



DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

A 7-Week Devotional Guide through Ephesians

Themes: **Transformation • Mission • Calling**

A Word Before You Begin

The letter Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus is one of the most concentrated pieces of writing in the New Testament. In six chapters, he covers who you are, what God has done, how you belong, what you're called to, how you live, and where you're going. He does it from a prison cell. And he does it with the kind of unhurried confidence that comes from a man who has staked his entire life — and is currently paying the price for it — on the things he's about to tell you.

This booklet walks through that letter alongside your small group. Three days each week. One passage at a time.

This series, **Grounded & Sent**, comes directly from Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:17 — that his readers would be rooted and grounded in love. That phrase is the heartbeat of the whole letter. To be grounded doesn't mean to be settled and comfortable. It means to be stable enough to move. Roots go down so the person can go out. Every session, every conversation, every week of devotionals works toward that same end: people who are so deeply grounded in who God says they are that they can be sent into the ordinary, difficult, beautiful circumstances of their lives and actually stand.

That's what you're doing here.

Devotional practices — the habit of returning regularly to Scripture, sitting with it longer than efficiency demands, and bringing your honest self to it — are one way the church has found to let truth travel from the head to the heart. Most of us know more than we live. The gap between what we believe and what actually shapes our decisions, our relationships, and our fears is where devotional practice does its work. Not by adding more information, but by creating space for what we already know to become reality.

These devotionals are designed to deepen what your small group is exploring together each week, not to replace it. The group discussions will push you outward — into honest conversation, into accountability, into the specific application of what you're learning. The devotionals will pull you inward — into the passage itself, into the parts of it your group may not have time to reach, into the personal questions that are best answered in a quiet place rather than a living room. The two experiences are meant to work together. One without the other is incomplete.

So find a quiet place. Read slowly. Write honestly. You don't have to have it together before you begin. Neither did Paul, writing from chains. The point isn't to perform a spiritual discipline. It's to show up — to God, to the text, and to the honest version of yourself — and see what happens when you do.

Being grounded isn't settling in. It's preparing to move.

WEEK 1

“Chosen Before You Knew It”

Ephesians 1:1–14

Before You Were You

Ephesians 1:3-5 (NIV)

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 for adoption to sonship 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.

Think about the earliest memory you have of yourself. Maybe you're four years old, standing in a backyard. Maybe you're seven, riding a bike for the first time. Wherever that memory lands, here's what Paul wants you to know: God was already thinking about you long before that moment. Not just before your earliest memory. Before the world existed.

That's not a small statement. Paul writes it almost in passing — "he chose us in him before the creation of the world" — as though it's simply the starting point of the story, the first thing to establish before anything else can make sense. And it is. Because if God's choice of you came first, before your birth, before your faith, before any single thing you did or didn't do, then that choice can't be undone by anything that comes after it either.

We spend a lot of our lives trying to become someone worth choosing. Worth loving. Worth keeping around. We perform for our parents, our friends, our coworkers, even for God. There is a quiet voice in most of us that whispers: you have to earn this. You have to prove you're worth it.

Paul's opening is a direct answer to that voice. Before there was a world to perform in, before there was anyone watching, before there was even a "you" to succeed or fail — God chose you. Not because of what he saw you becoming. Because of who he already is.

That's not a sentiment. It's a foundation. Everything Paul is going to say about how you live, what you're called to, and where you're sent is built on this one bedrock reality: the choice came first. The love came first. Grace came first.

You didn't find your way to God. He found his way to you. Before you were you.

Personal Response

- Sit quietly for a moment before you write anything. Then ask yourself honestly: do I actually live like I'm someone God chose before the world began? Or do I live like I'm still trying to earn that?
- What would change about today — one specific thing — if you carried this truth with you into it?
- Talk to God honestly. Tell him where you still feel like you're auditioning. Ask him to let the reality of his choice become more real to you than the performance.

Every. Single. One.

Ephesians 1:3 (NIV)

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.

Paul doesn't say God has blessed us with many spiritual blessings. He doesn't say God has blessed us with the blessings we've earned, or the blessings appropriate to our level of spiritual maturity, or even most of the available spiritual blessings. He says every. Every spiritual blessing in Christ.

That word is worth sitting with. Every means there is no blessing Paul is going to describe later in this letter that you are still waiting to receive. Chosen? Already yours. Adopted? Already yours. Redeemed? Sealed by the Spirit? Already. All of it. Before you woke up this morning. Before you had your quiet time or skipped it. Before the good day or the bad one.

