possession. His plan is that you will become pure and holy and blameless—just like Jesus. That's what he sees in you.

The first step in understanding who you are in Christ is understanding who Christ is. The result of understanding who Christ is, and understanding who you are in Christ, is that you will experience his resurrection power. Power that will change you from the inside out. Power over sin. Power over despair. Power over fear. His power is available to you.

## God Wants You to Know Him

Participant's Guide

**Action Point:** Share with the group one area that you feel you need power in. Pray for each other concerning these things, using the words of Ephesians 1.

—*Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*

## God Wants to Change You

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

# God Wants to Change You



*We are new creatures in Christ, and a way for the world to see God's glory.*

*When we come to God, as sinners with empty, broken lives, God forgives, cleanses, and saves us. Then he begins the process of changing us—of making us like Jesus. The second chapter of Ephesians contains a popular salvation verse: "For by grace you have been saved, through faith ..." This passage teaches us not only how we are saved, but how God is at work to remake us into the image of his Son, Jesus.*

Scripture: [Ephesians 2](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



## God Wants to Change You

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

God wants you to bury the past. In the first few verses of Ephesians 2, Paul talks about a way of life that he assumes is ancient history for his readers. For some of you, this may not be the case. In fact, everyone falls into one of three categories:

- Those who have given their lives to Christ and have successfully left behind their old way of life.
- Those who have given their lives to Christ but still struggle with their old way of life.
- Those who haven't yet given their lives to Christ, and what Paul refers to as the old way of life is actually their current way of life.

If you're in group one—hallelujah. If not, God doesn't want you to be chained to a sinful way of life. He wants to set you free. He wants to give you the power to overcome sin—and to bury the past forever in the past.

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

If you haven't yet made that decision, you can today. If you have already made that decision, you can renew it today. This is the first step in breaking away from the past.

#### Discussion Questions:

- [Q] If you feel like sharing, what part of your past still haunts you, and why?
- [Q] Do you believe that God has forgiven you for that past? Why or why not?
- [Q] What can be the problem with not leaving your past behind?
- [Q] What do you think it would take to leave that past behind?

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching Point One: God will give you the power to leave your past behind and to come alive spiritually.**

## God Wants to Change You

### Leader's Guide

Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

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

For some of you, sin is not just an occasional slip-up; it's a constant, never-ending craving—one that leaves you completely powerless. Once that craving consumes you, there is nothing you can do to escape it. Maybe that craving is the temptation to explode in anger at your spouse or children; maybe it is to drown your misery in alcohol or food; maybe it is to commit some kind of sexual sin; maybe that craving is to spend too much money at the mall; maybe it is to exploit a business situation and take advantage of someone for your own selfish gain. The lure of the old way of life comes at us in dozens of different forms and faces, but the result is always the same: it brings the stench of the past into the present, and makes living a new life for Christ virtually impossible.

How do you get rid of it? How do you bury the past in the past? Paul gives us a hint in this “pyramid of power” in verse 3. Our cravings are born out of our desires, and our desires are born out of our thoughts. If you want power over sin, then you have to attack the source of its stronghold: your thoughts. When you change what you think about, and (listen carefully) when you change what you *want* to think about, you change your destiny.

We have a tendency to identify ourselves more with our sinful past than with our sanctified future. We think things like, *I have no control over my temper ... I am powerless over food ... I'm basically a dishonest person*, and on and on. Those things may have been true in the past, Paul says, but God wants to bury the past in the past. What was true about you yesterday doesn't have to be true today. He wants to change you through and through. In order for him to change you, you have to change the way you think.

For example, when a situation comes up that typically would cause you to blow your top, take these two steps:

1. Change what you think about. Instead of dwelling on the situation, dwell on the solution, or dwell on a non-related subject that is more conducive to a peaceful mind. Then ...
2. Change what you want to think about. Instead of thinking, *This is the kind of thing that puts me over the edge! say to yourself, This is the kind of thing that used to put me over the edge—the very thing that Christ is changing in me.*

If you want to bury the past, you have to kill it first. The only source of life the past has in your life is in your thoughts. Change what you think about, and you change your destiny.

## God Wants to Change You

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**[Q]** Don't answer this out loud, but what one thing would you change about yourself if you could? Be brutally honest with yourself. Ask yourself: What one thing would my spouse want to change about me? What one thing would my kids want to change about me? What one thing would my parents, siblings, or coworkers want to change about me?

**[Q]** Again, answer this quietly. How might thinking the following be useful in conquering this thing: *This is the kind of thing that puts me over the edge, but not anymore. This is the very thing that Christ is changing in me.*

**[Q]** If you would like to, mention this thing to the group and ask everyone to pray for you in this area. You may even want to give them permission to ask you how it's going in a week or two.

### Teaching Point Two: God wants to custom design your future.

Imagine the heavenly realms that Paul made reference to in verse 6 as they appear at this very moment. There is Jesus, sitting on his throne. There, seated with him, is a group of Christians. If you look closely, you'll see it's not just the superstar Christians sitting with him; the stumbling Christians are there, also. Look closer. There YOU are. In the heavenly realms. With Jesus. How did you get there? Is it because of something you did? Something you didn't do? No. You're there because he brought you there. You're alive spiritually because he made you alive spiritually. This spiritual life that he gave to you gives you a capacity for change greater than you ever had before. God changes you through and through by making you into a brand new person.

Good works aren't enough to save you. But God wants you to do good works to bring him glory. Look at verse 7.

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

Verse 10 makes clear that God has a custom-designed future for you. There are things that you can do—that only you can do—that will bring him glory throughout the ages. It's hard to imagine, but it's true.

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

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

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

## God Wants to Change You

Leader's Guide

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To help us understand how God wants to use us.*

**Activity:** *Sometimes it's hard for us to recognize our own gifts. Focusing on one person in the group at a time, ask each person in the group to say what they think that person is best at—something they think is their strength.*

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

An article in *Reader's Digest* explained how the roots of trees—even trees of different species—can become linked together. By being linked together, each tree can draw from the resources of every other tree in the forest. The trees furthest from the water can draw from the trees that are closest; the trees lacking nutrients can draw from the trees with an abundance. Each tree has access to all the resources of the forest.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the redwood trees in California are 2,500 years old and stand 300 feet tall. The roots of the trees don't go as deep as some might expect, but they're all intertwined. The way these trees' roots are locked together gives the trees additional stability in high winds.

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

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

Across this planet at this very moment, millions and tens of millions of Christians have come together for the same purpose that we have come together—to worship the name of Jesus Christ. We are connected to them. We belong to them, and they belong to us. Just as we share our strength with one another here, we need to do all we can to share our strength with the global church.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22.

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

<sup>1</sup> *Speaker's Quote Book*, p. 71.

## God Wants to Change You

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

**[Q]** What are some ways that community can help you transform to be more like Christ? Give a specific example of when that has happened in your life.

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

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God has plans for you. Big plans. He wants to show the world the incomparable riches of his grace, and you're the one he can use to do it. Even when you fail, he doesn't give up on your future. Because God not only has plans for you, he knows you can become like Jesus. He is sure of this because he has the power to change you through and through. He'll bury your past, because he wants to change you; he'll give you new life, because he wants to change you; and he has custom-designed a future for you, because he wants the world to see the change.

**Action Point: Break into pairs and share with your partner one thing you are going to do this week to change. It can be a habit to break or a habit to start. It can be a prayer to pray every day, or a Scripture to memorize and make a part of your life. Pray for each other after each of you has shared.**

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants to Change You

Participant's Guide

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## God Wants to Change You

Participant's Guide

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## God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

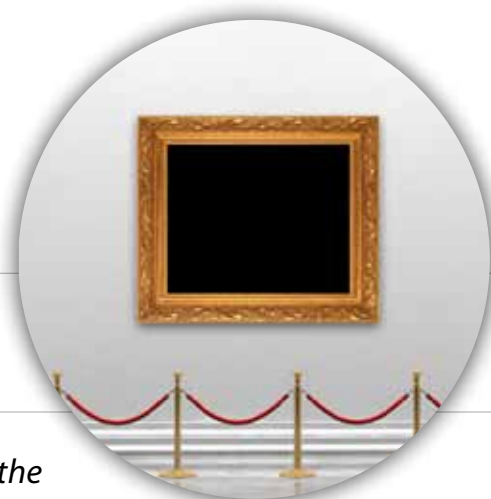
# God Wants You to Find Your Mission

*Adopt the same attitude as Paul: "I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do."*

*One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the opportunity to start again—and without exception, we all need a fresh start from time to time. The apostle Paul certainly did. When we look at him from this side of history, most often we only see the good that he did. He wrote most of the New Testament, he started churches throughout the world, and he helped shape human history. We call him St. Paul, and many churches are named after him, but the fact is that there was a time in his life when he was anything but a saint. In those days his name was Saul, and he was, in fact, quite a rascal.*

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## God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

By the apostle Paul's own admission, he was an enemy of God and of the church. He persecuted Christians and did all he could to stop the growth of the church. Then, suddenly, his life changed. He was walking on the road to Damascus when a bright light from heaven blinded him and a voice spoke to him, saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

He asked, "Who are you?"

The voice responded, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting."

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

You can change just as dramatically by adopting the same attitude as Paul: I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

#### Discussion Questions:

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

[Q] When you decided to follow Christ, did you also have a sense of mission (I now have something important to do)? If so, what was it? If not, why do you think you lacked a sense of mission?

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

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

#### Teaching Point One: Live with a sense of purpose.

Have you ever seen Bruce Springsteen in concert? He's semi-retired now, but in the 80s he was one of the hardest-working people in the entertainment business. His concerts typically last four hours—and whether he is playing to 20,000 people in an outdoor arena or just a few hundred people in a small room, Springsteen always gives 100 percent to every performance. There is always one point in the performance when the band dramatically stops playing and he screams into the microphone, "I'm just a prisoner of rock and roll!"

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You know what? He is a prisoner of rock and roll. From the time he decided to be a musician, he has been obsessed with playing music before an audience. He refused to allow anything to stand in his way. Once, when he was still struggling to make it, he attended the wedding of a fellow struggling musician. At the wedding Bruce said to his friend, "I'm happy for you, but I'm sad—you'll never be able to make it now that you're married." Springsteen pursued his career with unbridled enthusiasm, and ultimately became a big name in rock music. It wasn't until after he became one of the highest-paid persons in show business that he settled down, got married, and started a family. Until then, he gave his life to rock and roll.

In the very same way, Paul gave his life to preaching the gospel. In Romans, Paul referred to himself as the "bondservant" or "slave" of Christ. In Ephesians he called himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." In Ephesians 3:7 he said, "I became a servant of this gospel."

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

Paul was Jewish, and like most Jewish men of his time, he grew up with the notion that there were two types of people in the world: Jews, who were God's chosen people, and everyone else. In the early days of the church, most Jewish Christians would have been content to let Christianity remain as Jewish as possible. Paul couldn't do it, though. After his face-to-face meeting with Jesus, he recognized that he had a purpose in life—to tell Gentiles about Jesus and bring them into the church. This made Paul extremely unpopular in certain circles, but he never let go of the mission to which God had called him.

What about you? What is your mission? God has given you a purpose. That purpose isn't created to serve you—you are created to serve that purpose. We need to get past the idea that we deserve or need an easy life. Instead, our attitude must be, "I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do, and I will serve my purpose."

Read Ephesians 3:1–13.

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

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

**[Q]** Sometimes our mission changes as we grow and mature. How has yours changed? What is your mission at this point in your life, and why?

