



# **LIFE AT THE CENTER**

**Ron Pickell**

**LEADER'S GUIDE**

*Life at the Center—Leader's Guide*

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# Journey... Life at the Center

I once read, “find your center, and let the rest of the world spin around you,” which sounds really good and like something we might hear on campus. But what if your center isn’t all that great or a bit orbital? Of course that would place us at the center of our own universe which can’t possibly be true. Still, living a well centered life makes a whole lot of sense, but centered on what or whom?

The Apostle Paul talked about living a centered life in his letter to the house church in Ephesus. Here’s how he put it:

*“He (Jesus) is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ’s body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.”* Ephesians 1:22, 23 (Message Bible)

According to this, Jesus is the center of everything. From that center and with the church as His body He is filling the world with His presence. In Jesus we find our own center in the beautiful tapestry of the church—God’s new community!

This may be a difficult picture to visualize since the church is filled with broken people and has received such bad press. It has become virtually impossible for many to see any reflection of Jesus in His church as the bumper sticker reads, “God save me from Your followers!” Still, the people that Jesus called to join Him in His mission are the centrifugal force of God’s new world order and His agency for reshaping and transforming the world!

We might say that this letter to the church in Ephesus was Paul’s ecclesiology or theology of the church similar to his soteriology or theology of salvation in his letters to the *Romans* and *Galatians*. It appears that *Ephesians* was intended like many of the apostles’ letters to circulate among the house churches with these subtle differences. *Ephesians* was not addressed to anyone in particular—just *To the Ephesians*. It contains no personal counsels and reads more general in nature than most of his other letters, making it appear more like a generic letter about the church and its mission.

Read from this perspective, Paul and even more importantly Jesus have an extremely high view of the church. It is central to God’s mission and the agency through which He is transforming the world. It is God’s new society!

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote about a new man and a new society in the *Communist Manifesto* pamphlet of 1848. The new society that they envisioned was a classless society following the revolution, and the new man would emerge as a result of the great economic revolution. Jesus, however, 1,800 years earlier had already birthed a new community called the ekklesia—*called out ones*.

*Kirk* or modern day “church” is the facility that Gaelic believers much later worshipped in across Northern Europe. The term “church” stuck, but what Jesus created was much more than a building. It was a living, breathing activated community of people called out from the world and into God’s kingdom. This new phenomena was God’s community—shaped by the fellowship of Jesus through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

What does the community of Jesus look like and how was it to make a difference in the world? We get snapshot pictures of it throughout the New Testament Epistles, but the view from our modern balcony into the earliest framework is found right here in the letter to the Ephesians.

It may still be difficult to consider the church we know today as members of Christ's body, but what if we were to reimagine the church as the entity that Jesus referred to in His teachings? What if the church Paul is describing here is not so much the institution it has become—towering expensive architectural structures, deeply divided denominations of bureaucracy that produce church members that act more like the goats in Jesus' parable than the sheep who cared and ministered to the people that Jesus gave His life for?

What if the church at the center with Jesus is defined more like the one in Acts 4 who "listened to the apostles teaching, ate together daily, worshiped and prayed together, shared their surplus of food and wealth with others in need and who the Holy Spirit was adding to their numbers daily"? What if it looked more like the other church in Acts 13, the Antioch church that was known for its "Spirit filled members and its passion to reach outsiders including them in God's mission—the church where so much of the mission of Jesus was being carried out that the church members were being called Christians by the outsiders they were ministering to"?

These churches were filled with people living close to Jesus and following in the ministry of God's Spirit. These churches were living life at the center because they were defined by Christ, the head of a body that looked and behaved like Him. The world becomes peripheral to the church when the church is living at the center where Jesus is Lord!

It's one thing to search for an image of the church from the early followers of Jesus, but where can we find examples of this radical new society today? When we stop to consider the simple expressions of following Jesus as a spirit-led community, surprisingly small campus fellowships can feel more like the church that Paul had in mind than the forms of church we are accustomed to. What if instead of going to church we are the church as we live our faith together regardless of the space or circumstances surrounding us? What if the church wasn't a building? What if the church is exactly what Jesus created it to be—His *ecclesia*—those called out of the world into God's new kingdom?

Living a God-centered life on campus is living in community with Jesus at the center with the powerful life of Jesus flowing through His body and out onto the campus. This is exactly the kind of church Paul had in mind. Let's listen to what he had to say about a life centered in God reaching the campus and changing the world!

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## Breaking Down *Journey*

*Journey* was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.



- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leader's guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using *Journey* in their daily life. We recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the number of questions is limited in the *My Story* section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.



- **Back Story** is a helpful guide for those leading out in the *Journey* series and is only included in the leader's book.

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## Getting the most out of *Journey*

Here's what you're going to need for *Life at the Center*:

- Good soil—an open and receptive heart
- Working the soil—Determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst—Desire to follow God as He leads
- We also strongly advise reading the entire book of Ephesians since *Journey* only zeros in on selected episodes. Use this study guide for your group reading/discussion. The important thing is to really lean into what Paul's letter to the Ephesians can teach us. In fact, set it aside if it's getting in the way of hearing his story. Remember, God and His ways are the real study, not *Journey*!

Best Practices: The five S's of hearing and discerning God's voice

- **Seek:** Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
- **Soak:** Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about the passage.
- **Seal:** Seal God's word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.

- **Script:** Journal or write if even a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God's voice and the way He is speaking through scripture.
  - **Share:** Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in *Journey*. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.
- 

## *Journey* Covenant

I want to follow Jesus in the noble purpose He has for me. I want to participate in *Journey* to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and small group meetings.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

My best times of availability are

Morning: \_\_\_\_\_

Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

# Blessed and Highly Favored

John Leis, Campus Ministry Director, Washington Conference

One of my favorite stories comes from *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* (1910) in an article titled “*The Most Remarkable Incident.*” A ship captain recounts meeting George Müller while navigating dense fog. Exhausted after 22 hours on the bridge, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

“Captain,” Müller said, “*I must be in Quebec by Saturday afternoon.*” It was Wednesday. The captain dismissed it as impossible. Müller calmly replied, “*If your ship can’t take me, God will provide another way. I have never missed an engagement in 57 years.*”

Müller suggested they pray. Skeptical, the captain followed him to the chart room. Müller prayed simply: “*Lord, if it is Your will, remove the fog in five minutes.*” As the captain prepared to pray, Müller stopped him. “*You don’t believe He will, and I believe He already has. There’s no need to pray further.*”

Müller then said, “*Captain, I have known my Lord for 47 years, and He has never failed me. Open the door.*” The captain obeyed – and the fog had vanished.