Most of us relate to God from a posture of deficit. We feel like we're behind. Like we owe him something. Like the account is overdrawn and we need to make it right before we can really approach him. So we try harder. Show up more. Pray longer. Serve more often. And underneath all of it is the quiet belief that God is withholding something we haven't yet earned. Paul says that posture doesn't match reality. In Christ, you are not behind. You are not in deficit. You are not waiting for God to warm up to you based on your performance this week. You have been "blessed . . . with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Now here's the thing that makes this harder than it sounds: Paul wrote this from prison. Chained to a Roman soldier. Awaiting trial. If anyone had reason to feel like God was withholding something, it was the man writing these words. And yet he opens with an explosion of praise — not because his circumstances were good, but because he knew something about his standing that his circumstances couldn't touch.

That's the kind of grounded Paul is talking about. Not the feeling that everything is fine. The settled conviction that you already have everything you need in Christ — regardless of what everything around you looks like today.

Personal Response

- Write down the areas of your life where you feel most spiritually behind or in deficit. Then read verse 3 again slowly over that list.
- What would it look like to approach God today from abundance rather than deficit? What might change about how you pray?
- Ask God to help you believe — not just know — that every spiritual blessing in Christ is already yours. Tell him honestly where the gap between knowing and believing actually is.

Signed, Sealed, Delivered

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

In the ancient world, a seal meant something. When a king sent a letter, he pressed his signet ring into warm wax and that mark said: this is mine. Authorized. Protected. Don't tamper with it. The seal wasn't decorative. It was a legal declaration of ownership and protection.

Paul says that when you stepped over the line of faith, God pressed his seal into your life. Not wax — his Spirit. The Holy Spirit living in you is God's legal declaration: this one is mine. Authorized. Protected. Don't tamper with it.

But Paul goes further. He doesn't just call the Spirit a seal. He calls him a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." In first-century commerce, a deposit wasn't just a good faith gesture. It was a legally binding commitment. When someone put down a deposit, they were obligated to complete the transaction. The deposit was the beginning of a promise that had to be kept.

So when Paul says the Holy Spirit is a deposit, he's saying this: God has already put something down on your future. He is legally, cosmically committed to finishing what he started in you. The Spirit in your life right now isn't just a comfort or a warm feeling. He is God's binding promise that your story doesn't end here.

A lot of us live with a low-grade anxiety about the future. Will I make it? Will I drift? Will I fall away? Paul's answer is that the question isn't primarily about your grip on God. It's about his grip on you. And the evidence of that grip is the Spirit he has placed inside you as a down payment on everything that's coming.

You are sealed. You are a deposit-holder. Your inheritance is guaranteed — not by your consistency, but by his commitment. That's not a reason to be careless. It's a reason to stop being afraid.

Personal Response

- Where in your life do you carry anxiety about your standing with God or your spiritual future? Bring it here honestly.
- What does it mean to you personally that the Spirit isn't a feeling but a guarantee? How does that land differently?
- Sit quietly for a few minutes and simply acknowledge the Spirit's presence. Thank God for the deposit he's already made on your future. Ask him to make that reality more solid than your fears.

WEEK 2

“Dead. Alive, and Made for This”

Ephesians 1:15-2:10

WEEK 2 - DAY 1

Not By. For.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Two prepositions. Ten verses apart. They change everything.

Verse 8: not by works. Verse 10: to do good works. Same letter. Same author. Same passage. And they are not in contradiction — they're the two halves of the most important sentence about the Christian life Paul ever wrote. You are not saved by works. That door is closed completely. There is no amount of serving, giving, attending, praying, or behaving that puts you in right standing with God. Grace is the only currency that buys salvation, and it's not for sale — it's a gift. Paul shuts the performance door firmly in verse 8 so that no one, anywhere, ever, can claim credit for their own rescue.

And then in verse 10 he opens a completely different door. You were created for good works. Not to earn anything. Not to maintain your standing. But because you are God's handiwork — his poem, his craft — and the works were written into the design before you showed up. They're already in your path. Your job is simply to walk it. The difference between these two postures is enormous in practice. Working to earn salvation is exhausting, anxious, and ultimately hopeless — there is no finish line where you've done enough. Working as a response to grace is energizing, free, and oriented by gratitude rather than fear. One is a transaction you can never complete. The other is a life you're already invited into.

Check your motivation honestly. When you serve, when you give, when you show up — is it coming from a sense of obligation and debt, or from a sense of joy and response? The works are the same. The posture behind them is completely different. And Paul says only one of them flows from understanding what grace actually is.

Personal Response

- Honestly: when you do things for God — serve, give, pray, show up — what is primarily driving you? Obligation? Fear? Gratitude? Something else?
- What would change about how you approach the works in front of you this week if you fully believed they were prepared in advance and that you have nothing left to prove?
- Ask God to help you move from “by works” to “for works” — from earning to responding. Tell him specifically where that shift feels hardest.