**Teaching Point Two: Live with a sense of humility and wonder.**

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Some of the things Paul said about himself are surprising. Without a doubt, he was one of the greatest men who ever lived, yet he spoke of himself in rather harsh terms. He called himself a slave, a servant, and a prisoner for the Lord. In 1 Timothy, he called himself the chief of all sinners. In Romans 7 he referred to himself as a “wretched man.” And in Ephesians 3:8 he says, “I am less than the least of all God’s people.”

From a theological standpoint, Paul knew this statement was inaccurate. He knew better than anyone that all individuals are equal in God’s eyes. In fact, equality was the very heart of his message. He knew God shows no partiality, and he himself was no worse than anyone else. Yet, Paul chose to look at himself from this perspective because he knew it was necessary for him to keep his ego in check. He refused to allow himself to be too important in his own eyes.

Paul was just like we are. If we’re not careful, we will act like we are the center of the universe. That’s why Paul adopted this attitude: I am not an important person, but I have an important job to do.

A few years ago, a religious satire magazine called *The Door* published an issue on the subject of racism. To give their readers an idea of what it is like to be the object of discrimination, they sent out photocopied issues of the magazine with a letter explaining that they had inadvertently printed too few magazines this time and had run out of copies. The letter said that the limited quantity of printed copies went to top priority subscribers, so you would have to accept this lesser-quality photocopy. Of course, all readers got this same letter and photocopied issue, but many of them didn’t get the point. *The Door* office was flooded with complaints. One pastor wrote a letter saying, “I have never been treated with such disrespect—I demand a written apology.” Sometimes we forget to live with a sense of humility.

In contrast, Kenneth Blanchard co-wrote a little book called *The One-Minute Manager*. The book was a huge success; it ended up on the *New York Times* bestseller list and sold millions of copies. Overnight, he became a celebrity in the business world. Later, he said that during this time he realized that he had two choices. One was to take all the credit for his success and assume that he was a better writer and more insightful thinker than anyone else. The other was to take the path of wonderment. He asked himself, “Why has this happened to me, and what can I learn from it?” As an observer of his own success, he was better able to manage the pitfalls and challenges that came with it.

Paul lived his life with a sense of wonder. He said, “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,” and “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.”

The word Paul repeatedly used to describe God’s work in his life was “grace.” Grace literally means an undeserved favor. He didn’t fool himself into thinking that he was doing God a favor by serving him. He had a sense of wonder about the calling God had placed on his life.

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There are two temptations we must resist. The first is an attitude of smugness—thinking that we're really something and that God is lucky to have us on his team. The second is an attitude of "Why me?" complaining about our lot in life: "Why couldn't I have been born rich? Or handsome? Or talented?" In many ways life seems to be unfair. Some are born to prosperity, others to poverty. Some are born with talent, some aren't. As we look at our own lives, we need to have a sense of wonder. We need to ask ourselves, "Why did God place me in this time, this place, this situation? What can I learn from it, and what does he expect me to do about it?"

**[Q]** Are you more tempted to smugness, thinking God is lucky to have you on his team, or to complaint, thinking God isn't fair? Why do you think you are tempted toward that?

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

- Read Ephesians 3:7–13.

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

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

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

### Teaching Point Three: Live with a sense that God's love is your life.

Read Ephesians 3:14–21.

God has it all. He owns it all. As Psalm 50 says, all the animals of the forest, the cattle on a thousand hills, every bird of the mountains ... "the world is mine, and all that is in it" (Psalm 50:12). He can give you anything he wants—money, possessions, prestige, success, a life of privilege. But look at what he most wants to give you, according to Ephesians 3:18–19.

He can give you anything, and what he wants to give you most of all is the ability to know his love. Love is God's greatest resource. He takes love so seriously that he defines himself by it. The Bible says God is love. To experience the fullness of God in your life—which includes experiencing his power at work within you—you need to develop at least an inkling of the awesomeness of his love, although in this lifetime we will only, at most, scratch the surface of understanding God's love.

God loves you far more than any parent could love a child. As Augustine said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." Paul's prayer is that you will grasp this. God's greatest resource is his love.

## God Wants You to Find Your Mission

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- [Q] What has most helped you grasp God's love for you?
- [Q] What can you do to better experience God's love in your everyday life? Brainstorm ideas.
- [Q] How might this passage be a prayer that helps you to experience God's love?
- [Q] How does this love motivate you in your mission?

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To give us insight into the breadth of God's love.*

**Activity:** *God's love is beyond comprehension, and we will never fully understand it, but we can at least begin to try. August Hare once said (paraphrased), "Love flows downward. The love of parents for their children has always been far more powerful than that of children for their parents. In the same way, no one has ever loved God with more than 1/1,000th of the love that God has given us."*

*Think of pre-school children. Think of how totally dependent they are on adults—how vulnerable, helpless, and fragile they are. Brainstorm some ways they can't understand the limits adults set on them. Then discuss how those limits show our love for them. Finally, compare this to our relationship with God, and make analogies."*

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Living in God's love is the key to power. To the extent that we understand his love, we experience his power. What kind of power are we talking about here? Power over sin. Power over weakness. Power over fear. Power over shame. Power over despair. Power over rage. Power over lust. Power over greed. Power over pride. Power over doubt. Power over guilt.

These are the things that beat us down. These are the things that make our lives miserable. We don't have to live under their tyranny any longer. God promises his power. It's available to you. To receive his power, you only have to yield to his love.

Do you want to experience the power of God so that you can move past your sin and gain his mission for your life? Then get immersed in the love of God. Pray about it. Think about it. Meditate on it. Contemplate it. Believe it. Receive it. When you know his love, you will experience his power and find your mission.

**Action Point:** *To begin to understand God's love, we need to meditate and contemplate. Meditation is thinking in a specific direction; contemplation is*

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thinking for an extended duration. That's how you get immersed in God's love. Think about it intensely, and think about it extensively.

This week, read a Bible verse or passage that reaffirms God's love for you. As you read, pray, "God, make these words real to me." Ask yourself, "How would knowing that I am loved by God affect what I think about myself? How would it affect the way I respond to insults or criticism? How would it affect my need for recognition or approval? How would it affect my life's work?" Then pray, "Lord, make your love real to me," and think about times that you have experienced a special touch of God's love through his mercy, through a spiritual blessing, or through the ministry of one of his people. Say, "Lord, help me to know always what I have known in the best moments of my life—that I am your beloved child." This is meditation and contemplation. It's not a snappy 60-second formula; it's a lifetime process. The longer we meditate on his love, the deeper we are rooted in it, the better we understand it, and the more we experience it.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Participant's Guide

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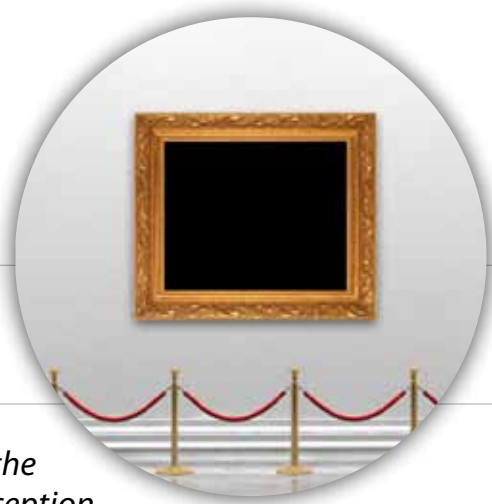
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### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching Point One: Live with a sense of purpose.**

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**Action Point:** To begin to understand God's love, we need to meditate and contemplate. Meditation is thinking in a specific direction; contemplation is thinking for an extended duration. That's how you get immersed in God's love. Think about it intensely, and think about it extensively.

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## God Wants You to Find Your Mission

Participant's Guide

**a spiritual blessing, or through the ministry of one of his people. Say, "Lord, help me to know always what I have known in the best moments of my life—that I am your beloved child." This is meditation and contemplation. It's not a snappy 60-second formula; it's a lifetime process. The longer we meditate on his love, the deeper we are rooted in it, the better we understand it, and the more we experience it.**

*—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

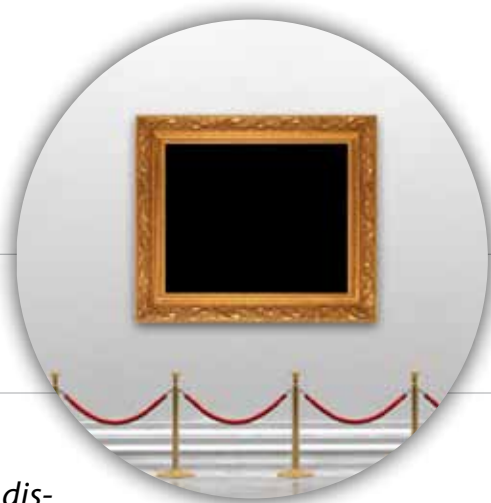
# God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

*We want to be useful, and in Ephesians 4, Paul teaches us about how God wants to use each one of us and to set us apart for him.*

*We have an innate desire—even a need, you could say—to be useful and to be used. Most disgruntled employees are disgruntled because they feel that their employer isn't maximizing their skills. Ask any player in the NFL if he would rather be the highest paid back-up or the lowest-paid starter, and the overwhelming majority would certainly say, "Put me in, Coach, I'm ready to play."*

Scripture: [Ephesians 4](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Paul talks about our usefulness in Ephesians 4. He says, "As a member of the body of Christ, you have been given a special gift, a special grace, a special ministry, that Jesus designed especially for you."

Whether your gift is or isn't obvious at this point, it does exist. To help you maximize your gift (or ministry), Paul teaches that God has given you a team of leaders whose job it is to bring your gift to full fruition in the service of Jesus Christ and his church.

Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. What do these titles mean? These terms didn't mean the same thing then (or, rather, didn't have the same connotation) as they do now. But all four offices are crucial to the ministry of God's people. You need this team of leaders to help you become fully functional in your service to him.

Ephesians 4 is also about unity. But a team cannot function as a team without coaches or leaders to give them guidance. Your coaches—your team of leaders—consists of these four offices.

#### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** How would you define each of the following?

- apostle
- prophet
- evangelist
- pastor-teacher

Where did you get your definitions?

How can each of these people help you use your gifts?

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Leader's Guide

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

#### Teaching Point One: God gave all four offices for your good.

Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

Let's look at each of these offices.

*Apostle.* Most often, *apostle* refers to a person having a special type of authority. Paul described himself as an apostle, emphasizing that his primary qualification was that he had seen the Risen Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1). So, in New Testament times, the title of *apostle* applied to a limited group of believers with unique authority in the church.

Near the end of the fourth century, when the Council of Carthage convened to determine which books would comprise the New Testament canon, they chose the 27 books we use today based on, in part, the books' apostolic authority—the fact that there was sufficient reason to believe that Paul's letters were truly written by Paul, the books of John were truly written by the apostle John, and so on.

As a believer, you are accountable to the apostles and their teaching—in other words, the Bible. It is the voice of authority in your life. It has the final say over what's right and wrong.

*Prophet.* First Corinthians 14:3–4 says, “But everyone who prophecies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort ... he who prophecies edifies the church.” That's the role of the prophet. So, as it turns out, those doom and gloom guys who keep making terrible predictions that never seem to happen—they're not even close to what the true biblical gift of prophecy is. The best word to associate with the role of prophecy is challenge. Prophets challenge people to be more holy, but they do it in a way that strengthens and edifies their listeners.

We need prophets—people who are spiritual enough to speak from God's perspective, who will say what needs to be said, who challenge us to excel in our relationships with God, but who have the gifting to say it in a way that brings strength, encouragement, and comfort.

*Evangelist.* One commentary defines an evangelist as “someone who focuses on proclaiming the gospel and its relevance.” The author added, “Such activity could be addressed to either believers or non-believers.”<sup>2</sup> God gave evangelists to the church because the church—just like the world—needs to be pointed to Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, p. 204.

