

# FEARLESS

UNLEASHING GOD'S FIERCE LOVE IN YOUR WORLD



STUDENT DEVOTIONS IN EPHESIANS

GREG STIER



## INTRODUCTION

We 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 each of us to simply walk into the embrace of His extravagant, unconditional, irrevocable, fierce love.

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

And when He does, WATCH OUT!

When God embraces you in His lavish love, and you truly let it seep down into the deepest parts of your soul, something amazing happens. Out of the overflow of His great love for you and through the power of His Spirit at work in and through you, you'll find yourself boldly compelled to live for Jesus, and longing to bring others along with you on this amazing journey.

Because once you embrace grace and let grace embrace you, you WANT to serve Christ! Not because you have to, but because you want to. And once you tap into the power of the Holy Spirit, you'll find a power you never knew you had that will help you be bold and fearless as you live for Him and unleash His love in your world.

That's really the essence of what the book of Ephesians is all about: God's love and our response.

What does this look like in practical, everyday life? Well, it will look different for you personally than it will for me. That's part of what's so amazing about our God. He's King of the Universe, and yet He's personal. His relationship with each of us is uniquely fitted to our personality, talents, needs, emotional baggage and circumstances.

**These 28 days of daily devotions in the book of Ephesians are designed to help you grow in your understanding of God's love, and help you unpack how you might unleash that love in your own world.**

We'll be focusing on selected passages that will help us explore the following four themes:

- 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

Get ready to be encircled by the lavish love of your heavenly Father, empowered by His Spirit, enlisted into a life of love and emboldened to fearlessly live for Him and share His message of grace!

### **A Word about the Bible Translations Used in this Devotional**

During weeks one through three of this devo, I chose to draw upon *The Message* paraphrase for each daily Bible reading. *The Message* is a contemporary paraphrase that brings a modern language perspective to the Bible's timeless truths. Its imagery and wording in the early chapters of Ephesians beautifully capture the essence 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), 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 devo, 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.

Since I'm the author, I felt free to move between these translations or the paraphrase. But since you're the reader, I hope you'll feel free to crack open you own personal favorite version of the Bible, and study each day's verses in the one that suits you best!

DARE 2 SHARE PREVIEW

# FEARLESS

DARE 2 SHARE PREVIEW



## You! You're the Focus of His Love

# 1

*Ephesians 1:4*

*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.*

### Explore

God's extravagant, lavish love for you is deep and wide, fierce and focused, unconditional and irrevocable.

It almost seems too good to be true, doesn't it? That the mighty God who laid the foundations of the earth longs to laser-focus a



love like that into your soul, and make you "whole and holy by his love."

Do you **really** believe that God loves you like that, warts and all? Not because you've "earned" it by trying to be good or do good, but just because **He is** the very definition of love itself.

God's love is a free gift, extended to you no matter how battered, broken, bad and blamable you might feel. "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8, NLT).

We don't have to clean up our act for God to encircle us with His deep, fierce, lavish love.

In fact, it's His crazy, **amazing** love that has the power to heal our brokenness and bring us into a rich, personal relationship with Him. We're made "whole and holy," not by what we do, but by what He's done for us.

I want to be embraced by a love like that. **Don't you?**

### Encounter

Mere words are inadequate to capture the expanse of God's love for you. Still, we have to start somewhere. The key is to move the words off the page into your soul.

So ask God through His indwelling Holy Spirit to help you, and one-by-one, pull each of the following six words that describe God's love for you into your heart and soul. Think for awhile about each word individually, hold it tight and let it soak into your soul. Then jot down a short phrase about what it means to you personally.

## GOD'S LOVE FOR ME IS...

*Lavish*

He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son (Ephesians 1:6).

**IMMENSE**

For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth (Psalm 103:11, NLT).

**Fierce**

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NLT).

**FOCUSED**

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 (Ephesians 1:4).

**UNCONDITIONAL**

He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12, NLT).

**IRREVOCABLE**

For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5b, NLT).

## Engage

Talk to God right now, and ask Him to show you more of Himself across the next 28 days of these *Fearless* devo readings. Invite Him to guide you into a deeper, richer place with Him. Ask Him to show you, day-by-day, what it looks like in **YOUR** life to fearlessly experience and extend His deep, fierce, lavish love more and more fully.

Party Time!

