



Week Four

Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and ... clothe yourselves with your new self created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:23-24

This study follows a pattern of gathering—reflection—sharing—prayer.

GATHERING

Last week our practice focused on breath prayers How did that go for folks?

This week's theme in worship is holiness as being fully alive. When you hear words like 'holy' or 'obedient', does that feel inviting or limiting?

SHARED REFLECTION: Ephesians 4:17-32

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 out loud once. Which part of this passage stands out most to you?

This entire section in Ephesians contrasts the old and new life. What characteristics are true of the old and which are true of the new? You can make use of the contrasting things that we are to adopt (put on) or abandon (put off) as well.

If you have the time as a group, focus in on all the places Paul mentions God / God the Father, Jesus Christ or the Spirit. What does Paul focus on each time one of these persons in the Trinity is mentioned? What difference does it make to our own journey in holiness?

At one point Paul warns us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Why grief, do you suppose, and not "anger" or "ignore"? How does it change your own motivation to have the Spirit's reaction to our going back to the old self described as grief rather than anger?

Laurie made a big deal out of Ephesians 4:23 and the importance of the renewal of our mind by the Spirit. What, in practical terms, is different having this verse in the letter instead of Paul going directly from "put off" to "put on" in his instructions?

Laurie also was fairly direct about how grievous it is when the sort of talk and action Paul describes in 4:31 is practiced and tolerated in families and in the church as a family. But honestly, it is very awkward to know how to respond when someone is talking in one of these ways — or to be on the receiving end of someone saying, "hey — no bitterness, remember?" How can a family, or friends, or a small group, or folks in a church help each other to abandon these 'old self' ways of talking and to adopt kindness, compassion and forgiveness (Eph. 4:32)?

Week Four ...

SHARED LIFE —

Practicing holiness ... Renewal of the spirit of our minds (Concentration)

“A crucial aspect of holiness is an increase in *concentration*:
the focusing of mind, will and affections
on the holy God
and on his ways with us”
— John Webster

The practice for this week is to concentrate, that is, to focus our mind will and affections on the holy God and his ways with us. It is another way to speak about being renewed in the spirit of our minds. Talk as a group about some practical spiritual disciplines that a believer can try to address one specific “abandoning and adopting” habit in Ephesians 4. Make it a goal, if time allows, for each person to state how they sense God’s Spirit inviting them to be renewed in mind and action this week.

For example, I (Laurie) have not been stealing, but I also have not been thinking about my work as a way to earn enough to share with those in need. Sometimes I’m annoyed at the time I need to put into work. After prayerful reflection, I sense an invitation from the Lord to refocus my attention away from myself and what I’d rather be doing, and think instead, “this task / time is dedicated to earning money that can go to Meftua” (my sponsored child through World Vision). The refocusing not only wakes me up out of my sad self, it also reminds me to pray for her and her family, and that usually becomes prayers for others as well ... and it shifts me into gratitude for the gift of good work.

How goes it with your soul?

These are questions that your group may be ready to use at some point for mutual accountability and encouragement. They can also be questions you use to meet up with each other in prayer partners between group meeting times. The goal is authentic discovery and mutual love as we seek to follow Jesus with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

Where is God at work in your life?
Where are you resisting?

Where are you cooperating?
How can we pray & encourage you?

PRAYER

Be sure to dedicate time to praying together in God’s presence and for one another. You may want to take some notes here to remember how to hold each other in prayer during the week.