

Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at ScriptureAwakening.com. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@scriptureawakening.com.



Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

Isaiah 64:4

Introduction

You are about to embark on a journey of spiritual discovery. Ephesians showcases heavenly riches that are accessible to each of us.

Most people are not aware of the heavenly realms. Because we are so immersed in our secular and materialistic society, even Christians are only dimly aware of the heavenlies. The heavenly realms often are perceived as merely a distant echo of the future on the other side of death instead of being a constant experience in our daily lives.

Spiritual blessings and heavenly riches make the largest bank account seem like a collection of play money. When we discover the heavenlies as a present reality, life moves from a flat gray plane into multiple dimensions. It is as if, instead of hearing in monotone, we hear melodies and symphonies; instead of seeing in black and white, we see in color.

As you study Ephesians, you will also discover that the Church is the arena in which heaven and earth meet to create a community of light and life. On this journey, you will glimpse the breathtaking power of God through the whole sweep of history working to bring you and the rest of the world together under the saving lordship of Jesus Christ.

Background

Paul spent three years in Ephesus, probably from 54-57 AD, and his ministry had far reaching impact in the surrounding region. Ephesus was a center of commerce and trade during that time. It was located on a main highway between east and west and was surrounded by 230 independent communities within the Roman Province of Asia. Ephesus also served as a major financial center for the region, so the Ephesians were very familiar with images of riches and wealth.

Because of its strategic location, the Ephesian church became a hub of the Christian faith. The vitality of this church and its regional influence was so great that it began to have an economic impact. The silversmiths who sold idols for the worship of Artemis in Ephesus began to suffer financial losses as converts stopped buying their wares. You can read about it in Acts 19:23-46.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a strategic letter. Next to the letter to the Romans, it contains the most comprehensive summary of the Christian faith in the New Testament. In contrast to Romans, which is a systematic summary of Christian doctrine, Ephesians is a systematic summary of the benefits and responsibilities of the Christian faith.

Ephesians is also full of emotion. The truths of which Paul writes are not ivory-tower ideas; they are truths to set the heart on fire. If you watch for it, you can sense the thrill and joy that Paul feels as he conveys these truths.

Throughout the letter, contrasts of ideas and emotions are woven together. The first half of the book covers "doctrine"—what we need to understand about Christianity. The second half covers "actions"—how we should act based on what we know. Paul wants Christians to know how to speak to each other, how to act as husband and wife, how parents should relate to their

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.

Ephesians 1:3-6

children, and how slaves and masters should live out their spiritual blessings on a daily basis.

A Survey of Spiritual Riches

Over the next ten weeks we will explore these riches in some detail. Here is a list of the themes and passages of each lesson:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. A Celebration of Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:1-14 |
| 2. A Prayer for Our Spiritual Riches I | Eph. 1:15-23 |
| 3. Receiving Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:1-10 |
| 4. The Surprise of Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:11-22 |
| 5. The Mystery of Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 3:1-13 |
| 6. A Prayer for Spiritual Riches II | Eph. 3:14-21 |
| 7. Growing Together in Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16 |
| 8. Living in Light of Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:17-5:20 |
| 9. Living Out Spiritual Riches in Our Families | Eph. 5:21-6:9 |
| 10. Spiritual Battles for Our Spiritual Riches | Eph. 6:10-23 |

Paul Unfolds Our Blessings

In this first study, we will join in Paul's celebration of spiritual blessings as he displays them for us. In the Greek, Ephesians 1: 3-14 is one long sentence. Words tumble upon words, phrase builds upon phrase, as Paul seeks to convey his wonder at the spiritual blessings Christians have in Christ. He emphasizes more than anything that we are blessed to be chosen by God, and Paul unpacks the many facets of that truth:

- God chose us long before we breathed our first breath, even before creation.
- God chose us in Christ—we are redeemed (or bought) by Christ's blood.
- God chose us because He loves us—He has adopted us as His dearly loved children.
- God chose us to be holy and blameless.
- God chose us for a purpose—to the praise of His glorious grace.
- God chose us to give us wisdom and understanding, the ability to know the mysteries of God.
- God chose us to share His grace with others.
- God chose us and sealed His promise to us through the Holy Spirit—the down payment

Blessed be the Lord, who
daily loadeth us with
benefits, even the God of
our salvation. Selah.

Psalm 68:19 (KJV)

offered as proof of our inheritance.

- God chose us because it makes Him happy!

These are not blessings we have earned or deserve. They come from God's lavish grace in our lives given to us by Christ's sacrifice. Because we are chosen, we are transformed. We are no longer driven by the demands of the world but by the blessings of God.

Final Thought

We live in a driven culture. The pace of our lives is frantic; and mentally, we are borderline frenetic. Our sense of worth and our values are tied into our productivity and material accumulation. In the compulsive, busy pursuit of success, we lose something. Even while we appear to be abundantly rich with opportunities and possessions, we are inwardly impoverished as our hearts experience a depletion of life and love that is seldom replenished.

Jesus calls us to stop this way of life, and the Apostle Paul helps us to see how. Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Paul walks us step by step through a way of life that sets our hearts on heaven, that we may constantly live in the power of Christ's heavenly light.

What difference would it make in the way you lived, if you were assured that everything you wanted was already yours? According to Paul, it already is! As you study his letter to the Ephesians, you are about to find out how you can be freed from the overwhelming appetites that can never be satisfied, and instead, live from overflowing riches that will nourish your heart and transform your life.

Spending Time With God

This study series, "Spiritual Riches," is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 1

A Celebration of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:1-14

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and resources in Christ for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. As you read through Ephesians 1: 1-14, describe Paul's attitude towards God. What image of God do we see through Paul's eyes? In what way does this encourage or challenge you?

3. Paul's enthusiasm comes from God's lavish act of choosing to adopt us into his family. Imagine for a moment that you are a penniless orphan, and a rich and kind benefactor picked you to be his child. How would your life change? Now looking at this passage, list at least three things Paul emphasizes that have changed in our lives because God has chosen us.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Ephesians 1:3 states that we have “every spiritual blessing” in the heavenly realms. Why do you think Paul used the word “every”?

How might believing that these blessings are yours now affect the way you live?

5. Every spiritual blessing comes to us “in Christ.” Have you ever had an encounter with someone who didn't agree that salvation is only in Christ (John 14:6)? If so, tell about it.

6. In Ephesians 1:4, Paul says that we have been chosen “to be holy and blameless in His sight.” Why do you think Paul added the words “in His sight”?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 1

A Celebration of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:1-14

7. What does it mean “to be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 1:4)? Are you striving for this in your daily life?

10. Paul gives us a glimpse into the ultimate mystery of the universe in Ephesians 9-10. Describe this mystery in your own words.

8. In Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul writes that Christians are chosen by God and predestined to be adopted as his children. What is your response to the challenging spiritual truth that even before you chose to believe in Christ, God had chosen you?

11. The third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, makes an appearance in Ephesians 1:13-14. Describe the Spirit's role(s) in our salvation.

9. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul writes that we have “redemption through [Christ's] blood.” Redemption in Paul's day often meant paying a ransom or paying the price to free a slave. What does this tell you about the price God had to pay in order to adopt you?

What is the significance of the Spirit being described as a “deposit”? (This same word could also be translated “down payment.”)

How is this “amazing grace” (1 John 3:1-2)?

Can you come up with an analogy such as purchasing a house or making a layaway deposit?)



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 1

A Celebration of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:1-14

12. As God's chosen, adopted, and blessed children, how are we to relate to others who are not following Christ? (See also Genesis 12:2-3, where God tells Abraham he is blessed in order to be a blessing; and Luke 6:32-36.)

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. God's plan for us does not exclude the necessity that we must choose to respond to Him by faith at some point in our lives, as in Ephesians 1:13. Other scriptures, such as Revelation 3:20, also emphasize our responsibility to open the door when God knocks (see also John 6:37). Can we reconcile the idea of being chosen with the idea of choosing to respond?

14. Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." Our coming to faith in God is central to the very fabric of His creation. Consider the amazing truth that you are not merely the result of your parents' desire or a sexual accident. How does this shape the way you think about yourself and your relationship with God?

Scripture for Meditation

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 1:7-8



One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray...”

Luke 11:1

Introduction

Everyone knows that prayer is the lifeline of Christians. Yet most of us struggle to pray in consistent ways that keep us connected to God. There are lots of reasons for this: our sense of independence, our busy schedules, and our spiritual blindness to name a few.

One of the primary reasons we struggle to pray is due to our lack of spiritual perception. Most of us are practical materialists. We may say that we believe in a spiritual reality, but from the way we live, we demonstrate that what really motivates us, what we really put our trust in, is money in the bank, an ample house, and a nice car.

Frankly, we don't know how to begin to think about the spiritual realm, which brings us to Ephesians. In the passage you are about to study, Paul launches into one of the most powerful prayers ever prayed. Learning to pray along with the Apostle Paul will take us a long way in the right direction.

We will explore three dynamics of Paul's prayer: the foundation of Paul's prayer, the focus of Paul's prayer, and the fulfillment of Paul's prayer.

The Foundation of Paul's Prayer

As he begins his prayer, Paul acknowledges that he has heard about their faith and love (Ephesians 1:15). We should note that he does not start the prayer with a list of problems. He begins it with joyful praise and thanksgiving. He praises God for the maturity evident among the Ephesians and the strong foundation upon which they can grow. This is a good model for all prayer. Rather than making prayer primarily about problems which need God's help, it is good to come into God's presence celebrating His goodness and the good things we see around us.

The Apostle is also very clear about the One to whom he addresses the prayer: “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father” (Ephesians 1:17). Recently there was a carefully controlled scientific experiment that investigated the effectiveness of prayer. A group of hospital patients received daily prayer for their recovery. Another group received no prayer at all. When the results were analyzed, no measurable difference was found between the recovery rates of the two groups. The conclusion of the study was that prayer makes no difference.

Such a study is flawed for many reasons, one of which is the assumption that any kind of prayer will work. Who knows how many were praying to the One who answers prayer, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father”? We can address God as Father because that is how Jesus taught us to pray. As we learned last week, we are adopted into God's family, and now we have the right as God's children to address Him as Father. Jesus also taught us to pray “in His name.” This of course means more than tacking on the phrase “in Jesus name, Amen” at the end of our prayers. It is only through Christ that we have this right to approach God, and all that we ask is done in His name. Paul sets the direction of his prayer by beginning it with a clear declaration of to Whom and through Whom he is praying.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 57:11

The Focus of Paul's Prayer

Paul's first request is that God will give the Ephesians "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Ephesians 1:17). The word *revelation* means uncovering. Spiritual blessings have been given to us, but like gifts, the wrappings need to be taken off and the boxes opened. The point of spiritual knowledge is not to make us great sages who know the future or impress people with our wisdom, but "so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17). The Greek word for *know* means "intimate, personal knowledge." The phrase could be literally translated, "so that you may know Him deeply."