But God

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)

But 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.

Two words carry the entire weight of the Christian story: But God.

Before those two words, Paul paints a picture of what our lives looked like without Christ. Dead. Following the current of a world oriented away from God. Satisfying cravings. Living under the quiet weight of what we deserve. It's not a flattering picture, and Paul doesn't soften it. Dead isn't struggling. Dead isn't searching. Dead is dead.

And then: But God.

Those two words are the pivot on which the entire universe turns. Not "but you tried harder." Not "but you finally figured it out." But God, who is rich in mercy. The initiative is entirely his. The action is entirely his. You didn't climb toward the light. He reached into the dark and pulled you out.

There is something deeply important about sitting with this that most of us skip over too quickly. We move fast to the good news without fully feeling the weight of what preceded it. If you don't understand what you were before "but God," you can't fully receive what you are after it. The mercy is only as stunning as the condition it remedied.

Think about your own story. There is a moment — or a season — where those two words changed everything. Maybe it was dramatic and you remember it clearly. Maybe it was slow and you only recognize it looking back. Either way, your story has a "before" and an "after." And the thing that separates them isn't you. It's him.

But God. Two words. Everything.

Personal Response

- Write out your own "But God" moment in a sentence or two. What was true before, and what became true after?
- If you're not sure you've had that moment yet, write honestly about that too. What would it mean for you if it were true?
- Spend a few minutes in gratitude. Thank God specifically for what he reached into and pulled you out of. Be as specific as you can.

You Are the Poem

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *poiema* — the word from which we get “poem.” You are God’s poem. His workmanship. His craft. Not a product off an assembly line. Not a rough draft. Something he made with intention, care, and a specific purpose in mind.

Think about what it takes to write a good poem. It isn’t accidental. Every word is chosen. Every line break is intentional. The sounds matter. The rhythm matters. The image in the final line is placed there because the poet knew from the beginning where the whole thing was heading. A poem is one of the most deliberate things a human being can create.

That’s the word Paul reaches for to describe you.

And then he says something that should stop you cold: the good works you are meant to do were “prepared in advance.” Before you showed up. Before you knew what your gifts were. Before you had any idea what your life would look like, God had already written the works into the poem. They’re not an afterthought. They’re part of the original design.

This means two things that don’t always sit comfortably together. First: you have a purpose. Not a vague spiritual purpose but specific works, prepared specifically for you, already waiting in your path. Second: you don’t have to manufacture them. Your job isn’t to create your calling out of nothing. It’s to walk the path God already laid and do the work that’s already there.

The pressure you feel to figure out your purpose, to find your calling, to make something significant of your life — Paul says that pressure is based on a misunderstanding. The poem is already written. The works are already prepared. You don’t write the poem. You live it.

Personal Response

- What do you think the good works prepared for you actually look like? Not the dramatic version — the ordinary, everyday version that’s already in your path.
- Where have you been trying to manufacture your calling rather than simply walk the path God already laid? What would it feel like to stop striving and start paying attention?
- Ask God to help you see the works he’s already placed in front of you today. Then pay attention to what shows up.

WEEK 3

“Closer than you think.”

Ephesians 2:11 – 3:21

The Wall That Came Down

Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

There was a literal wall. Archaeologists have found the inscriptions that once marked it in the Jerusalem temple — a stone barrier separating the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts where Jewish worshippers could go. The inscription warned in Greek and Latin that any Gentile who crossed it would be responsible for their own death.

This was the world Paul's readers lived in. Not just a cultural preference for keeping certain people at a distance. A physical, legal, theological wall that said: you don't belong here. You are outside. Stay out.

Paul says Christ demolished it. Not lowered it. Not made it optional. Demolished. The Greek word he uses is the same one used for tearing down a building. What Christ did to the wall between insiders and outsiders wasn't a renovation. It was a demolition.

And notice what Paul says replaced it. Not tolerance. Not a diversity program. Not a set of rules for getting along. He says Christ himself is our peace. The peace between formerly divided people isn't an arrangement or a treaty. It's a Person. Jesus didn't just broker reconciliation. He became it.

This matters deeply for how we live. There are walls in every human community — between classes, races, generations, political tribes, insiders and outsiders of every kind. The church is not immune to them. But the gospel insists that Christ has already demolished what we keep trying to rebuild. Every wall we erect between ourselves and someone else is a structure we're raising on ground he already cleared.

The wall came down. The question is whether we're still trying to put it back up.

Personal Response

- Where in your life do you notice a wall between yourself and someone else? It doesn't have to be dramatic — even subtle distance or avoidance counts.
- What would it mean to treat that wall as something Christ has already demolished rather than something you need to maintain?
- Ask God to show you one specific relationship where he's calling you to live like the wall is already down.