2

### *Ephesians 1:5-6*

*Long, long ago he [God] 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.*

## Explore

Imagine with me what it would be like to grow up in a war-torn, poverty-stricken country like Syria or South Sudan. You're hungry 24-7. Gunfire and violence echo endlessly around you, and inside



your head. When illness strikes, there's no doctor or medicine. Now imagine that both your parents have been killed. You're orphaned and homeless, out on the streets fending for yourself. Your life is a desperate struggle in a hostile, dangerous world.

You'd feel pretty helpless and hopeless, wouldn't you?

**BUT ONE DAY SOMETHING INCREDIBLE HAPPENS!**

Two loving parents swoop in and adopt you! You go from poverty to plenty—beyond your wildest dreams. From an abandoned orphan on the gritty streets, to a cherished member of a loving family, full of other adopted kids who've been rescued from desperate circumstances, too. Your new parents take great pleasure in showering you with lavish gifts—and not just “stuff,” but more importantly, love, care and emotional security. You've gone from rags to riches!

**WOULD YOU FEEL LIKE CELEBRATING? YES!!!**

### Encounter

Did you know that something even more miraculous than being adopted into an earthly family has actually happened to you as a follower of Jesus?

Before you accepted Jesus' free gift of salvation, spiritually you were like a poverty-stricken orphan, hungry, battered and homeless, wandering in a broken, fallen world, lost and separated from God. But because of Jesus' work on the cross, the way was opened for you to be adopted into God's family! John 1:12 puts it like this: *“But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (NLT).*

In fact, the Bible tells us **we can approach God as Abba**, which in the language of that day was the equivalent of “Daddy” (Galatians 4:6). Isn't it amazing that the God of the Universe wants you to call him Daddy?

As His cherished child, your *Abba-Daddy* takes great pleasure in lavishing all sorts of incredible gifts on you: His love and forgiveness, a restored personal relationship with Him through Jesus, a meaningful, abundant life here and now as you walk with Him, and eternal life in the forever after of the ultimate party scene—heaven.

