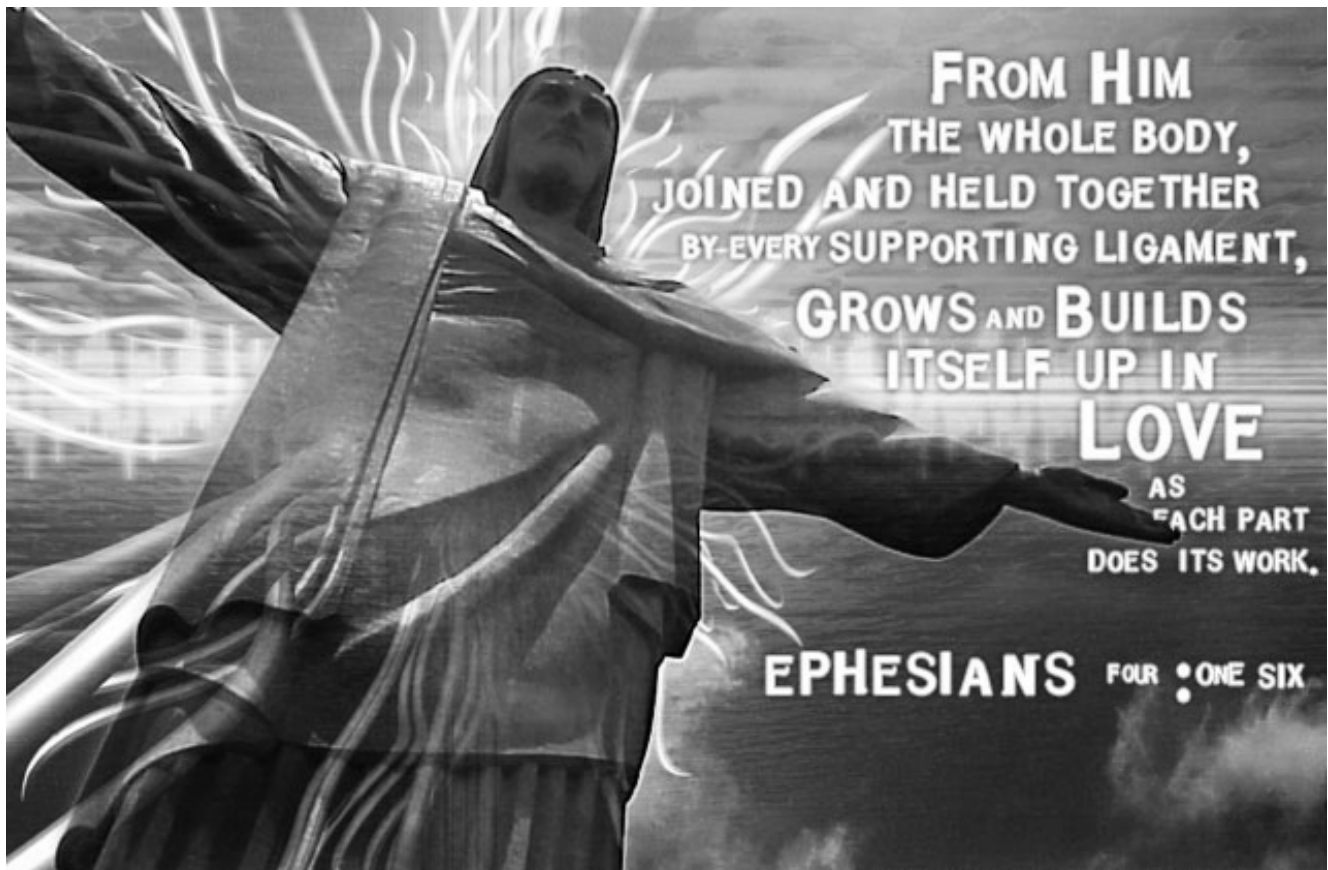


Ephesians



**Eagle United Methodist Church
Fall Sermon Series
September 8, 2008 – October 19, 2008**

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How to Use this Study Guide

1. Join a small group for the six weeks of the study (September 8 – October 19). If you need help finding a small group, contact Laura in the church office. (939-0108 or Laura@EagleUMC.com)
2. Prior to your group meeting each week, spend some time reading the assigned scriptures and answering the questions in this study guide.
3. Meet with your group to discuss and share your thoughts, insights and questions.
4. Attend worship on Sunday morning to hear a sermon on the scripture and topic you have just studied.