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

### Leader's Guide

*Pastor-teachers.* In the Greek, these words are combined to refer to one office. Actually, the word *pastor* means *shepherd*. Jesus described himself as a shepherd. He promised to lead, guide, feed, and protect his sheep. He even said that when one of us is lost, he will seek us, find us, rescue us, and carry us home. Jesus is the great shepherd. So a pastor-teacher is to love you and teach you the Word of God.

**[Q]** The Bible is our “apostolic authority.” We are accountable to it. How can we put ourselves under its authority? Who helps hold you to that authority today?

**[Q]** Who in your life is a prophet (has the ability to see with God's perspective, and can say what needs to be said in a way that will strengthen, encourage, and comfort you)?

**[Q]** Who, as an evangelist, points you and unbelievers you know to Jesus? Who reminds you that Jesus is, always and forever, the only answer you'll ever need? Who has the ability to help you cut through the clutter and confusion of life with the simple message that Jesus loves you?

**[Q]** Who is your shepherd (pastor-teacher)? Who nurtures you in your faith? One person on the list is probably your pastor, but there should be others.

God has a plan for you, a ministry for you. He has given you a special gift to accomplish it. Maybe your ministry exists within the parameters of the local church, serving in one of our established ministries. Or maybe it exists beyond our boundaries—in the workplace, or in your neighborhood, or even halfway around the world.

You are useful. You can be used by God. He has a place for you to serve him, and he has given you the grace you need to do it. He has also given you a team of leaders to help you accomplish his work in your life. Look to their leadership and do what God has called you to do.

### **Teaching Point Two: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your thoughts.**

Read Ephesians 4:17–24.

The objective of this text is to teach you how to experience absolute transformation from your old way of life to your new way of life. Paul addresses three areas that we need to focus on in order to experience change. The first of these is our thoughts.

This idea has been repeated by teachers and philosophers throughout the ages:

*The most important things in life are the thoughts you choose to frame.*  
(Marcus Aurelius)

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

### Leader's Guide

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

*A person is what he thinks about all day.* (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

*The mind is like a clock that is constantly running down; it has to be wound up daily with good thoughts.* (Fulton J. Sheen)

*Good thoughts are blessed guests, and should be heartily welcomed, well-fed, and much sought after. Like rose leaves, they give out a sweet smell, if laid up in the jar of memory.* (Charles Spurgeon)

*Change your thoughts and change your world.* (Norman Vincent Peale)

And Paul says it in this text.

Here are some thoughts and attitudes from Scripture that can empower you to change your thoughts:

*Things are working out for the best.* (Romans 8:28)

*Christ will finish in me the work he has begun.* (Philippians 1:6)

*God has turned his back on my sin.* (Isaiah 38:17)

*God will never turn his back on me.* (Hebrews 13:5)

*I belong to God, and that will never change.* (Ephesians 1:5)

*I have access to everything I truly need.* (2 Corinthians 9:8)

*My future is bright.* (Ephesians 1:18)

*Living in God's love is the key to living in power.* (Ephesians 3:19)

This is why a daily devotional is so crucial in a believer's life. Our mind needs to be saturated with God's wisdom; we need to get into the habit of thinking his thoughts. Change your thoughts; it's the first seed of change.

**[Q]** Thoughts are often out of control and as natural as breathing. How can we change them? Name some ways that have worked for you or others you know of.

**[Q]** Looking at the list above from Scripture, which would be most useful in helping you change your thoughts?

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Leader's Guide

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To help us understand how to change our thoughts.*

**Activity:** *Advise the following people how they can change their thinking about their circumstances, using the verses above.*

*Joan doesn't understand why she lost her job. (Romans 8:28)*

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

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

*Darla feels like God is far away, even though she's doing everything she can to follow him. (Hebrews 13:5)*

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

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

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

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

### Teaching Point Three: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your words.

Read Ephesians 4:25–32.

We all need to learn to encourage one another. We must remember that our words carry tremendous weight. Words can be destructive. The philosopher C. J. Ducasse said, "To speak of 'mere words' is much like speaking of 'mere dynamite.'"

God wants his church to dwell together in unity. Simply put, he wants us to get along. In order to do that, we have to learn to watch what we say.

Paul said to speak truthfully to one another; he also said don't use abusive language. Have you ever noticed that some people have a hard time reconciling those two? They seem to think being honest means saying whatever mean thing comes to mind.



## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

### Leader's Guide

This matter of watching our words needs to be taken seriously by the church. It's an essential part of displaying your new nature in Christ. Don't use foul or abusive language—no matter how right you are or how wrong they are. Don't use foul or abusive language—even if they used it first.

**[Q]** How has your language changed since you've come to Christ?

**[Q]** What is conversation for you? A chance to tell others what you like? What you think? What you know? What you want? What do you most often talk to others about?

Conversation should be seen as something more than an opportunity to speak your mind. Paul says to look at it differently. Look at conversation as an opportunity to say something helpful to someone else.

Here's a principle we can all try: "When I talk to you, I talk about you." Doing this helps put a lid on criticism and gossip. It also gives us the chance to minister to our friends, rather than just chat with them.

If you want to display the new nature Christ has given you, change your words—because your words are a seed of transformation.

**[Q]** How can we change the deeply ingrained habits of our words? Give practical ideas.

### **Teaching Point Four: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your actions.**

A preacher stood up in front of his congregation and asked, "Have any of you here, at any time in your life—even in childhood—ever told an untruth? And white lies count, by the way." Of course, everyone raised their hand. Then he asked, "And have any of you here ever taken something that didn't belong to you—like a piece of bubble-gum from a candy store, or a paper clip from work, or never returned something that you borrowed?" Everyone raised their hands. "That's good," the minister said. "I just needed to know who my audience is. I see that I'm surrounded by liars and thieves."

That seems to be what Paul is saying. In verse 25 he tells us to put away falsehood, and in verse 28 to stop stealing.

Liars and thieves! Is that his audience? Is that the kind of person who attended church in Ephesus? Actually, they were probably a lot like us, and they wouldn't consider themselves liars and thieves any more than we would. But Paul uses this extreme example to define the kind of transformation that needs to take place in our behavior.

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The thief must become a philanthropist. This is transformation. A thief thinks only of himself, and acts only on his own behalf, regardless of the pain it may cause others. He's looking out for number one. A philanthropist, however, looks out for the well-being of others, and he takes care of them in addition to taking care of himself.

In your relationships, in your ministry, in your work life, look for ways to live win-win. Take care of yourself without hurting others; take care of others without hurting yourself.

**[Q]** What actions of yours need to change? It can be a negative action you need to drop, or a positive action you need to adopt. Share one of them with the group.

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

In Paul's words, we see the essence of transformation. There's something that goes deeper than our thoughts, words, and emotions—it is the core of our being. When we talk about transformation, that's what we want to see changed. It's not just a matter of doing good; we want to *be* good, through and through.

This is how you destroy the enemy: with your thoughts, with your words, with your actions. Every time you think a godly thought, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you speak an uplifting word, you sow a seed of transformation in the core of your being. Every time you act with generosity and kindness, you sow a seed of transformation. These things—our thoughts, our words, our actions—are more than just the surface level elements of our lives. They are the seeds of change.

**Action Point:** Which area of your life most needs transforming? Your thoughts? Your words? Your actions? Share your answer with the group, and pray for one another about what you have shared.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

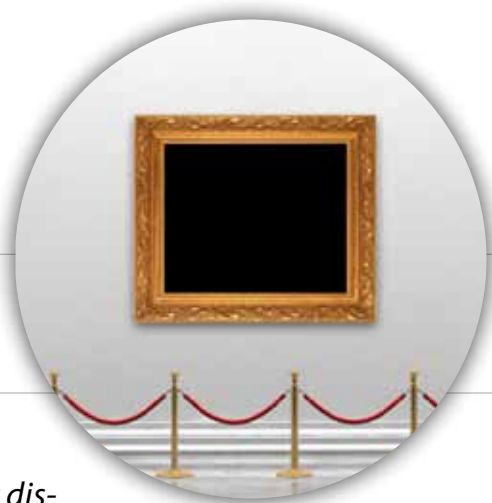
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Scripture: [Ephesians 4](#)

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## God Wants You to Be Useful and Holy

### Participant's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

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**Teaching Point One: God gave all four offices for your good.**

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This idea has been repeated by teachers and philosophers throughout the ages:

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**Teaching Point Three: God wants to transform you and make you useful by changing your words.**

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### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

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**Action Point: Which area of your life most needs transforming? Your thoughts? Your words? Your actions? Share your answer with the group, and pray for one another about what you have shared.**

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

# God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation



*You imitate God by loving people.*

*Occasionally, when you read the Bible, you'll come across a verse that overwhelms you by virtue of its sheer impossibility. For example, when Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Or the time when Jesus told what was left of his original band of disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Sounds like "Mission Impossible" for 11 ragtag, uneducated men, doesn't it? There's another scripture where Paul tells us to do the seemingly impossible: "Be imitators of God ..."*

Scripture: [Ephesians 5](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.*

Marlon Brando was one of the most imitated actors. He's kind of like Elvis—everyone thinks they can do a Brando impersonation. Part of the reason is that he spoke so many classic movie lines. People immediately know who you're imitating when you shout, "Stella!" Or when you say, "I coulda had class! I coulda been a contender!" Or when you say, "Santino, don't ever go against the family."

It's amazing how an actor or a comedian can adapt the facial expressions, the physiology, and the vocal inflection of a famous person. Dana Carvey's impersonation of the senior George Bush was one of the best—even the former president loved it. Carvey once explained the trick involved in doing George Bush. He said you take one part John Wayne, one part Mr. Rogers, mix them together, and you end up with "Not gonna do it; wouldn't be prudent."

Some imitations are good, but they're no substitute for the real thing. For example, no Hollywood producer ever says, "We can't get Arnold Schwarzenegger for this movie, but my unemployed nephew does a pretty good Schwarzenegger impersonation, so let's use him instead." There's more to imitating a famous actor than just repeating their best-known lines with their accent.

Which brings us to the subject of imitating God. In the same way, there's more to imitating God than just talking the talk. Some people think that if they just quote enough Scripture enough times in enough conversations, they'll be branded as godly. Quoting Scripture is, of course, a good thing, but there is more to imitating God than just repeating his best-known lines.

So, how do we imitate God as Ephesians 5:1 says we are to do?

#### Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What first comes to your mind when you hear "Be imitators of God ..."?
- [Q] In what ways is it impossible to imitate God?
- [Q] How do you think we should go about imitating him?

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

Read Ephesians 5:1–2.

That's how you imitate God: you love people. Love is not a feeling, it's an action. Love is something you do. The Bible says that God loves us, and he demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). So when Paul talks about imitating God by walking in love, he's not talking about having a feeling, he's talking about showing an action. So, we'll look at some actions that demonstrate God's love to the world.

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: You imitate God by forgiving others.

Read Ephesians 4:32–5:21.

Look again at Ephesians 4:32. You imitate God's love by forgiving others. Mohandas Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." He may not have been a Christian, but he understood this aspect of forgiveness: It requires strength.

The inability to forgive is a sign of weakness; the ability to forgive is a sign of power. That's because forgiveness isn't easy or human. It doesn't come naturally to us. C. S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive."

If you're married, there's no doubt that you have something to forgive. If you have children, parents, or siblings, you have something to forgive. If you have a boss or employees, you have something to forgive. If you serve in ministry or volunteer in any area of the church, you have something to forgive. In the course of human events, it is inevitable that offenses will come; we all find ourselves facing opportunities to forgive. The question is: What will you do about it? Whose example will you follow? Who will you imitate?

When you are struggling with the need to forgive someone, ask yourself a couple of questions: If I did what this person did, would God forgive me? While you may not be guilty of the same offense, you are guilty of an equal offense. (See 1 John 1:8 and James 2:10.)