We serve a God who not only owns the cattle on a thousand hills and calms storms with a word but pours heaven out for us!



1. Which do you think people talk about more – being lucky, being blessed, or being favored? Why do you think that is?
2. When you hear the word “chosen” what comes to mind? How does that word make you feel?



Read Ephesians 1:1–14.

1. According to Paul in Ephesians 1:1–14, what blessings have we received “in Christ”? How do these blessings reveal that we are truly “blessed and highly favored”?
2. Verse 4 says that believers were chosen “in him before the foundation of the world.” What does this tell us about God’s plan and His view of us?
3. In verse 6, Paul says we are “accepted in the Beloved.” What does that phrase reveal about our value and relationship with God through Christ?
4. How does knowing that you have been chosen, redeemed, and sealed by God (vv. 4, 7, 13) influence how you live each day?
5. Do you find it easy or difficult to view yourself as “blessed and highly favored”? Why do you think that is?
6. According to verse 13, what must take place before someone is “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”? What does it mean to be sealed, and how does this connect with Revelation 7:4–9 and God’s mark upon His people?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. Have you ever intentionally set aside time to reflect on and accept the spiritual gifts Jesus has given you? What was that experience like, or what do you think it could look like?
3. In Psalm 81:10, God invites us to 'open [our] mouth wide' so He can fill it. What would it look like for you to truly accept and live out this promise in your life today?



## Back Story

The city of Ephesus was a major cultural and commercial center in the Roman Empire—strategically located, spiritually diverse, and highly influential. It was also home to one of the strongest early Christian communities. Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other city during his missionary journeys (Acts 19), and the church there experienced a powerful movement of God, marked by repentance, miracles, and deep discipleship including a great revival that rid the city of much spiritualism (Acts 19:19, 20).

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he began not with correction or instruction, but with praise—celebrating the spiritual blessings believers have “in Christ.” From being chosen before the foundation of the world, to redemption through His blood, to the sealing of the Holy Spirit, Paul emphasized that every blessing is received through union with Christ. The phrase “in Christ” or “in Him” appears repeatedly in these verses—highlighting the source of every gift and the center of our identity.

Ephesus was indeed a church that embraced these gifts. Yet, years later, in Revelation 2:1–7, Jesus addressed this very church with both affirmation and warning. He commended them for their works, discernment, and perseverance—but also rebuked them: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Revelation 2:4, KJV). Despite all their knowledge, zeal, and favor, they drifted from an intimate relationship with Christ—the very One in whom all blessings are found.

While we are blessed and highly favored, the call is to remain rooted in Christ, not just in doctrine, activity, or experience. Our spiritual inheritance is not just a concept—it’s a relationship. Let this passage both encourage and caution us to embrace all God has given, and to never let go of our first love.



# Eyes to See

Samson Sembeka, MDiv, Pastor and Campus Minister,  
University of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Have you ever had a moment when you suddenly understood something that was unclear before? Maybe you struggled with a math problem until one day, it just clicked. That moment of realization is like what Paul prays for in Ephesians 1:15-23. He asks God to give believers wisdom and revelation so they can truly know Him.

Author and disability rights advocate Helen Keller lost her vision and hearing abilities after an illness at 19 months. She lived in darkness until her teacher, Anne Sullivan, made a simple yet life-changing breakthrough: running water over Helen's hands while spelling "water" into her palm. In that moment, something clicked. Helen realized that everything had a name. That moment of understanding opened the door to an entirely new world for Helen. In a similar way, Paul prays that believers' spiritual eyes would be opened so they can truly grasp God's power and hope.



1. Have you ever had a moment where something suddenly made sense to you? What was it like?
2. If you had to explain the concept of "seeing with your heart" to someone, how would you describe it?



Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

1. What does Paul pray for the believers in this passage?
2. Why do you think Paul focuses on wisdom, revelation, and the eyes of their hearts being enlightened?
3. How does understanding God's power change the way we live?
4. Paul emphasizes hope, inheritance, and power. Which of these stands out most to you, and why?
5. In verse 22 and 23 Paul emphasizes that God is filling the universe through the church—His body. What is your relationship to church and what role does it play in your life?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What areas of your life do you need to see with new eyes?
3. How can you actively seek God's wisdom and revelation in your daily life?



## Back Story

Ephesus was a major city in the Roman Empire, known for its wealth and the famous Temple of Artemis. It was also a place of great spiritual activity, with many people practicing magic and worshiping various gods. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, a group of Gentile believers, to encourage them in their faith and deepen their understanding of God's power.

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 is more than just words of encouragement—it's a foundational plea for spiritual clarity. He asks God to give the believers a spirit of wisdom and revelation so they can truly know Him. The phrase "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" suggests that spiritual insight is necessary to grasp the depth of God's love, the hope of His calling, and the greatness of His power. This power, Paul explains, is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in authority above all things. This power is amazing!

Helen Keller's story provides a modern example of what it means to move from darkness to light. Just as she was physically unable to see the world around her, we are spiritually blind without God's revelation. But when God opens our spiritual eyes, we begin to see and understand His truth in a way that transforms our lives.

Paul's prayer is just as relevant today as it was then. Many believers struggle with doubt, insecurity, or a lack of direction. This passage reminds us that we don't need to navigate life blindly—we can ask God to open our eyes and reveal His truth to us. Just like Helen Keller's moment of realization changed her forever, a deeper understanding of God can radically transform our faith and daily lives.

# Recreated to Work With God

Nelson Silva, DMin, ACF/YA Director, Kentucky Tennessee Conference

An experienced Christian once told me, *"I haven't sinned in weeks."* She was troubled by fellow believers grieving their ongoing sinfulness. Could it really be possible to live without sin every day?

At first, I found the idea absurd. But as I listened, I recalled my own past. Decades ago, as a business student at a secular university, I prided myself on my "sinless" life. While classmates drank beer between classes, I studied or exercised. When a sociology professor assigned a movie report on *Ghost*, I wrestled with its spiritist themes. Seeking advice, I was relieved when an alternative assignment was offered. I saw these choices as proof of my holiness—God would always provide a way out.

My most defining moment came at an outdoor gym, where a classmate noticed my clean speech and respectful attitude. That conversation led me to share Christ with him. Recently, I reunited with Ivan in Caracas, Venezuela—30 years later—and had the privilege of praying for him.

