

FEARLESS

UNLEASHING GOD'S FIERCE LOVE IN YOUR WORLD



Leader's Guide

4 Week Youth Group Curriculum in Ephesians

GREG STIER

A Word to Youth Leaders

Our students live in a world that longs for love, but often looks for it in all the wrong places.

Many young people try to fill the longing in their heart and the hole in their soul by chasing after pleasure, popularity, partying, possessions, porn and a profusion of other pointless pastimes. When all along, our great God is standing with His arms outstretched, longing for them to simply walk into the embrace of His extravagant, unconditional, irrevocable, fierce love.

Because only He can fill the God-shaped hole in their souls.

That's really the essence of what the book of Ephesians is all about: God's love and our response. And when our young people experience God's extravagant love in the deepest parts of their souls, something amazing happens. Out of the overflow of His great love for them, and through the power of His Spirit at work in and through them, they can boldly, fearlessly reach out to others. God delights in taking their energy, enthusiasm and passion, and unleashing them into their hurting world with His message of hope.

May God bless you as you help your students explore the rich, powerful, beautiful book of Ephesians. May they learn to live a life of love and fearlessly live and give the message of gospel!

Greg Stier
CEO, Dare 2 Share

A Note about the Bible Translations Used in this Curriculum

During weeks one through three of the material in the curriculum and student devotional handouts, I chose to draw upon *The Message* paraphrase. Its imagery and wording in the early chapters of Ephesians beautifully capture the essences of God's lavish love for us and our grateful response back to Him.

In week four, however, when it was time to unpack the "armor of God" found in Ephesians 6, I chose to use the *New International Version* (NIV) of the Bible, because this is the translation that I memorized this incredibly descriptive passage from in my younger days, and the NIV richly depicts this amazing spiritual armor that God's graciously provided for our protection.

On occasion throughout this material, I also used the *New Living Translation* (NLT), when I thought that it best captured the meaning of a particular verse or passage for you, the reader.

Feel free to use the Bible translations that suits you best.

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How to Use this Curriculum

This Leader's Guide and corresponding 28 days of student devotional handouts drill down into a few specific passages in Ephesians. The lessons and devo readings work in tandem to help your students develop a deeper, richer relationship with God, and better understand His call on their lives to join Him in the most important job on the planet—bringing His hope and truth to their world.

Your group lesson time will introduce each Bible passage. Then, the daily student devotional readings during the subsequent week will drill down even deeper into the same passage. The devo content and activities strive to make the biblical truths of the passage more personally applicable to each student.

The weekly themes and Bible passages break out like this:

1. **Embraced**...Encircled by God's Fierce, Deep, Lavish Love
2. **Empowered**...Equipped by the Spirit with a Glorious Inner Strength
3. **Engaged**...Living a Life of Love
4. **Emboldened**...Fearlessly Stand and Be Counted

The curriculum provides fully developed lessons. You'll find step-by-step directions, ice breaker activities, discussion questions, prayers, Scripture, gospel presentations and more in your Leader's Guide.

If your discussion times go well, there may be more content in these lessons than your group has time for, so feel free to pick and choose what to cover and what to cut. If your group is hesitant to participate in the discussion time, ask your questions and wait patiently for your students to engage. Waiting creates tension, and tension is a tool for change. You know your students best, so customize your use of the materials to your own context. The detailed lessons are simply a plan that you can modify as needed. (User Note: The words in bold provide a sample script to help you, while the non-bolded words provide logistical directions for you.)

Each lesson includes a segue to a clear gospel presentation. Don't assume that all your students have previously understood or embraced the message of the gospel. And follow up with those who make a decision to trust in Christ. Get them grounded and growing in their new faith. For help with this, check out Dare 2 Share [Now Grow!](#) discipling curriculum, or go to www.somethingamazing.net/moving-forward for a free, engaging, new believer follow up video series.

Week 1: Embraced...Encircled by God's Fierce, Deep, Lavish Love

Key Idea

Embracing God's extravagant love for us in Christ sets us free and compels us to join Him in His work.