The Least Likely Messenger

Ephesians 3:7-8 (NIV)

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.

Paul is describing himself here, and his self-description is striking. He doesn't say "I am the least of the apostles." He says "less than the least of all the Lord's people." Not just the bottom of the leadership ladder. Below everyone. The least qualified, least deserving person imaginable to carry this message.

And he meant it. Before his conversion, Paul hunted down Christ followers and had them imprisoned. He watched approvingly as Stephen was stoned to death. He was, by his own account, the chief persecutor of the very community he was now being sent to serve. If you were going to design a resume for the person least suited to preach about God's love, Paul's pre-conversion life would be a strong candidate.

And yet. God chose him. Not despite his history, but — in some way that defies human logic — through it. The man who knew better than anyone what life without Christ looked like became the man who described it most vividly. The man who persecuted the church became its most passionate missionary.

This isn't a story about how bad people can become good people if they try hard enough. It's a story about what grace does when it lands on someone who knows they don't deserve it. Paul's sense of his own unworthiness never left him — "less than the least" is how he describes himself years into ministry. But that awareness of what he didn't deserve only made the grace more extraordinary.

God has a pattern of choosing the least likely messengers. Which means your history — whatever it contains — is not a disqualification. It might be exactly the thing that makes you the right person for the specific work God has prepared for you.

Personal Response

- Is there something in your past that you've believed disqualifies you from being used by God? Name it honestly.
- How does Paul's story speak to that belief? What does it suggest about how God works?
- Ask God to help you see your own story — including the parts you're not proud of — the way he sees it. Ask him to show you how he might use even that.

Rooted

Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is where the title of this series comes from. Rooted and grounded in love. Paul prays it over his readers because he knows it's the only thing that can hold a person steady when everything else is shifting.

A tree with a shallow root system looks fine in calm weather. It's only when the storm comes that you find out how deep the roots actually go. Paul's prayer isn't that his readers would have a good spiritual season. It's that they would be so deeply rooted in the love of Christ that the storms — which are coming, Paul knows this from a prison cell — wouldn't uproot them.

And then he asks for something that sounds almost paradoxical: that they would know a love that surpasses knowledge. How do you know something unknowable? Paul is reaching for the distinction between intellectual knowledge and experiential knowledge. You can know everything there is to know about the ocean without ever having stood at its edge. That's not the same as standing there. Paul wants his readers at the edge. He wants them to feel the vastness.

Wide enough to cover everything you've done. Long enough to stretch from before you were born to beyond the end of time. High enough to be above every circumstance that feels crushing. Deep enough to reach whatever in you is buried and hidden and hasn't seen the light.

That's what Paul prays over you. Not that you would understand it perfectly. That you would be rooted in it so deeply that it becomes the thing you draw stability from. The thing that holds when everything else shakes. Being grounded isn't settling in. It's preparing to move.

Personal Response

- Where in your life right now do you feel most unrooted — most easily shaken? Bring that honestly to this prayer.
- Paul asks for power to “grasp” the dimensions of Christ's love. Wide, long, high, deep. Sit with each one for a moment. Which dimension feels hardest to believe right now?
- Pray Paul's prayer in 3:14-19 slowly over yourself today. Let it be your prayer rather than just your reading.

WEEK 4

“One Body, Many Callings”

Ephesians 4:1 – 16

Therefore

Ephesians 4:1 (NIV)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

In the original Greek, this passage begins with the word “therefore” and it’s doing a lot of work. In Paul’s writing, “therefore” is never a throwaway transition. It’s a hinge. It means: everything I’m about to say flows directly from everything I’ve just said. You can’t understand the second half of Ephesians without the first.

And the first half has been telling you who you are. Chosen before the world began. Made alive when you were dead. Adopted as a full heir. Redeemed. Sealed. Brought near. Built together as God’s dwelling. Rooted and grounded in love. That’s three chapters of identity before a single ethical instruction appears.

Now Paul says: therefore, live a life worthy of that.

Notice he doesn’t say “live a life that earns that.” He says live a life worthy of it. There’s a difference. Worthy means proportionate to. Matching. Consistent with. He’s not asking you to achieve something new. He’s asking you to live in a way that matches what is already true about you.

This is a completely different starting point than trying to become a better person through sheer effort. Better-person-through-effort starts with a deficit and tries to close the gap. Living worthy of your calling starts with the reality of who you already are and asks your behavior to catch up.

The whole practical section of Ephesians — the humility, the community, the gifts, the household stuff, the armor — is built on this single word. Therefore. Because of who you are. Because of what has been done for you. Because grace came first.

Live accordingly.