For years, I believed my victories over sin validated my faith. My friend's claim—*"I haven't sinned in weeks"*—was something I, too, had once thought. But Scripture offers a different perspective. Paul reminds us in Ephesians that we were *"dead in our transgressions"* and *"by nature deserving of wrath."* Romans 3:23 states, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* while John warns, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves"* (1 John 1:8). Even Paul, a pillar of faith, called himself *"the chief of sinners"* (1 Timothy 1:15).

So how do we reconcile these truths? Can we truly live without sin? Or does acknowledging our need for grace lead us to deeper faith?



1. Share a time when you experienced a moral dilemma. What made it so pressing at the time? If faced with the same situation today, would your decision change?
2. Share a time when you were surprised to know that people noticed your behavior.



Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

1. Paul begins this section with describing us as dead in our sins, but moves us to resurrection and life in Christ. How would you describe yourself as raised from death to new life and seated with God in heavenly places?
2. Take a minute to evaluate your upbringing, church, campus, and even your own theology. How do you struggle with accepting the free gift of God's grace? How can that mindset change?

3. What is the connection between grace, faith, and human effort in the salvation process?
4. How do you work with God? (Read Ephesians 2:10, 1 Peter 4:11, and 1 Corinthians 10:31).
5. Jews and Gentiles were at odds in the early church. Jewish Christians believed that gentile converts had to embrace Judaism. Later on, in Ephesians, Paul calls it a wall! Is there a similar wall of separation on your campus, church, or society today? What role are you, your ACF chapter, or your church playing in building or tearing down this wall?
6. How do you see your current studies preparing you to fulfill God's recreation (grace) in you? Read 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7.
7. How are you seeking clarity on your future career and God's desire to bless the world through you?
8. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. Have you ever felt morally superior to others? Share with the group if you are comfortable.
3. What was it like to live as God's handiwork on campus this week?



## Back Story

John R. W. Stott's commentary on Ephesians refers to the three areas in which we are dead apart from Christ. He says we are dead in our transgressions by virtue of the *ways of this world*—the way we used to live before Christ. Next, we are held captive by the *spirit of the power of the air* that is now at work in the disobedient and finally overcome by our own *sinful nature*. In other words, we are held captive to sin in a downward spiral of death from the influences around us, the power above us, and our own sinful nature within us—around, above, and within!

Perhaps the most powerful words in Ephesians 2 are: "But God." Were it not for God this trilemma of sin within, without, and above would seal our fate—but *God* in His mercy raised us up in Christ Jesus when we were dead and actually seated us above the trilemma in heaven with Him! And now we are not only alive in Christ; we have been brought back to God's original intention as stewards of God's grace—created to do good works and live triumphantly in Him!

The word grace leads this section of Ephesians while the words faith and works make an appearance in the context of salvation. Central to *soteriology* (salvation) is the word *sin*. Dallas Willard, in *Divine Conspiracy*, conceptualizes it as: "Sin Management." Believers have a reality to face: Sin. How can we manage it? Ephesians 2:1-10 argues that sin cannot be managed—at least not by us. Not even the law can manage sin because of sin's power in our life. Since it cannot be managed it must be buried! Through Christ's death and resurrection our old life in Adam and Eve must be buried and raised to a new life in Christ Jesus as part of God's new creation made to work in partnership with God as stewards of grace in His new world order.

And yet, even in our new life in Christ we still fall and still sin. I John 1:8, reminds us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." The idea here is sinning as a pattern of life. Through the indwelling of God's Spirit and spiritual disciplines like time alone with God in His word, prayer, and Christian fellowship, believers can live a new life of increasing victory. The pattern of being defeated by sin

has been broken and Christ—the new manager of our life described in Romans 6:11–14—has taken over so that sin no longer has total sway in our lives.

We are now free to live our glorious purpose. Free to live an abundant life in Him. Free to even fail as we live in Christ and He lives in us!

Look around: Where is God moving and how can you join Him? Where is the kingdom of God seeping through on your campus? God has raised us up and seated us with Christ to reestablish His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is what we died for, were buried for, were raised up and recreated for—to be doing the good works of God in the world and bring glory to Him!



# Picturing God's New Society

Stephen Erich, MA, Campus Minister, Greater New York Conference

We met on the first Friday of every month; college students and young adults from across New York City. We came together to hear each other sing, to recite poetry, and to tell stories along a spiritual theme. It was usually delightful, or funny, or touching. But sometimes it wasn't.

In fact, we often made each other feel uncomfortable. We were a mixed group. We met at a Seventh-day Adventist Church uptown, but participants included Christians from other traditions, as well as Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and nonreligious people. Everyone had time at the mic to speak on their terms. And everyone listened, even when it got awkward, or offensive, or weird. Plenty of weird.

Some had never spoken in a church before, and admitted that they never thought they would tell their story in a church. Others didn't realize the event was intended to engage in faith until halfway through their comedy set, when their jokes weren't hitting the way they expected. And some got to practice expressing their spirituality in a pluralistic setting, without assuming everyone agreed with them.

If there are just two things I learned from my time with this experimental group in New York, it's this: 1) unity is not uniformity, but rather commitment to each other, and 2) peace is not always comfortable.

This week, we read Paul's vision for reconciliation through Christ. Reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, of hostile groups, of foreigners and strangers, even of two *humanities*. And how? Not because of creed. Not because of ethnicity. Simply because of the person of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation on this basis is stable like a cornerstone, and messy like a construction site—or like any small group of diverse students trying to be honest with each other.



1. Have you been close friends with someone very different from you?
2. What is one thing a close friend does that you just cannot understand—and yet you love them anyway?



Read Ephesians 2:11–22.

1. What is the person of Christ being contrasted against in these verses?
2. “He himself is our peace” (v. 14). What does it mean for a person to *be* peace?
3. How is peace based on Christ different from other kinds of peace?
4. Bodies and buildings are two metaphors used in this passage. What can we learn from them about peace and reconciliation?

5. Where does commitment show up in these verses?
6. What are the consequences of Christ's work on our behalf?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?
2. Can you remember a time when choosing peace prompted social discomfort?
3. Have you committed to a group of people (even if they're a little different than you)?



## Back Story

Ephesians 2 offers a glimpse into the kind of society God is building. Paul uses political language like *foreigner* and *citizen* to describe how people relate to the kingdom of God. This language would have been particularly salient to those living in Ephesus, a city that was part of a federation of cities called the Ionian League. Membership in the league gave them protection and special status, even to the point that they were allowed to mint their own coins within the Roman empire. The Ephesians were familiar with the importance of membership in a political body.