Key Scripture

Ephesians 1:4-8; 2:4-10 (*The Message*)

Supplies

- Paper and Pencils – enough for one of each for each group of 4-5 students
- Bibles
- Worship music that focuses on God's love
- Reproducible *Fearless* Week 1 student devotions handouts (one set for each student)

Explain

This week, we're launching into a new 4-week series called *Fearless*. It's about learning to boldly, fearlessly lean on God love and power as we strive to live a life of real, radical, lasting impact. We'll be unpacking a few key passages in the book of Ephesians each week and exploring what they have to tell us about how to lean our lives on Jesus and boldly, fearlessly bring His mission and message to our corner of the world.

But first, let's start with a little fun.

Icebreaker

Divide your students into teams of four or five. Everyone on the team searches through the physical possessions they brought with them: pockets, wallets, purses, backpacks or whatever (including the clothing they're wearing). Each group tries to come up with one object in their possession that begins with each letter of the alphabet. Each group should designate a scribe to write down their ABCs and tally up their grand total. Set a time limit of 5-7 minutes. The winning team is the one that found objects representing the most letters. (Hint: Creative labeling is allowed, i.e., the various shirts worn in a group could include a Tee-shirt, Hoodie, Jersey, Sweater, etc.)

Transition

After the game, settle your students and open in prayer.

Explain

OK, so when you all were digging through your pockets or purses or whatever, did any of you come across some trash...some useless thing where you thought "I should throw that away..."? Give me a show of hands if you found something like that when you started digging around.

From among those who raised their hands, ask for a volunteer to come forward with their piece of trash. As they come forward, pull out a \$10 (or even better, \$20) bill. Ask them if they're willing to exchange their trash for the bill you are holding. Then do the swap.

Ask

- What just happened here?
- I gave up something of value, in exchange for this person's trash. Was that a good deal for _____ (student's name) _____? Did it cost him/her anything? They got something of value for giving me something they needed to discard.
- Why am I showing you this illustration? How does this illustration tie into the Christian life?
- Does God know all about all our trash?

Explore

Explain

That's what we're going to be talking about today—the great exchange—our trash exchanged for God's lavish love. Psalm 139:1 tells us that God knows *everything* about us—from A to Z. Which means He knows our trash from A to Z, too, but He loves us anyway.

So let's jump in and take a closer look at God's amazing love for us by reading Ephesians 1:4-8 in *The Message* paraphrase. Here's what it says:

Long before he [God] laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son. Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!

Ask

- It says God "*wanted us to enter into the celebration of His lavish gift-giving.*" What gift is it talking about here?
- How do we get this gift?
- What do we receive when we accept this gift?
- Did God take pleasure in giving us this gift?
- How is that possible, since death on the cross is a terrible, horribly painful way to die? How could God take pleasure in giving us this gift?

Ask for a volunteer to read Philippians 2:6-8.

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,*

he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (NIV)

Ask

- What did Jesus sacrifice when He was born as a human man?
- What did He sacrifice when He died on the cross?
- Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?

Explain

That last question was actually a trick question—because Jesus didn't actually *have* to die on the cross. He willingly *chose* to die on the cross. He wasn't a helpless victim. He was a God-man on a rescue mission. In John 10:18, Jesus puts it like this: *"No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again."* (NLT) He willingly died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin.

Now let's read Ephesians 2:4-9.

...Immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving.

Ask

- Remember our illustration of the trash and money earlier? Do we do anything to earn God's gift of salvation and eternal life?
- What does it mean to *"trust God enough to do it"*? What does this kind of *"trust"* look like?
- Why did God do this for us when we didn't deserve it?
- Did Jesus have any guarantee that we would accept His love, His sacrifice and His gift of eternal life when He set about His plan to rescue us through the cross?

Encounter

Explain

Accepting Jesus' gift of salvation is just a first step in our loving relationship with Him. He wants this give-and-take exchange of His love to us and our love back to Him to be an ongoing, deep, soul-satisfying, joyful relationship.

Ask for a volunteer to read Romans 8:38-39 while the rest of the students close their eyes and listen.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (NLT).

Think about it. His lavish, extravagant love encircles us moment-by-moment as we walk through our entire lives. And He longs for us to love Him in return with a deep, wide, fierce, focused, self-sacrificing love.

Yet, He gives each of us the free choice of whether to be embraced by His love, or to stiff-arm Him and push His love away.