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

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

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

**[Q]** What is the difference between forgiveness and trust? Are they the same? Does one automatically mean the other? How might you forgive someone that you don't trust?



## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

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

### Teaching Point Two: You imitate God by suffering for others.

Look again at verse 2. Because of his love for us, Jesus denied himself—his own rights and even his own will—and gave himself for us.

Just as forgiveness requires strength that is beyond us, so does self-denial. It is not easy to say no to yourself, and yet, that is what God has called us to do (Matthew 16:24).

You will never be called upon to suffer for others to the extent that Jesus suffered for you, but you will be inconvenienced. You will have to take calls when you don't want to take calls, run errands when you don't want to run errands, give when you don't want to give. The willingness to suffer for others is saying, "I'm not the center of the universe; the world doesn't revolve around me." If Jesus (who truly is the center of the universe) can adopt that attitude, so can you!

This willingness to suffer for others is not about suffering that happens to you—that you have no choice about. It's about self-denial, a choice that you make. And that's why it takes strength to do it, because—like Christ—you are giving yourself up willingly. When we choose to suffer—or even be inconvenienced—for the sake of others, we demonstrate God's love.

Do you want to imitate God's love? Serve others. Ian Maclaren said, "The world cannot always understand a person's profession of faith, but it can understand service."

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

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

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

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

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

### Teaching Point Three: You imitate God by being careful, perceptive, and filled.

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

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

Why the distinction? What is the difference between “being” and “doing”? When Paul tells us to “be” a certain way, he’s talking about attitudes and habits that we need to adopt and exhibit around the clock. He’s talking things we need to do—but we do them because they are so much a part of who we are that these attitudes and habits just flow out of us. Being always leads to doing.

There is an unbreakable connection between being and doing. One substantiates the other. Do you want to BE generous? Then DO generosity—in other words, give. Do you want to BE compassionate? Then DO compassionate things. There is an unbreakable connection between being and doing, and the more you “DO,” the more you will “BE.” So, in Ephesians 5, when Paul says to “BE,” he’s saying: Do these things again and again and again, until they become so entrenched in who you are that they are part of your very nature.

Look at verse 15. You tell someone to “be careful” when they’re about to face something dangerous, or when they’re about to encounter something important. And that describes every day of our lives. Paul’s phrase in the original text has a “seize the moment” connotation to it—this day, this hour, this moment is important. Seize it. Maximize it. Redeem it. Live it for all it’s worth.

We should approach every day with a certain amount of caution, because there is spiritual danger all around us. When the pressure to succeed is mounting and you start to think about cutting some ethical corners, be careful. When that person in the office says something subtly flirtatious, be careful. When you come home on edge and as soon as you walk in the door your spouse says the wrong thing, be careful. Danger lurks at every turn of the day. Be careful. Approach each moment of each day with caution.

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

Look at verse 17. Usually when we talk about God’s will, we are referring to major decisions, such as who does God want me to marry, where does God want me to work, and so on. That’s not what Paul is talking about here. He is referring to what God wants us to do on a daily basis, how he wants us to live. It does no good to have a grand vision for your life if you don’t understand that living the Christian life is a day-to-day process.

Look at verse 18. Paul’s command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is an indication that when it comes to being Spirit-filled, the ball is in our court. It is up to us to activate it. How? You ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit, to give you as much of him as you can have. Then you yield yourself to him, surrendering your will to his will. And you receive it, because at that moment he fills you with his Spirit. You don’t have to wait for a feeling or any kind of sign, because the proof of his presence is not in your emotions, it’s in the reliability of his Word. It

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

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

Bill Bright teaches this concept on spiritual breathing: As we go throughout the day, becoming aware of impurities in our life, we “exhale” them by confessing them to God. And then we “inhale” his presence in our lives by surrendering ourselves to his control, asking to be filled with his Spirit.

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

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

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

### Optional Activity:

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

**Activity:** *Break into three groups. Assign each group one of the following: Live carefully and cautiously. Live immersed in God's will. Live filled with the Holy Spirit.*

*Ask each group to come up with two short skits. The first should illustrate the opposite of the thing they were assigned (for example, someone who lives carelessly and takes risks all the time). The second should illustrate that person converted into the Ephesians 5 way of living. Perform both skits for the entire group and discuss.*

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

Read Ephesians 5:22–6:4.

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

**1. Accept your role as a leader (vv. 22–23).** This reference to Christ is a comparison, not a job description. You're the leader of your family, not their Lord and Savior. This is what it means: Your wife needs (and wants) you to be a strong and courageous leader. Not a bully, not a dictator, not a caveman, but strong and courageous. There is not a woman in the world who wants to be married to a weakling. There is not a woman in the world who wants to be married to a coward. She needs you to be strong. Your family needs you to be strong. They need to be able to look to you for leadership. This has nothing to do with chauvinism; it has everything to do with character.

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

You're the leader. Do you know what an effective leader does? Here's a great quote: "Good leaders inspire people to have confidence in them. Great leaders inspire people to have confidence in themselves." When Sam Ewing made that statement, he was talking about business—but he could have been talking about marriage.

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

**2. Accept your role as a lover (vv. 25–29).** Paul tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How much did Christ love the church? Enough to die for it. Who makes the sacrifices in your household? Do your wife and kids structure their lives around yours? Do they have to yield their wants and needs to yours? Are you the center of your little universe? Who makes the sacrifices at your house? If a sacrifice is to be made, you're the one to make it. You do without, not them.

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

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

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

**[Q]** If your wife is present in this group, get together with her and discuss the following. If she is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find a time to discuss them with your wife.

- Is there any area in which I am abdicating my leadership?
- I need your help in fulfilling my role in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How can I better love you? What would make you feel loved?

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

#### What about being a good wife?

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

The main focus of this passage is not the role of the woman; it is the role of the man. Anyone who thinks Ephesians 5 is just about a wife submitting to her husband is missing the point. It's primarily about the husband's role. However, Paul does mention some things the wife needs to do.

Paul says all believers are to submit to one another (v. 21), and wives are to submit to their husbands (v. 22). Wives are to submit to their husbands in the same way that we all to submit to one another. Now, men, is there anyone you submit to in a way that could be described as subservient, or blind obedience? Of course not. It's true that Christian men submit to one another in the sense that we (at the proper time) yield ourselves to the influence and leadership of our Christian brothers—but we're nobody's slave.

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

So, what does it mean to submit to your husband? We know it's not about being subservient, so what is it about? Wives are to submit to their husbands in the way that all believers submit to one another, so how do you do it? Here are three ways you can submit to your husband.

**1. Listen to his counsel.** If you're like most wives, sometimes you just want to pour out your troubles and have your husband listen with an understanding ear. And if your husband is like most men, as soon as he hears your trouble, he starts giving advice on how to fix it. When your husband starts offering simplistic advice to make your problem go away, listen to him. He probably has insight into your problem that you don't have, not because he's so much brighter than you, but because he has the right balance of distance from the problem and familiarity with your situation to speak with some amount of wisdom on the subject.

**2. Look to his leadership.** If your husband is good at doing something, by all means let him do it. Let him be the leader in this area, and don't challenge him every step of the way. Trust his judgment and yield to his leadership. (Don't you already yield to the leadership of other knowledgeable people? Don't you trust their judgment? Try it with your husband.) In a marriage this should go both ways.

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Leader's Guide

What about decisions you must make together, such as moving to a new city, buying a new house or car, or deciding which church you will attend, etc.? Who gets the final say? A husband who unilaterally makes decisions for the family without taking into consideration how that decision will impact his family is an irresponsible man. When it comes to major decisions, each couple needs to decide for themselves how they will be reached. And they must remember that the question is not “What’s best for me?” or “What’s best for you?” The question is “What’s best for us?”

**3. Respect your husband (v. 33).** Some wives treat their husbands like one of the children. They rarely make reference to any of their good qualities, but talk a lot about their faults. Remind yourself of what he does well. And while you’re at it, remind him from time to time.

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

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

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

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

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

**Action Point:** Do you want to learn to imitate God? Then begin to say no to yourself and yes to others. Make a list of who you need to forgive and who you need to serve. Think of one action that you need to take daily to serve someone else.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

# God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

*You imitate God by loving people.*

*Occasionally, when you read the Bible, you'll come across a verse that overwhelms you by virtue of its sheer impossibility. For example, when Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Or the time when Jesus told what was left of his original band of disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Sounds like "Mission Impossible" for 11 ragtag, uneducated men, doesn't it? There's another scripture where Paul tells us to do the seemingly impossible: "Be imitators of God ..."*

Scripture: Ephesians 5

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](http://PreachingToday.com)



## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

Participant's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

There's more to imitating God than just talking the talk. Some people think that if they just quote enough Scripture enough times in enough conversations, they'll be branded as godly. Quoting Scripture is, of course, a good thing, but there is more to imitating God than just repeating his best-known lines.

So, how do we imitate God as Ephesians 5:1 says we are to do?

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching Point One: You imitate God by forgiving others.**

**Teaching Point Two: You imitate God by suffering for others.**

**Teaching Point Three: You imitate God by being careful, perceptive, and filled.**

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

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

- 1. Accept your role as a leader (vv. 22–23).**
- 2. Accept your role as a lover (vv. 25–29).**
- 3. Accept your role for a lifetime (v. 31).**

**[Q]** If your wife is present in this group, get together with her and discuss the following. If she is not present, take time to answer these questions yourself and then find a time to discuss them with your wife.

- Is there any area in which I am abdicating my leadership?
- I need your help in fulfilling my role in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_  
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- How can I better love you? What would make you feel loved?



## God Wants You to Be a Good Imitation

### Participant's Guide

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1. Listen to his counsel.
2. Look to his leadership.
3. Respect your husband (v. 33).

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

- How can I better listen to your counsel? When do I cut you off and not let you give your opinion?
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—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

## God Warns You About the War Zone

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

# God Warns You About the War Zone

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

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

Scripture: [Ephesians 6](#)

Based On: "You Are God's Masterpiece," by Steve May, [PreachingToday.com](#)



## God Warns You About the War Zone

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

This short paragraph was written in the second century by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180 AD):

At day's first light, if you find yourself inclined to stay in bed, be prepared to say, "I am rising for the work of man." Must I grumble at setting out to do what I was born to do? Is this the purpose of my creation, to lie here under the blankets and keep myself warm? You might say, "Ah, but it is a great deal more pleasant!" Was it for pleasure then, that you were born, and not for work? Look at the plants, the sparrows, ants, spiders, bees, all busy at their own tasks, each doing his part towards a coherent world-order; and will you refuse to do your share of the work? You might say, "Yes, but everyone needs to relax sometime." Granted, but relaxation has its limits set by Nature, in the same way as food and drink have; and you overstep the limits, you go beyond the point of sufficiency; while on the other hand, when action is in question, you stop short of what you could well achieve. [Book 5:1]

When you wake up in the morning, if you dread getting out of bed, remember that getting out of bed is worth it because it gives you the opportunity to fulfill your purpose. Aurelius refers to a "coherent world-order" established by nature; believers have a more enlightened view, because we understand that we are not servants of an impersonal force of nature, but of a personal, loving Father. How much more so, then, can his words be applied to us: At day's first light, if you're inclined to stay in bed, be prepared to say, "I am rising today to do that which I was created to do. I am rising today to do the work of God."

We weren't made for the pursuit of pleasure, or the pursuit of happiness. We were created to work. (This idea goes all the way back to Genesis 1.) Christians understand that we don't work merely for work's sake or for the glory of ourselves; we work for the glory of God.