Obviously the Ephesians already know God through Jesus Christ. Yet Paul wants them to know that there is more, the enlightening of the eyes of the heart (Ephesians 1:18). The heart, in biblical culture, was not merely the source of emotions, but the seat of knowledge. Paul is asking that the hearts of the Ephesians may be able to see in the very depths of their being what before was not fully known. It is like Elijah's prayer in 2 Kings 6, when he asks that the eyes of his servant be opened to see that God's army is much bigger than the enemy army. God's power is all around us, but we need our eyes opened so we can see it!

The testimony of God's people throughout the ages is that there is always more to learn about God. Jonathan Edwards, the great American Puritan and leader of the first Great Awakening in the 18th century, wrote that the nature of spiritual knowledge is that the more of God we know, the more we want to know. "Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature and the more a man experiences this . . . satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly he will hunger and thirst for more." Five hundred years earlier in France, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, "We taste of Thee, of Thou living Bread, and long to feast on Thee still. We drink of Thee, the fountainhead, and Thirst our souls of Thee to fill." And written more than a thousand years earlier, the Psalms record this longing for deeper spiritual knowledge: "My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:2).

The Fulfillment of Paul's Prayer

Having rejoiced in their spiritual maturity and having prayed for their spiritual growth, Paul now unfolds three things that they need to see and comprehend if they are to grow: "the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us..." (Ephesians 1:18-19). Let's look at each.

"The hope to which he has called you." God calls us and has a purpose for us. Our dreams, hopes, and visions for the future are never big enough and can lead us into cul-de-sacs and dead ends. Left to ourselves, we can reach our highest goals and still end up saying, "Is this all there is?" Or, "Is this truly as good as it gets?" However, God's calling gives us an eternal hope that is always bigger than anything we dream and more satisfying than we could ever hope to achieve on our own.

"The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." Many scholars and commentators on American life have observed that we live in an individualistic culture in which persons are thought to be complete and self-contained. As Christians living in this "Me" culture, we tend to

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

think of spiritual knowledge as a very private matter that takes place between “me and God.” This, however, is not the biblical view of spiritual knowledge. The riches of God are those which God's people share together. This becomes very clear in Paul's prayer as we consider that the phrase “in the saints” could best be translated “among the saints.” Practically speaking, that means that we grow spiritually as we learn about God together. More to the point, we need each other to truly know the riches of God.

Finally, Paul wants the Ephesians to know about God's “**incomparably great power.**” We have hope and a wonderful inheritance because God has the power to keep His promises and nothing, not even death, can stand in His way. Paul grabs every word he can lay his hands on to describe this power of God. He actually uses four words for power in this prayer: *dynamis*, which means “explosive power;” *energeia*, which is effective or operational power; *kratos*, which is “power to overcome resistance;” and *ischys*, which means “bodily strength and muscular force.” All this power of God is most clearly shown by God raising Christ from the dead and seating Him in heaven above every power so that He may rule over the world.

Pulling It Together

So, let's draw together the themes of Paul's theologically and spiritually packed prayer and connect them with his opening introduction. God has, through Christ, blessed us in the heavenly realms with untold spiritual riches (Ephesians 1:3). But if we are going to know these spiritual riches, then we need to pray that God will uncover them for us by His Spirit and reveal them to us in the depths of our hearts. As we get to know God better, we will discover that He has a purpose for us which is only understood in our relationships with other believers. Together with others, we come to see the spiritual power of God revealed in the resurrection. And the result of it all is our surrender to and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Considering where Christ is now, raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, we can understand why Paul tells us back in Ephesians 1:3 that our spiritual riches are in the heavenly realms. Heaven is where Christ is, and Christ is the source and goal of all the riches that God has for His people.

Now with this overview of Paul's wonderful prayer, it's your turn to spend some time exploring it in more depth.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 2

A Prayer for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:15-23

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and resources in Christ for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Read Paul's prayer for the Ephesians aloud (Ephesians 1:15-23). What would you say he is particularly passionate about?

3. Note in Ephesians 1:15-16 that Paul's prayer springs from his warm relationship with the Ephesians.

Write down the people you regularly pray for :

Why is it important to move beyond praying for their temporal needs to praying for their spiritual growth? Explain:

Prayer goes two ways. Who might you ask to pray for you? Who might you ask to become a prayer partner, committing yourselves to pray for each other on a regular basis?

4. Paul notes their faith and their love (Ephesians 1:15). What weaknesses might be evident in a fellowship that emphasizes faith but has little love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)?

What weaknesses might be evident in a fellowship that emphasizes love but has little faith?

Since this is a study on prayer, stop now and give thanks for the expressions of faith and love in your church or Christian fellowship.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 2

A Prayer for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:15-23

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Note in Ephesians 1:16 how serious Paul is about thanking God for others. From your own perspective or experience, what are the benefits of thanking God for people rather than complaining to God about them?

6. Read aloud Ephesians 1:17.

In your own words, what is Paul asking here?

7. Enlightenment in the heart (Ephesians 1:18) means seeing on the inside what we only have seen from the outside. There is always more to discover about God (Ephesians 1:17). Can you think of a time when you were especially blessed with a fresh insight about God, whether yesterday or many years ago? If so, try to capsule and describe that insight.

8. There are three things Paul prays for the Ephesians to know (Ephesians 1:18-19). If you could especially deepen your knowledge in one of the three, which would you choose? Why?

9. Considering Ephesians 1:19-23:

What was the ultimate demonstration of God's power?

Where is that power manifested (Ephesians 1:21-23)?

What would our world be like if Christ's power was limited and impotent?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 2

A Prayer for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 1:15-23

10. The commentary suggests that we often find it easier to trust in the things of the world than in God's power. Do you agree with that? Explain why or why not.

14. Prayer is not only focused on helping others, but on opening new avenues of our lives to God. In the little booklet "My Heart Christ's Home" the story is told of a person who found that each area of his life needed to be more fully yielded to Christ's lordship. Imagine your heart as a home. Take a tour of your inner life with Christ beside you. Which room needs the most work?

11. What, if anything, gets in your way, keeping you from the prayer life to which God calls you?

12. The Church has the awesome privilege of being Christ's body and the means by which the world gets to see what Christ is like (Ephesians 1:22-23). How are we doing? (Take time to pray for God to do a great and mighty work through your church and your life).

For example: How is your basement—any skeletons to remove? Your dining room—have you been extending hospitality? Your bedroom—do you sleep with a clear conscience? Your kitchen—is the Lord honored by the way you eat, and by dinner table conversations? Your living room—is what you watch on television honoring to God?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Meditate on Ephesians 1:23. What do you see and hear in your heart and mind when you read that the Church is the fullness of Christ, the One who fills everything in every way?

Scripture for Meditation

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.

Ephesians 1:17



The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Ezekiel 18:20a

Introduction

One early Easter morning, a congregation gathered for a sunrise service in a beautiful garden. The pastor started his sermon with all the usual images of Easter—butterflies coming out of cocoons, spring flowers budding, and chicks breaking out of eggs. Then he said, “These are all wonderful and natural events, but they don’t have anything to do with the real Easter. Easter is not natural! It’s supernatural! Jesus didn’t just wake up from hibernation—He rose from the dead!” The congregation was startled to realize how they had come to take for granted Christ’s rising from the dead.

We all have heard of life coming from death so often that we no longer see it for the amazing miracle it is. And just as Jesus’ resurrection was miraculous, so too is our salvation. In this passage from Ephesians, Paul reminds us of God’s miraculous grace as He raises us from spiritual death to new life in Christ.

Spiritual Death: Ephesians 2:1-3

Paul confronts us with the image of spiritual death at the very beginning of Chapter 2. He has just concluded a long prayer for the Ephesians — that their eyes would be opened to God’s blessings, rich inheritance, and amazing power. Then he starts this chapter with a very stark truth:

“As for you, you were dead...”

We weren’t *mostly* dead. We were *all* dead. Before we were alive in Christ, we truly were dead to God and the realities of heaven. The death referred to here is not figurative or metaphorical. Just as we are cut off from a loved one who has died, we were cut off from the love and presence of God. Why? Because of our “trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1b). *Trespass* means to “step over the line,” *sin* means to “fall short of expectations.” Basically, in spiritual death, we are both rebels and failures.

Spiritual death is a manner of life—literally “a way of walking” (Ephesians 2:2). It involves taking our cues from the world—human life organized without reference to God, and being energized (*energeia*), (Ephesians 2:2), perhaps we could say driven, by the ruler of this godless world.

People who do not follow Christ often depict Christianity as confining, with a bunch of rules to follow. They argue that they, on the other hand, are free to do whatever they want. Paul argues very differently. In Romans 6:6, he literally calls us “slaves to sin.” He portrays a similar image here—we are under the control of the “ruler of the kingdom of the air,” the devil, and we are governed by our sinful nature and its cravings, desires and thoughts. This is not freedom. It is slavery—and spiritual death.

Paul emphasizes our spiritually lifeless human nature with the phrase, “those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:2). In the Greek, the word *disobedient* could literally be translated as “apathetic.” That is, we had no feelings toward God. Starvation goes through several stages, and during the last stage, hunger feelings vanish. Likewise, in the last stage of spiritual starvation is no hunger, no desire for God.

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Romans 3:23

We are also spiritually dead because we are “by nature objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). This phrase could literally be translated “children of wrath.” Paul’s point here is that we were born into a state of judgment because from birth we were spiritually cold and hard. It is like we were cars made with the ability only to turn left, not right. We have the freedom to go anywhere we want to as long as it’s some degree of left. That’s what sin has done to us—it’s taken away our ability to go the right way. When Christ comes into our lives, He fixes our steering wheel and frees us to be able to make right turns (pun intended!).

Sin is not a popular topic today. Author Allen Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* wrote that the only sin left in America is to say that there is sin. Most people today, including some Christians, do not believe in sin at all.

Disbelief in sin creates a problem. How do we explain the destructive way that people act? Where does evil come from? The utopian dream that better education and spreading affluence would do away with our inhumanity to each other is dying a painful death through the violent streets of our urban ghettos, the epidemic of guns and drugs in suburban high schools, and yet another century plagued with warfare.

The Apostle Paul stands in sharp contrast with our modern views. He knew that sin is real. We have only to look around to see its destructive effects on our lives and society. When Adam and Eve sinned, God found them hiding out in the bushes. As a race, we have been there ever since.

Spiritual Life: Ephesians 2:4-7

Having described spiritual death, Paul now unfolds spiritual life. God miraculously raised us from the dead and brought us new life in Christ.