What might have been more difficult for the Ephesians—and often for us—to grasp, is the criteria upon which this membership was based. Paul writes that it is “in Christ Jesus” (v. 13), “in his flesh” (v. 15), and “through him” (v. 18) that we begin to belong. This idea clears up any propensity we might have to associate our belonging with something about ourselves. It isn’t based on where we were born, or where we live now, and it isn’t based, as Paul addressed in verse 11, on being circumcised. In fact, this passage says nothing about what the audience has done. Rather it describes a diverse audience with nothing else in common but Christ and what Christ has done for them.

And what is the result? Christ “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (v. 14). He took disparate groups and joined them together. We changed from foreigners and strangers to citizens and members of one household.

Removing barriers is often painful work. But so is enforcing them. Melissa Urban writes in *The Book of Boundaries* that “there is no comfortable solution.” She makes the point that whenever your boundaries are crossed, you have a choice of when to experience discomfort, but you don’t have the choice to forgo discomfort altogether. You can either experience the discomfort of confrontation, or you can experience the discomfort of living with an unresolved violation of your boundaries. The choice is yours, but both are uncomfortable.

If we take Urban’s argument one step further, in the context of Ephesians 2, we might begin to interrogate our religious boundaries. When we encounter someone that makes us uncomfortable, we always have the option to explain and enforce our boundaries. Often we should. Or we can live with the discomfort. But perhaps there’s a third option: to evaluate our boundaries. Where did they come from? Who do they protect? And—particularly when it comes to differences of religious practice and conviction—do they put up barriers to ours and others’ participation in the kingdom of God? If that is the case, it could be that this boundary is taking the place of Christ in our theology and practice.



# Unlikely Evangelists

Natasha Richards, MDiv student and Campus Ministry Liaison,  
Andrews University

I am sitting in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. By the time you read this, I would have just graduated with my Master's in Divinity and, during that time, also accomplished my Bachelor's. If you had told me 10 years ago that this would be my journey, I would have thought you were crazy. But as I look back, I realize that God has been preparing me for such a time as this.

Revelation is the mystery unveiled to our hearts by God. Much like the Apostle Paul, who once persecuted Christians, I too see myself as an unlikely evangelist. Someone who, by the world's standards, may not have been the obvious choice to carry the gospel forward. Yet, God's wisdom confounds human understanding, and He often chooses the most unlikely candidates to do His work.

The book of Ephesians offers profound insights into God's plan for salvation, the unity of believers, and the role we each play in His kingdom. Through this study, we'll explore how God uses us—flawed, imperfect, and unlikely—as vessels of His grace and truth.



1. Share a moment in your life when you felt unqualified or unlikely to succeed in something. How did God guide you through that experience?
2. Think of a modern-day "unlikely evangelist" (e.g., someone from a challenging background who now inspires others). Share what makes their story impactful.



## Read Ephesians 3:1–13.

1. Paul's Perspective: Paul, once a persecutor of Christians, now calls himself a servant of the gospel. Reflect on his transformation and the humility in his words (v. 8).
2. God's Mystery: Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ revealed to the gentiles (v. 6). What is the mystery and how does it reflect God's inclusive plan for salvation?
3. Empowerment by Grace: Paul acknowledges that it is only by God's grace that he is able to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (v. 7–8). How does grace empower us to step into roles we feel unqualified for?
4. Reflection on Calling: Like Paul, have you ever felt called to a role or task that seemed beyond your abilities? How did you respond?
5. Identifying Gifts: Ephesians 3:7 reminds us that God equips us through His Spirit. What unique gifts or talents has God given you to share the gospel?
6. Overcoming Barriers: Paul faced imprisonment and opposition but remained steadfast. What challenges or fears hold you back from sharing your faith, and how can you overcome them?
7. Unity in Christ: Paul emphasizes that the mystery of the gospel brings unity between Jews and Gentiles. How can we foster unity in our communities today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
  2. What is God teaching you and how is He using you to bring good news to your campus?
  3. What does the manifold wisdom of God look like on your campus?
- 



## Back Story

Let's talk about Paul for a second. If you think you're not "qualified" to do something big for God, Paul's story is about to blow your mind. Before he became the Apostle Paul, he was Saul – a guy who had one mission: to destroy the early church. Seriously, he was the guy Christians were terrified of. He was hunting them down, throwing them in prison, and even approving their deaths. If there was ever someone who seemed like the wrong person to spread the gospel, it was Saul.

But God!

God has this incredible way of taking the least likely people and turning their stories upside down. On the road to Damascus, Saul had a literal encounter with Jesus that changed everything. He went from persecuting Christians to becoming one of the most passionate and influential leaders in the early church. The same guy who once hated the gospel ended up writing most of the New Testament, including the book of Ephesians.

Now, let's zoom in on Ephesians 3:1-13. By this point, Paul's life was completely transformed. He wasn't just preaching the gospel – he was writing letters from prison to encourage and build up the church. In this passage, Paul talks about the "mystery" of the gospel: that God's plan wasn't just for one group of people (like the Jews) but for everyone, including the gentiles. That was groundbreaking at the time. Paul was saying, "Hey, this good news? It's for all of us."

What's wild is that Paul calls himself "the least of all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 3:8). Even after everything he accomplished, he still saw himself as unworthy of the grace God had given him. But instead of letting his past define him, Paul let God's grace empower him. He knew that his story – his failures, his transformation, his calling – was proof of God's power.

And that's the beauty of Paul's journey. It shows us that God doesn't need us to be perfect. He doesn't need us to have spotless résumés or flawless pasts. He just needs us to be willing. If God can use someone like Paul – a former persecutor of the church – to spread the gospel to the world, He can use you too.

So, as we dive into this study, let's keep in mind: God doesn't see us the way the world sees us. He doesn't see our mistakes or our weaknesses as disqualifications. He sees them as opportunities to show His grace and power through our lives. Just like Paul, you might feel like the most unlikely person to make an impact, but that's exactly why God wants to use you!

# Established In Love

Joshua Guerrero, Public Campus Ministry Coordinator,  
University of Wisconsin

This past winter, I was walking through the airport looking for something to eat. Airport food is expensive! I stopped at a smoothie shop and saw one option with a good amount of protein. After the staff finished making the smoothie, I went to pay, but the lady responded, "You're good to go!" I was confused that maybe she didn't realize that I hadn't paid and again told her what happened. She just responded with the same words and a smile. I walked away realizing how blessed I had been and didn't deserve it.

In the same way, mercy is what every human desperately seeks. What happens when we realize that we're broken, that there seems to be no one to turn to? We find that we can have a friend in our Creator and there is One that is ready and willing to restore us.



1. When you think of being rich, what picture comes to your mind?
2. Who was someone in your life that showed you undeserved favor and forgiveness?