Your thoughts, struggles, fears, doubts, dreams, and goals are in the midst of a fierce battle. From the time you wake up in the morning until your head hits the pillow late at night, you are engaged in combat—in a war hard fought and not easily won, a war in which the casualty count can include every person you come into contact with, day in, day out.

#### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** Is there any kind of work that you really enjoy? If so, what is it?

**[Q]** How can we see all the necessary details of our day as God's work? What makes them God's work?

## God Warns You About the War Zone

Leader's Guide

**[Q]** How would you define a spiritual battle?

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

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

Since we no longer have the institution of slavery (thank God), think of this passage in terms of employers and employees. Read Ephesians 6:5–9.

Some of you might say, “My boss is a jerk. He doesn’t deserve respect.” Actually, whether he or she is a jerk or not is beside the point. Show that person respect because of their position, not their personality. If you refuse to show respect, it reflects poorly on you and on Christ.

Also, pour yourself into your job. It’s been said that your “self” is made up of your mind, your will, and your emotions. Paul says to pour all three into your work:

- Your mind. Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear (v. 5).
- Your will. Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching (v. 6).
- Your emotions. Work with enthusiasm (v. 7).

Some work places seem to be designed to drain every ounce of enthusiasm from you. And some bosses seem to thrive on knocking the wind out of your sails. That’s why we must remember that Paul spoke these words to slaves—people who were in the worst possible work situation.

Mother Teresa, who worked in the slums of Calcutta among the poorest of the poor, described her ministry team’s work ethic like this: “We are committed to feed Christ who is hungry, committed to clothe Christ who is naked, committed to take in Christ who has no home—and to do all this with a smile on our faces and bursting with joy.”

She makes reference here to Matthew 25:35–36. Do it all for Jesus.

When there is an aspect of your job that you have to do, but don’t want to do, imagine that Jesus is asking you, “Would you do it for me?” Of course you would. You might not want to do it for the ungrateful people you have to deal with day in and day out, but you’ll do it for Jesus, won’t you? That’s what he’s asking you to do. Do your job for him, not for the company, not for the boss, not for the paycheck, but as an offering unto him.

## God Warns You About the War Zone

### Leader's Guide

**[Q]** Which of the three areas is hardest for you to keep straight in your work: you mind, your will, or your emotions?

- How does one affect the others?

**[Q]** What difference would it make to do your work for Jesus instead of your boss?

**[Q]** How can we know when we should seek a new job instead of staying in the one we are currently in?

**[Q]** How might this passage apply if you are a stay-at-home mom or dad?

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

Read Ephesians 6:10–20.

Think again about verses 10 and 11. It is only through God's power that you can expect to win the spiritual battles of life. If you enter the battlefield alone, there's no telling what will happen. But, if you enter in his power, you are guaranteed to win.

Because Jesus Christ has been given all power in heaven and Earth, we do not have to lose spiritual battles. What exactly is a spiritual battle?

Every time you are presented with the opportunity to entertain a lustful thought, you have entered a spiritual battlefield. Every time you have the chance to do something vindictive, you are on the battlefield. Every time you have the chance to say something harsh and hurtful, you are in the midst of battle. Every time you toy with the notion that you're just a little bit better than most of the people you know, you are surrounded by enemy fire. Every time you encounter a person in need, you are engaged in combat.

Life is a spiritual battlefield, and there is a force at work in this world that does not want you to do good and does not want you to live for Jesus. There is a force at work in this world that does not want you to minister to others in Jesus' name and reflect his love and mercy. And that force will do whatever it takes to make sure you don't do it. Some of you may say, "Wait a minute. I didn't sign up for this!" Maybe not, but when the doctor spanked your bottom, you were drafted into it. That's just the way life is. As someone said, "You gotta serve somebody—it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody."

Our enemy might be strong, but our Savior is stronger. Don't get the impression that a fight between God and the devil is a close match. The devil has been defeated. Beaten. Stomped. Humiliated. He has no power in your life, so you don't have to moan and groan about how

## God Warns You About the War Zone

### Leader's Guide

oppressive he is. All you have to do is put on the full armor of God and you will win the battle. James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

- [Q] Give an example of a spiritual battle that you know you fight daily.
- [Q] How have you found victory in your spiritual battles? Name practical ways.
- [Q] If Christ has already defeated the devil, why do we still struggle in a spiritual battle?

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

You resist the devil by putting on the full armor of God. Look again how Paul describes it in verses 13 through 17.

This is an interesting metaphor. Paul was, of course, describing a Roman soldier. At the time he was writing this letter, he was in prison and was probably chained to a Roman soldier. Each item on the list parallels a behavior—something we are to do in order to experience the fullness of God's strength. The emphasis is not on the item of armor and all it symbolizes. The emphasis is on the behavior Paul is challenging us to emulate.

**Wearing the belt of truth, we can stand firm in truthfulness and sincerity of heart.** Paul is talking about truthful living, truthful thinking, truthful speaking. He's talking about not lying, not being deceptive. He's talking about honesty, to live truthful lives according to God's truth.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the belt of truth.

**Wearing the breastplate of righteousness, our personal holiness will be seen in doing good.** The breastplate's role was obvious. It was like a bullet-proof vest. It protected your most vital organs. And what is that breastplate made of? Righteousness. Paul is talking about doing good works.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the breastplate of righteousness.

**Wearing feet fitted with readiness, we can go and fight or serve the instant God opens an opportunity.** Paul is saying: Put your shoes on. Be ready to go. Be ready to move. Be ready to work. Be ready to serve.

- [Q] Write down an example of what it would mean for you to have feet fitted with readiness.

## God Warns You About the War Zone

### Leader's Guide

**Wearing the shield of faith, we are protected from anything the enemy throws at us.** Roman soldiers used two kinds of shields. A small one in hand-to-hand to combat, and a large one—four and a half feet tall by two feet wide—for use when the army was advancing. The soldiers would stand side-by-side, each holding up his shield, and the enemy would be faced with a solid wall of shields—row after row after row. This made the army impenetrable. That's what faith does. It makes you impenetrable, especially when you're marching side by side with your fellow soldiers.

He makes reference to fiery darts. The Roman shields were covered with leather, and were often soaked before battle so that they would quickly absorb and snuff out the flaming arrows that were shot at them. Your faith gives you the same protection. When you continue to advance side by side with your fellow soldiers, your faith protects you from anything the enemy throws your way.

**[Q]** Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the shield of faith.

**Wearing the helmet of salvation means meditating on all God has done for us and has planned for us.** Paul is talking about the way we think. I can't give in to despair, no matter how bad things get, because God's salvation protects my head. When I think about what he has done for me, and all that he promises me, I can't believe in despair—even during the darkest days.

**[Q]** Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the helmet of salvation.

**Wearing the sword of the Spirit, God gives us specific words to live by.** In verse 17, Paul refers to "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." In this case, Paul isn't referring to the Bible or the New Testament, which hadn't yet been completely written and compiled. And he doesn't use the word *logos* here. Rather, he uses the word *rhema*, which really means "a saying." It refers not to a general word, but a specific word. For example, the whole Bible could be called a *logos*, but John 3:16 would then be called a *rhema*, or a specific word or saying.

The sword of the Spirit is that specific word—that *rhema*—that God gives us by supernatural revelation. Most often, it is a verse of Scripture that applies to my specific situation. We have to spend a lot of time in the Word, the Bible, so that God can speak specific words into our life when we need them most.

**[Q]** Write down an example of what it would mean for you to wear the sword of the Spirit.

Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God. You don't have to remember the breastplate and the belt and all the others, but you do need to remember this: We are in a spiritual battle, a battle that we can win only through the strength of God. In order to experience the strength of God, we need to do certain things: Live truthfully, do good works, be ready to go where God sends us, be faithful (full of faith), think about salvation, and listen to God's word.

## God Warns You About the War Zone

### Leader's Guide

This is the full armor of God. It enables you to stand against the devil's schemes. And there's one more weapon in your arsenal: prayer (v. 18).

Paul's strategy for prayer is quite simple: Pray for everything and everyone, he says. On all occasions. With all kinds of prayers and requests. For all the saints. Pray.

This is your greatest weapon in spiritual warfare. Why? Because when you pray you are submitted to God. Remember the verse from James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To help us understand what it means to put on the whole armor of God.*

**Activity:** *Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with a poster board, magazines, markers, scissors, and glue. Ask each group to make a soldier equipped with the armor mentioned in Ephesians 6. When finished, label and define each piece of armor. Share and explain the finished product to the whole group.*

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Life is a war zone, and every day we're on the battlefield. The only way you can win this battle is through the strength of God. But to receive God's strength you must act. Put on the belt of truth: live truthfully. Put on the breastplate of righteousness: do good works. Put your shoes on and be ready to go where God sends you. Take up the shield of faith, and be ready to live by faith. Wear the helmet of salvation, and fill your mind with thoughts about all that God's salvation means to you. Get into the Word and listen to God's voice, so that he can speak specific words into your life. And most of all, pray—on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for everyone. Do this, Paul says, and you will stand your ground, and when the battle is over, you will remain standing for the glory of God.

**Action Point:** **This week make prayer your "first resort." Before you do anything, pray. When you get up in the morning, before you interact with your family, pray just a quick prayer: "God, help me help them get their day off to a great start." When you walk into your workplace, pray a quick prayer: "God, help me do your work today for your glory. And help me treat my coworkers with dignity and respect." Before you make a phone call, before you speak to a client, before you go to a meeting, pray. In traffic, pray. In stressful situations, pray. In every event throughout the day, pray. On all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, pray.**

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



## God Warns You About the War Zone

Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

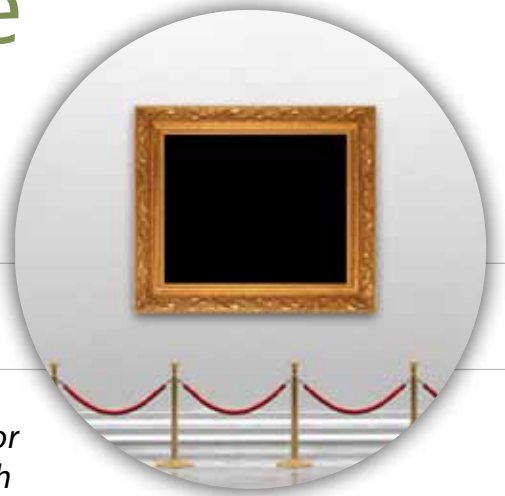
# God Warns You About the War Zone

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### Participant's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

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—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon

# Study Through the Bible

## Philippians: Finding Joy

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**CHRISTIANITY TODAY**

INTERNATIONAL

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# Study Through the Bible

## Philippians

### Why read this book?

If you've ever had trouble seeing how faith can be dressed in everyday work clothes, Philippians is for you. It puts lofty truths into practical terms. And along the way you'll run a gamut of human experience: joy, bitterness, unity, bickering, arrogance, humiliation. Read Philippians to peek into the heart of its writer—and to be drawn closer to the one who was foremost in his heart, Jesus Christ.

### Who wrote this book and to whom was it written?

While under house arrest in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote to believers in the city of Philippi, located in northeastern Greece. It lay ten miles inland from the modern port city of Kavalla.

### When was it written?

About A.D. 60 to 62, during the time Paul awaited trial on an appeal to the Roman emperor Nero.

### Why was it written?

To thank the Philippians for sending Paul money to help defray his living expenses as he awaited trial (4:10–18). Paul also wanted to warn them against false teachers and urge them to greater unity among themselves.

### What is the background of this book?

Philippi, a Roman colony, was where Paul planted the first church on European soil (Acts 16:11–40), probably around A.D. 50. When Paul moved on, the church occasionally sent him aid, one of the few churches in those years to do so (4:15).