Personal Response

- What is the calling Paul says you’ve received? In your own words, summarize what the first three chapters of Ephesians say about who you are.
- Where is there the biggest gap between who Paul says you are and how you actually live day to day? Name it specifically.
- Ask God to help you live today from who you are rather than toward who you’re trying to become. Ask him to make “therefore” more than a word.

Bear With One Another

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Paul lists five qualities in these two verses: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and making every effort for peace. Together they describe the posture of someone who has genuinely been grounded in the identity Paul spent three chapters establishing. These aren't the traits of someone trying to be a nicer person. They're the fruit of someone who is no longer primarily worried about themselves.

The phrase that tends to get passed over is "bearing with one another." It's easy to read it as passive — just put up with difficult people. But the Greek word Paul uses carries the idea of actively carrying a weight. Bearing with someone isn't tolerating them. It's choosing to carry the burden of the relationship even when it costs you something.

Think about who in your life requires the most bearing with. The person who drains your patience. The one who disappoints you regularly. The relationship that costs more than it seems to give back. Paul is saying: that relationship is exactly where this verse is meant to live.

And notice the motivation he gives: "in love." Not in obligation. Not in gritted-teeth endurance. In love. The bearing with is meant to come from the same source as everything else in Ephesians — the love that chose you before you had anything to offer, that made you alive when you were dead, that is rooted and grounded in Christ. That love doesn't just receive. It bears.

Nobody who has been truly loved well finds it easy to love difficult people. But everyone who has been truly loved well has a reason to try.

Personal Response

- Who in your life do you currently need to "bear with"? Name them specifically rather than keeping it general.
- What does bearing with that person actually look like in practice this week? What would it cost you, and what would it give them?
- Ask God to fill in the gap between the love you can manufacture and the love this person actually needs. Tell him honestly how hard this is.

Your Part

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Every supporting ligament. Each part. Paul's image of the body is remarkably specific. It's not just the obvious, visible parts that matter. It's the ligaments — the connective tissue that most people never think about until it's damaged and suddenly nothing works the way it should.

You have probably never woken up grateful for your ligaments. You don't notice them. They don't get celebrated. Nobody writes songs about connective tissue. But tear one and you'll immediately discover how essential the invisible, uncelebrated parts of the body actually are.

Paul says the body of Christ works the same way. The people who show up quietly week after week and do the unglamorous work of community are not less important than the people on stage or in visible leadership. They are the ligaments. And without them, the body doesn't function. It can't.

The phrase that carries the most weight here is "as each part does its work." Not as a few talented parts do their work while everyone else watches. Each part. The growth of the body — toward maturity, toward the fullness of Christ — depends on each person contributing what they've been given.

Which raises the honest question for each of us: are you doing your part? Not someone else's part. Not the part you wish you had. The part you actually have. The contribution that is specifically yours to make — in your group, in your family, in your workplace, in your neighborhood. When you hold it back, the body is poorer for it. When you offer it, the whole thing grows.

Personal Response

- What is your part? If you're not sure, write down what other people have told you that you contribute — even informally. What do people come to you for?
- Is there a place where you've been holding your part back — waiting to feel ready, waiting to be asked, waiting until conditions are right? Name it.
- Ask God to show you one specific way to do your part today. Not someday. Today.

WEEK 5

“Taking Off, Putting On”

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:21

The Clothes You Keep Reaching For

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Most of us have something in our closet we should have gotten rid of years ago. A shirt from a different season of life. A pair of shoes that don't fit anymore. We keep them around not because we wear them, but because letting them go requires acknowledging that who we were then is not who we are now.

Paul's take-off/put-on language works the same way. The old self isn't just bad behavior. It's a whole way of being — a way of moving through the world oriented by self-interest, deceitful desires, the relentless pursuit of what feels good right now regardless of what it costs later. And Paul says: take it off. Not minimize it. Not manage it. Take it off, the way you take off clothes that no longer belong to who you are.

The reason this is hard isn't that we don't know what needs to come off. Most of us know exactly what it is. The reason it's hard is that the old self feels familiar. It fits in the way that things you've worn for years fit — worn in, comfortable, easy to reach for without thinking.

But Paul says the new self has already been created. It's not something you're waiting to receive. It exists. It was created in Christ Jesus to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. The wardrobe has already been restocked. The question is which set of clothes you keep reaching for.

Transformation isn't a feeling that comes over you. It's a decision you make over and over again. Take off the old. Put on the new. Not once. Every day. Some days every hour. But the new self is real, and it fits better than the old one ever did.

Personal Response

- What is the specific thing Paul is asking you to take off? Name it as honestly as you can. Not a category — the actual thing.
- Why do you keep reaching for it? What does it give you that you're afraid you won't find anywhere else?
- Ask God to help you put it down today. Not forever — just today. And ask him to show you what putting on the new self looks like in the specific situation in front of you.