Take a look back for a moment at Ephesians 1:19-20. Paul told us of God’s incredible power that raised Jesus from the dead: “the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” Here in Ephesians 2:4-7, Paul uses that exact same imagery: “God... made us alive with Christ..., raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” Through God’s miracle-working power, we are no longer slaves to sin and dead to God. The grip of evil is loosened and in its place is God’s everlasting power. God raises us from the dead, and not only that—He promises a place for us in heaven beside Christ!

Spiritual Grace: Ephesians 2:8-10

And why does God save us? Grace, grace, grace. Notice how many times Paul uses words like grace, mercy, love, and kindness in Ephesians 2:4-10. He even seems to stick it in the middle of other thoughts, so we’re sure not to miss it. Paul emphasizes that grace, this amazing gift from God, is at the very heart of our spiritual life. Think about it: We cannot escape death by our own hard work. If someone’s heart has stopped, it will only be through the efforts of medical personnel that it will start again. Likewise, our souls, which were spiritually dead, couldn’t be brought to life by our own efforts. But that’s the point where God decided to show His love and mercy to us. Even though we deserved wrath, we received mercy.

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

After this message of grace upon grace, where do good works fit in? Paul makes it clear that works have absolutely nothing to do with our salvation—“Not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9). But yet, we are still “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Think about it in this way: When we were still subjects of the “ruler of the kingdom of the air,” our work (or slave labor) was to do sinful things. Our sinful natures controlled us and made us be disobedient. But now, with our new life in Christ, we are children of God, and we are freed to be obedient and to do good things. We don’t do works in order to be saved, we do them because we are saved. It is now part of our very DNA—the way God re-created us to be as His children.

A Final Thought

These days, our culture thrives on instant gratification. “Have it your way” is no longer just an ad slogan; it is seen as a basic human right. Our culture tells us it is our right to fulfill any craving we have, whether physical, sexual, or emotional, whenever and however we would like.

How can we as Christians navigate this bombardment of desires? We just read about sinful desires, but we also hear in the Psalms that God will “give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4b). The hard part about being a Christian is discerning which desires are which! Even Jesus faced that decision when He was tempted in the desert. The devil told Him He could turn the stones into bread—to fulfill the very basic desire and necessity for food. But Jesus responded, “Man shall not live on bread alone” (Matthew 4:4).

Jesus placed God first, and His own desires second. We often forget the first part of Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Our first and highest responsibility is to seek God and then trust Him to fulfill all our desires. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6)!

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God’s Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and new life in Christ for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Read through Ephesians 2:1-3 slowly and picture yourself in each line of the verses. What does it look like to be spiritually dead? What controls you? What hope do you have?

3. Now read 2:4-10 and picture God reaching down to bring you back to life. See yourself, for the first time, opening your hands and receiving it from Him. What joys and reservations do you experience?

4. Read 2:3 again and think about the desires that come from our sinful nature.

Are there specific ones you struggle with?

What desires do you feel are truly the “desires of your heart”?

Stop for a moment and ask God for wisdom and discernment in dealing with desires.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read Ephesians 2:1 and 5. What are some of the differences between being spiritually dead and spiritually alive?

Which difference is most significant to you?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 3

Receiving Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:1-10

6. Traditionally it has been said that a Christian has three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. How are all three present in these verses?

9. Paul obviously wants to emphasize God's grace to the Ephesians—in fact he becomes almost redundant in this passage. What might have been getting in the way of the Ephesians hearing his message about grace?

Do you see these enemies around us today? Where?

10. It seems like grace is a message we hear every week in church, and yet, we Christians often live like we have to earn God's love. Why do you think that is?

7. The commentary quoted Allen Bloom saying that the only sin left in America is to say there is sin. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain why you feel that way. Briefly explain how you might state your belief to someone who doesn't follow Jesus. Can you give specific examples?

11. Paul lives and writes with an eye both to this present age and the one to come. According to Paul, what is God's purpose in saving us in Ephesians 2:7 and 10?

8. Reflecting on Ephesians 2:4-10, what do you see as God's role and what is the human role in moving from a condition of death to life?

12. Try to envision and describe some of the blessings of "the age to come."



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 3

Receiving Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:1-10

13. Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18, that the Ephesians might know the hope of their calling. Then in Ephesians 2:10, he says that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Describe what you think God calls all Christians to do.

What do think God is calling you (personally) to do?

What do you think God is calling us as a church community to do?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Martin Luther led the Reformation of the church by recovering Paul’s teaching that we are justified by faith alone. He was uncomfortable with the statement in James that “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). How might you use Ephesians 2:8-10 to respond to Luther’s concerns?

15. This passage has been described as one of the most concise complete expressions of the Gospel in all the Scriptures. How might you use this passage to explain to someone why Jesus Christ is the only way back to a relationship with God?

Scripture for Meditation

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Ephesians 2:4-5



you are all sons of god
through faith in Jesus
Christ.

Galatians 3:26

Introduction

National Public Radio once ran a story about two churches which merged in order to share resources, personnel, building space—even the lives of their people. Bringing together two different churches with separate histories and experiences is difficult at best, but hardly newsworthy. What caught the headlines about this merger was that one congregation was white and the other African American.

Bringing together two different groups of people, whether in a church or a country, can be a challenge: differing races, histories, cultures, languages or dialects, traditions, worship styles, political preferences, even differing levels of education can create friction and discord.

The history of the world is a record of wars between nations, between parties and regions of a country, and between classes of people. Even in those rare cases where there is a merging of sorts between differing groups of people, underlying resistance and prejudice show up as snide comments and power plays.

The early Church faced this conflict between groups when the Spirit of Jesus began to fall upon the Gentiles, inviting the world of nations into a fold once centered in the life of the Hebrews. Despite Jesus' commission to go to all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20), Peter still had to be told three times in a vision that God did not consider Gentiles unclean and that he was to proclaim the Gospel to them (Acts 10:9-23).

Similarly, the Jews were the primary focus of Paul's early ministry, and synagogues became stepping stones for the expansion of the Gospel throughout Asia Minor (Romans 1:16; Acts 14:1, 17:2, 18:4). Paul himself, once a devout and dedicated Jew of high standing and education, carried special credentials to reach the Hebrew people (Philippians 3:4-6). It was God's plan, however, to send him to the world of the Gentiles and to spread the message of life to places where the name of Christ had never been named (Acts 9:15, 13:46-47).

As Paul's mission to the Gentiles began to flourish, the early Church found itself embroiled in a conflict that required a special council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Both before the Jerusalem Council and in letters to young churches, Paul spent a great deal of his energy developing communities of believers that included both Jews and Gentiles. Paul's letters to the churches in Galatia, Rome, and Ephesus—and to some extent all of his epistles—addressed issues that came to the fore as the saving grace of Jesus Christ brought together distinct people from many walks of life.

Many Jews became angry that Paul helped open the door of faith in a manner that they felt compromised their beliefs. Missing the part about Christ being the long-predicted and awaited Messiah, some Jewish people treated Paul with contempt and hatred. Eventually their hatred became so violent that the Romans stepped in, and Paul was forced to endure several years of incarceration and eventually, imprisonment in Rome (Acts 21-28).

Facing Our Issues

The Ephesian Church had to face the uncomfortable shock that God's Spirit called together both

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Jews and Gentiles to live together as one community under the Lordship of Christ. In Ephesians 2:11-22, step by step, Paul unfolds how God has achieved this reconciliation and how both people groups were now to live, worship, and serve their God as one—different instruments brought into harmonious unity through God's orchestration.

Paul begins this section by naming the prominent outward symbol behind the internal conflict: circumcision (Ephesians 2:11). This sign of the Jewish covenant had been for generations the cherished proof of membership in the privileged community of the chosen people (Genesis 17:11; Acts 7:8). For a Jew to say to a Gentile, “You are uncircumcised” was to say, “You are an outsider.”

There are three words that Paul uses to describe the Gentiles' “outsider” status from a Jewish perspective: “foreigners” (Ephesians 2:12,19)—those who are temporary visitors, but couldn't stay and didn't belong; “far away” (Ephesians 2:13, 17)—those who had never been near the homeland; and “aliens” (Ephesians 2:19)—those who lived inside the country but who had no legal status. No matter how you stacked the deck, from a Jewish perspective, the Gentiles were out of the game.

Further, Jews and Gentiles could never be united because of “the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14). This refers to the wall in the Jewish temple separating the outside court of Gentiles from the temple proper. There was a notice on the wall which said, “No foreigner may enter the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

We can look back today and frown at the hostile and smug attitude the Jews demonstrated toward the inclusion of outsiders, but we must remember the monumental changes occurring in their lives and in their place and practice of worship. For centuries, the Hebrews were uniquely God's people, blessed by God with a covenant, and given promises for the future (Ephesians 2:12). In contrast, the Gentiles were estranged from the citizenship of Israel and without God. Before the Lord's coming, the Gentiles were Christ-less, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and to a large extent, God-less.

A New Temple

Having described the problems of alienation and hostility between Jews and Gentiles, Paul points to the solution. The Jews had been blessed to be a blessing, and Jesus was the one who bridged the gap. Paul enumerates several things that Christ accomplished:

1. He brought near those who were far away (Ephesians 2:13).
2. He became our peace by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14).
3. He reconciled both peoples to God (2:16), making “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15).
4. He came and preached peace to all people (Ephesians 2:17).

Christ has made a new way to God for both Jew and Gentile—not through the law, but through

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:18a

His flesh and through the cross. Now both groups have a shared access to God. The Greek word for “access” (*prosagogeis*) conveys the rich image of a *Prosagogeis*, the official in an Oriental or Middle Eastern court who conducted visitors into the king’s presence.

Having reminded the Gentile believers that they were once outside the covenant community, then brought near by the blood of Christ, he opens before them the treasury of riches graciously given to them through the sacrifice of Christ. Gentiles are now fellow citizens instead of strangers, built together with the Jews to become the very temple of God. Established on the firm foundation of the apostles, prophets and Jesus Christ Himself, they are the very dwelling place of God’s Holy Spirit.

Thus the thought of Chapter 2 becomes a unified whole. It begins with everyone, Jew and Gentile, being dead to God (Ephesians 2:1), and ends with both alive to God, who graciously dwells in their midst (Ephesians 2:22).

Final Thought

In 1968, four days before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. preached a message in which he declared eleven o’clock on Sunday morning to be “the most segregated hour of America.” It needn’t be that way; Christ has removed the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14).

The kingdom of God transcends language, race, culture, and every area of difference between the peoples of the earth. When Christ died, He gave himself up for all the nations, after which He commanded His disciples to bring the message of life to everyone (Matthew 28:18-20). The work of the Church will not be complete until representatives from every tribe, language, people, and nation have surrendered their hearts and lives to Christ the King (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 5:9).