### What to look for in Philippians:

You'll find one of the Bible's most prominent psalms of praise to Jesus (2:5–11); you'll see the futility of religious activity compared to a relationship with Christ (3:4–11); and you'll gain practical tools to help reshape your thinking according to God's ways (4:4–9).

*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



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# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 1**

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **Put the Gospel First**

*This is the secret to the apostle Paul's unshakeable joy.*

We live in a world that constantly offers ways for us to achieve happiness by improving our circumstances. Unfortunately, such happiness is always fleeting. In contrast, the apostle Paul retained his joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, because he understood that true joy comes from gospel-first relationships, goals, desires, and conduct. This study will highlight four principles that will help us retain our joy no matter what we encounter in life.

Scripture:  
Philippians 1

Based on:

The series builder "If You're Happy and You Know It ..." by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Philippians is Paul's answer to the question: If you had nothing left in the world, what would still make you happy? This book was not written by someone who had it better than you—it was written by a man who had it worse than you but still found joy.

The apostle Paul spent roughly one-quarter of his missionary career in prisons. John McRay wrote the following in *CHRISTIAN HISTORY* magazine:

Roman imprisonment was preceded by being stripped naked and then flogged—a humiliating, painful, and bloody ordeal. The bleeding wounds went untreated as prisoners sat in painful leg or wrist chains. Mutilated, bloodstained clothing was not replaced, even in the cold of winter.

Most cells were dark, especially the inner cells of a prison, like the one Paul and Silas inhabited in Philippi. Unbearable cold, lack of water, cramped quarters, and sickening stench from few toilets made sleeping difficult and waking hours miserable. Because of the miserable conditions, many prisoners begged for a speedy death. Others simply committed suicide.

In settings like this, Paul wrote encouraging, even joyful, letters and continued to speak of Jesus.

(Elesha Coffman, "Christian History Connection," *CHRISTIAN HISTORY*, issue 47)

Paul's joy didn't come from circumstances. It came from the gospel.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] Describe a time when your circumstances were miserable but you kept a good attitude. What enabled you to do so?
- [Q] How would you describe the gospel? Why would Paul's joy come from it?

PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Joy comes from gospel-first relationships.

Read Philippians 1:1–11. To us, the word *fellowship* (or *partnership*) implies shaking hands after a church service, coffee and donuts at Bible study, or eating dessert with your small group. But fellowship in Paul's day was more commercial—similar to sharing blood, sweat, tears, and cash together in a business enterprise. In other words, it took a person's all-out effort.

The best relationships come from working toward a common goal. Paul's relationships were gospel driven. He surrounded himself with those who were as passionate about spreading the



message of Jesus Christ as he was. This brings a new kind of joy to our lives—knowing we are working together for the glory of God. Minor differences fade into the background when we keep this at the fore of our relationships.

- [Q] Why did it bring Paul joy to pray for the Philippians (v. 4–5)?
- [Q] How does the truth of verse 6 help us to be patient with each other's shortcomings?
- [Q] What does verse 7 say about our own shortcomings, making us more tolerant of other's shortcomings?

**Leader's Note:** *Paul said that they shared God's grace. As we remember that we, too, need God's grace, we are more willing to extend that grace to others.*

- [Q] List the things Paul prays for in verses 9–11. How would it improve your relationships to pray this for those you love?

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us begin to pray for others as Paul did.*

**Activity:** *Take a few moments of silence to pray through verses 9–11 for one person whom you love.*

### **Teaching point two: Joy comes from gospel-first goals.**

Read Philippians 1:12–18. Paul saw a decidedly positive outcome from his dismal circumstances.

Achieving worldly goals can make you happy, but such happiness is fleeting. Have you ever heard any of these phrases at a funeral? "He rarely scored above a 79 on the golf course." "He led his office in sales for three straight years." "He always kept his lawn nice." Obviously not, because these things do not matter in the long run.

In contrast, gospel-first goals are the crowning achievement of life. Read Romans 1:16, Colossians 1:6, and Isaiah 55:11. Such goals provide the satisfaction of real achievement and prevent setbacks from stealing our joy.

- [Q] What two positive consequences does Paul mention as a result of his imprisonment?

**Leader's Note:** *1. The gospel had been extended to both royalty and criminals.  
2. Paul's stand had inspired courage in others, as heroic deeds always do.*

- [Q] What was Paul's attitude toward those who preached the gospel with bad motives (v. 18)? What does that tell you about his commitment to the gospel?
- [Q] Read Romans 1:16. Why was Paul so committed to the gospel?





- [Q] Read Isaiah 55:6–11. According to this passage, a commitment to spreading God's Word was not unique to the New Testament. How does this passage encourage you to spread the Good News?

### Teaching point three: Joy comes from gospel-first desires.

There is a difference between goals and desires. Read Philippians 1:19–26. These verses may sound a little bit clichéd until you remember that Paul was writing them in prison, with the real possibility of execution looming over him. Gospel-first desires help us to multiply joy by promoting it in others rather than limiting it to ourselves. Paul's overriding concern was the good of others rather than what would make him happiest. In that attitude, he found joy.

- [Q] According to this passage, why was Paul willing to remain in his difficult circumstances?

**Leader's Note:** *He knew the Philippians needed his help to fully experience the joy of serving God.*

- [Q] What was Paul's view of life and death as a result of this attitude?  
[Q] Which of the following best describes gospel-first desires?

1. I am driven by my love for Jesus Christ.
2. I am driven by the fact that others are going to hell.
3. I am driven by my love for others.
4. I am driven by duty to God.
5. Other.

Are all these statements valid? Is there a problem with any of them? Why or why not? Which of the above most motivates you?

### Teaching point four: Joy comes from gospel-first conduct.

Read Philippians 1:27–30. The language Paul used in these verses tells us a lot. In verse 27, Paul says, "Whatever happens," which means, "This is the bottom line." "Conduct" refers to a political term denoting citizenship—Paul is reminding the Philippians that they are citizens first and foremost of heaven, not Rome or Philippi.

Paul also uses athletic language—"stand firm," "contending," and so on—to define conduct worthy of the gospel. He brings up ideas such as: *Who wants to play for a divided team?* and *Who wants to play for a team that gives in to intimidation?*

We are saved because Jesus suffered on our behalf; we show it by suffering on his behalf.

- [Q] What does it mean to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"?  
[Q] What does it mean to "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel"? Describe what that might look like.



- [Q] Why is unity such a powerful testimony to the gospel?
- [Q] Why is suffering talked about as if it were a gift (v. 29)? What does our faithfulness in suffering tell the world about Christ?

PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

In Philippians Paul shows us not how happy he is, but how he is happy. Gospel joy is the defiant “nevertheless” we speak in the face of our circumstances. Gospel joy saves us from enslavement to circumstances and life-sapping comparisons to those who have it better. For example, some people live to compare: when apartment-dwellers drive down the road, all they see are houses; when singles go out, all they see are married people; when bald guys enter a room, all they see is hair.

Like Paul, if you’ve found joy that is not dependent on circumstances, you’re putting the gospel first.

**Action Point:** Ask each person to determine what they base their happiness on. Close by praying that each will turn from putting their hope in circumstances to putting their hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 1**

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### **Put the Gospel First**

*This is the secret to the apostle Paul's unshakeable joy.*

We live in a world that constantly offers ways for us to achieve happiness by improving our circumstances. Unfortunately, such happiness is always fleeting. In contrast, the apostle Paul retained his joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, because he understood that true joy comes from gospel-first relationships, goals, desires, and conduct. This study will highlight four principles that will help us retain our joy no matter what we encounter in life.

**Scripture:**  
Philippians 1

**Based on:**  
The series builder "If You're Happy and You Know It ..." by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

Philippians is Paul's answer to the question: If you had nothing left in the world, what would still make you happy? This book was not written by someone who had it better than you—it was written by a man who had it worse than you but still found joy. Paul's joy didn't come from circumstances. It came from the gospel.

PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Joy comes from gospel-first relationships.

Teaching point two: Joy comes from gospel-first goals.

Teaching point three: Joy comes from gospel-first desires.

[Q] Which of the following best describes gospel-first desires?

1. I am driven by my love for Jesus Christ.
2. I am driven by the fact that others are going to hell.
3. I am driven by my love for others.
4. I am driven by duty to God.
5. Other.

Teaching point four: Joy comes from gospel-first conduct.



PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

In Philippians Paul shows us not how happy he is, but how he is happy. Gospel joy is the defiant “nevertheless” we speak in the face of our circumstances. Gospel joy saves us from enslavement to circumstances and life-sapping comparisons to those who have it better. For example, some people live to compare: when apartment-dwellers drive down the road, all they see are houses; when singles go out, all they see are married people; when bald guys enter a room, all they see is hair.

Like Paul, if you've found joy that is not dependent on circumstances, you're putting the gospel first.

*—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 2**

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **Give Yourself Away**

*Three important benefits of self-emptying love.*

We live in a culture that emphasizes individuality and glorifies accumulation. Therefore, Christians must be careful not to apply those worldly principles to the benefits and gifts we receive as members of God's kingdom. Instead, we should look to the example of Christ and give away those blessings, so that others may experience God's love and be saved. This study shows us how practicing self-emptying love for others brings true joy.

**Scripture:**  
Philippians 2

**Based on:**  
The series builder "If You're Happy and You Know It ..." by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

What does it mean to be a “star” in today’s culture? When NFL wide-receiver Keyshawn Johnson was asked about his former teammate Wayne Chrebet’s retirement, he said: “You are trying to compare a flashlight to a star. Flashlights only last so long, but a star is in the sky forever.”

This is exactly the opposite of Christianity’s approach to others. We don’t promote ourselves, but look out for the interests of others. Christianity does not compute when it’s carried around in expensive handbags. It only makes sense when it’s giving itself away.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] What kind of people do you most enjoy being around—those who promote themselves or those who are interested in others? Why?
- [Q] How do you identify arrogance in another? How do you identify humility?

PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Happiness is the fruit of mutual love.

Read Philippians 2:1–4. These verses are grounded in human experience. Paul uses repetition in verse 2 to emphasize the importance of unity in mutual love (“like minded,” “same love,” “one in spirit”).

A wise person has said that you’ll make more friends in two weeks by being interested in others than you will in two years by trying to get others interested in you. Love is the currency of God’s kingdom. The economy collapses if that currency is not kept circulating.

When Thomas Cannon was three years old, his father died. After Thomas’ mother remarried, the family of six lived in a three-room wooden shack without running water or electricity.

As an adult, Thomas went to work with the postal service. He never made more than \$25,000 a year. Upon retirement, he and his wife lived in poverty. Yet over the course of 33 years, Thomas gave away more than \$156,000. His gifts were mainly in the form of \$1,000 checks given to people he read about in the newspaper who were going through hard times or who especially exemplified courage or kindness. A youth worker in a low-income apartment complex, a volunteer faithfully serving at an elementary school, a Vietnamese couple wanting to return home to visit, and a teenager abandoned as an infant were some of the recipients of Thomas’ benevolence.

Thomas’ motivation came from an incident that happened when he was a young man attending a naval signal school. When an explosion at Chicago’s port took the lives of many of his



shipmates, Thomas concluded that “he had been spared to help others and be a role model.” This led to his passion for giving.

Cannon’s biographer, Sandra Waugaman, comments, “Not many people would consider living in a house in a poor neighborhood without central heat, air conditioning, or a telephone, and working overtime so that they could save money to give away.” (“Thomas Cannon Had Little Money to Give,” *Omaha Sunday World Herald* [July, 2005], p. 13A; submitted by Ted De Hass, PREACHINGTODAY.COM)

- [Q] Explain the phrases in verse 1. What encouragement do you receive from being united with Christ? What comfort do you gain from his love? What fellowship to enjoy from the Holy Spirit?
- [Q] What does it look like to have tenderness and compassion for others?
- [Q] What does it mean to be like-minded?
- [Q] Name some practical ways that you can consider others better than yourself.