Introduction

There is a story of an old farmer who became a millionaire when oil was discovered beneath his land. The wealth had been there all along – but the farmer never knew it.

The book of Ephesians is like that – reminding us that we possess an amazing wealth of spiritual blessings, but we often fail to recognize just how much abundance we have received. As you read and study this book, look for the references to our amazing wealth in Christ.

The book of Ephesians can be broadly divided into two parts. The first three chapters generally deal with doctrine, giving us the sweeping view of all that God has done for us in Christ and encouraging us to offer praise and thanks for all these amazing gifts. The second three chapters deal more with application – what new standards are expected of those who have received the gift of God's salvation through Christ.

Other major themes to watch for in Ephesians include:

- The importance of unity in the body of Christ
- Paul's mission and message
- Proper conduct for the children of God
- How the children of God should relate to one another

It is our prayer that you learn and grow through this study. We echo Paul's prayer:

"... That the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe." (Ephesians 1:18-19a)

Smiles,

Laura Hibberd

Hello, Praise, Thanks!

Ephesians 1

Week of September 8-14

Welcome to the first in our six-week study on the book of Ephesians.

I highly recommend that you take the time to read the whole book of Ephesians straight through before you begin. The book is short, and if you read it at least once in one shot, it will greatly enhance your understanding of the book as a whole, and assist you as we look at each section more closely. If you read it aloud, it will help you even more as your ears hear the words.

Objective: Gain awareness of the generous blessings we have received from God.

1. **Warm-Up Discussion: Think about the most extravagant birthday or Christmas gift you have ever received. How did you feel to receive this gift? How did the giver of the gift feel about giving it?**

Read Ephesians 1

2. **What is your first impression of this passage? What is the mood of this writing?**

Read Ephesians 1:3-10

This is a dense passage packed with an introduction to the abundant blessings we have received in Christ. You may find it helpful to look at this passage in multiple bible translations.

3. **Begin by using the table below to make a list of the blessings/gifts from God mentioned in this passage and what each blessing means. I've included an example to get you started.**

Verse	Blessing/Gift	Meaning
3	Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ	Because we follow Christ, God has not withheld any spiritual blessing. Spiritual blessing means this is not a physical or material thing.
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

For more insights into this section and filling in this table, see the supplemental information located on our website: www.eagleumc.com

Read Ephesians 1:11-14

- 4. According to these verses, what is the purpose of being chosen or predestined to believe in Christ? Who is included in this predestination?**

5. **“Predestination” is a difficult word for many Christians. Based on what you’ve looked at so far in Ephesians, what does predestination mean?**

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

6. **What reasons does Paul have to give thanks?**
7. **Paul has spent the first part of this letter explaining how the Ephesians are spiritual millionaires. However, based on his prayer here, what seems to be the problem with how they are living?**
8. **In your own words – What have these believers already done right? What greater thing(s) does Paul want for these believers?**

Apply

9. **What do you think would change if your group consistently prayed verses 17-19 for each other? For other Christians? Are you willing to try it?**
10. **How would you rate yourself in “awareness of my spiritual wealth”?**
(1 = I feel penniless 10 = I’m a billionaire!)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- 11. How would knowing you are “chosen”, “adopted” and “redeemed” change your view of yourself? How would it change your view of God?**
- 12. How much are you using God’s “power” at this point in your life? God put into your bank account all his resources. What is keeping you from transferring them to your checking account?**
- 13. Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.**

This week I commit to:

****Note, this question/exercise will be part of this entire study. Here are some tips.**

- Pray about this. Listen to any leading from God.
- Make sure what you choose is a reasonable thing.
- As a group, help members determine if their goal is overly ambitious.
- A few ideas for this week include:
 - a. Each morning this week I will pray verses 17-19 for a specific individual or group of Christians.
 - b. Every time I spend money this week, I will make a conscious effort to remind myself how “rich” I am in spiritual blessings from God.
 - c. Write down your own prayer or hymn of thanks for all that God has done for you. Pray or sing it several times during the week.
- Create your own commitment, or adapt the ideas here as needed. This exercise is for YOU to grow as a disciple.