Think about it: we will be living together with all the peoples of the world for eternity. May God help us find new ways to build visible fellowship among members of God’s kingdom here and now as well.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God’s Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and new life in Christ for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Write down different words or phrases you discover that express *exclusion*.

Now record words or phrases you find that express *inclusion*.

3. There was a great deal of hostility between Jew and Gentile that God had to address through Christ. Are there ways in which you have experienced exclusion either because of race or some other social prejudice?

How did it affect you?

4. Has your relationship with Christ helped you face issues of social exclusion and inclusion? If so, how?

5. Are there ways in which you have helped cause exclusion for another person or group of people—perhaps because of race, ethnicity, economics, language, or another reason?

Spend time in reflection and prayer asking God to give you guidance on how you could respond in a way that is pleasing to Him. Write down insights on the next steps you might take.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 4

The Surprise of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:11-22

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Have you ever witnessed exclusion being practiced in a church?

In what ways has your congregation or group practiced inclusion?

7. “Without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12) is a phrase which paints a bleak picture. Where have you seen people without hope or without God these days?

8. Read Ephesians 2:13-18 aloud, and think about the spiritual privileges that are given to us in Christ. For which of these blessings do you especially thank God? Why?

9. The covenants of the Old Testament centered on the promise to the Jews, “I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). According to Ephesians 2:11-12, how had this great promise to the Jewish nation become a problem for the Gentiles?

10. Are you aware of people today who are excluded from the Church, in general, by no fault of their own?

If so, as you describe them, discuss also ways they might be welcomed into local Christian fellowships.

11. Because of Jesus’ work, His Church is supposed to be a place of social and racial reconciliation. How does your church experience reflect that? What needs improving?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 4

The Surprise of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 2:11-22

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Before our faith in Christ, we were foreigners and aliens (Ephesians 2:19). Through Christ we became citizens and members. How are citizens and members different from foreigners and aliens?

14. The great gift of Jesus Christ is that we can all have access to God (Ephesians 2:18). To capture the sense of this great privilege and its implications, imagine how you might feel if you were just outside the door of God's throne room waiting your turn to enter. What are your thoughts? Why not express them to God in prayer?

How should this truth influence our relationships with other Christians? With non-Christians?

13. Complete this thought: "A time when a local church or group of churches really felt to me like a visible demonstration of God's Kingdom was..."

Scripture for Meditation

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20



Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12b

Introduction

The Bible is like a mystery novel, and we get to peek at the last chapter. In the juiciest mysteries, we follow the author's plot twists and turns, and we think we can guess whodunnit. But inevitably at the end, there's a revelation we didn't expect. As the mystery is revealed, we go back to the beginning and realize all the obvious clues along the way that we completely missed. The whole story is different when we know how it ends.

David Steinmetz gives us this great image to use as we read Scripture. He points out that we have to read all of Scripture in light of the end—the revelation of Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophecy takes on a whole new meaning, now that we know what clues to look for. God's redemption of the Jews in the Old Testament now connects seamlessly to Christ's redemption of all people in the New Testament.

This is very clear now, but it was pretty shocking to those for whom Christianity was new. The Jewish Christians of Paul's time were still trying to make sense of the plot twist at the end of the book. Why is God reaching out to the Gentiles when we are the chosen people? Did God change His mind about who is chosen?

Paul speaks to us in much the same way that the great fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes speaks to his assistant, Dr. Watson. Holmes would usually say “Elementary, my dear Watson,” and then explain all the intricacies and clues missed along the way. Paul does much the same in explaining the Gospel. He affirms that the gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed God's eternal plan, not an afterthought. God was working out His plan in His way and unfolding it in His time. And now, through Paul, God is giving us a glimpse of the last chapter—the solution to this mystery.

Paul's Situation

As Paul begins this section, he is about to start a prayer (which we see continued in Ephesians 3:14). Before he prays, though, he feels compelled to emphasize the Gentiles' true place within God's unfolding mystery. Even though Paul has spent a large part of Chapter 2 on God's grace toward the Gentiles, he wants to impress upon them that they were part of God's plan all along.

What diverts Paul is his reference to his current situation. He is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” (Ephesians 3:1). As Paul writes this letter, he is under house arrest in Rome, accused of disturbing the peace by taking a Gentile into the forbidden temple precincts in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-25:12). Jews in Jerusalem rioted not only because of the suspected temple violation, but because of rumors being spread about Paul's aggressive religious involvement with the Gentiles.

Although Paul is in prison for his ministry to the Gentiles, he is not unsettled or anxious. He is a prisoner of the Roman emperor, but he writes that he is really “a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” His belief in the sovereign goodness of God is unshakable. Paul is confident that he is in prison because it was the Lord's wise choice for him to be there—a calculated element of God's mystery plot.

For my eyes have seen
Your salvation, which You
have prepared in the sight
of all people...

Luke 2:30-31

Paul's Responsibility & Insight

Paul feels deeply responsible to reveal this mystery to the Gentiles—to take them out of the court of the condemned and introduce them to their lawyer and redeemer, Jesus. In Ephesians 3:2, Paul reminds the Gentiles that he was given the charge to administer God's grace to them. The word for *administration* literally means “responsibility for the affairs of the house.” In this new house of God, the Church, Paul sees himself as the one to make sure both Jews and Gentiles are made welcome.

Paul marvels that he was chosen for this responsibility. It was certainly an unexpected surprise in which he was literally knocked to the ground and the course of his life totally redirected (Acts 9). This astonishing plot twist revealed Jesus to Paul, and it also showed him Jesus' love for all people of all nations. The word *revelation* in Ephesians 3:3 means uncovering. The new spiritual temple was previously cloaked, and now, God has taken off the cover for Paul to see and then to proclaim—the mystery was finally solved.

This newly uncovered truth, Paul emphasizes, has been part of God's plan all along—even though no one fully understood how all the clues would come together to solve the mystery. Other generations did indeed know that God would reach out to the Gentiles. When God called Abraham, he told Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). Spiritually perceptive people knew God's blessing was for more than just the Jews. The old man Simeon, when he saw the eight-day-old Christ child dedicated at the temple, took Jesus in his arms and declared that He was “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32).

What is new—that which nobody expected—is that God would create this new entity that brought both Jews and Gentiles together on the same footing! This was totally shocking!

In Ephesians 3:6, Paul lays out the mystery explicitly: “That through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Paul explains this new creation by using three words that begin with word *syn* in the Greek which could be translated as “co-”. Jews and Gentiles are “co-heirs”, “co-members”, and “co-sharers.” There is no hierarchy; there are no more walls. All are brought together in Christ.

As he goes on, Paul struggles for words to express how thrilling this revelation is. He writes of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” and the “manifold” (literally “multicolored” in the Greek) wisdom of God. As scholars try to capture Paul's thought here, they start to sound like excited literary critics trying to get their comments on the back cover of the novel. One commentary says, “The wisdom of God displayed in creation and embodied in Christ is a many splendored thing, iridescent with constantly unfolding beauties.” John Stott writes, “The riches of Christ are unsearchable, inexplorably, untraceable, unfathomable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable and incalculable.”

The shock of the unveiling of this mystery extends even into the heavenly realms. Paul writes that now it is even uncovered for “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:10)—not even they had been able to read the last chapter of the book until then.

...and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8b

Paul's Humility

As Paul uncovers the great mystery, he avoids the smugness often common among fiction's detective heroes. He writes of himself as “less than the least of all God's people” (Ephesians 3:8). He is conscious that he is revealing a secret that God had showed him, not something he figured out by himself. He is just walking in the works that God has prepared for him to do, and so he can't take credit for solving the mystery.

His greatest hope is that as the secret is revealed, the church will take up the message and show it to others. He explains that God's “intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known” (Ephesians 3:10). He longs to see the Church revealing the mystery not only in word but also in deed. He wants the world to see that only God's incredible power could break the power of sin and also destroy the dividing wall between nations. He wants the end of the story to be obvious to all who see it lived out.

Paul's Concern

At the end of this section, Paul is once again reminded of his imprisonment (Ephesians 3:13). Paul is concerned that his imprisonment might be unsettling to the Gentiles. What good does it do to be Sherlock Holmes if you're trapped in jail? Paul asks them “not to be discouraged” (Ephesians 3:13). He assures them that his sufferings are their “glory.” We are reminded of Paul's letter to the Romans, where he writes, “we share in [Christ's] sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory” (Romans. 8:17b). Even in the midst of suffering in these earthly realms, we can be assured of God's strength, power, and victory in the heavenly realms. Even in the midst of a seemingly impossible mystery, justice will be done!

Final Thought

Both the Jews and Gentiles were surprised at the mystery Paul uncovered. Are we surprised? Most of the time, it seems like we think, “Oh, I knew that,” then we set down the mystery novel and go about our daily lives. But this is not just a novel—it's real life! Can people look at our lives, as individuals and as congregations, and see this mystery revealed in us? Do people think of the Church around the world and see the miraculous way God is making the many one? We know how the story ends. God wins! And now may we—His Church—live and act in the confidence we have in Christ's victory.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 5

The Mystery of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 3:1-13

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches through the mystery of grace for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. The commentary suggested thinking of the Bible as a mystery novel. How might this help you understand Scripture?

3. Over and over in this passage, Paul uses the word mystery. Describe in your own words the secret Paul is revealing.

4. Part of the mystery Paul revealed is God's joining together Jews and Gentiles in one body. This was a surprise even to the spiritual beings in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 3:10). In ways they had not glimpsed before, they saw the "manifold" wisdom of God. (The Greek word translated as *manifold* can also mean "multicolored.") Take a moment to imagine what God's manifold wisdom might look like. What expressions of God's multicolored wisdom do you see in your church? Your community?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Paul is confident in God's mystery, even though he himself is in prison. He sees his imprisonment as the Lord's doing and even says it is the "glory" of the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:13). Explain how you think Paul understands his suffering could lead to their glory.

Have you experienced a time when you felt that God was using a hardship in your life for His glory? If not in your own life, perhaps in someone else's? Describe.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 5

The Mystery of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 3:1-13

6. In Ephesians 3:6, Paul reveals the mystery that the Gentiles and Jews are now as co-heirs, co-members, and co-sharers in the promise of Christ. What adjustments might such a revelation require in the heart and mind of a Jewish person of the first century?

How would you describe them?

What adjustments might that require in the heart and mind of a Greek or Roman in the church at Ephesus?

8. Paul uses the word “grace” to describe not only God’s love for us but also the gift of being able to proclaim this mystery, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For many of us, telling others about Jesus can be a daunting task. What are some of the obstacles we face when sharing the Gospel?

Is there a person or group with whom you find it difficult to envision being a co-heir or co-member through Christ?

What are there helpful things we can learn from Paul’s attitude and actions?