What Your Words Are Building

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Paul doesn't say avoid bad words. He says avoid unwholesome ones. The Greek word he uses — *sapros* — means rotten. The image is of fruit that's gone bad. It looks fine from the outside but has nothing good left inside. And when you bite into it, the rot spreads.

Words work the same way. You can say technically true things in a tone that rots a relationship. You can use acceptable language to deliver devastating messages. You can speak without profanity and still tear someone down completely. Paul isn't giving a list of forbidden words. He's asking about the function of your speech. Is it building? Or is it rotting?

The alternative he offers is specific: only what is "helpful for building others up according to their needs." Three things packed into one phrase. Helpful — is it actually useful? Building up — does it leave the person stronger? According to their needs — is it calibrated to what they actually need, not what I want to say?

That last piece is the hardest. Most of our unhelpful speech comes from saying what we want to say rather than what the other person needs to hear. We unload our frustration. We share our opinion when it wasn't asked for. We say the thing that makes us feel better rather than the thing that helps them. Paul says the test of our words isn't how they feel to say. It's what they do to the person who hears them.

Think about the people you spent time with today, or will tomorrow. When they walk away from a conversation with you, what have your words built in them? What have they left behind?

Personal Response

- Think of one person in your life who consistently leaves you feeling built up after a conversation. What do they do with their words that creates that effect?
- Think of a recent conversation where your words did more tearing down than building up. What was driving that?
- Ask God to make you aware today of the effect your words are having on the people around you. Ask him to help you speak according to their needs rather than your own.

You Are Light

Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV)

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Read that verse carefully. Paul doesn't say you were in darkness. He says you were darkness. And he doesn't say you are in the light. He says you are light. Those aren't descriptions of where you've been and where you're standing. They're descriptions of what you are.

This is one of the most complete identity statements in Ephesians, and it's easy to skip over because it comes embedded in a list of practical instructions. But Paul is doing the same thing here he did in chapters 1–2: establishing what is true before telling you how to live from it. You are light. Not “you could be” or “you should try to be.” You are.

Now consider what light does. It doesn't try to illuminate. It doesn't strategize about the best way to push back the darkness. It simply is what it is, and the darkness responds accordingly. Light doesn't coexist with darkness. It displaces it. Not through effort. Through presence.

Paul's instruction — “live as children of light” — is simply asking you to be consistent with what you already are. Not to perform brightness. Not to manufacture goodness. But to stop living in ways that are inconsistent with the nature you've been given. The fruit of the light, he says, consists in goodness, righteousness, and truth. Those aren't things you produce by trying harder. They're what grows naturally when light is doing what light does.

The question Paul leaves you with is a simple and penetrating one: you are light — are you living like it? Not in some areas. Not when it's convenient. In the places where it costs something. In the relationships where darkness would be easier. In the moments where no one would notice if you didn't bother.

You are light. Live accordingly.

Personal Response

- Where in your life right now is there the biggest gap between who Paul says you are (light) and how you're actually living? Name it honestly.
- What would it look like today to simply be consistent with what you already are — not to perform, but to stop hiding?
- Ask God to help you live as light in one specific situation this week. Ask him to show you where your presence is meant to displace something.

WEEK 6

“Sent Into Your Closest Relationships”

Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9

A Love That Gives Itself Away

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

There is a Greek word that Paul uses here that most English translations flatten into the single word “love.” The word is agape. And it is not the love of warm feelings, romantic attraction, or even deep affection, though it may include those things. Agape is a love that makes a decision — a love that chooses the other person’s good even when it costs something. Even when it costs everything.

The example Paul gives is not subtle. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That’s not a metaphor for being nicer. That’s a man on a cross. Paul is setting the standard for the household codes at the highest possible point and then asking: now live from that.

Notice what Christ’s love produces in the one it is directed toward. He cleanses. He presents. He makes radiant. He removes every stain and wrinkle. Agape love in Paul’s vision doesn’t leave the other person where it found them. It moves toward them with the specific intention of their flourishing, their wholeness, their becoming more fully who they were made to be.

Most of us love people in the way that feels natural — when the relationship is going well, when we feel appreciated, when the other person is easy to be around. Agape asks a harder question: what does this person need to flourish? And then it gives that, even when it isn’t convenient, even when it isn’t returned, even when it costs more than you feel like spending.

That kind of love doesn’t come from trying harder to be a nicer person. It comes from being so grounded in the love that was given to you first — costly, unconditional, directed specifically at your flourishing — that it begins to overflow into the way you treat the people around you. You were loved that way. The question is whether you’re learning to love that way too.