Unity and New Life in Christ

Ephesians 2

Week of September 15-21

Last week we looked at some of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. In this section Paul continues to talk about those blessings – how God has rescued us from our previous way of life and united us together in the family of God. In this section we are also bluntly reminded that we are totally incapable of doing anything toward our salvation. Salvation is a gift from God - an act of sheer grace - through his son Jesus Christ.

Objective: Look at who we all are “before” and “after” God’s intervention. Understand why Paul can proclaim that we are all one in Christ.

1. **Opening Discussion: What did you learn about God and yourself through your experience this week?** (The commitment you made last week in question #13.)

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

2. **What are the characteristics of the way all of us used to live? (vs. 1-3)**
3. **For each item in your list above (#2) ask: What does this mean? What are the consequences?**
4. **Given our sorry state... What did God do for us? What does this tell us about God and how God feels about us? (vs. 4-7)**
5. **What was God’s purpose in doing this?** (These verses give at least two reasons).

11. It is not uncommon to hear the phrase, “All things come together in Christ” (or something similar). How would you explain to a brand new Christian why this is true? Can you think of other scripture verses that support this idea?

12. Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.

This week I commit to:

****See notes on question #13 in week one for tips on this exercise.****

Ideas for this week include:

- Identify one group that might be considered “outsiders”. (e.g. - prisoners, the elderly, homeless, illegal aliens) Visit, write a letter or otherwise act to make a tangible expression of the truth that in Christ we are now all equals and all “insiders”.
- Paul makes some radical statements about the unity and oneness of the church. Identify one person with whom you have “a dividing wall of hostility” and take one step toward reconciliation.
- Journal about the way you “used to live” (vs. 1-3) as compared to the way you can live now in Christ (vs. 4-10). Make these observations personal to your life. Offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for making such a radical difference.
- ****Remember these are only suggestions!**** Create your own commitment, or adapt the ideas here as needed. This exercise is for YOU to grow as a disciple.

A Prisoner's Prayer

Ephesians 3

Week of September 16-28

In this section, Paul again emphasizes the truth he brought up in chapter 2 – we are all one in Christ! He adds to this message his own role in sharing this truth. In this chapter we are given a glimpse into the heart and mind of Paul – the ways he feels blessed and the things he is passionate about.

As you have read these chapters so far, have you gotten the impression that Paul is in awe of what God has done through Christ? As you read this week, watch for phrases that communicate awe, wonder and amazement. You may want to go back and re-read chapters 1 and 2 as well.

Objective: Understand the “mystery” Paul feels called to share. Feel the passion Paul has for sharing this mystery and helping everyone to fully grasp what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ.

1. **Opening Discussion: What did you learn about God and yourself through your experience this week?** (The commitment you made last week.)

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul begins this section by introducing himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles”. He then appears to interrupt himself to elaborate on this statement. It seems Paul fears that it would be easy for people to hear of his imprisonment and become discouraged or feel pity. As you read this section pay special attention to Paul’s attitude and the reasons that his imprisonment is NOT cause for discouragement.

2. **What does Paul see as his life mission or calling? How does he feel about this?**
3. **What is the “mystery” Paul mentions several times in this section? Look also at Ephesians 1:9-10, Romans 16:25-26 and Colossians 2:2-3.**

4. **Why does he refer to this as a mystery? Why is this mystery revealed now?**

5. **As you read this passage, what is your sense of God's plan for the world? Haphazard? "I hope this works"? Totally under control? What phrases lead you to this conclusion?**

6. **In Ephesians 3:13 Paul said, "I ask you therefore not to be discouraged". What reasons has he given to show they should not be discouraged?**

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

In these verses Paul picks up the prayer it seems he was about to start in 3:1 before he interrupted himself. This passionate prayer reveals to us the heart of Paul – the way he knew and experienced God and the way he wished for others to know God as well.