7. Paul runs out of words to describe the riches we have in Christ (Ephesians 3:8). What are some of the spiritual riches you see in this passage?

9. The mystery of the Church is that through Christ we all, from every race and culture, can have access to God. How does Paul describe the manner or the way in which we can approach God (Ephesians 3:12)?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 5

The Mystery of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 3:1-13

What sorts of experiences, regrets, or emotions might hinder you from approaching God in the way Paul describes?

Are there ways your church could better participate in this diverse body of Christ? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. A church in Kenya has been working for years to establish partnerships with other churches around the globe. They describe the body of Christ through a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12:14-20:

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the American church should say, "Because I am not an African, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the European church should say, "Because I am not an Asian, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were one nationality, where would the sense of vibrancy be? If the whole body were made up of only people from one continent, where would the sense of color be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. There are many parts, but one body.

In what ways do we see this mystery revealed in the Church today? In what ways is it hidden?

Scripture for Meditation

In Him and through faith in Him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 3:12



Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.

Jeremiah 33:3

Introduction

Ever been to a boring prayer meeting? Have you ever felt like your prayers were hitting the floor instead of rising to heaven? Have you felt deeply disappointed that your prayers were not answered? In this lesson, Paul provides keen insight about prayer for times such as these.

Oswald Chambers once said, “Every time we pray, our horizon is altered, our attitude to things is altered, not sometimes but every time, and the amazing thing is that we don’t pray more.”

At the end of the third chapter in Ephesians, we find insight from Paul that can stir us to pray more. Ephesians 3:14-21 is a continuation of the prayer Paul offered in Ephesians 1:15-23. It is brimming with energy, passion, and purpose. Even though Paul is writing from prison (Ephesians 3:1), he celebrates God’s ability to do “more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

The Greek word for *more than* is the same word from which we get the word “hyper”. The point is that we can have great expectations for what God will do when we pray. Like the Lord’s Prayer, this prayer of Paul’s can be a model for us that will deepen and enrich our prayer times.

Praying Our Beliefs

In the time in which the New Testament was written, authors put their climax in the middle of their work. This is not the way we write or speak in our culture and so we miss it. But catching the climax is important because it helps us see the point of all that has been written or said. You can see that this prayer is the climax of Ephesians not only because of the content and emotional tone of the prayer, but because Paul closes it by launching into a benediction (Ephesians 3:20-21), something which we only do at the conclusion of a worship service or a public event.

In his prayer, Paul makes a climactic summary of everything he has said so far about God’s riches in Christ. In effect, not only is Paul praying in faith, he is praying his faith. This model prayer shows us that we can frame our requests in expressions of faith in God’s fatherhood (Ephesians 3:14), in the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18), and because of God’s power and glory (Ephesians:20). At the end of this prayer, he drops his requests all together and just celebrates (Ephesians:20-21)!

This progression from intercession to celebration is noteworthy. If our prayers are primarily limited to intercession, we can find ourselves struggling to keep coming up with an ever-growing list of requests. Such an approach to prayer can become exhausting. But when we begin to celebrate who God is and what He has already done for us, the confidence that He will also hear our petitions is redoubled, as is our joy.

Praying to the Triune God

Some commentators see an underlying structure built around three petitions which each imply a “so that”. Paul’s first petition is so that you may be strengthened by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). His second petition is so that you may be strengthened to grasp Christ’s love (Ephesians 3:18). His third petition is so that you may be filled with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). Note that each of these petitions concludes with an appeal to one of the members of the Trinity: the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), Christ (Ephesians 3:18), and God (Ephesians:19).

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us...

Romans 8:26b

Our vision of God is what powers our prayers. If it is not clear to Whom we are praying, then our prayers will be flat. Someone once said, “God is not boring; if we find our prayers boring it may be that we are not praying to God.” We are not just praying to *a god*, we are praying to *the God*—the God who parted the Red Sea and who raised Jesus from the dead! We ought to expect our prayers to have vitality and energy as we connect with the living God, our Creator and Redeemer.

A.W. Tozer wrote that what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Perhaps we could rephrase it this way, “What comes into our minds when we pray is the most important thing about our prayer.” Paul’s mind is filled with thoughts of the triune God. His passion in prayer is directly connected to his faith in the Father, Son, and Spirit, and he prays to each one with a respectful familiar confidence. It is this connection, by faith, that powered his prayers.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon compared the strength of prayer focused on the true God above with the feebleness of human-centered intercession through an analogy with waterwheels:

“There are overshot waterwheels and undershot. In the one case the motive power falls from above; in the other the water turns the wheel from below. The first is more powerful. Men, like wheels, are turned by forces from various sources, and too many move by the undercurrent—mercenary desires and selfish aims drive them. But the good man’s driving force falls from above; let him endeavor to prove to all men that this is the most mighty force in existence.”

The Riches of God's Power

In prayer we often seek God’s intervention for a specific purpose. We might pray for:

- power to heal others;
- strength to excel in our work;
- ability to touch another life for good; and
- supernatural wisdom to guide a decision.

But Paul’s focus is not only toward power for a purpose, but that we may have power to know a person—that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17). Rightly understood, prayer is our vital connection with God for every circumstance and challenge in life. We should pray not only for God’s help but for God’s presence through which help is made real for every need.

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes, “Think of the last thing you prayed about—were you devoted to your desire or to God? Determined to get some gift of the Spirit or to get at God? ‘Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.’ The point of asking is that you may get to know God better. ‘Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.’ Keep praying in order to get a perfect understanding of God Himself.”

The best way to know God is with the help of God. Luke records that the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus failed to understand what Jesus was teaching them until He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). Likewise, as Peter confesses that

Let us then approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16b

Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus tells him “this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17b).

This means that our prayers ought to include regular requests for spiritual power so that what we read in the Scriptures and what we are taught in books and sermons about God may penetrate our hearts.

The Riches of God's Love

It also takes power for us to begin to grasp the riches of God's love. Paul prays that we “may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge”(Ephesians 3:18-19). If the first and primary purpose of prayer is to know God, then the first and greatest result of prayer will be the experience of God's love, because God is love (1 John 4:8).

It is one thing to know about God's love but quite another to experience its full dimensions: greater than all of our needs, broader than our wildest dreams, deeper than our wounds and failures, higher than the heavens. Oh the riches of the love of God that can be ours constantly if we will draw regularly from the treasures of the kingdom through prayer!

Conclusion

Our ability to live as children of the Almighty King is directly related to the practice of God-centered prayer through Jesus Christ. Do you draw daily from the riches of heaven through prayer?

The story is told of two pastors' wives who sat mending their husbands' pants. One of them said to the other,

“My poor John, he is so discouraged in his church work. He said just the other day he was considering resigning. It seems nothing goes right for him.”

The other replied, “Why, my husband was saying just the opposite. He is so enthused, it seems like the Lord is closer to him than ever before.”

A hushed silence fell as they continued to mend the trousers; one patching the seat and the other the knees.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 6

A Prayer for Spiritual Riches II | Eph. 3:14-21

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches for which you are especially thankful to God.

3. What is there about God and the Christian faith causes you to be especially grateful?

2. Paul begins his prayer with the words, “For this reason” (Ephesians 3:14). This statement refers back to all that he has written to the Ephesians so far. Look back over the first three chapters and write down at least one reason from each chapter as to why Paul might be inspired to pray such an enthusiastic prayer:

4. How might you summarize the tone of this prayer (Ephesians 3:14-21)?

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. In the opening words of this prayer, Paul refers to God as “the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:14-15). How might praying to God as Father help or hinder your prayers?



6a. We pray to God the Father as members of our families and as members of the Church, the Christian family. How might that sense of belonging to God and to each other affect the way we pray?

6b. How do you benefit by praying with others (Matthew 18:20)?

6c. How do you benefit by praying for others?

7. Paul prays that “together with all the saints” the Ephesians might be able to grasp the full dimensions of Christ’s love (Ephesians 3:18). What have you learned about God’s love from the Christian family that you can’t learn by yourself?

8. How can a small group be especially helpful in learning about the love of God?

9. Read aloud Paul’s description of the measureless love of God (Ephesians 3:18-19). Complete this thought: “If the Church around the world really believed that God’s love was this great, such belief could change...”

(Describe what might change in our lives, in our church, or even around the world.)

10. Paul writes of being strengthened in the inner person (Ephesians 3:16). How would you describe a person with inner strength?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 6

A Prayer for Spiritual Riches II | Eph. 3:14-21

11. Have you experienced an inner strengthening in response to prayer? If so, explain how it came about.

14. What connections can you find between the Colossians prayer and Paul's prayer in:

a. Ephesians 1:15-23?

b. Ephesians 3:14-21?

12. Paul concludes his prayer and the first half of his letter with a benediction that could be described as the climactic summary of the entire book (Ephesians 3:20-21). According to this benediction, what is the main point of Ephesians?

15. Describe several ways that your prayers will be changed or enhanced through a study of Paul's prayers.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Paul's prayer in Ephesians is similar to the one he prays for the Colossian church (Colossians 1:9-12). Read the Colossians prayer. What does he ask for?

Scripture for Meditation

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Ephesians 3:17-18



No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him...

1 Corinthians 2:9

Introduction

Deep inside most of us is a little wish...a dream that maybe someday we too might be one of the lucky few to win the lottery! It's fun to think of all the things we could buy, the places we could go, the gifts we could give. But we don't often see what happens to real lottery winners. Yes, some go on to live contented lives of leisure, but for others, their lucky lottery win turns into more of a curse. Their marriages frequently end in divorce. Family members sue each other. Their lives are torn apart by something that was supposed to be a blessing.

In our study of Ephesians, we have heard Paul describe to us over and over the unfathomable spiritual riches God has given us. We are children of the King! We have hit the spiritual jackpot! But now that we begin to understand how much has been given to us, Paul wants to make sure that we don't let these newfound blessings pull us apart and that we don't squander our riches on every new fad and fancy. He wants to see us grow and mature in our faith, growing together and building each other up as a body.

Paul opens this chapter by urging the Ephesians to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). What does it look like to live a life that is truly worthy of this lavish gift from God? As we go through this passage and the remaining chapters of Ephesians, we will find Paul's specific, concrete, and practical advice about how we can live our lives worthy of this lavish blessing and calling we have received.

Worthy in Character (Ephesians 4:1-3)

As we open chapter 4, Paul has just finished his exuberant benediction about our God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine. But now, in the next sentence, he is back to describing himself as a “prisoner for the Lord” (Ephesians 4:1). Even though we are spiritual millionaires, we may have to live as paupers here on Earth. Using himself as an example, Paul wants to demonstrate the character qualities of humility, submission, and faith. Even in hardship, he reveals his faith in God's plan for him without a trace of resentment or bitterness.