Personal Response

- Think about the person you are in closest relationship with. What would it mean to love them with the specific intention of their flourishing — not your comfort, not the relationship’s ease, but their becoming more fully who God made them to be?
- Where in your closest relationships are you loving from convenience rather than from decision? Name it honestly.
- Ask God to give you a specific act of agape love toward someone in your life today — something that costs you something small and gives them something real.

The Picture Your Life Is Painting

Ephesians 5:31-32 (NIV)

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Paul quotes Genesis here — the very first description of human marriage in all of Scripture — and then says something that reframes everything: I am actually talking about Christ and the church. Marriage, in Paul's understanding, was never just a human arrangement. It was always a picture of something cosmic. A living illustration of the love between God and his people.

This is what theologians call a type — a human reality that points beyond itself to a divine one. The marriage is real. The love is real. The leaving and cleaving is real. But underneath all of it, embedded in the very structure of human intimacy, is a picture of the most profound relationship in the universe: the one between Christ and his bride, the church.

Which means every committed relationship you are in is, whether you intend it or not, saying something to the people who observe it. It is painting a picture. The question is what picture.

A relationship characterized by self-giving love, by the pursuit of the other's flourishing, by faithfulness and patience and the willingness to stay — that relationship points somewhere. It tells a story about a God who loves his people that way. A relationship characterized by self-protection, by score-keeping, by conditional love that withdraws when it isn't returned — that relationship tells a different story.

Paul isn't describing marriage only. He is describing every significant relationship we are in as a potential witness. The people closest to you are the first ones to read the story your life is telling about the love of God. Not the story you intend to tell. The one they actually see.

What story are your closest relationships currently painting?

Personal Response

- Think about someone who observes your closest relationships from the outside — a child, a neighbor, a coworker. What picture of love do they see? Be honest rather than idealistic.
- Is there a relationship in your life where the picture is out of alignment with the story you want to be telling? What would it take to change it?
- Ask God to help you see your relationships the way he sees them — not just as personal arrangements but as witnesses. Ask him to make the picture worth pointing to.

Whatever You Do

Ephesians 6:5-8 (NIV)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

The context Paul is writing into is one most of us will never fully inhabit. Slavery in the Roman world was brutal, dehumanizing, and without the legal protections modern employment relationships carry. Paul is not endorsing this system. He is writing to people who are in it and have no legal recourse for leaving it, and he is trying to give them a framework for living with dignity and meaning inside an unjust situation.

What he offers them is a radical reorientation of motivation. You are not working for the person who holds your contract. You are working for the Lord. The task in front of you is not a degrading obligation — it is an act of worship offered to the one who sees everything, rewards everything, and is not limited by the injustice of the system you're in. The phrase that carries the most weight is this: "as if you were serving the Lord, not people." That phrase crosses every century and lands on every Monday morning. The irritating coworker, the unreasonable deadline, the thankless task, the role you didn't choose and don't love — Paul is saying: what if the person you were doing this for was Christ himself?

That question doesn't make the work easier. It doesn't make an unjust situation just. But it does something to the worker that nothing else can: it gives the work meaning independent of whether it is recognized, appreciated, or even fairly compensated. You are not waiting for the right person to see what you're doing. The right person already sees.

The most ordinary work, done with sincerity of heart as an offering to God, becomes something Paul calls "doing the will of God from your heart." Not the exciting version. The Monday morning version. The version nobody sees. That's the one God rewards.

Personal Response

- Think about your work this week — whatever form it takes. Which part of it is hardest to approach as an act of worship? What makes it feel disconnected from God?
- What would change about how you showed up to work — not what you do, but why and how you do it — if you genuinely believed Christ was the audience?
- Ask God to sanctify your ordinary work this week. Ask him to help you find him in the tasks you'd rather skip, the roles you didn't choose, and the moments nobody else notices.

WEEK 7

“Stand”

Ephesians 6:10 - 24

The Soldier in the Room

Ephesians 6:13-17 (NIV)

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Paul wrote this passage chained to a Roman soldier. He was not imagining a metaphor from memory. He was looking at one. The belt holding the soldier's tunic in place so it wouldn't impede movement. The breastplate protecting the vital organs. The heavy sandals with iron hobnails that gave the soldier traction on any terrain. The large rectangular shield that, when interlocked with others, formed an almost impenetrable wall. The helmet. The short sword.

Each piece of equipment existed for a reason, designed through centuries of trial and failure to keep a soldier alive and effective in the field. Roman military equipment was among the most sophisticated of the ancient world. Paul was surrounded by it, studying it, and finding in it a picture of something the church desperately needed to understand.

The belt of truth. In Roman armor, the belt was not decorative — it held everything else together. Without it, the armor shifted and became a liability rather than a protection. Paul puts truth there first because a life built on anything less than what is actually real will shift and slide at the worst possible moment. Truth isn't just an intellectual virtue. It's the thing that holds the rest of you together when you're under pressure.

