

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-SIX

Here's How to Finish Well

Ephesians 6:18–24

Prayer focuses our time and energy on what God is doing. It keeps our eyes off ourselves and guards us from throwing pity parties. Prayer makes us positive. It gives us hope to go on. Stay strong in prayer, and you will finish well.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE'VE certainly covered a lot of ground in Ephesians, haven't we? Paul began his letter by opening our eyes to the spiritual blessings we share in Christ in the "heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:3). Then he revealed how God raised us to life with Christ, turned our divisions into unity, and led us out of darkness into His radiant light. Paul showed us how to put our theology into action in every relationship, whether at home or work, as we submit to one another in reverence to Christ. So full of truth and practical application, Ephesians is a wonderful letter for all believers in every age.

What happened after Paul wrote his inspired epistle? After two years under house arrest, Paul was released, and he returned to active ministry. Later, however, he was arrested again and in chains transported to Rome where he lived his final days in the Mamertine dungeon. Paul preached Christ to the end of his life, and in his last written words, he triumphantly declared, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful" (2 Timothy 4:7).

How did Paul keep a steady course without faltering? His final lines in Ephesians reveal four guidelines for finishing well that can help us in our spiritual race. Let's follow Paul's lead and learn these final truths to conclude our study of Ephesians.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul's letter, like his life, exudes grace, from Paul's opening prayer, "May God . . . give you grace" (Ephesians 1:2) to his final blessing: "May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:24). Grace in the beginning. Grace every step of the way. Grace to the very end.

Take a moment to thank God for His grace in your life and ask Him to strengthen you to live courageously to the end of your days. In the space below, write your prayer to our Father of all grace.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 6:18–24* a couple of times, slowly and carefully. Notice how Paul echoes *four themes* that he developed throughout his letter: prayer, love, peace, and grace.

- *Prayer.* In 1:15–23 and 3:14–21, Paul prays for his readers. Here he urges them to pray for others, including himself.
- *Love.* In 3:18 and 5:2, Paul showcases the love of Christ. Here he features our love for Christ.
- *Peace.* In 2:14–17, Paul announces the peace between Jews and Gentiles. Here he prays for courage to keep on declaring this message of peace.
- *Grace.* In 2:8–9 Paul teaches that God saved us by His grace. Here he prays that God will continually extend His grace over us.

Paul expressed these themes throughout his life and ministry, and we can see them reflected in the *four guidelines* Paul modeled for finishing the Christian life well.



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Observation: Four Guidelines for Finishing Well

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for examples to follow, such as Paul's prayer life—which forms the frame around the first guideline.¹

Stay Strong in Prayer—Ephesians 6:18

Write down everything you observe in Ephesians 6:18, such as repeated and emphasized words, imperatives, and anything else you see.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18 NASB)

Did you count the number of times Paul wrote the word, *all*? Four times in one verse! What point do you think Paul was making by repeating *all* so many times?



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Let's examine closer what "all" referred to each time Paul used the word. "All prayer and petition" refers to *kinds* of prayer; "all times," to *occasions* for prayer; "all perseverance," to *duration* in prayer; "all the saints," to *beneficiaries* of prayer. What do these particular concepts teach you about prayer?

The easiest discipline to neglect is prayer for our children. As they go off to school, as they make their way on their own, as they get older, pray. Pray your warnings. Pray your corrections. Your children will be enhanced by that kind of prayer with perseverance. And you will finish well. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Be Bold in Courage—Ephesians 6:19–20

Now observe *Ephesians 6:19–20*. What key points do you see? By requesting prayer for himself, what was Paul teaching his readers about prayer? And what was foremost on Paul's list of prayer needs?

If the apostle Paul ought to speak boldly at his age, so should we. Not tactlessly or offensively but boldly. You never get so old that you are not important. Quit talking yourself out of speaking up for Christ. You'll finish well if you stay bold in courage. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Cultivate Closeness with Faithful Friends—Ephesians 6:21–22

Through his letters, Paul kept in touch with those he had ministered to over the years. What do you observe about Paul's personal comments in *Ephesians 6:21–22*? What principle did Paul model that you can follow?