Read Ephesians 3:14–21.

1. Where should our identity be rooted? (See v. 14 and 15.)
2. What are we named after and how does that determine our value?
3. What are some of the riches that Jesus is longing to give to us?
4. Why do we need to ask God to grant us these riches?
5. Why is the concept of putting faith in something a necessary part of receiving and experiencing life?
6. Why is being rooted and grounded in love more valuable than knowledge?
7. How can the church be a place of refuge where we can experience God's redemptive love?
8. What are some riches you need in your life right now?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What aspects of faith and mercy have gotten you thinking this week?
3. How has God's love and forgiveness impacted you this week?



## Back Story

Paul had exceeded most people in his day in righteous living. He had been a Pharisee and was at the top of his career, persecuting those who had foolish and inferior views—or so it seemed.

The concept of Christianity can seem a lot like this to unbelievers. Christians are sometimes accused of having a blind faith—one that is based on mere stories. But Paul, who was very well versed, intelligent, and righteous according to Jewish standards concluded that it was all rubbish compared to the matchless riches of life in Christ (Philippians 3:8). He realized that there is much more to life and wisdom than just knowledge. That true knowledge and wisdom includes emotional aspects, spiritual aspects, etc. The concept of love and forgiveness is something we cannot measure or attain through keeping the law.

Paul humbled himself before the Father and acknowledged that he was named by him. When we humble ourselves before God and place our identity in who He has called us to be, we can experience the full potential He has created us to experience and reach.

Faith is a necessary component of science. Anytime we make a decision, no one ever has 100% evidence. We make decisions every day and scientific theories are based on putting our faith in the information we have and making an intelligent decision from that. Belief in God is the same way. God has given His Word, history, archaeology, science, and various other disciplines to explore and examine His handiwork. From this we make an informed decision to place our trust in God. This is where faith and science work together—the concepts of grace and mercy defy realms of logic.

To experience God's love, we have to let go of wisdom as defined by this world and accept God's love and forgiveness. When we let go of ourselves and accept God's love, we can be filled with all the fullness of God instead of human wisdom. We can experience His power which is able to do exceedingly and abundantly above all we ask or think. Forgiveness can only be experienced by humbly accepting the gift.

This is what followers of God have to offer the world—an environment that is altogether different than a judgmental, condemning, accusatory one. ACF chapters can provide a space where we seek to redeem others just as Jesus gave His life and redeemed us when we were broken and didn't deserve His mercy. How can your campus ministry be a place where students experience healing and transformation, encouraging them to get up, walk, and leave everything behind to follow Jesus?

True riches are not what they seem. It is the inner qualities that give true satisfaction and joy; this is true wealth. God desires to build up our inner spiritual reality and not an outward, materialistic one. Once we experience Jesus, we see how empty life is without Him and that the inner qualities we experience through Him like peace, love, joy, courage, etc. are the true longings of the heart.

# United In Christ

Chris May, Director and Campus Minister Advent House,  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Before I became a campus minister I was an ACF student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. One of the events our ministry did was church on campus. Three times a month our students would lead worship on campus and for the fourth Sabbath we would visit our local church and run the service for them. This tradition started long before I arrived and our reasoning was that our local church was far away, making it difficult for us to convince our non-Adventist friends to join us there. Since we couldn't bring them to church we brought the church to them. We also wanted to stay connected to the local church ourselves and made an effort to visit and minister to them each month.

While it was an amazing experience being able to worship with a group of all students, it also meant there was no room for pew warmers, for there was always work to be done. As a freshman you would be asked to do the opening or closing prayer or possibly the announcements. As a sophomore you'd be asked to give the scripture reading, introduce the time for tithes and offerings, or lead out in the praise and prayer request portions of the service. By the time you were a junior it was time for you to preach. The seniors would mentor the others and run the service similarly to how the elders would in a church – making sure the next generation would be ready to take their place after graduation.

It was at this time in my life that I learned how to do ministry on a scale that was bigger than anything I could accomplish on my own. We did fundraisers on campus to sponsor our fellow students on mission trips and ran Bible studies on Friday nights, all while being full-time students in college.



1. Describe a time when working on a team was better than working as an individual.
2. When in your life have you felt like you were right where God wanted you to be?



Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

1. In verse 1, Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling. What is your personal calling?
2. In verses 8 and 11 Paul says God has given gifts to all people, calling some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and/or teachers. Everyone has a role to play. Which do you most identify with and why? (See more spiritual skills described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 27–28.)
3. What does it mean to be in the body of Christ? (See Ephesians 1:22–23.)
4. Paul says in chapter 4 verse 12 that God gives these skills “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Reflecting on your answer to question 4, in what ways are you using your skills to be a benefit to your church community?

5. Looking back on Paul's writings in this section, how do we grow in all things while being in the church?
6. Why is it so important that we speak the truth in love?
7. Is it ok to be a follower of Jesus and remain separate from the body of Christ? Why or why not?

*"So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing."  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)*



1. How has God been using journey in your life this week on campus?
2. What challenges are you facing as a Christian on campus?
3. How can this group best pray for you?



## Back Story

### *Road Map Question 1 Insights*

At the beginning of this chapter Paul talks about calling. There's the general calling to follow Christ which all Christians share and there's the unique calling that we each have, such as where we fit in the body of Christ. As you ask others about their calling you'll run into some that are unsure in what way God has called them. Take this lesson as an opportunity to help them consider theirs. For our general calling to follow Christ check out these verses about God's will for our lives: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-22 and Mark 16:15. As for your personal calling, always pray to God and ask for direct insights from Him before anything else. Stop and do so now if you haven't before. If more time is needed, reflect on the problems around you that you feel passionate about. It's not a mistake or coincidence that you notice these problems and that you feel the way you do. Perhaps helping others in these areas is where your service with God begins.

It's important to note that our personal callings will never contradict our general calling to follow Christ and His ways. For more Bible insights on our personal callings read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

### *Road Map Question 2 Insights*

Ask yourself and your group what the difference is between these groups listed in Ephesians 4:11. Here are some helpful insights.

- Apostles have been sent by Jesus to build up the church in faraway places. The origin of the word apostles is similar to that of missionaries. Most think of the 12 disciples as apostles, but the Bible describes others as apostles too (see Acts 14:14 and Galatians 1:19).
- Evangelists preach and teach to convince non-believers to become followers of Christ and members of the church.
- Pastors come from the Greek word "poimen," which means "shepherd." Pastors are leaders that care for a flock of people, or, as some would say, a congregation of believers.
- Teachers in the church instruct others how to follow Jesus according to the Bible. Jesus calls us to be teachers before He ascended to heaven in Matthew 28:19-20.