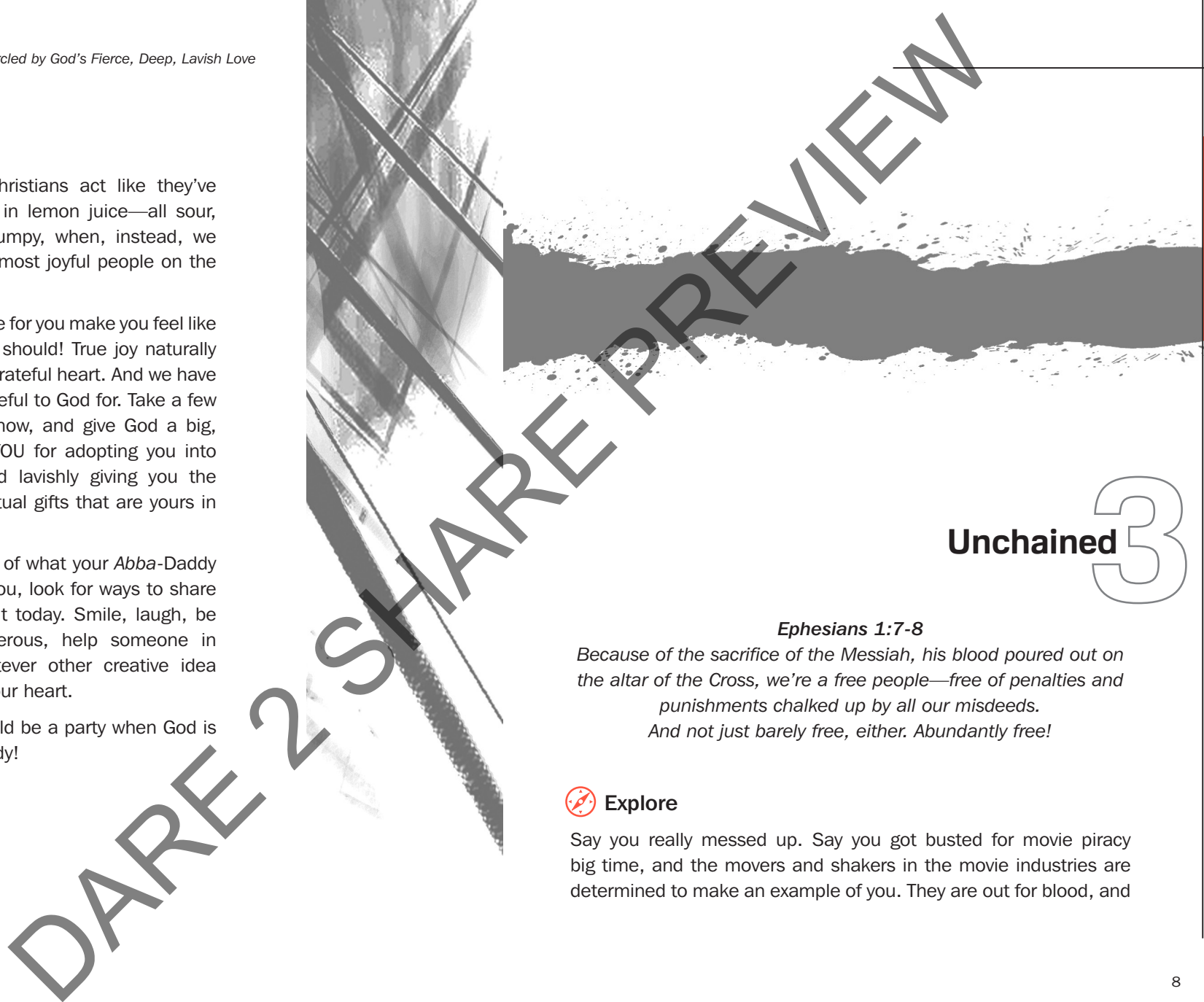
## Engage

Sometimes, Christians act like they've been baptized in lemon juice—all sour, scowly and grumpy, when, instead, we should be the most joyful people on the planet!

Does God's love for you make you feel like celebrating? It should! True joy naturally flows out of a grateful heart. And we have a lot to be grateful to God for. Take a few minutes right now, and give God a big, huge THANK YOU for adopting you into His family, and lavishly giving you the incredible spiritual gifts that are yours in Christ.

Then, because of what your *Abba-Daddy* has done for you, look for ways to share your party spirit today. Smile, laugh, be kind and generous, help someone in need, or whatever other creative idea God puts on your heart.

Every day should be a party when God is our loving Daddy!



# Unchained 3

### *Ephesians 1:7-8*

*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!*

## Explore

Say you really messed up. Say you got busted for movie piracy big time, and the movers and shakers in the movie industries are determined to make an example of you. They are out for blood, and





Why would the judge pay out hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay your penalty for you? Because the judge happens to be your father, and he loves you unconditionally.

You're free! Free from punishment, free from fear.

## Encounter

Like the father in this story, in the spiritual realm, God has stepped in, and paid the penalty for all your misdeeds and mess-ups—past, present and future. He wrote a check with His life when He died on the cross and paid for your sin.

### **Why? Because He loves you.**

If you've never trusted Christ, or aren't totally sure that you have received this free gift of salvation, check out the GOSPEL box on page 15. It will help you understand and embrace this gift that sets you free!

And if you have trusted in Christ, the Bible declares you not just barely free, but totally free! *"Abundantly free!"*

Do you feel totally free from the burden of guilt and shame? Many Christians continue to struggle with a nagging voice inside their head, telling them that they'll never be good enough for God to really love them and totally forgive them. Do you?

This voice could be the evil one—the Bible calls him "the Accuser" and "the father of lies." Or it could be your own stricken conscience, reminding you of some sin that packs a wallop of shame.

Yet God tells you differently.

## Engage

Read each of the following Bible verses, and write a response to God about how each of these promises make you feel.

**1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (NIV).*

**Romans 8:1** *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus (NLT).*

**Micah 7:19** *Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! (NLT).*

Do you know someone else who struggles with feeling unlovable? Maybe they wrestle with discouragement, self-injury or depression. Pray for them today, and ask God to show you a way to share His love with them, and point them toward the freedom that can be found in Jesus.

## The Gospel

The Gospel means “good news,” and is explained by the following six key truths.

