



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 4:1-16 :: “In Christ You Are Equipped” [5.26.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: The best version of you is the version that looks more like Jesus and most like Jesus. God provides everything you need to equip you to grow to be like Jesus. Today, we learn how.

Subject: God’s equipping of believers

Object: Grow to be like Jesus

Context: In the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, we discover our position or identity as followers of Jesus. In chapters 4-6 we learn the practice of Christian living.

A. Christ’s example (1-6)

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

1. Live like a follower of Jesus (1)

Therefore (1) refers to your spiritual position as a follower of Jesus. The blessings of adoption, reconciliation, inheritance, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as part of every spiritual blessings in Christ (Cf. Romans 12:1-2). *Beseech* means to strongly exhort, encourage or beg. The term *walk* is used seven times and means a manner of living, and implies progress. You are to *walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*. In light of all that Christ has done for us (Ephesians 2:8-10) it is proper to return love and do our part to live like a follower of Jesus.

2. Reflect Jesus’ virtues (2-6)

a. Humility and gentleness (2)

With all lowliness and gentleness. Lowliness is humility. It is not simply thinking less of yourself, but putting the needs of others before our own. Humility also involves an awareness of our dependence upon God rather than self-reliance.

In the Greco-Roman world, humility was seen as a purely negative trait and not a virtue. Aristotle, Alexander the Great’s teacher, taught that lowliness should never be exhibited, “The greatest Greek virtue is to refuse to tolerate any insult and readiness to strike back.” In contrast, a biblical worldview exalts humility as a virtue or grace. In the Old Testament we read, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

Similarly gentleness or meekness is a virtue. The term is not a reference to weakness, rather it refers to power under control. The Greek term was used in the context of a horse under rein. A bridled horse is not weak, but is yielded.

Jesus exemplified both humility and gentleness. In His only autobiographical statement, He declared that He was humble and gentle (Matthew 11:29). Similarly, Jesus' humility is exemplified in His incarnation, putting the needs of others before his own, and ultimately giving His life upon the cross (Philippians 2:3-8).

b. Patient endurance (2)

With longsuffering, bearing with one another in love. Longsuffering is the idea of patient endurance. It conjures the image of a long fuse rather than a quick temper; and responding in love rather than reacting in the flesh.

Bearing is literally “holding them up” or putting up with others.

As you contemplate Jesus' ministry to the disciples you see patient endurance modeled. When Jesus foretold His crucifixion the 12 argued among themselves as to who would be greatest in the kingdom, and Jesus loved them to the end (Luke 22:24, John 13:1).

c. Unity (3-6)

Seven times you see the word “one.” There is one: body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God. We are called to

endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (3). The peace between us is a spiritual work that bonds and unites us. We have a common hope of life with Christ, common faith in the new covenant, common baptism regarding identity in Christ, and we worship the same God who is in and among us who believe in Christ (4-6).

Jesus models unity as all three persons of the one God are in perfect communion. Similarly, Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room, hours before the cross, is a call for believers to be united like the God the Father and God the Son (John 17).

B. Christ's gifts to equip and edify (7-12)

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

1. Spiritual gifts are given to all (7-10) (1Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1Peter 4:1-7).

Jesus' followers need to learn how to walk worthy, and need to be equipped and edified (built-up). Spiritual gifts enable this to happen. Each of us have received at least one spiritual gifts from Christ (7, 1Corinthians 12:1-12). There are various gifts. At least twenty are listed, but they are not complete lists (e.g. worship, and intercession are not listed).

Verses 8-9 quote Psalm 68:18. The context was the practice of conquering kings taking their own subjects who had been liberated from an enemy, and the spoils of war, and the prisoners of their vanquished enemy through their own capital before their own citizens. Paul is referring to Jesus descending to Sheol (Hades, Luke 16) during the three days in nights in the belly of the earth. The ascension (10, Acts 1:9) is the evidence of the triumph. And just as ancient kings gave gifts to their subjects, King Jesus has given gifts.

2. Spiritual gifts to equip and edify (11-12)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

First, we need to distinguish “gifting” from an office. For example, the office of apostle was limited to 12 people. Similarly there were people called to the office of prophet in the Old and New Testaments, there are no new apostles or prophets, but there are giftings that are related to those offices.

Apostolic gifting relates to being sent on a mission, and can be seen in missionaries and visionary leaders.

Prophetic gifting urges and exhorts people to yield to God, strengthens and comforts others (1Corinthians 14:31).

Evangelists love to proclaim the good news to the unsaved. Phillip helped to oversee a benevolence ministry, and the shared the gospel in Samaria, and to an Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 6-8). Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist (2Timothy 4:5).

The *pastor-teacher* gifting is to lead, shepherd, and feed the flock of God (John 21, 2Timothy 4:2). They help people to understand the Bible, and apply biblical truth to their lives.

The purpose of these gifts is to *equip* (12) or prepare. The Greek term is used re mending bones. In essence, set something or someone straight. The ones being equipped are *the saints* (followers of Jesus) (12). You are being equipped *for the work of ministry* (12). Every follower of Jesus should discover an area where they can serve others in a local church. The goal is *the edifying of the body of Christ*. To *edify* means to build-up. When people are using their gifts to serve others, they are built-up, and those they serve are built-up and the *body of Christ* is strong and healthy.

C. Christ's Goal (13-16)

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

1. Grow to be like Jesus (13-15)

We are to grow in *the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man* (13, 2Peter 3:18). *Perfect* is the idea of spiritually mature. *To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (13) is the goal, to be like Jesus. You are to abandon childish things and seek spiritual maturity (1Corinthians 13:11).

A result of spiritual maturity is stability. We grow as mature spiritual adults and no longer like *children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting* (14). The image is of a boat being taken off course, but it is immature Christians who are reeling.

The goal is to, *grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ* (15).

2. A garden for growth (15-16)

a. Biblical truth (15)

But, speaking the truth is set in contrast to false doctrine, and false motives (14). The antidote for recognizing and rejecting false doctrine is knowing sound doctrine. Jesus declared, "If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

b. Biblical love (15)

Speaking the truth in love. To grow you need truth and love, both and rather than either or. The Greek is literally, "truthing in love." Thus we demonstrate love not only with doctrine and words, but by committing, serving, putting the needs of others before our own, accepting people without compromising truth or condoning sin. The truth of God's word and love brings spiritual growth.

c. Biblical community (16)

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Spiritual growth occurs when *every part of the body does its share*. Everyone doing their part causes growth of the individual and community building up the whole in love.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1. What comes to mind when you consider the phrase, "Live like a follower of Jesus"?

Q2. What are some of the spiritual gifts that you believe that God has given you?

Q3. How might you use those gifts to build up others in your church community?

Q4. How can a healthy church be a garden for growth?

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. A helpful article to help you walk worthy: <https://www.gotquestions.org/walk-worthy.html>

2. Here are some insights regarding spiritual gifts: <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-gifts-survey.html>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
Contemplate and pray that God would guide your next steps in your spiritual growth.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. **Preparation and participation:** Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?**
If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.
3. **The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better.** As a leader, discuss this section frequently.
5. **The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples.** Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 4:17-32 :: "In Christ You Are New"