As often as Paul has reminded us of our blessings in this letter, he has also urged us toward unity in the body of Christ. He picks up that theme again, as he now spells out the character traits necessary for the honor of Church membership (Ephesians 4:2). He calls for humility, meekness, patience, and forbearance. The Greek word for “humility,” *tapeinosophrene*, was rarely used outside the New Testament. It means “to think about oneself in a lowly manner.” This characteristic was rejected and despised by the Romans, who aspired to personal glory and dignity. Paul wants the Ephesians to assume a posture directly opposed to their culture's values. But to do so, he reminds them, it is especially important to support one another, not with gritted teeth, but in love.

These four character traits: humility, meekness, patience, and forbearance are strategically chosen because without them, the “bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) cannot be maintained. The use of the word *bond* in the Greek is a play on Paul's status as a prisoner. As he is a prisoner, *des-mois*, for the Lord, they are fellow-prisoners, *sun-desmois*, with each other, bound not by bars of steel, but by a commitment to peace with each other.

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

1 John 2:6

Where earthly wealth often divides and alienates, Paul wants us to work hard to make sure our spiritual wealth draws us together—even when some of us are difficult to live with!

Worthy in Unity (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Paul urges us toward oneness, reminding us that the very heart of our faith is founded around the unity of One God. He waxes poetic as he describes seven *ones*: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.

Looking at the Church over the years, the unity based on the seven ones can be hard to discern. For Christians and for the world, it is hard to see that there is only one body. For the first 1,000 years of Christian history, there was only one Church, though it had different centers of leadership and influence. In 1054, the tensions between the Western and Eastern Church broke up the organization of the Church into two branches, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. The Roman Catholic branch fragmented again 500 years later with the Protestant Reformation. And immediately the Protestants began to divide like multiplying cells. There are now literally thousands of denominations of Protestants around the world.

In light of that division of the body, it is hard for the watching world to discern that we Christians believe there is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...” (Ephesians 4:5-6).

Even though the Church is organizationally fragmented, it doesn't mean we can ignore Paul's call to be one body. Yes, we are divided into different organizational structures, but there must still be a spiritual unity that ties us together. Each generation of Christians is to do its part to be worthy of the calling by living by these foundational *ones* and bringing peace where it is possible. In all we do, we need to cling to our unity under the headship of Christ, which allows us to be multicultural, multiracial, multi-generational and multi-organizational. We are many parts but one body—like our US coins say, *E pluribus unum*—out of many, one.

Worthy in Leadership (Ephesians 4:7-12)

After this poem on unity, Paul now reminds us that each of us has a role to play in the body of Christ. Whether we are the hands, shoulders, mouth, or eyes, each of us has been given a special gift of grace that we are to share with the body.

In other lists of spiritual gifts (as in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12), Paul includes both the gifts of leaders in the Church and the gifts of those who work behind the scenes. In this list, he focuses specifically on leadership gifts, the gifts through which the ascended Lord is establishing His Church and feeding His sheep.

The focus on leadership gifts is not to demean the importance of the rest of the members of the Church, but so that the entire membership can grow to become worthy of our calling. Now that we have been endowed with these spiritual riches, we need to learn to use them wisely. In Ephesians 4:12, Paul says the purpose of the gifted leaders is to *equip* God's people for works of ministry and to build up the Body of Christ. The word for *equip* is a rich word meaning to “fix, complete, restore, repair, and make perfect.” Those called to lead are fulfilling their purpose

...there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

1 Corinthians 12:25

when their ministry influences others to engage in service, causing the Church constantly to be renewed, developed, and completed.

Worthy in Maturity (Ephesians 4:13-16)

A sailboat with its sails unfurled can be a beautiful sight. The sails fill with the wind as the boat skims across the water. But one of the most important parts of a sailboat lies below the water's surface: the keel. The keel is a long board that extends below the bottom of the boat and keeps the boat from flipping over under the force of the wind.

Paul has seen too many Christians who have failed to mature and are tossed around like a sailboat without a keel. The first interesting teaching or dynamic speaker that comes along can fill their sails with wind but end up knocking them off course. This frenetic aimlessness is overcome by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Actually the Greek is not “speaking the truth,” but *truthing*, which suggests not only speaking truthfully, but acting truthfully as well. The result of this truthing is that we are connected to Christ and grow together.

Individualism—charting our own course—is the mark of immaturity, but those who are growing in the Lord are the ones who are growing together. We are literally being woven together, each joint and sinew connecting to build up the body of Christ under our head, Jesus. This happens as each individual member does his or her part and the result is a healthy, growing Christian community, one that is worthy of its calling.

Final Thought

The internet is full of advice about how to win the lottery and what to do with the money. But a group called Prosperity Partners includes with their advice, “Seek personal growth before financial growth. Remember, prosperity is a state of mind, not an amount of money.” If our state of mind is to acknowledge how truly rich we are in Christ, then we will seek personal/spiritual growth, church unity, and all of the wondrous expressions of our wealth in Christ as described in this lesson.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 7

Growing Together in Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and spiritual growth for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2a. Read Ephesians 4:1-6. Paul appeals to the believers in Ephesus to live a worthy life. According to these verses, what does a worthy life look like?

2b. Are there people in your church or community that seem to you to live a worthy life? What is it about them that stands out?

3. Look at the list of gifts in Ephesians 4:11. How do you see those gifts lived out in your church? Has someone using one or more of these leadership gifts made a contribution to your spiritual growth? In what way?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Paul begins this call to live a worthy life right after he has prayed a glorious prayer about God's abundant love and blessings. How do/should the blessings we receive impact the way we live?

5a. Paul gives a list of *ones* in Ephesians 4:4-6. How do these *ones* provide a foundation for Christian community?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 7

Growing Together in Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

5b. How do these *ones* reflect the character of the Trinity?

9. How might your congregation work on these areas?

6. Are there particular *ones* your church may need to work on or learn more about? Explain.

10a. Paul says that there are waves and winds that beat against the church to undermine its growth (Ephesians 4:14). What teachings and deceitful schemes have you seen rise against the Church in recent years?

7. Unity was an issue for the first Christians. It has been a problem for 2,000 years. Where and when have you seen problems of unity in your Christian experience?

10b. How have such forces of misdirection affected you and your church?

8. How is unity and maturity in the Church achieved according to Paul (Ephesians 4:11-16)?

10c. What are some ways your church could better prepare to fend off these attacks?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 7

Growing Together in Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

11. How is speaking the truth in love (or truthing) to build up the Church (Ephesians 4:15) different from the actions of those who are conspiring to misdirect the Church (Ephesians 4:14)? What does “truthing” look like?

14. If you are in a group setting, describe what gifts you see in each other. (If you are doing this study alone, reflect on what gifts you see in your loved ones.)

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. What point do you think Paul is trying to make by his parenthetical comment in Ephesians 4:9-10?

13. Take a moment to read through the lists of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12. Which gifts do you think you have? How might you use your gifts to build up the Church?

Scripture for Meditation

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

Ephesians 4:4-6



You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

Romans 8:9a

Introduction

The 19th century Anglo-Indian novelist William Makepeace Thackeray said, “Life is a mirror: if you frown at it, it frowns back; if you smile, it returns the greeting.” In this lesson, Paul shows us how to approach life with a smile, confident that we share in the riches of God’s love and grace. What follows are four steps toward the abundant life Christ offers (John 10:10b). The word *live* occurs four times in our text, each showing an important aspect of true Kingdom living:

Ephesians 4:17 “...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...” (Live in righteousness.)

Ephesians 5:2 “...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Live in love.)

Ephesians 5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...” (Live in the light.)

Ephesians 5:15 “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...” (Live in wisdom.)

The Greek word *peripateo* (translated “live” in the NIV) literally means “walk” and refers to the way we order our behavior. Are you and I really living in righteousness, love, light, and wisdom? As we delve into this lesson, Paul will show us the way.

Living in Righteousness

Paul wants the newly converted Gentile pagans to understand that they must live differently now that they have become Christians. Up until this point, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians would have been much more difficult for a Jewish Christian convert to accept than a Gentile convert. Paul has been emphasizing that the Church replaces and fulfills the rights and privileges that had been accorded to the Jews as God’s chosen people. Now, however, it is the Gentiles’ turn to squirm. In no uncertain terms, Paul stresses that the conduct that had been “normal” for a pagan, is not fitting for those who have been chosen in Christ.

Throughout this section, there is an underlying theme of contrasts. Put bluntly, the worthy walk of a Christian is totally opposite to the walk of pagans. He makes his point loudly in Ephesians 4:17, “I tell you this, and insist on it...”

Paul’s description of the behavior of the unbeliever in Ephesians 4:18-19 is stinging. He labels them as:

- darkened in their understanding;
- separated from the life of God;
- ones whose hearts are hardened; and
- people who have given themselves over to sensuality.

In describing the arrogant and sensual behavior of the Gentiles, Paul is, of course, general-

Out of the same mouth
 come praise and cursing.
 My brothers, this should
 not be.

James 3:10

izing. Certainly not all Gentiles acted this way. However, based on the ethics and philosophy of paganism that all Gentiles were steeped in, such behavior was not uncommon, nor even necessarily frowned upon.

In Ephesians 5:3-4, Paul paints in vivid colors the behavior that must be avoided. These can be grouped into two categories—sins of lust and sins of the mouth.

Sins of Lust

sexual immorality
 impurity
 greed

Sins of the Mouth

obscenity
 foolish talk
 course joking

Our human tendency is to be repelled by the grosser and more obvious sins like sexual immorality while overlooking the subtler failings of the tongue and heart. Christian author and scholar C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*: “For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.”

Paul insists that all who claim to be Christians must strive wholeheartedly to live like Christ. Righteousness should be the mark our lives, inside and out. We must “put off falsehood” aside as we examine our lives (Ephesians 4:25-28), our words (Ephesians 4:29), and even our attitudes (Ephesians 4:31-32). To be lax in our pursuit of this call to righteous living is to grieve the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).

Living in Love

There are two ways we can respond to the sometimes overwhelming challenge to live righteously. The first is to buckle down and try harder to be good people. The second is to humble ourselves and surrender to the Spirit of God, through whom God’s love is made real to us and through us (Romans 5:5b). Paul urges us to embrace the second option:

“...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Only love can spur us on to true Christ-like living. When love is our motive, we will be compelled to do what is best for others, for God, and for ourselves—love is the heart of a righteous life.

Living in the Light

When we are filled with God’s love, we will walk by His light. In Ephesians 5:8, Paul states, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...” The source of human darkness is described by Paul in 4:17-19. Unbelievers have darkened minds and hardened hearts (like a hardened calcification grown over a broken bone, or like marble).

But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:15-16

The result of such mental darkness and hard-heartedness is that they engage in unbridled behavior and are consumed with sensual desires.