7. **The entire trinity (Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, God the Father) is referenced in this prayer. What does Paul request from each member of the trinity?**

8. **In your own words, what does Paul think is the most important thing(s) for growing in Christian maturity? What can you do to gain this? What role does God play?**

9. **What do you envision your life would look like if you were filled with "all the fullness of God"? (vs. 19)**

Apply

10. **When in your life have you experienced difficulty because you were following Christ? How well did you do at drawing on God's strength in those times? How was your attitude?**

11. **Analyze Paul's prayer and assertion of God's power in 3:14-21. What type of things is Paul praying for? Are they big? Small? Spiritual? What does Paul believe God is capable of doing? How does this prayer compare to your own prayers? Are your prayers too small?**

12. **Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.**

This week I commit to:

****See notes on question #13 in week one for tips on this exercise.****

Ideas for this week include:

- Take one step forward on something you feel God calling you to do but have been avoiding because of possible "difficulties". (Re-read Chapter 3 for encouragement on the fulfillment that can be experienced – even in difficulty – when we are following God's will for our lives.)
- Elaborate on Question #11. Focus this week on inserting aspects of Paul's prayer into your own prayers.
- Pray Ephesians 3:14-21 every morning for a specific Christian. Every evening pray these verses for yourself.
- ****Remember – these are only ideas! Feel free to come up with your own commitment.****

Grow Into the Body

Ephesians 4

Week of September 29-October 5

The focus of the previous three chapters has been largely on the wonderful things God has done for us – how amazingly “rich” we are in blessings from God. We have been saved by the grace of God, we are part of God’s family, we have all been made equal in Christ. Having outlined these blessings, the tone of the letter now shifts to the practical implications of these grand truths. Paul teaches about how salvation and unity should be expressed in our daily living.

Objective: Understand the importance of unity, and how our actions can maintain (or destroy) unity. Recognize some of the characteristics we should be striving for as children of God.

1. **Opening Discussion: What did you learn about God and yourself through your experience this week?** (The commitment you made last week.)

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

2. **Based on all we have learned in the previous chapters, how do you feel about Paul’s urging to “live a life worthy of your calling”? Does this sound difficult? Easy? Worthwhile?**
3. **On what basis are Christians called to live a life of unity? What things unite us?**
4. **How do the qualities in verses 2 and 3 promote unity? (How does the absence of these qualities promote dis-unity?)**

5. **Christians are all united by what we share. Yet we are all unique as well. According to this passage, what is the source of our uniqueness? What are the purposes of our uniqueness?**

6. **Compare and contrast the traits of “spiritual infants” versus “spiritual maturity” as presented in Ephesians 4:14-16.**

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

This is the first part of a section about “Living as Children of the Light.” The remainder of the section will be covered in chapter 5 - next week’s lesson.

7. **In this section Paul lists several characteristics of the life of the “ungodly” or those who do not know God. They are listed in the left column below. In the right column write the opposite of these.**

Life without God	The opposite – increasingly true of those who know God
Futile thinking	
Darkened understanding	
Separated from the life of God	
Ignorance	
Hardened hearts	
Lost all sensitivity	
Given themselves over to sensuality	
Indulge in every kind of impurity	
Continual lust for more	

8. **Based on what you discovered in the table above, what is most striking about these contrasting characteristics? Which one do you feel has the most practical implications for you right now?**

9. **What attitude does Paul encourage in these verses? What role does attitude/mind/thinking seem to play in our living as God's children?**

In these verses Paul uses the imagery of “putting on” our new self and therefore “putting off” the traits of our old sinful selves. Some of the sinful traits he mentions are: falsehood, sin in anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, fighting, slander and malice. Notice that not only does Paul tell us not to do these things, but he always elaborates a bit more – telling us the positive traits to replace them with.

10. **Make special note of the “whys” Paul gives. Choose two of these “whys”. List them below, and elaborate on how they function.**
(For example: “avoid falsehood and speak truthfully because we are all members of one body.” Because all Christians are part of one body, that should be motivation to treat each other with dignity, respect and integrity – truthfulness.)

Apply

11. **Pick two of the “old self” traits. Describe how they might appear in your life today. Be specific – try to recall specific instances. Then describe what the situation would look like if you were to replace the negative trait with a positive one.**

12. Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.

