

**OASIS:
“LIVING LETTERS”
EPHESIANS 4:1-16
DONE IN SYNC WITH
THE “LIVING GOD’S STORY” JOURNEY**



Preface: Welcome to our LC Bible study in our sermon series “Living God’s Story.” As you know, this year we are working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. So fasten your seat belt—it is quite a ride! These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.

Note to Newer Leaders: I am delighted to learn that some LCs have started to use the Oasis notes this spring. They are intended to give you a head-start in your prep time. Please know that all these questions cannot be asked in a single night and still have time for a good conversation so please read/edit/select the best ones for your LC. For more instruction, please read the footnotes and feel free to email me at tghali@grace.org with any questions or comments. Peace and strength as you serve the Kingdom!

Study’s BIG idea: God has given His grace and has gifted His church for the work of the Kingdom.

Ephesians 4:1-16

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Context: Paul & Ephesus

Paul visits Ephesus for first time at end of his second missionary journey on his way back to Jerusalem. He enjoyed his short time there and felt so welcomed that this was his first stop of the third missionary journey and he stayed for almost 3 years from 54-57 (Acts 20:3).

In the first century, Ephesus was an important city in the Roman Empire as it was a major hub connecting East to West. Furthermore, 230 independent communities within the Roman province of Asia surrounded it. Its geographical centrality, its multiculturalism and its cultural significance were contributing factors in the Lord's use of Paul's ministry of spreading the Gospel.

Paul loved his time in the region and Acts 20:17-38 describes the emotional farewell with the Ephesian elders. Like with any significant ancient document, there is debate surrounding timeline, authorship, etc., but a predominant school of thought believes that this letter is likely written around 60-62 AD by Paul, imprisoned in Rome.

Discussion Questions:

O – What instructions and themes strike you in the first 6 verses of Ephesians 4?

(Living a life worthy of the calling, be humble, gentle, patient, tolerant, keep the unity, Oneness of the Christian faith)

I – The Greek for “humility” is a derogatory term suggesting low-mindedness and groveling. Why do you think Paul would use this odd word here?

(One, it's consistent with the prisoner idea. Two, It seems Paul is being counter-cultural in trying to redeem it with the servant-hearted model of Jesus to represent a Christian virtue.)

A – What practical actions accompany virtues like humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance and bearing with one another and how can they help shape a young and growing faith community? How can these virtues shape our community?

O – As recipients of this word, we were just told to be humble and then in verse 7, we are told that each one of us has been uniquely given grace by Christ. Though seemingly contradictory, how does this leave you feeling?

(Paul wants each believer to know how significant he or she is in the Kingdom of Jesus even if the world sees him or her as lowly.)

I – Paul “quotes” Psalm 68:18 “When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious—that you, LORD God, might dwell there.” But Paul's use is slightly different from the original. What do you think Paul is doing here?
(While some have speculated that he is quoting from memory and has forgotten, it seems more likely that through divine inspiration, he is amplifying the meaning of the Psalm to include Jesus' giving His followers spiritual gifts and grace.)

O – For what purpose(s) does the Lord give some the gifts to be evangelists, pastors and teachers (v 11)? What do you notice about these purposes?

A – In other letters, Paul expands the list of gifts to include service, hospitality, etc. What have you learned from using your gifts over the years? What have you seen when the Body of Christ does not use its gifts?

O – Verse 14 states that there is a direct correlation between serving and maturing. Why do you think that is? How do we find the balance between avoiding a strictly works-oriented Christianity and a strictly private practice of faith?

(In general, there can be a balance of spiritual formation, worshipping with other believers and serving “the other” found in being committed and active to the local church)

I – Why do you think people in a Church community focused on Christian unity help each other to avoid being “blown here and there by every wind” of deceitful teaching?

(If the community is anchored in Christ, the head, the source, then it will not fall prey to the power schemes of the devious.)

A – Christian unity is so evasive for many local churches today. Why do you think that is? How can we as Christ-followers build unity, especially in light of past hurts and grievances? What blessings can be found in pursuing this important task?

O – How does Paul describe the church in verses 15-16?

I – Why do you think he chooses to employ this metaphor? Why are the roles of the headship of Christ and love so necessary to the Church?

A – The metaphor of the body states that we all have a function and a gift in order for the whole church to work as God intended. What does this mean for us as individuals and what does it mean for us as an LC?

Text notes (you can access biblical texts via www.Biblegateway.com)

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.