As you reflect on these roles, see which you relate to the most. You might not be an ordained pastor, but your job in ACF might be closer to a pastor than an evangelist or vice versa. Paul also lists more spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 27-28.

#### *Road Map Question 3 Insights*

As Christians we sometimes use phrases or wording that sounds strange to others. "Being a part of the body of Christ" is one example. Make sure to know how to describe this concept in other words when talking to people. For extra insight on what Paul means by the body of Christ reading what he wrote earlier in Ephesians 1:22-23 is helpful. Paul also goes into even greater detail on this topic in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

#### *Road Map Question 4 Insights*

It's one thing to know your gifts and the calling that God has given you. However, it's important to not just know them, but to also use them. In verse 12 Paul is telling us to use our gifts to: help other believers, help those in need, and help the church at large. Take time to reflect on what you're doing to fulfill this. If you realize you aren't, think of ways you can start.

#### *Road Map Question 5 Insights*

In regard to growing in all things Paul talks about this in the 15<sup>th</sup> verse of this chapter.

#### *Road Map Question 6 Insights*

Paul elaborates on the importance of speaking the truth in love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Understanding all mysteries and all knowledge is worthless if we do not love. Also see 1 John 4:7-8.

#### *Road Map Question 7 Insights*

There are too many people that think it's ok to be a lone Christian separate from a church and a community of God's people. They often state that having a personal relationship with God is what matters and I agree with that. However, God tells us through His word to partake in fellowship with His body of believers, also known as His church. When we separate ourselves from a church community we are like a foot or hand that has been separated from the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us not to forsake nor neglect the assembly of believers. 1 John 1:7 identifies fellowship as a vital part of following Jesus. Jesus even says in Matthew 18:20 that where two or three are gathered He is there. When we choose to be a Christian in isolation we are putting our own desires above God's and following ourselves instead of Jesus.





# Lighting the World

Darrel Lindensmith, MA Religion, MS Psychology, Pastor,  
and Campus Minister at North Dakota State University

The Psychoanalytic Carl Jung wrote: "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness."

*"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*  
Jeremiah 17:9

Ephesians 4 reminds believers of our tendency to drift back into sin, before we are aware of it.



1. Have you done something or said something, and then you wondered, "Where did that come from?" or "Why did I say that?"
2. Where are you when you do your best thinking?



## Read Ephesians 4:17–32

1. Paul "insists on it," that the believers "must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking." What is futility?
2. In v. 22 Paul admonishes the Ephesians to "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." Describe a time when you were in denial about something and came to see it clearly. How did you become aware of it? Did someone tell you?
3. What does Paul mean in v. 25 that we "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to each other"?
4. How does becoming "callous to every kind of impurity" in v. 19 apply to life on campus?
5. What is the relationship between anger and forgiveness?
6. As you consider Paul's list of things that need to change as a follower of Christ, what areas do you struggle with the most? How can your brothers and sisters in ACF help you grow and overcome any of these?



1. How has God been using journey in your life this week on campus?
2. How is God using you to bring light to your campus this week?
3. What area are you most in need of prayer?



## Back Story

"Futility" for Paul seems to mean a useless running after pleasure; like a life without *ultimate* context dominated by temporal goals of getting an education for a career and having fun on the way to getting a well-paid job so that we can have more money for more fun.

Paul urges people to stop living like the Gentiles, who were living aimlessly and in sin.

It might seem silly to ask yourself, "What unconscious selfish beliefs do I have that influence my behavior and choices, since they are unconscious?" But "knock and the door shall be open unto you," Jesus said. Paul calls them "deceitful desires" because we choose not to explore our motives deeply.

But we can be brave enough to do this because "there is therefore no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In fact, it's only *because* we are saved by grace and secure in Jesus' love that we would even want to know ourselves in a deeper way. God wants to get in our head and "renew the spirit of our minds." We don't need to be "darkened in our understanding" or "alienated from the life of God because of our ignorance" because we can know God and experience Him.

He goes on to talk about grieving the Holy Spirit by the way we live and talk. This is an important reminder that Christ has come to live within us through His Spirit and whatever we do or say reflects on Him since we have died and are now living our new life in and through Christ.

A friend once described our new life in Christ and the path to victory like this. Imagine the devil tempting us toward the way of life Paul describes here by those who live without God and apart from His Spirit. The tempter tries to influence us, but our answer should be, "You've come to the wrong house. I don't live there anymore. I now live in Christ Jesus and have left the old way of life I used to live to only please myself."

The terms "in Christ Jesus" and "Christ in me" are some of Paul's favorite expressions for our new way of life through Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the life God is calling us to and the victory for us in Him!

# Imitating God

Lindsay M. Syeh, PhD, LMHC, NCC, MFT, MDiv

## The Viral Challenge—Who Are You Becoming?

It started as a joke. A group of college friends decided to take on a viral social media challenge—imitating their favorite celebrities. They mimicked their fashion, speech, and even their mannerisms. At first it was fun, but then it got serious. One friend, Jake, started dressing and talking like his favorite influencer so much that he lost his own personality. He spent hours perfecting the right look, rehearsing catchy phrases, and curating his feed to match the latest trends.

One evening, his mentor noticed the change and asked him, *“Who are you really?”* That question lingered in Jake’s mind. He had spent so much time imitating someone else that he forgot who he truly was.

This struggle isn’t new. Young men and women around the world often shape their identity based on cultural pressures, trends, or the expectations of those around them. But the real question is: Who are we imitating?



1. Who was someone you looked up to as a kid—and did you ever try to imitate them? What did that look like?
2. What’s a trend (fashion, music, social media challenge, etc.) that you followed in high school or college that now makes you cringe or laugh?



## Read Ephesians 5:1–20.

1. What does it mean to be an imitator of God in your daily life?
2. What are some cultural trends that make it difficult to walk in God’s light?
3. Paul warns against foolish talk and impurity (v. 4). How does our speech reflect our walk with God?
4. Verse 10 says to “find out what pleases the Lord.” How can you actively seek God’s will?
5. What are practical ways to walk in love on your campus or in your community?
6. Paul contrasts light and darkness. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to Christ’s light?
7. How does gratitude (v. 20) shape the way we interact with God and others?
8. How does being “filled with the Spirit” (v. 18) help us live differently from the world?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?
2. Verse 16 talks about making the most of every opportunity. What opportunities has God provided for you to live for Him this week?
3. What changes can you make this week to imitate God more intentionally?