This week I commit to:

****See notes on question #13 in week one for tips on this exercise.****

Ideas for this week include:

- Complete a spiritual gifts assessment to help you determine what your spiritual gifts are.
- Spend 15 minutes each day in prayer/brainstorming asking God what he would like you to do toward helping the body of Christ to be built up and move toward spiritual maturity. Toward the end of the week decide on one action step to take based on your prayers.
- Look closely at Ephesians 4:28. You (hopefully!) aren't making a living by stealing, but this encourages us to take a look at our motivation for work and our attitude toward what we receive. Evaluate your own attitudes and motivation.
- Choose one of the traits we are encouraged to "put off". Focus especially on "putting off" this trait in your life this week.
- ****Remember – these are only ideas! Feel free to come up with your own commitment.****

Live in the Light

Ephesians 5

Week of October 6 - 12

Ephesians chapter 5 is a continuation of the ideas we began looking at last week. Paul elaborates on all the blessings and gifts we have received from God and their practical implications for our daily behavior. If we truly believe all the things we affirmed in Ephesians 1-3, then the instructions in Ephesians 4-6 are the logical result.

Where do we get this image of “living in the light”? See Ephesians 4:18 and 5:8. Before we were in “darkness” – we were ignorant of how we should live and we were separated from God. But now that is no longer true! We now know God, we have been called God’s children, and we have God’s instructions on how to live our lives. The only thing remaining is for us to strive to live out these truths.

Objective: Understand our motivation for living as children of the light, and some of the specific expectations. Begin to analyze what Christian living means for our relationships.

1. **Opening Discussion: What did you learn about God and yourself through your experience this week?** (The commitment you made last week.)

Read Ephesians 5:1-20

2. **Recall a time you have seen a child try to imitate a beloved parent. Re-read verses 1 & 2. What does this tell us about our motivation for living as children of the light or children of God?**
3. **Look closely at verses 3-7. The Temple of Diana – known for its 300 temple prostitutes - was located in Ephesus. Sensual pleasure was part of the culture of the city. Even so, what type of standard does Paul set for Christians in these verses? What does this tell us about what/who should (or should not) define what acceptable behavior is for “children of the light”?**

4. You've heard of the "fruit of the spirit". In this passage, what does Paul list as "fruit of the light"? Define each of these "fruits".

5. Verses 15-18 offer some guidance about how to choose our behavior (and how NOT to choose our behavior). Use these verses to fill in the chart below.

Verse	Criteria for deciding on proper behavior
15	
16	
17	
18	

Using this chart, write your own set of brief "checklist" questions that you could use to help make decisions.

Read Ephesians 5:21-32

This begins a section on how relationships should function in the family of God. The section continues next week in chapter 6.

These verses are often challenging for our culture to hear. Words like "submit" and "obey" are not popular with us. Often when people get bent out of shape about these verses it is because they read only a part of verse 22: "Wives submit to your husbands". However, it is very important to read the entire section in context!

6. It appears that verse 21 is an introduction to this entire section on relationships (5:22 – 6:9). Who is the "one another" being referred to here? What is the reason we are called to submit to "one another"?

7. **What “model” do husbands have in how they are to treat their wives? What does it mean for a husband to live and love his wife following this model?**

8. **Paul was writing this in a culture where women were addressed through their husbands and Jewish law termed women a “thing”. Given the cultural attitude toward women at the time and taking this entire section as a whole: Would Paul have been considered a “male chauvinist” or a “radical feminist” in his day?**

9. **Is what Paul says here about marriage relationships completely outdated? Timeless rules for a happy marriage? A combination? Why do you think so?**

Apply

10. **Of all the things to avoid mentioned in these passages, which are the biggest challenge for you right now? What motivation does Paul give for avoiding these behaviors that is the most compelling for you?**

11. Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.