How many friends did Paul have? The large number might surprise you! Just take a look at the end of many of his letters to see how many names he listed: *Romans 16:1–16, 21–23*; *1 Corinthians 16:19*; *Colossians 4:7–15*; *2 Timothy 4:19–21*. Can you count the names? That's a lot of faithful friends!

Let Love for Christ Abound—Ephesians 6:23–24

In his final benediction in *Ephesians 6:23–24*, Paul wraps up his letter with love for Christ, peace, and grace. This benediction is like an elegantly wrapped gift to his readers, full of life's richest treasures. Receive Paul's gift to you personally and write down what you observe . . . and if you turn back to verse 18 to include "Pray in the Spirit," be certain to catch Paul's emphasis on each member of the Trinity.



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Did the word, *eternally*, stand out to you? Paul inserted this word for a purpose. He began his letter looking back to God's love for us in eternity past, "before he made the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Here Paul concludes by looking ahead to God's grace "upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" for eternity (6:24). From eternity past to eternity future, God lavishes us with love and grace! What does this truth about eternity imply about your assurance of peace with God in your present circumstances?

God has His own timetable. He has you exactly where He wants you. He is in control. As painful as the path may be right now, you are right where the Father wants you to be. Accept His plan and use it as an opportunity for love for Christ to abound in you.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Love Brings Doctrine to Life

For interpretation, let's look closer at Paul's fourth guideline: love. Can you remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians about God's love for us? Write down what Paul said in the following verses.

Ephesians 1:4–5: _____

Ephesians 2:4–5: _____

Ephesians 3:17–19: _____

God pours His love *into us* so that His love can pour *out of us*. What did Paul say in the following verses about letting the love of Christ abound to others?

Ephesians 4:2, 15–16: _____

Ephesians 5:2: _____

Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33: _____



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Remarkably, Paul used the word *love* fifteen times in his letter. Perhaps he emphasized this point because he knew it can be a challenge for love to flourish in churches that are strong in dogma like the Ephesian church. About thirty-five years later, Jesus Christ, through the apostle John, had this to say about the church at Ephesus: “I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!” (Revelation 2:4).

Pause here for prayer asking the Lord to guard you against becoming like the Ephesian believers who lost their first love. Invite Him to fill your heart with His love and to spark in you a fire for loving others in His name.



Correlation: The Power of Prayer to Make us Bold

For correlation, let’s focus on the role of prayer in Paul’s life, which was the secret to his courage. Interestingly, Paul wasn’t naturally courageous. What do the following verses say about Paul’s natural inclination toward self-doubt and discouragement?

1 Corinthians 2:1–4

2 Corinthians 1:8–9



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What did Paul say helped him through such difficult times, according to *2 Corinthians 1:10–11*?

Don't discount the power of others' intercessory prayers to encourage you. Who can you ask to pray for you today? In what areas do you need courage?

Application: A Final Send Off

As a final application, reflect on a section that touched you most deeply in Ephesians. Perhaps the section that impacted you most was Paul's list of spiritual blessings in chapter 1. Maybe it was about God reconciling us to Himself and to our brothers and sisters in Christ in chapter 2. Or it could have been Paul's prayer in chapter 3 that we know the fullest extent of Christ's love. Or Paul's focus on submission in our relationships in chapters 4 and 5. Or, finally, Paul's teaching on wearing the armor of God in chapter 6 or the guidelines for finishing well that we just studied.

What truths touched you the most, and how can these truths change your life starting now?



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Are you ready to let God's living words in Ephesians soak into your soul and flow out to everyone you know? Be assured, the Spirit will empower you to follow Christ with a whole heart and finish your race well—just as Paul finished his race, staying faithful to the end.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may the truths I learned in Ephesians help me to not only live well but finish well. Guard me from the temptation to let my commitment fade as I grow older. Keep me from discouraging thoughts that tell me I have nothing to offer Your kingdom. Here is my heart, mind, body, and soul. Use me as You wish for Your glory until the end of my days and forever. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