- G**od created us to be with Him. (Genesis 1-2)
- O**ur sins separate us from God. (Genesis 3)
- S**ins cannot be removed by good deeds. (Genesis 4 – Malachi 4)
- P**aying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again. (Matthew – Luke)
- E**veryone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life. (John)
- L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever. (Acts - Revelation)

Is there anything holding you back from putting your faith in Jesus right now to give you eternal life? The moment you trust in Jesus, you enter into an eternal relationship with God. Your life will never be the same. Both now and for all eternity.

While saying a prayer isn't what gets you into a relationship with God, it is a way for you to express your newfound faith in Jesus. You might pray something like this...

**“Dear God, I know that my sins have broken my relationship with You, and that nothing I could do could 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! Amen.”**

For more information, go to [www.somethingamazing.net](http://www.somethingamazing.net).

## Signed, Sealed, Delivered

# 4

### *Ephesians 1:13-14*

*It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.*

### Explore

Imagine applying to a university, and having the Admissions Office call to inform you that you're missing one important form that

needs your principal's signature in order to be considered for a big scholarship. But the deadline's tomorrow. So you rush to get the form printed, filled out and signed. You get a large FedEx envelope, put the form inside it, peel off the little tape thing that covers the sticky stuff on the lip of the letter, seal it and pay the right amount of postage you need to get it to its final destination overnight. Finally, you send it with the full expectation of it getting to where it needs to go.

But once you send the letter, it's out of your hands. It probably will make it to the desired destination, but there are no guarantees. It could get lost in the mail. The FedEx plane carrying it could crash.

That's where salvation is different.

**God *signs*** the letter,  
**the Holy Spirit SEALS** it and  
**Jesus *delivers*** you to  
your final destination.

And Jesus **never** loses his mail.

 **Encounter**

What does it actually look like for you to be "sealed by the Holy Spirit"? Great question! Let's take a quick look at just a few of the things Scripture tells us about the Third Person of the Trinity's role in your life.

**HE GIVES YOU NEW LIFE.** "He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, NLT).

**HE SEALS YOU AS BELONGING TO GOD.** "[God] set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:22, NIV).

**HE LIVES INSIDE YOU.** "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19a, NLT).


**HE TEACHES YOU TRUTH.** "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26, NIV).

**HE EMPOWERS YOU TO BATTLE SIN.** "And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death" (Romans 8:2, NLT).

**HE GIVES YOU SUPERNATURAL GIFTS TO SERVE OTHERS.** "It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have" (1 Corinthians 12:11, NLT).

DARE 2 SHARE PREVIEW



 Engage

The Holy Spirit's presence in your life means that you are never alone! Because the Spirit lives inside you, even if you feel alone... you are not.

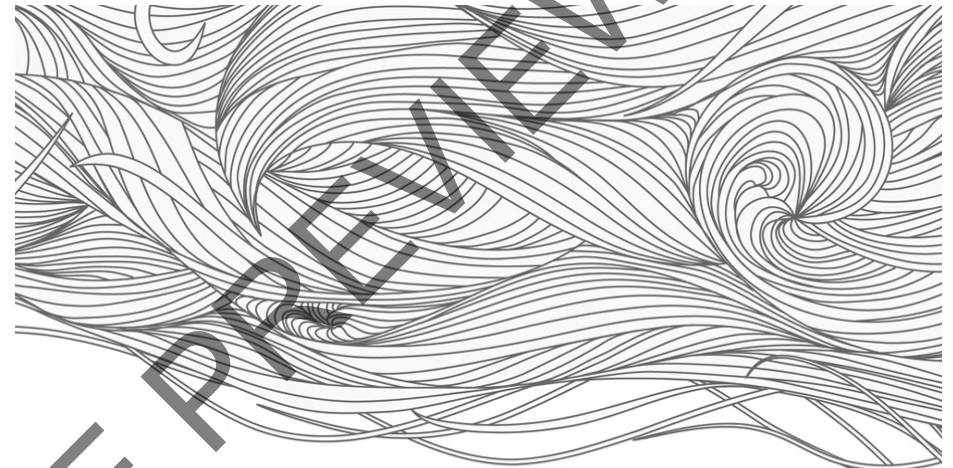


Take a moment right now, and...

**Thank the Spirit** for living inside you and for all He's at work doing in your life.

**Invite Him** to empower you today.

**Listen for** His promptings throughout your day and step into the **opportunities** He sends your way to share God's light and love with others.



**Juxta-What?**

5

*Ephesians 1:17-21*

*I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!*

*All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything.*