This week I commit to:

****See notes on question #13 in week one for tips on this exercise.****

Ideas for this week include:

- Paul gives several reasons that should be at the heart of our motivation to avoid acting wrongly and behave in honorable ways instead. Write down the reason you find most compelling and post it someplace where you will see it every day. With that motivation in the front of your mind, focus on behaving as a “child of God” this week.
- Verse 4 admonishes us to avoid “foolish talk or coarse joking”. Focus on your speech this week with these admonishments in mind. Keep a tally of how often you slip into foolish talk or coarse joking without even realizing it. Strive to be more aware of your speech and ways to make it more holy and honorable.
- At least once each day this week use the “checklist” questions you created in question #5 to help yourself pause and think about making correct behavioral choices.
- If married: Spend time honestly reading, praying and reflecting on Ephesians 5:21-32. Do these verses offer any guidance that should be implemented more in your marriage relationship? Focus on YOUR roll, not your spouse’s!
- ****Remember – these are only ideas! Feel free to come up with your own commitment.****

Be Well Suited

Ephesians 6

Week of October 13 - 19

This chapter continues the section began in chapter 5 by providing examples of how relationships should function among those who are children of God. It then concludes with Paul's famous depiction of "the armor of God".

Objective: Further understand how Christians should relate in their relationships. Examine the "armor of God" and discover practical ways to wear and use this "armor" in our lives.

1. **Opening Discussion: What did you learn about God and yourself through your experience this week?** (The commitment you made last week.)

Read Ephesians 6:1-9

2. **This entire section was introduced with Ephesians 5:21. "Submit to one another..." In what ways are children to submit to their parents? In what ways are parents to submit to their children?**
3. **We no longer have "slaves" and "masters" in our society today as they did in Paul's day. However, we still have plenty of situations where there is a hierarchy – people in positions of authority over others. With that in mind, how would you apply these verses about proper behavior for slaves and masters to your own life? Your job? Organizations you are involved with?**
4. **Based on everything you have studied in Ephesians 5:21-6:9, how would you define Christian submission? How is this similar and/or different from the way society commonly thinks of submission?**

Read Ephesians 6:10-24

The table below lists the pieces of equipment motioned here and the role they would play in protecting a Roman soldier. Use this chart to aid in your discussion of “the Armor of God”.

Armor/Equipment	Protecting Role
Belt	Protect the waist region, support/carry other armor and equipment
Breastplate	Protect chest area – vital organs such as lungs and heart
Shoes/Sandals	Protect feet from injury, aid in providing firm footing
Shield	Stop arrows, especially help to put out arrows that had been set on fire
Helmet	Protect the head, face and brain
Sword	A short sword designed to be used in close combat. Since it is used in close range it must be used with precision. This is primarily a defensive weapon.

5. What is the source of “strength”, “might”, “power” and “armor” here? What does that communicate about our role?

6. Who/what are Christians in a “battle” against? Describe who this is or what these terms mean. (It may be helpful to look at different Bible translations.)

7. The table below lists the six pieces mentioned here that make up the “armor of God”. Fill in the table by describing what each piece of armor means and how it functions to protect us in real-life situations. I’ve included an example to get you started.

Armor/Equipment	Explanation and Real-Life Application
Belt of truth	God’s truth – all that he has revealed to us. Knowing what is really true provides a solid foundation for our lives and protection from evil’s lies and subtle deceptions.
Breastplate of righteousness	
Shoes/Sandals readiness from the gospel of peace	
Shield of faith	
Helmet of salvation	
Sword – the word of God	

8. Choose two pieces of the “armor of God” and describe a real-life situation where you might use that piece of “battle gear”.

9. How well do you think a soldier would do if we supplied him with all the greatest equipment and sent him into battle - but he had never actually put on or used any of it before? How much practice with the “armor of God” are you doing on a regular basis? Which bit of gear do you need the most practice with?

10. What role does prayer play in the “battle” we are engaged in? How does this fit in with the armor of God?

Apply

11. Decide on ONE thing you would like to do based on what you have studied here. Share it with your group and commit to doing it for the upcoming week. Be prepared to share your experience with the group.

This week I commit to:

****See notes on question #13 in week one for tips on this exercise.****

Ideas for this week include:

- Clearly define Christian submission. (Study other bible passages as well.) Think and pray about two situations in your life where you need to better practice Christian submission. Focus on doing so this week.
- Read Ephesians 6:5-9 each day before you leave for work. Pray that God will help you to work as if you were “serving the Lord, not men.”
- Choose one piece of “gear” mentioned as part of the armor of God. Think about what it would mean to use this piece of gear in your daily life this week. Focus on practicing using it!
- ****Remember – these are only ideas! Feel free to come up with your own commitment.****