Maybe you're here today, and you've never heard before about God's extravagant love that He demonstrated on the cross. If that's true for any of you, I invite you to put your trust in Jesus right now and enter into His loving embrace, by swapping your sin for His gift of eternal life.

I invite you to pray this prayer along with me. Keep in mind that saying a prayer isn't what gets you into this relationship with God; it's just a way for you to express what's happening in your soul if you decide to trust in Jesus. So if you're ready, I invite you to pray this prayer along with me right now.

Dear God, I want this kind of loving, intimate relationship with you. But I know that my sins have gotten in the way of that, and that nothing I can do will ever change that. But right now, I believe that Jesus died in my place and rose again from the dead. I trust in Him to forgive me for my sins. Through faith in Him, I am entering an eternal relationship with You. Thank you for this free gift! In Jesus' name, amen.

Invite those who trusted Christ to see you after the meeting for follow up material. (We suggest you use the new believers videos found at www.somethingamazing.net/moving-forward.)

But there are also many of us here who have been Christians for a while now, and quite honestly, many of us feel like we're struggling to experience the life-giving embrace of God's love.

Ask

- **What are some of the reasons people may struggle to experience God's love?** [Encourage answer such as "because there's lots of pain and hurt in our lives," or "we ignore Him and fail to regularly connect with Him on deep, intimate level."]
- **Jesus is our suffering Savior. Do you think that helps Him understand our pain and hurt? Why or why not?**

It's all too easy to become deadened to His presence and promptings in our lives. Many of us have fallen into the trap of rushing through our days and weeks without giving our relationship with God much time or effort. So let's take some time right now, pause from the noise of our lives and focus on God's love for us and be encircled by it. Engage your group with worship music that focuses on God's love. Consider changing up the atmosphere of the room to help your student engage in serious worship: i.e., light some candles, gather in a circle and sit on the floor, or whatever works for your group.

Engage

Explain

God's great love for us is life-transforming, isn't it, literally? Colossians 1:13-14 says we've been transferred out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We're transformed and set free by His love!

And knowing that we're loved fiercely and unconditionally by the God of the Universe, should make a huge difference in how we live our lives. How so? Listen in on this final verse in Ephesians 2:10 that we're going to look at today. After the Apostle Paul goes on and on for verses and verses about God's extravagant love for us, he drops this little "so what" verse into the mix. Here it is:

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

The Apostle Paul isn't talking here about doing "good works" to earn our way to heaven, or to earn God's love. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you are safe and secure in those. In fact, there's nothing you can do to make God love you more. And there's nothing you can do to make God love you less.

No, he's talking here about how *because of* God's extravagant, lavish, fierce, unconditional, irrevocable love and grace, you have been set free for a greater, higher, more meaningful purpose.

Because once you embrace grace, and let grace embrace you, you WANT to serve Christ!

So what about you? Are you up for loving and serving Jesus because of all He's done for you? Are you willing "*to join Him in the work He does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do*"? What is this good work? Well, we'll be exploring that in more detail next week—and we'll take a look at how God empowers and equips you as you join Him in His work. But this week, let's start with a simple step.

Embark

Begin to pass out *Fearless* Week 1 devotional handouts for each of your students.

Explain

To help you build a habit of connecting with God daily and nurturing your love relationship with Him, I'm providing each of you with weekly handouts to take home with you. The devo entries you'll be reading each day will take the truths we're covering in youth group for the next four weeks and drill down to an even deeper level with each of them. They'll help you more fully understand and experience God's love, and also give you practical ideas for how to live it out and share it with the world around you.

My challenge to you is to read the Intro and the devo for Day 1 tonight before you go to bed, and then one entry each day after that. That way you'll be on track for the content we'll be covering in our youth group meeting next week. Come back next week, ready to share your own stories of how God's at work in your life as a result of some of the specific activities you'll find in the devos this week.

Let's close with a final prayer.

Dear God, thank You that You know us from A to Z and that You love us anyway. Thank You for Your deep, wide, fierce, extravagant, unconditional love for us! Help to walk in the embrace of Your love this week and to have eyes to see opportunities You send our way to share Your love with others.

If possible, send your students a couple text messages during the coming week, reminding them to remember to read their devos each day.

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CURRICULUM PREVIEW