



Questions for reflection and discussion

Week 1: Sit with Christ

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. This could be interpreted in very abstract, theological ways but discuss how it applies to you practically. In what ways have you and are you experiencing grace at work in you, making you alive? What areas of your life feel dead? Based on what you read here, what do you need to do for those areas to become alive?
3. Read Ephesians 1:17-23. What kind of enlightenment is the writer talking about here? In what ways do our eyes need to be opened and to what? What do you think it means that "Christ is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms"? Given that the previous passage states that we are also seated with Christ, what are the implications for us and what kind of power is the writer talking about?
4. Read Philippians 2:1-11. How does this passage reframe power and authority? How did this kind of power play out in Jesus' life? How could it play out in our lives? What is appealing about this to you? What about this makes you feel uncomfortable and/or challenged?
5. Given what we know about what Jesus taught and how he lived, and given the early church writings (like the ones above) about power, why do you think so many church communities over the centuries have tended to become authoritarian, controlling, and even aggressive? What are ways to counter this?
6. Read Mark 9:33-37. Why do you think Jesus sits down in this story? In what parts of your life right now do you feel in competition with others? In what ways are you struggling to be first? On reflection what would you say is driving that competitiveness? How might being "seated with Christ" help you let go?
7. Break into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (or stay together as a larger group if that feels appropriate) and each share the one area where you feel most challenged to change based on the above reflections and discussions. Then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Sit with Christ

Take some time each day this week to "sit with Christ." Center yourself by closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing. Let go of tension and intrusive thoughts and then read the passage overleaf. Just relax and let the reality the words describe flow into you. Don't try to force or convince yourself of anything, just let go of any resistance and receive the spirit of Christ as a gift.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established 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.

Ephesians 3:14-19 (NIV)

Week 2: Walk in Love

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. In Ephesians 1:1 the writer addresses their readers as "holy" (or "saints" in some translations). The meaning behind this word is "set apart." How could a sense of being set apart have a positive impact on a community? How could it have an unhealthy impact? In what ways do you feel set apart and how does that play out in your own life?
3. Read Ephesians 3:14-19. What does this passage tell us about how to walk in the way of love? How could you practically participate in this more? Now read Ephesians 4:1-6. What does this passage tell us about how to walk in the way of love? What does it look like? How could you practically participate in this more?
4. In Ephesians 4:20-24 the writer talks about the "old self" and the "new self." Some spiritual thinkers (like Thomas Merton) have used the terms "false self" and "true self" for these matters. Which of these terms do you find most helpful? What do they mean to you and how are they significant in your own life? How might verse 23 ("be made new in the attitude of your minds") relate to what you read in Ephesians 3:14-19 above? How might verse 24 ("put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness") relate to what you read in Ephesians 4:1-6 above?
5. Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9. What do you find inspiring about this passage and why? What do you find alarming or disturbing about this passage and why? How do you think an understanding of the first century cultural context of the writer should influence the way we interpret this passage? How does this make you feel about the way to approach scripture as a whole? In what ways is it helpful? In what ways is it uncomfortable?
6. Look more specifically at Ephesians 5:21-33. What evidence do you see for a positive dynamic towards inclusivity and equality? What evidence do you see of patriarchy, exclusion, and inequality? How might the positive dynamic influence and challenge us to respond to the patriarchy, exclusion, and inequality in the passage? How might this influence the way we approach scripture as a whole?
7. Take some time alone to reflect on the following personal questions:
 - What are you doing to consciously experience union with the risen Christ?
 - How does your view of self and others need to change?
 - With whom are you resistant to deference and why?
 - Where do you need to take the pain and hurt you carry?

Then break into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (or stay together as a larger group if that feels appropriate) and each share the one area where you feel most challenged to act. Then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Walk in Love

Make a point this week of consciously walking in the way of love. Start each day by reading the scriptures below. Invite God's spirit to reset how you see yourself and others and to refocus you on opportunities to practice the way of love throughout the day. Specifically, look out for opportunities where you can use words and actions to bring unity and inclusion. Be aware of moments when you feel competitive, controlling, or the urge to get your own way. Intentionally adopt a posture of deference and generosity instead.

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way 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 (NIV)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 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. 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 4:1-6 (NIV)

Week 3: Stand Up to Oppressive Forces

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you? Was there anything that seemed puzzling or with which you disagreed?
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-20. Was this passage already familiar to you? If so, what thoughts and feelings do you have about this passage, and how have they changed over time (if at all)?
3. What do you think Paul means when he urges the Ephesians to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (v. 10)? How might this relate to sitting with Christ in gentleness and humility, and walking in love and peace?
4. How do you understand the concept of “rulers, authorities, the powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (v. 12)? What might resistance to such forces mean for us in our own context today?
5. How might the metaphor of putting on God’s armor be helpful? How might it be unhelpful?
6. In this part of the letter to the churches in and around Ephesus, Paul draws heavily on the prophet Isaiah—as well as referencing the psalms. How do the following passages cast a different light on our understanding of “the armor of God”?
 - Isaiah 11:2-5 (Note: in the LXX version that Paul references, v. 5 reads, “Righteousness will be his belt and truth the sash around his waist.”)
 - Isaiah 59:15-17
 - Isaiah 52:7
 - Psalm 91:4-5
7. Consider the interpretations of God’s armor below. How are these items part of your identity in Christ? How do you “wear” them? Where do you feel weak? Where do you feel strong?
 - Belt of truth—grounded integrity that unites the church
 - Breastplate of God’s righteousness on behalf of the marginalized and exploited
 - Shoes of readiness to proclaim and embody the good news of peace
 - Shield of God’s faithfulness
 - Helmet of God’s salvation and liberation of the oppressed
 - Sword of the transformative word of God that makes us more like Jesus
8. Reread Ephesians 6:18-20. Take a few minutes to share about any situation in which you want to be “fearless” in standing up for what is right, or anything related to your responses in question 7 above. Spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Standing in God's strength

Each day this week, read the verses below.

- **Be challenged** to stand in God's strength.
- **Take encouragement** from the promise that you will be able to stand up to anything.
- **Receive** the grace and peace that God gives.
- **Commit** to living out the love and faith we see in Jesus.

Let the Lord make you strong... Evil days will come. But you will be able to stand up to anything. And after you have done everything you can, you will still be standing... May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give peace to the brothers and sisters, and also love and faith. May grace be given to everyone who loves our Lord Jesus Christ with a love that will never die.

Ephesians 6:10, 13, 23-24