If love is the heart aspect for living rightly, light is the mental factor that makes Kingdom living a reality. Appealing to our minds, Paul gives several reasons for avoiding worldly behavior:

- because it is rooted in a hard heart estranged from the life of God (4:18);
- because it is contrary to the teaching and truth of Jesus Christ (4:20-21);
- because Christians are part of the same family and such behavior hurts our brothers and sisters (4:25-32);
- because it is contrary to the character of God and the sacrifice of Christ for us (5:1-2); and
- because those who act like pagans won't inherit the kingdom of God and are subject to God's wrath (5:3-7).

But when our hearts and minds are renewed by God's Spirit and Word, we have yet one more key to righteous living: wisdom.

Living in Wisdom

Wisdom is truth and love rightly applied. In Ephesians 5:15, Paul exhorts us, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...” He then tells us how to do so: “...making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (5:16).

When we compartmentalize our lives between the sacred and secular, the important and unimportant, God's time and our time, we lack wisdom. Every moment of our lives, every place we go, every person we meet presents a God-ordained opportunity — but we must ask God for the insight to recognize it. All the varied situations we face are but facets of one diamond reflecting the light of God's purpose. Fundamentally, there is no distinction between spiritual work and material work.

Conclusion

Helen Keller once said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” What is life to you? Are you striving to live in the light of God's love and the wisdom of His truth? If so, it is an adventure, abundant with joy and purpose. But if you are living only for the moment, for personal fulfillment and temporal pursuit, it will be worth very little in the end. We are made rich by the awesome reality of God's kingdom. Now let us live like it!

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your person-



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 8

Living in Light of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

al study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and the call to be children of the light for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. In this lesson, Paul shines the light on behavior that dishonors God. Note what he says about the use of the tongue (Ephesians 4:25, 29). What changes will you make in your patterns of speech in obedience to these commands?

3. How does Paul's admonition about the use and abuse of anger challenge you (Ephesians 4:26-27)?

What changes will you make as a result?

4. Name one thing that you find especially challenging from the lists in Ephesians 4:31-32.

5. Righteous living so important for a believer (Ephesians 4:30)? How might you avoid grieving God's Spirit today?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 8

Living in Light of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. If possible, name one insight that you drew from the commentary or personal study questions that you would like to discuss with the group.

7. Note how Paul uses the word “Gentiles” to refer to unbelievers (Ephesians 4:17). Considering the background of the early Church, why do you think people would have easily understood his meaning then (but perhaps such use of the word is confusing to us now)?

8. In Ephesians 4:18-19, Paul gives a scathing description of the moral depravity of the unbelievers in his day. Do you think he was overstating his case? Would his description fit the general behavior of people in the world today? Explain.

9. Considering Paul's references to the mind, thinking, and mental attitudes (Ephesians 4:18,23), what role does thinking have in the Christian life?

10. Read aloud Ephesians 4:25, noting the importance of relationships of mutual accountability in the body of Christ. Do you have one person (or more) in your life with whom you share such accountability? If so, describe the relationship. If not, pray for God to build such a relationship into your life.

11. Ephesians 4:26-27 discusses anger. Is all anger wrong? If not, describe the difference between the right and wrong use of anger.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 8

Living in Light of Spiritual Riches | Eph. 4:1-16

12. Read Ephesians 4:28. We tend to connect stealing with obvious and blatant embezzlement of people's things. In what more subtle ways do people in our society tend to steal?

15. Read Ephesians 5:3-7 and discuss from Ephesians 5:5 how living in and loving sin is an evidence of being without God and compare this to the life of an imperfect but forgiven believer who strives to please God (Ephesians 5:8-14).

13. Note the incredible challenge in Ephesians 5:1. How does the phrase "as dearly loved children" make all the difference?

16. From Ephesians 5:15-21, describe the Spirit-filled life. Pray for one another, that the awesome truths in this text might become yet more of a reality in your lives.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. From Ephesians 5:3, what challenge do you find from the use of the word "hint" in the NIV? Give examples of how this teaching should work itself out in our lives. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:22 NASB.)

Scripture for Meditation

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2



Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Colossians 3:23

Introduction

A boy and girl about 10 years old were playing together one afternoon in the backyard. After they tired of playing “chase” and a few other games, the girl suggested that they play “house.” “Here is how we are going to do it,” she said, “You be the father, and I will be the mother. We’ll both come home from work and argue about who is going to put the food in the microwave.”

As socially defined roles of men and women continue to unravel, it’s not clear how men and women should behave toward each other. This creates problems at all levels of society. It is no longer clear who should take out the garbage, much less who should make the big decisions. The unraveling of social roles, of course, is not just limited to husbands and wives but to all family relationships. Due to this lack of clarity, there are tensions which cause conflicts and relational ruptures. Now is a good time to go back to the Scriptures and discover how God would have Christians relate in the family.

As we study Paul’s words here, we must always keep in mind the theme he has been repeating throughout Ephesians: we are dearly loved children of the King! God has given us vast spiritual riches in Christ, and because of that, we can relate to each other in completely new ways. Just as the relationships between Jews and Gentiles can be transformed, so too can relationships twithin households.

The Transforming Order of the Home

As Paul turns to focus on how we are to live out our spiritual riches within families, he uses a form familiar to those in the Greco-Roman culture. The order or structure of family life in most codes of Paul’s time stated that the male (generally the oldest male) was the supreme authority over all the affairs of the house. Men had broad power over their wives to act as they wished, and they had life and death power over children and slaves. In Paul’s instructions for life in a Christian community, the man is no longer the supreme authority—that role is reserved only for the Lord.

Paul begins this entire section with the governing command, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). Jesus Christ is the key to all relationships, and we are to be in reverential submission to Him first and then to each other. A key word is submit, *upotasso* in the Greek. It is made of two words. The root word *tasso* is the same word we use for classification in biology: taxonomy. The prefix *upo* means “under.” So literally, the word could be translated as “under-order.” Submission, under-order, is to be the governing theme for all Christian relationships, especially in the family: husband/wife, parent/child, and master/slave (slaves were a part of the family structure at that time).

Wife to Husband (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Following his command for all Christians to submit to one another, Paul repeats this command to wives. This is uncomfortable for many modern Christians. Paul’s instruction seems to perpet-

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

1 Peter 3:7

uate the authority of the male—what we now often describe derisively as paternalism.

What many people miss is that Paul's instructions may not be about equality but about something deeper and more important: the state of the heart and the issue of dignity. The most shocking thing to the Ephesians would have been the fact that Paul begins by addressing the wife, thereby affirming female dignity. It would have been culturally expected for Paul to address the male first. Then, while Paul uses the word “obey” in reference to children (Ephesians 6:1) and slaves (Ephesians 6:5), he does not do so in reference to the wife—quite a change from the expected norm. And again, he reaffirms that the husband is no longer the sole and supreme source of authority. Ultimate authority belongs to Christ, and wives are to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

Husband to Wife (Ephesians 5:25-33)

Paul had three verses of instruction for wives, but now he has nine verses for husbands. Above all, Paul charges Christian husbands to love—the sacrificial love of Christ. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church...” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul commands husbands not just to love their wives, but also to give themselves sacrificially, and to build up their wives in the faith.

In addition to the model of Christ, Paul reminds husbands of the spiritual nature of marriage. In marriage, males and females are bonded together as one flesh (Ephesians 5:31). Since both husband and wife are one, then for the man to love himself means that he must love his wife as well.

In Ephesians 5:33, Paul sums up his instructions, calling husbands to love and wives to respect. This difference is striking because, it seems that for many women, love is the easy part, but respect is the hard part—and for men, the opposite is true. Many marriages have been torn apart by a wife snipping at her husband. And in turn, marriages often die because husbands fail to give their wives the love and affection they need. Paul calls both to do the harder task—to give both love and respect to their spouse, just as Christ has so generously given to them.

Children to Parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Paul then turns from husbands and wives to parents and children: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord...” (Ephesians 6:1). Parenting is thus endowed with a divine authority in which honor and respect are to be given to God through the parents.

This divine order, however, is not a license for parents to do whatever they want. Paul requires that fathers not be arbitrary (Roman fathers had the right to kill their children if they wished), nor to exasperate their children. Instead the children too were to be respected. Further, a father's discipline was governed by “the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), so the way that Jesus teaches and serves His people is to be the model for the father who is to teach and serve His children.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

It is noteworthy that he requires children to obey their parents, not just their fathers. He quotes the Fifth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother,” and clearly emphasizes shared parenting authority, not the sovereign father common to the Romans.

Paul's words about parenting directly address the heart of today's serious family problems. Often troubled children come from families in which there is no clear line of authority or respect. Children see their parents argue about everything from who puts the food in the microwave to how to raise their kids. Conflicted parents are paralyzed and inhibited in both the exercise of discipline and the expression of love. In such a conflicted state there is often little respect or harmony between parent and child, as well. Paul's wise words provide a way to untangle and resolve the heart issues of these and many other parenting challenges.

Slave to Master & Master to Slave (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Paul continues his transforming teaching by requiring slaves, who were in bondage against their will, to choose to serve their masters, “like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart” (Ephesians 6:6). And in a similar manner, Paul removes sovereign power from masters, reminding them they too have a Lord in heaven to whom they are accountable (Ephesians 6:9).

One third of the 60 million people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Slaves were legally on par with tools and were to be used and disposed of by the will of the master. Paul's commands begin the transformation of master/slave relationships that culminated in the nineteenth century. Through the efforts of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect in England, and John Woolman and the American Abolitionist movement, the institution of slavery was abolished. Both of these movements were driven by Christians who read the heart issues behind Paul's words, that no matter what our individual roles may be, we all have dignity and spiritual equality in the Lord.

Learning to Live Together

We truly are children of the King, blessed with more riches than we can even imagine. Why then are we fighting over who puts the food in the microwave? Paul calls us to the radically transformed relationships that are only possible when we realize that we are all God's children. God loved us first, and because of that, we are free to love others. Jesus sacrificed Himself for us, and because of that, we can sacrifice for others. As God's dearly loved children, we can change our question from “Who takes out the trash?” to “Who gets the privilege of serving this time?”

Spending Time With God

This study series, “Spiritual Riches,” is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time



with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches, and the call to be children of the light, for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2a. What good memories do you have from the family in which you grew up? What are you especially thankful for?

2b. How would you wish for your family of origin to be different?

3. The word "submit" has many negative connotations these days. What images does this word bring to mind?

4. Jesus submitted Himself to the Father, most notably when He prayed, "...yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). What other images of submission do we see in Jesus?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Ephesians 5:21 is a governing clause that sets the framework and tone for the verses that follow. In what relationships in your life is it difficult to submit? Where is it easy?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 9

Living Out Spiritual Riches in Our Families | Eph. 5:21-6:9

6. Paul begins by addressing wives, Ephesians 5:22-24. Looking through Ephesians 5:21-33, what obligations and benefits come to a wife within the framework of a Christian understanding of marriage?