The breastplate of righteousness covered the heart and lungs — the center of life. The righteousness Paul describes isn't your moral resume. It's the righteousness that has been given to you in Christ, imputed and real, covering the most vulnerable parts of who you are. The enemy's most effective attack is almost always at the heart — at your sense of worth, your standing before God, your right to belong. Righteousness is what covers that.

Paul looked at the soldier in his room and saw the church. He sees you in it too. Every piece is assigned. Every piece is necessary. And unlike the soldier's armor, this equipment never wears out.

Personal Response

- Look at the list of armor again: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God. Which piece do you most take for granted — the one you assume is in place without regularly putting it on?
- The belt of truth holds everything else together. Where in your life is truth being compromised — in what you say, what you tell yourself, what you pretend is fine when it isn't?
- Ask God to show you which piece of armor you most need to deliberately pick up today. Then ask him to help you actually wear it.

The Armor You Can't See

Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

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

Paul lists six pieces of armor in verses 13-17. Then he adds a seventh — and it isn't a piece of equipment at all. It's a practice. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

Some scholars argue that prayer is the posture that holds all the other armor in place — not a seventh piece, but the atmosphere in which the other six function. You can put on truth without prayer, but prayer is what keeps truth alive and active in you rather than just intellectually held. You can carry the shield of faith without prayer, but prayer is what keeps faith from becoming a habit of thought rather than a living dependence on a living God.

The phrase “all occasions” is worth pausing on. Paul doesn't say pray when you feel like it. He doesn't say pray in the morning or pray in your designated quiet time. He says all occasions. The Greek word is *kairos* — which means the right moment, the appointed time. Paul is saying: every moment that presents itself is an occasion for prayer. The difficult conversation. The anxious thought. The moment before you respond to the email that made you angry. All of them.

And then he adds something that most people miss: “be alert.” The armor of God is not passive protection. It requires a watchful posture — someone who is paying attention to what is actually happening in the invisible dimension of their life, not just the visible one. Prayer is how you stay alert to that dimension. It keeps the eyes of your heart open to what God is doing and what the enemy is attempting.

The armor you can't see is often the most important piece. The Roman soldier's equipment was impressive and visible. But the soldier who prays is the one who knows what he's fighting before the battle begins.

Personal Response

- How would you honestly describe your current prayer life? Not ideally — actually. What does it look like on a normal week?
- What does “all occasions” look like practically for you? Think of two or three specific moments in your ordinary day that could become occasions for prayer but currently aren't.
- Ask God to make you more alert — to what he is doing, to what the enemy is attempting, and to the moments when prayer is exactly what is needed. Ask him to make prayer feel less like a discipline and more like a reflex.

The Bravest Thing Paul Ever Said

Ephesians 6:19-20 (NIV)

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Paul has just written one of the most theologically comprehensive letters in the New Testament. He has described the eternal purposes of God, the mystery of the gospel, the nature of the church, the armor of God, and the spiritual forces arrayed against the people of Christ. He has done it from a prison cell. And now, at the end of all of it, he asks for prayer.

Not prayer for his release. Not prayer for his comfort or his safety. He asks for courage. Specifically, he asks for the courage to keep saying what he has been saying, in the way he has been saying it, without fear.

This is worth sitting with. Paul — the man who survived stonings, shipwrecks, beatings, and imprisonment, who said “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” — this man is asking his friends to pray that he wouldn’t be afraid. Not that the fear would go away. That he would speak fearlessly in spite of it.

Courage, in Paul’s understanding, isn’t the absence of fear. It’s faithfulness in the presence of it. And even the most faithful person Paul’s letters ever describe needed other people praying for his courage to hold.

There is something deeply releasing about this. If Paul needed prayer for courage, you are not failing when you need it too. The battle you are in requires more than you can produce on your own. The courage to keep going, to keep speaking the truth, to keep standing in territory Christ has won — that kind of courage doesn’t come from self-sufficiency. It comes from a community of people who are praying for each other to not be afraid.

Seven sessions of Ephesians. And at the very end, Paul’s final request is not theological. It’s personal. Pray for my courage. That’s where the letter lands. That’s where we land too.

Who is praying for your courage? And who needs you to pray for theirs?

Personal Response

- What is the thing you currently need courage for? Not the thing you should say you need courage for — the actual thing. Name it.
- Is there someone in your life who is in a battle that requires more courage than they feel they have right now? Pray for them specifically by name before you close this devotional.
- Ask God for what Paul asked for: not that the fear would disappear, but that you would speak and act fearlessly in spite of it. Ask him to surround you with people who will pray that prayer over you.