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us learn to look out for the interests of others.*

**Activity:** *Read the following case studies. Advise each how they might stop looking out for only their own interests.*

- *Thomas has been offered a promotion at work, but it will mean having to move the family. He knows his wife and teenage children don't want to move.*
- *Josie is depressed. She has always wanted to be married and have a family, but at age 35, she is still single.*
- *Bart would like to buy a new car, but his best friend who is going on the mission field is raising support.*

### **Teaching point two: Humility is the path to exultant joy.**

Read Philippians 2:5–16. Your vision of God determines the direction of your life. A. W. Tozer said, “What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” These verses are grounded in Christ’s self-emptying sacrifice. God-likeness consists not in selfish grabbing but selfless giving. Crucifixion was usually reserved for slaves and terrible criminals, so it was not mentioned in polite conversation. Paul used shocking language here.

Unity with Christ is absolutely necessary evidence that the gospel is at work in the community; such unity is mocked by selfish ambition and complaining.

- [Q] Why could Christ give up his right to be worshiped on earth?

**Leader’s Note:** *He knew that he’d be worshiped ultimately. It is the height of security to give up our rights for others. It shows we understand that giving up our rights now secures great reward for the future.*





- [Q] What would it look like for our attitude to be like Christ's (v. 5)?
- [Q] How does our unity with Christ provide evidence that the gospel is at work?
- [Q] What does it mean to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (v. 12)? What kind of help do we get for this (v. 13)?
- [Q] How do selfish ambition and complaining destroy unity? Give practical examples.
- [Q] How does a lack of selfish ambition and complaining cause us to "shine like stars in the universe"?

### Teaching point three: Service is the essence of the good life.

Read Philippians 2:17–30. These verses are grounded in three individual examples. Paul allowed his life to be poured out as a drink offering. Timothy modeled the love that comes through service, and Epaphroditus modeled the joy of Christ that comes through suffering.

Less than a week before Martin Burnham's abduction by Muslim guerrillas on the Philippine island of Palawan in May 2001, the New Tribes missionary gave the devotional at a Wednesday evening service at Rose Hill Bible Church in his small hometown outside Wichita, Kansas.

Some of Burnham's last words in the United States were also the last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John: "Follow thou me." His uncle, Ralph Burnham, said, "Martin not only spoke of following him, but he took on that responsibility. Of course, at that time neither he nor any of us expected how far he was going to be required to go to. But he was willing to go."

Martin Burnham, 42, kept that attitude throughout the 376 days he and his wife, Gracia, 43, were held captive by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. Just before the Philippine military raid on the kidnappers that led to Martin's death and Gracia's freedom, the two huddled together in a hammock under a makeshift tent.

"Martin and Gracia had really been thinking that there would be a chance that they would not make it out alive," said Martin's brother, Doug, relying on a phone conversation with Gracia. "Martin said to Gracia, 'The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's go out all the way. Let's serve him all the way with gladness.'"

The two then prayed in their hammock, recited Scripture verses to each other, and sang. They laid down to rest. Then the rescue assault began and bullets began to fly, puncturing Gracia's leg and Martin's chest. (Ted Olsen, "Martin Burnham Went Out Serving with Gladness" CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM, 6-10-02)

- [Q] What did Paul mean that his life was "poured out like a drink offering" (v. 17)? How can our lives be poured out that way? Why should this make us glad?
- [Q] What did Paul appreciate about Timothy? What can we emulate in Timothy's behavior?
- [Q] Why was Paul willing to give up Epaphroditus's company when he relied on it so much?



[Q] What are the ways you most like to serve? Explain your answer.

1. Teaching others
2. Doing practical things to help others
3. Giving to help others' material needs
4. Giving others wise counsel
5. Other

PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

Learning to love is a matter of opening your heart, not of technique. As an experiment, give yourself entirely to the next person you meet: relax, and treat that person as if he or she were the most fascinating person you have ever met. Your spiritual life is as strong as your weakest relationship.

**Action Point:** Break into pairs and take turns listening to each other's prayer requests. Close by praying for each other's requests in a heartfelt way.

*—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 2**

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### **Give Yourself Away**

*Three important benefits of self-emptying love.*

We live in a culture that emphasizes individuality and glorifies accumulation. Therefore, Christians must be careful not to apply those worldly principles to the benefits and gifts we receive as members of God's kingdom. Instead, we should look to the example of Christ and give away those blessings, so that others may experience God's love and be saved. This study shows us how practicing self-emptying love for others brings true joy.

**Scripture:**  
Philippians 2

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## Identify the Current Issue

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PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Happiness is the fruit of mutual love.

Teaching point two: Humility is the path to exultant joy.

Teaching point three: Service is the essence of the good life.

[Q] What are the ways you most like to serve? Explain your answer.

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2. Doing practical things to help others
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PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

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—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 3**

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **Pursue God Aggressively**

*How to supercharge your passion for knowing God.*

Many Christians wallow daily in a lukewarm relationship with God. Deep down they realize that something is missing, but they have chosen to fill that emptiness through worldly pursuits. In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul reminds us that a vibrant co-mingling of our souls with that of Jesus is an attainable goal. Not only that, he shows us how to attain it.

We can supercharge our pursuit of God by taking a new view of our assets, making a new effort to know Christ, and finding a new model of the joyful life. This study alerts us to the fact that a passionate relationship with God is possible and highlights the important first steps toward such a relationship.

Scripture:  
Philippians 3

Based on:  
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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Many of us have experienced a date with someone of the opposite sex that filled us with an almost-insatiable desire for that person's presence. The heritage of faith handed down to us in the Bible is of people like Moses and David—people who sought God with the very same kind of earnestness. In Exodus 33:18, Moses said, "Now show me your glory." David said, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

When we read Philippians 3, we can sense the same passion radiating from Paul as he battles the tendency to fall into tepid religiosity. Fortunately, Paul wins the battle and gives us insight into joining a passionate pursuit of God.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] Would you say your relationship with God is more exciting or boring? Why?
- [Q] If it's boring, was it more exciting at a different time in your past? If so, why?

PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching point one: Put your confidence in a relationship rather than rituals and rules.**

Read Philippians 3:1–9. Nothing stymies the pursuit of God like self-righteous religion—being content with who you are and what you've achieved. The Judaizers saw Christianity as a sect of Judaism that required circumcision to mark you as a member of God's kingdom.

In contrast, Paul used his own life to illustrate that rigorously following a set of rituals and rules was not enough—something was missing. Paul wasn't moving from good to better; he was moving from bad ("rubbish") to best. These are timely words for a culture and church that often claims: "If you jump through the right number of hoops, you'll be okay."

- [Q] Why would Paul start this section with telling the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord? What does that have to do with placing no confidence in the flesh?
- [Q] Evidently Paul was repeating himself (v. 1). Why would he consider this so important?
- [Q] What was so bad about those who thought all Christians should be circumcised? Why did Paul so vehemently oppose such people?

**Leader's Note:** Paul knew that as soon as we start tacking on deeds to our salvation, we lose the reason for Christ's sacrifice. He also knew that it was a recipe for failure.



- [Q] What might be a similar ritual or restriction that some Christians place on others today?
- [Q] Why do rituals and rules often kill our enthusiasm rather than ignite it?
- [Q] What does Paul mean that for the sake of Christ he has lost all things (v. 8)? How should that be true of us? How do we actually gain through this attitude?

### Teaching point two: Make an all-out effort to know Christ.

Read Philippians 3:10–16. Knowing Christ entails two things: the “power of his resurrection” and the “fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” Paul says it is possible for us to experience a co-mingling of souls with Jesus, and that he is in hot pursuit of that goal. Regardless of what’s happened in your past, if you pursue God aggressively, he will not disappoint you. It is worth making that our goal in life.

- [Q] What do you think it means to know Christ in the power of his resurrection? To know him in the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings?
- [Q] What would it mean for you to press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of you (v. 12)?
- [Q] Why is forgetting what is in the past key to moving ahead in our Christian life?
- [Q] What is the prize Paul is straining toward (v. 14)?

#### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us realize what it would mean to make an all-out effort to know Christ.*

**Activity:** *On a whiteboard or poster board, list as many ways as the group can come up with to make an all-out effort to know Christ. After each thing listed, ask each person to write at least one way they could do that. For example, if you list “reading the Bible,” suggest at least one way you can think of to fit it into your schedule.*

### Teaching point three: Find a new model of the joyful life.

Read Philippians 3:17–21. In a 2006 interview with *Reader's Digest*, Jim Carrey said: “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.”

Paul emphasized the worldliness of those who base their lives on religious practices and warned his listeners not to follow their example. He said the best examples of godly living are folks who have a heavenly mindedness that informs their activity here on Earth.

A good example of this is found in the following story from author Leonard Sweet:

Tom Wiles served a stint as university chaplain at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A few years ago, he picked me up at the Phoenix airport in his new Ford pickup and whisked me away to keynote a leadership conference at the university. Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded,



sharing truck stories and laughing at the bumper-sticker truism: "Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."

As I climbed into his 2002 Ranger for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. "What happened here?" I asked.

"My neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and white scars," Tom replied with a downcast voice.

"You're kidding! How awful," I commiserated. "This truck is so new I can smell it."

"What's even worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage."

Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, "Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"

"This has been a real spiritual journey for me," Tom replied. "After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that I'd rather be in a relationship than be right. Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected." (Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question ... Into the Mystery*, Waterbrook Press, 2004, p. 91-92)

- [Q] Why could Paul confidently ask others to follow his example? How might we do the same?

**Leader's Note:** Paul readily admitted in verse 12 that he wasn't perfect, but he knew that he was on the right path, so he could confidently ask others to join him on that path.

- [Q] According to verse 19, what would our lives look like if we lived as enemies of the cross of Christ? How might Christians be tempted to live this way and even justify it?
- [Q] How does it help to remember that we are citizens of heaven?
- [Q] List three to five people, either living or dead, who you would like to emulate in some way. Share one person from this list with the group and tell why you would like to model yourself after this person.

### PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

There once lived a man who had it all. He was handsome, wealthy, and educated in the best schools of his day. He was also brilliant, and his excellence in philosophy and rhetoric was recognized at a young age.

This man also had an overactive libido that led him into some very poor choices and risky behavior. In this man's autobiography, he wrote: "As I grew to manhood, I was inflamed with desire for a surfeit of hell's pleasures. In the city, I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. I was willing to steal, and I did, although I was not compelled by any lack. I





was at the top of the school of rhetoric. I was pleased with my superior status and swollen with conceit. It was my ambition to be a good speaker for the inane purpose of gratifying human vanity.”

For 11 years, this man lived as a famous teacher and speaker; he also lived as a fornicator and a thief. As a hedonist, he was unsurpassed by any in his day. Yet, over time, his hedonism proved empty, and this man was not satisfied.

In that period, the man came across a bishop who was strangely appealing. This man of God was also an excellent communicator, and was able to paint a picture of God as the source of all the true joy and happiness the young man had been longing for—had been searching for those past 11 years. The bishop taught that life was a battle between two sources of pleasure—one good, one evil—and challenged the young man to view his life as a quest to search for the strength to enjoy God.

After some time, the young man's walls came down. He burst out of his house and ran into the garden, enraged. He felt like he was being driven mad by the internal struggle between his own fleshly lusts and God. Later, he wrote: “I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees.” His lusts taunted him, saying: “Will you dismiss us? Could you bear to be rid of us, never to have us again forever and ever?”

“I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears that streamed from my eyes. In my misery I kept crying, ‘How long shall I go on saying tomorrow, tomorrow? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?’”