7. Next Paul addresses husbands, Ephesians 5:25-33. Looking over Ephesians 5:21-33 again, what obligations and benefits come to a husband within the framework of a Christian understanding of marriage?

8. The commentary suggests that for women it is harder to respect and for men it is harder to love. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?

9. The issues husbands and wives must deal with are issues for everyone in the Christian community, single or married, as we are all members of His body (Ephesians 5:30). How does your relationship with the Lord affect your relationships with those in your Christian community?

10. Paul turns from husbands and wives to children in Ephesians 6:1-4. He instructs children to “obey” their parents and quotes the Fifth Commandment which requires children to “honor” their parents. Is there a difference between “honor” and “obedience”? If so, what?

11. It has been said that obedience to parents ends at adulthood, but the requirement to honor parents never ends. How do you respond to this?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 9

Living Out Spiritual Riches in Our Families | Eph. 5:21-6:9

12. Paul turns from parents and children to slaves and masters (Ephesians 6:5-9). Summarize the behavior and attitudes required by slaves and masters.

16. The Lordship of Jesus Christ transforms all our relationships, reshapes our attitudes towards others, and addresses the underlying dynamics of accountability and authority. Conclude this study by praying that the Lord's transforming power would work its way deeper into all that you are and do.

13. How would you relate these commands to our modern bosses and employees?

14.. How might you change your relationships, inside or outside your family, in light of Paul's instructions?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

15. Psalm 127 describes the Lord as the builder of a godly home. Write down a few insights you gain from reflecting on it.

Scripture for Meditation

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Ephesians 6:7-8



For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12

Introduction

The Neverending Story, a movie released in 1984, is about an adolescent boy whose mother dies. To make matters worse, not only does he have to deal with grief over the loss of his mother, but he has to cope with school bullies. One day, running from the bullies, he takes shelter in an old bookstore where he discovers a large dusty book with an unusual cover. As he begins to read, the enchanting story reaches out and draws him in—literally. He becomes not only the reader, but also a participant. Eventually, the young man comes back out of the book and finds there are connections between his life and the story in the manuscript. The battles he fought and the victories he won in the book enable him to face his grief and to put the bullies in their place.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is written to help Christians understand the “never-ending story” of Jesus Christ and our own place within it. As we engage in the story, we are not merely readers but participants. Even when we close the cover, we find there are connections between what happens in every day life and what happens in the Book.

A Brief Review

In these final verses (Ephesians 6:10-24), Paul makes a comprehensive and practical summation of all that he has been teaching about God's never-ending story. In order to appreciate the dynamics of these concluding verses, let's do a brief review of Paul's letter:

1. In chapter one, we learned that our heavenly riches include our being chosen, adopted, forgiven, and redeemed by the ascended Lord Jesus Christ.
2. In chapter two, we learned that we have been raised from the realm of sin and death into the realm of life and joined to the people of God by the exercise of faith as we receive God's lavish gift.
3. In chapter three, we learned that by the mysterious power of the gospel, the ascended Lord Christ not only dwells in heaven, but also dwells in our hearts so that we may be filled with the fullness of God.
4. In chapters four, and five we learned how to walk worthy of our blessings and calling, in unity, purity, and ordered family life through reverence for Christ.

Spiritual Blessings and Battles

Paul began his letter by telling us about spiritual riches in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3); we now discover at the end of his letter that we are also engaged in spiritual battles in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 6:10-17). The Lord's Prayer has this same sort of spiritual balance/tension between its opening and closing. We begin by praying for God's Kingdom to come, and we finish by praying that we would be delivered from evil.

We must be clear about the fact that there are spiritual forces that do not want us to experience

Some trust in chariots and
some in horses, but we
trust in the name of the
Lord our God.

Psalm 20:7

the riches of Christ. Such evil strongholds can obstruct our growth. Just as soldiers engaged in fighting for our country struggle to keep us free, so we must engage in spiritual battles to protect that which Christ has won for us. What does this onslaught of evil look like? Paul tells us it takes the form of:

- destructive conflicts within the Christian community (Ephesians 4:25-32);
- immoral behavior and lustful sensuality (Ephesians 5:3-5); and
- doctrinal confusion which produces fragmentation and twisted aspirations among believers (Ephesians 4:14).

Paul mentioned these evil forces previously (Ephesians 2:1-4, 4:27), and now he describes the tactics and weapons that we need to prevail. Using the analogy of Roman armor, he highlights the spiritual resources necessary for battle: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. Anyone who overlooks one of them, or who fails to be trained in their use, is a sitting duck and a certain casualty of war.

Power and strength are also necessary to fight a battle. Throughout Ephesians, Paul uses a variety of words for power. As he concludes his letter, he shows that all that power (*dunamis*—"strong," *kratei*—"strength," and *iskuos*—"might") is available for the battle (6:10). God supplies us with the riches of His armament and ability so that we can stand firm against the onslaught of evil (Ephesians 6:11,13,14).

Paul concludes his discussion about spiritual warfare by writing about prayer (Ephesians 6:18-19). The model of the Lord's Prayer and the testimonies of fellow believers down through the centuries affirm prayer as the preeminent means by which spiritual battles are won and lost. One commentator on spiritual warfare used the following prayer to begin his daily prayer time: "My spiritual senses, heart, eyes and ears are dull; and the Evil One has been blowing smoke, lying and stealing my knowledge. This day will you open the eyes of my heart, expose the lies, blow away the smoke, restore what I know and increase my knowledge? In this world of darkness there is a spiritual battle today over the in-breaking of new life and continued degenerating loss. I am in denial of the loss and blind to the lie. Send your Spirit so that I may receive Your life and be a witness to Your light."

Spiritual Warfare is Normal

Spiritual warfare is not limited to bizarre, esoteric experiences, or exorcisms. It is the common experience of every believer. If we choose to ignore spiritual conflicts, then the blessings of Christ may be diabolically snatched away from us. But if we know the schemes of the devil, we are better able to withstand them and to progress in the Christian life.

Most of our encounters with satanic activity relate to our attitudes and actions toward others and in our attitudes and actions toward God. C. S. Lewis authored the *Screwtape Letters*, and he

I have fought the good
fight, I have finished the
race, I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

envisions the Christian's struggle to obey God in the midst of demonic bureaucrats who utter whispers and lies in the depths of our consciousness. One part in the book describes a devil about to lose a student to faith in God as this student sat in a library and pondered the deeper meanings of life. The demon countered, not by argument, but by merely suggesting that the Christian faith is too important to think about on an empty stomach. By the time the student was outside of the library and into food, the thoughts of God had faded into unsubstantial fantasy.

Such is the common daily experience of spiritual warfare. We do not engage in spectacular battles against dragons, ogres, and dark knights. All too often we win or lose our battles on the level of quiet reflection, thought, and attitude.

Conclusion

The modern world of scientific advancement and materialistic achievement tends to banish spiritual forces to the realm of myth and make believe. We live in an enlightened age that assumes such things as demons and angels are merely superstitions. But this is not what the Scriptures tell us. As in *The Neverending Story*, the battles described in Ephesians are a real part of our daily experience.

Ephesians also promises us the victory. This gem of an epistle provides for us a breathtaking vision of God, Jesus Christ, and the Church! Paul has had to invent new words in order to help us feel, see, and taste the majesty of the gospel he proclaims.

In drawing this study to a close, it is fitting to return to Paul's climactic benediction which he offers, not at the end of his letter, but in the center: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21)."

Spending Time With God

This study series, "Spiritual Riches," is based on Ephesians and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich and strengthen your daily life and walk with Him. Begin now by praying for special insight into God's Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 10

Spiritual Battles for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 6:10-23

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about our spiritual riches and the call to be children of the light, for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against this present darkness, “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). In what ways are you aware of this battle in the world?

3. Read Psalm 27, recording any helpful insights about God’s protection.

4. Write a brief prayer asking God for safety and guidance in spiritual conflict.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Although Paul’s focus is on evil (Ephesians 6:10-17), this is not the first time he has mentioned the spiritual powers of wickedness and opposition. What else do you learn about evil in Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:14; and 4:27?

6. Looking back at Ephesians 4:17-19, in what ways are the forces of “this present darkness” working in the world?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 10

Spiritual Battles for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 6:10-23

7. Paul refers to the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11). In chapter four (Ephesians 4:14), he writes about the deceitful schemes of men who seek to unsettle and misdirect the Church. What do you think are the purposes of such schemes against the Church?

8. Have you experienced spiritual warfare on a personal level? If so, describe your experience.

9. Paul picks up again on the theme of power (Ephesians 6:10-11). Considering the sweep of Paul's teaching in Ephesians (Ephesians 1:19-20, 3:7, 3:16-20) and the power that is ours in Jesus' name, do you find yourself overly fearful about evil in the world? Explain.

10. Paul uses the word 'stand' four times in the space of three verses (Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14). What insight might this provide into the nature of the spiritual battle that Christians face?

11. Paul twice urges Christians to "put on the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11,13). Developing his metaphor, he uses the image of a Roman soldier's armor to illustrate our resources for spiritual warfare. What spiritual resource does each piece of armor symbolize?

Piece of Armor

Spiritual Resource

12. Which of these pieces of armor do you think is most important or essential for the battle? Why?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL RICHES | EPHESIANS

LESSON 10

Spiritual Battles for Spiritual Riches | Eph. 6:10-23

13. Which piece of armor do you most tend to neglect or forget to put on each day?

16. What else can we learn about spiritual warfare from verses 19-20?

14. Considering the make-up of our spiritual armor, what would you say are some of the ways that Satan attacks Christians?

17. Looking back on our ten-week study of Ephesians, what one overall truth did you glean from this study that you hope never to forget? Conclude this session by using the themes and perspective of Ephesians to pray for members of your study, your church, your family, and yourself.

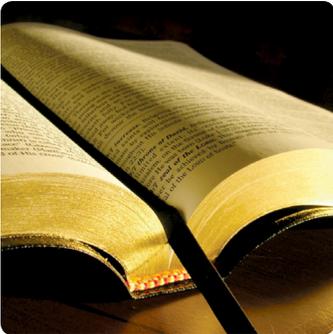
Digging Deeper (Further Study)

15. Paul concludes his teaching on spiritual warfare by urging the Ephesians to pray (6:18-20). What insight might this provide on the role of prayer and spiritual warfare?

Scripture for Meditation

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Ephesians 6:13



BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/. (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
 - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
 - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
 4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
 6. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

5. Dismissal

SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
 - Go to ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/ for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
 - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.
 - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).