## Back Story

Paul writes this letter to the church in Ephesus, a city steeped in pagan worship, idolatry, and immorality. Many of these new believers came from backgrounds where darkness was normal—where things like greed, impurity, and deception were part of everyday life. Now, as Christians, they faced a new reality: How do we live differently from the culture around us?

Paul makes it clear—believers must leave behind their former ways and embrace a new identity in Christ. The challenge for us today is that we are called to be different, but the world constantly pulls us back.

Paul challenges believers in Ephesians 5:1—*“Be imitators of God, as beloved children.”* Unlike following trends, imitating God isn’t about losing ourselves; it’s about discovering our true identity in Christ. Walking in His love, wisdom, and light transforms us into the people we were created to be.

# Relationships Transformed

Lindsay M. Syeh, PhD, LMHC, NCC, MFT, MDiv

## The Group Project Struggle

No one likes group projects. Sarah sighed as she opened the message thread – another argument about who was doing what. Every time, it was the same issue: One person refused to contribute, another took over, and someone else avoided responsibility altogether.

Sarah was frustrated. It wasn't that the project was hard; it was that no one wanted to listen to each other. Everyone wanted control, but no one wanted to submit. *"If we all just worked together instead of trying to be in charge, this would be easier,"* she thought.



1. If your life was a group project, what role would you typically play – and why?
2. What's one thing you've learned about love or friendship that changed how you approach relationships?



## Read Ephesians 5:21–6:9

1. What does it mean to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21)?
2. How does Paul's teaching on relationships challenge cultural views on power and independence?
3. What does Christ-like love in a relationship look like? How is it different from the world's definition?
4. How does seeing marriage as a reflection of Christ and the church (5:32) shape our understanding of love?
5. Why do you think Paul emphasizes both honor and responsibility in parent-child relationships?
6. How can students honor their parents while still growing in independence?
7. Paul tells workers to serve as if working for the Lord (6:7). How can this mindset change the way we approach school, jobs, and responsibilities?
8. How do we navigate power dynamics in relationships in a Christ-honoring way?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?
2. In what ways do you struggle with pride or control in relationships? How have you practiced humility this week?
3. How have you been able to apply the principle of serving others in your relationships this week?



## Back Story

Paul writes this letter at a time when Roman culture was built on dominance, hierarchy, and power. In households, men had total authority, women had little independence, children were often seen as property, and slaves had no rights. Paul introduces a radically different framework—one built on mutual submission and love rather than dominance and control.

The passage comes from the fact that Paul is not simply reinforcing cultural norms. Instead, he is completely redefining relationships through the example of Christ.

This struggle for control and recognition isn't just about group projects—it reflects a deeper human reality. We struggle with submission, not just in academics, but in friendships, dating, marriage, and even our relationship with God. Paul's words in Ephesians 5:21–6:9 challenge us to rethink relationships from a Christ-centered perspective.

# The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Akehil Johnson, Adventist Christian Fellowship

Neema Urassa discovered that her end-of-year exam was scheduled on the Sabbath (Saturday)—a day she reserved for rest and worship. Determined to honor her faith, Neema and her friend Chantal approached university officials to request a rescheduling. The university denied their request, citing a missed January deadline for religious exemptions—information Neema hadn't been aware of.

Undeterred, Neema obtained a letter of support from her pastor and met with the head of the civil engineering department. He suggested she attend the exam, sign her name, and leave, which might allow for a retake. Neema declined, believing this would still violate her Sabbath observance. The department head then gave an ultimatum that she retake the course the following year for \$3,600. This financial burden was unfeasible, especially without support from her non-Sabbath-observing parents.

With limited options, Neema made one last appeal. Days later, she received an unexpected email granting her permission to take the exam several months later alongside students who had previously failed, without additional requirements or fees.

Neema took Paul's counsel and stood firm, which led to a resolution that honored both her faith in God and her academic commitments. Let's dive deeper to understand how God fights our battles when He's the center of our lives.



1. What's a time in your life when you felt like you were in a battle—emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually? How did that battle end for you?
2. How do people typically fight their battles in life (e.g., stress, anxiety, struggles with temptation)?



Read Ephesians 6:10–18.

1. What does Paul mean when he says to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power”?
2. Why do you think Paul emphasizes standing firm rather than fighting back?
3. Paul says our struggle is “not against flesh and blood.” What does this mean for how we handle conflicts in our daily lives?
4. How can we trust God's victory when we don't know how things will play out in our personal struggles?
5. Why might people hesitate to put on the full armor of God? What could happen if we refuse to step into the fight?
6. Choose one piece of the armor of God. What does it symbolize to you and how can it be applied on campus practically?

7. How does God equip and strengthen those who feel unqualified or afraid?

*"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." Exodus 14:14*



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?
2. What's one practical way you can remind yourself this week that the battle belongs to the Lord?
3. How can you encourage someone this week to stand firm for God, even if they don't know what the outcome will be?



## Back Story

Teamwork can be both a blessing and a challenge. Paul's final charge to the believers—"Be strong in the Lord and His mighty power"—is not isolated encouragement. It is a call to the believers to rely on God's strength in every aspect of life, especially in times of spiritual warfare. Paul understood the pressure the Ephesians faced: they lived in a city dominated by wealth, pagan worship, and occult practices, all of which sought to undermine their faith, coupled with societal rejection and persecution. The pressure on the Ephesian believers was intense, and the spiritual forces working against them were relentless. It is with this context that Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are not fighting a battle against flesh and blood (as in the normal human relationships of marriage, family, and work outlined in the previous chapter) but against the spiritual forces of evil.

The vivid imagery of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:11 likely draws from both Paul's own experience and the broader biblical tradition. While imprisoned in Rome, he was likely guarded by Roman soldiers, which provided the perfect illustration for his letter. Roman soldiers wore highly functional armor for protection in battle. Likewise, Paul reinforces this image of a soldier by referencing several Old Testament passages where God is depicted as a warrior and protector, such as in Isaiah 59:17, where God is described as donning armor to fight for His people. As soldiers must wear their armor to survive the battle, so too must Christians be spiritually armed to withstand the temptations, trials, and spiritual warfare they encounter.

Each piece of the armor has its unique purpose: the Belt of Truth provides stability, the Breastplate of Righteousness guards our hearts, the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace enable us to stand firm in sharing the good news, the Shield of Faith protects against doubt and fear, the Helmet of Salvation guards our minds, and the Sword of the Spirit—God's Word—equips us to combat lies and temptation.