In that moment, a child's voice rang out from somewhere next door. It said, “Take it and read, take it and read.” Taking this as a sign from God, the young man opened the Scriptures and read the first passage his eyes fell upon. It was Romans 13:13–14: “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Thus, Aurelius Augustine—you might know him as Saint Augustine—was saved. (Greg Lafferty, from his sermon, “You're Pursuing God Aggressively,” [PREACHINGTODAY.COM](http://PREACHINGTODAY.COM))

Augustine—who went from Sex in the City to the City of God—said: “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

**Action Point:** What might be holding you back from pursuing God aggressively? Allow anyone who is willing to share this with the group. Ask the group to gather around those who share and lay hands on them to pray for them. If no one in your group is willing to share, ask them to pray silently as they bring this request to God.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 3**

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### **Pursue God Aggressively**

*How to supercharge your passion for knowing God.*

Many Christians wallow daily in a lukewarm relationship with God. Deep down they realize that something is missing, but have chosen to fill that emptiness through worldly pursuits. In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul reminds us that a vibrant co-mingling of our souls with that of Jesus is an attainable goal. Not only that, he shows us how to attain it.

We can supercharge our pursuit of God by taking a new view of our assets, making a new effort to know Christ, and finding a new model of the joyful life. This study alerts us to the fact that a passionate relationship with God is possible and highlights the important first steps toward such a relationship.

Scripture:  
Philippians 3

Based on:

The series builder "If You're Happy and You Know It ..." by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

Many of us have experienced a date with someone of the opposite sex that filled us with an almost-insatiable desire for that person's presence. The heritage of faith handed down to us in the Bible is of people like Moses and David—people who sought God with the very same kind of earnestness. In Exodus 33:18, Moses said, "Now show me your glory." David said, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

When we read Philippians 3, we can sense the same passion radiating from Paul as he battles the tendency to fall into tepid religiosity. Fortunately, Paul wins the battle and gives us insight into joining a passionate pursuit of God.

PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching point one: Put your confidence in a relationship rather than rituals and rules.**

**Teaching point two: Make an all-out effort to know Christ.**

**Teaching point three: Find a new model of the joyful life.**

PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

Augustine—who went from Sex in the City to the City of God—said: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

*—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## **Philippians: Finding Joy - Study 4**

LEADER'S GUIDE

### **Dwell on the Good**

*Happiness is not dependent on believing in yourself.*

A recent keyword search on Amazon.com turned up 11,687 books having to do with joy. Many people today, including many Christians, have walked worldly paths toward happiness and found them wanting. These people are in need of a godly alternative. This study will expose the faults of worldly paths to happiness and cover four aspects of the Christian path to joy. Stop pursuing happiness like an American and start pursuing it like a Christian.

**Scripture:**  
Philippians 4

**Based on:**

The series builder "If You're Happy and You Know It ..." by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

## Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Happiness is achievable, although it's rare. Only one-third of Americans report being happy—this in a country whose constitution guarantees the right to pursue it. The world has pushed happiness through “positive thinking”—believe in yourself and the power of human potential, stay positive, and so on—and found it wanting.

More than 60 scientists have been given millions of dollars in funding to help humanity find happiness. A popular movement among psychologists, called “positive psychology,” is an attempt to elevate and focus research on peoples' strengths rather than trying to deal only with human weaknesses and problems.

Although the U.S. standard of living has increased since World War II, there is no increase in the number of people who regard themselves as happy. A *U.S. News & World Report* article on the subject says, “Once income provides basic needs, it doesn't correlate to happiness. Nor does intelligence, prestige, or sunny weather. People grow used to new climates, higher salaries, and better cars.”

Many years and millions of dollars studying and treating depression have succeeded in reducing most people's levels of sadness, but they are not necessarily happier. Researchers have found that self-esteem, spirituality, family, and good marriages and friendships are key to a happy life. So are hope, meaning, and discovering and pursuing the right goals. Even helping others to be happy can “jump-start a process that will lead to stronger relationships, renewed hope, and a general upward spiraling of happiness.” Just seeing others do a good deed results in that heartwarming feeling and influences people to do the same.

Gratitude is another key ingredient to a happy life. People who made a daily and/or frequent practice of being thankful were “not only more joyful; they were healthier, less stressed, more optimistic, and more likely to help others.”

Hope and spirituality work together to provide an important basis for a happy life. “Hope fosters optimism, and faith is, by definition, hope for the future. And the churchgoing form of faith can be a built-in social support network. This is not to say that atheists can't be happy, but it helps explain why so many do find happiness in faith, and why researchers continue to find connections between faith, optimism, and physical health.” (Holly J. Morris, “Happiness Explained,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 9-03-01, pp. 46–54)

Imprisoned in Rome and facing execution for his faith, Paul used his letter to the Philippians to reveal the secrets of happiness and joy. G. K. Chesterton said, “Joy is the gigantic secret of the Christian.”

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] Why do you think happiness is so elusive?
- [Q] Where should Christians look for happiness? Is their happiness different than that of those who don't know Christ? Why or why not?



PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching point one: We should have a mind that is agreeable despite differences.**

Read Philippians 4:2–5. Paul called these women to be “like-minded” and to behave agreeably because of the gospel. His rationale: The Lord is near—how can anyone be proud or self-centered when standing next to the cross?

The Lord is near, but so is the devil (Ephesians 4:26–27).

On June 1, 2005, Percy Arrowsmith, 105 years old, and his 100-year-old wife, Florence, celebrated their 80th-wedding anniversary. Percy died two weeks later. They met at their church in Hereford, England. He sang in the choir, and she was a Sunday school teacher.

According to the Guinness World Record authorities, the couple held the record for the longest marriage, as well as the oldest aggregate age of a married couple.

The Arrowsmiths claimed the key to their long marriage was not to go to sleep on an argument. They said they always kissed each other and held hands each night before going to bed. (“Couple Mark 80th Anniversary,” *The San Antonio Express-News*, 6-2-05)

You can't be happy all by yourself. If there is dissonance of any kind among your circle of friends, deal with it at any cost, or your joy will be stymied.

- [Q] What do you think it means to agree with each other in the Lord (v. 2)?
- [Q] How can we learn to do that? How can we help each other do that?
- [Q] What difference does it make to know that the one we disagree with has his or her name written in the book of life?
- [Q] How does rejoicing in the Lord help our attitude during a disagreement? What does gentleness have to do with it?

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us learn how to help each other agree in the Lord.*

**Activity:** *Read the following case studies. Advise each how they might agree in the Lord.*

- *Kent disapproves of Robert, the new worship leader, who is introducing new instruments and songs into the church.*
- *Elizabeth is upset with Robin, who refuses to spank her child. Elizabeth is always quoting “Spare the rod, spoil the child.”*
- *Clint disagrees with Brent about the end times. Both believe Jesus will return but disagree on whether it will be before or after the tribulation.*



### Teaching point two: We should have a mind that is prayerful in the face of problems.

Read Philippians 4:6–7. Prayer is the solution to whatever is bothering you—whether problems, which are external, or anxiety, which is internal. Problems are inevitable—we all have them—but misery is optional. We don't have to let circumstances determine our attitude.

Paul promises God's peace, which really doesn't make sense, because it's peace that lasts through the most awful circumstances.

- [Q] Is it possible to avoid being anxious? Why or why not? If it is possible, how can we avoid it?
- [Q] What is the reason Paul gives us for not being anxious (v. 6)?
- [Q] How does the peace of God guard our hearts and minds (v. 7)?
- [Q] Read Psalm 131. What are the secrets to handling anxiety according to this psalm?

**Leader's Note:** According to the Quest Study Bible, "When David said his heart was not proud, it was a way of saying he was submitted to God and dependent upon him." As far as the weaned child metaphor: "a nursing baby is comforted at its mother's breast, so David was content to depend upon God. Others, however, say that the word weaned pictures a child that no longer cries and fusses for its milk; in this view David had matured and better learned to trust God for his needs."

### Teaching point three: We should have a mind that is virtuous even though the world is vile.

Read Philippians 4:8. Your thought style—the network of rails your thoughts roll down in a given situation—is arguably the most important part of being a Christian. Paul says our thoughts should only run down rails that are virtuous. Both absorption into and rejection of the surrounding culture are bad ideas—discrimination and discipline are the keys to remaining virtuous.

- [Q] How might the list in Philippians 4:8 affect your thoughts? List practical ways.
- [Q] How can we train our minds to think lovely thoughts?

**Leader's Note:** The Quest Study Bible says, "Paul is not talking about fleeting impressions that invade our thinking. Thoughts of temptation or discouragement can come unannounced. But we can discipline ourselves, making conscious choices to contemplate good things. Reading uplifting Bible verses, for example, or listing God's attributes can get us on the right track."

- [Q] Read Romans 12:2. What instruction does this verse give us about how to control our thoughts?



- [Q] Which of the following best illustrates what Paul is talking about in Philippians 4:8? Explain your answer.
1. I never think about anything bad, only what makes me happy.
  2. I never associate with negative people.
  3. I only think about things relating to God.
  4. I try to maintain a Christ-like perspective on whatever comes my way.
  5. I ask the Holy Spirit to direct my thoughts.
  6. Other.

**Teaching point four: We should have a mind that is content regardless of circumstances.**

Read Philippians 4:10–13. Paul rejoices in the Philippians' growth, not the fact that they are concerned about him again. He's just pleased that they are becoming other-centered. Notice, also, that Paul considers both "plenty" and "want" to be incidental to contentment. Neither one determines his contentment.

*The Chicago Tribune* (9/1/96) ran the story of Buddy Post as "living proof that money can't buy happiness." In 1988, he won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania Lottery. Since then, he was convicted of assault, his sixth wife left him, his brother was convicted of trying to kill him, and his landlady successfully sued him for one-third of the jackpot.

"Money didn't change me," insists Post, a 58-year-old former carnival worker and cook. "It changed people around me that I knew, that I thought cared a little bit about me. But they only cared about the money."

Post is trying to auction off 17 future payments, valued at nearly \$5 million, in order to pay off taxes, legal fees, and a number of failed business ventures. He plans to spend his life as an ex-winner pursuing lawsuits he has filed against police, judges, and lawyers who he says conspired to take his money. "I'm just going to stay at home and mind my p's and q's," he said. "Money draws flies." (*Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Baker), from the editors of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL)

Paul succeeded in learning the secret of contentment by banking on a constant: Christ.

- [Q] Why would Paul be so excited about the Philippians becoming generous?
- [Q] Why is it so hard to be content?
- [Q] How can we learn to be content no matter what our circumstances? What does our contentment need to be based on for that to happen?
- [Q] How does verse 13 give us an answer to how we can learn contentment?





PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

Evander “The Real Deal” Holyfield is a former heavyweight-boxing champion of the world. During his boxing career he earned a staggering \$205 million in prize money, \$92 million in his last five fights alone. Holyfield lives in a 54,000 square foot mansion in Fayetteville, Georgia. Holyfield is an avid collector of cars and has a stable of thoroughbred horses worth millions. His estate is situated on hundreds of acres, where he has built a regulation-size baseball diamond and miles of horse trails and motorcycle trails. He has also opened a restaurant bearing his name in the city of Atlanta.

Though Holyfield has accomplished so much in his illustrious career and will be remembered as one of the great champions of all time, he continued to fight after losing his boxing crown. Why? In an interview with Christian author Gary Thomas, he confessed, “I continue to fight because I’m bored.” (Chris Bennett, “The Secret of Satisfaction,” SermonNotes.com)

The question “Are you happy?” is really a question about your inner life before God. When I have nothing left, I still have Christ—and that’s everything!

**Action Point:** Which of the things covered in this study do you have most trouble with—disagreements with others, an attitude of rejoicing, keeping a pure mind, or being content? Mention that area to the group and pray for each other.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

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