Isn't it funny that students on today's campuses face almost the same pressures that the Ephesians faced? Whether it's the pressure to conform to a secular culture, the temptation to compromise faith for personal gain, or the spiritual battles of anxiety and fear. Just as the Ephesian believers needed God's strength to endure, so too do students today. The battle is not against people but against the unseen forces that seek to pull us away from God. The temptation to rely on personal strength or worldly wisdom is strong, but rest assured that the power of God is greater than any force we face.

Spiritual challenges are inevitable, so stand firm! Because of Christ's triumph, we don't strive for victory—we operate from it. Isn't it great that the power of God is available to all who trust in Him? God's power is sufficient to overcome any challenge or temptation. By relying daily on God through prayer, immersing yourself in Scripture, engaging with a faith community, and donning the full armor of God, you are empowered to overcome the challenges ahead.



# Benediction

Sarah Leis, Campus Minister University of Washington, Seattle,  
Student Counseling Department

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, and Holocaust survivor. In the 1940's Frankl was a successful physician, but during World War II he and his family were deported to Nazi concentration camps. During this time Frankl lost his parents, brother, and pregnant wife, all who perished in the camps. Frankl himself was imprisoned for three years where he endured horrific conditions, forced labor, starvation, and the constant threat of death. Despite the immense suffering, Frankl observed that some people were able to find meaning even amidst the horror.

After WWII Frankl was released from Auschwitz and returned to his work at the hospital where he developed a new form of therapy called logotherapy. It was built on one simple but profound idea: the primary drive in life is not pleasure or power, but meaning. Frankl saw firsthand how people who had a sense of purpose, even in the darkest of circumstances, were more likely to survive. He wrote, *"Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how.'"*

We see this illustrated in Paul's life. In Ephesians Paul is writing from prison, but he's not asking for comfort or rescue. Instead, he's asking for boldness to keep proclaiming the gospel. Paul found meaning not by avoiding suffering, but by anchoring his life in something greater—Jesus. He saw himself as an "ambassador in chains," a man on a mission, even when locked away. His circumstances didn't define his purpose; Christ did. Like Frankl said, we're all searching for a "why," a reason to get up in the morning and keep going. But meaning isn't something we have to invent. Jesus gives it to us. Through Him, our identity is secure, our mission is clear, and even our pain has purpose.



1. If Paul had access to social media in prison, what hashtag do you think he'd use to share his message?
2. If you were an "ambassador" for something silly (like pizza or naps), what would it be and why?



Read Ephesians 6:19–24.

1. Why do you think Paul, writing from prison, doesn't ask for rescue or relief, but instead asks for boldness? What does that reveal about his mindset and purpose?
2. In your own words, what does it mean to be "an ambassador in chains"? Can you think of modern examples—people living with purpose in tough circumstances?
3. Viktor Frankl said, "Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how.'" How does Paul's "why" show up in this passage?
4. Verse 21 introduces Tychicus as someone sent to encourage others. How does that reflect the importance of community in our faith journey?
5. Frankl believed meaning couldn't be invented—it had to be discovered. How does Paul's prayer reflect a discovered purpose, not a self-created one?

6. In verse 23-24, Paul ends with words of peace, love, faith, and grace. How can those things give meaning to everyday life?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. Paul had Tychicus to help carry the message and encourage others (v.21-22). Who are the "Tychicus" people in your life—those who support your walk with Jesus?
3. What do you think it means to live on campus with a sense of mission today, like Paul did—even when life doesn't go as planned?



## Back Story

This study explores one of the deepest questions people face: *What gives life meaning, especially in suffering?* To open that conversation, we draw from the powerful life story of Viktor Frankl, a man who endured horror yet helped millions find purpose.

Viktor Frankl was born in Vienna, Austria in 1905, into a Jewish family. He showed early interest in psychology and medicine and eventually became a neurologist and psychiatrist. Before the war, he worked with patients who were suicidal or suffering from deep depression. Frankl already believed that a sense of meaning was key to mental health, but his beliefs would be tested in the most extreme way imaginable.

During World War II, Frankl and his family were deported to Nazi concentration camps. He spent three years imprisoned in places like Auschwitz and Dachau. His wife, unborn child, parents, and brother all died. He faced starvation, forced labor, daily humiliation, and the ever-present threat of death.

Yet even in the camps, Frankl was observing. He noticed that survival wasn't just about physical strength. Some who were physically strong gave up. Others, physically weak, found the strength to carry on. The key difference? Meaning. Those who had a reason to live, a loved one, a dream, a spiritual conviction, were more resilient. As Frankl later wrote, *"Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how.'"*

After the war, Frankl returned to Vienna and wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*, one of the most influential books of the 20th century. He developed logotherapy, a form of existential therapy built on the idea that the search for meaning is the primary human motivation—not pleasure (as Freud said) or power (as Adler claimed), but purpose. Frankl spent the rest of his life teaching, writing, and helping people find meaning, even in suffering.

In Ephesians 6:19-24, Paul doesn't plead for rescue or relief. Instead, he asks for boldness to keep sharing the gospel. He refers to himself as an "ambassador in chains"—a phrase packed with meaning. Even in captivity, Paul sees himself as a representative of Christ's kingdom. His identity and mission are intact.

Like Frankl, Paul knew deep suffering. He was beaten, shipwrecked, hunted, and imprisoned multiple times. Yet he writes with clarity, confidence, and courage. His sense of purpose wasn't tied to comfort or outcomes; it was rooted in Jesus. His "why" was the gospel. And because of that, he could endure any "how."

Paul ends this section not with despair, but with peace, love, faith, and grace. He is anchored. He has found a purpose that suffering cannot steal.

People are still searching for meaning. Many are exhausted, discouraged, or just drifting. Paul's letter to the Ephesian house church invites them to go deeper than self-help or positive thinking. It points them to Jesus, who gives us identity, mission, and hope that no circumstance can undo.

Both Frankl and Paul show us that life's darkest moments can become the soil where purpose grows. But Paul shows us the ultimate truth: meaning isn't just a mindset, it's a Person!



# What if your center isn't all that great or a bit orbital?

Someone once wrote, "find your center, and let the rest of the world spin around you," which sounds really good and like something we might hear on campus. But what if your center isn't all that great or a bit orbital? Of course that would place us at the center of our own universe which can't possibly be true. Still, living a well centered life makes a whole lot of sense, but centered on what or whom?

According to Ephesians, Jesus is the center of everything. From that center and with the church as His body He is filling the world with His presence. In Jesus we find our own center in the beautiful tapestry of the church—God's new community!



*Life at the Center*  
Participant's Guide  
available at  
[AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org).