



Ephesians

A Universal Call to Holiness

Heart of Mary Women's Fellowship



heartofmarywf.com

About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

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Introduction

The Universal Call to Holiness

I think one of the biggest lies we can ever believe is that the universe is indifferent and that there is no purpose or meaning to life. There's an entire philosophy that revolves around this called "existentialism" and the appeal of this particular way of thinking is that the only way to create meaning in life is through our choices. Life literally becomes what you make of it.

Aside from making people believe that there is no such thing as evil, I think that existentialism is one of the best-selling lies that the devil ever told to the world. It's basically the same temptation he gave to Adam and Eve: that they can become like gods and grasp at knowledge because what else is there?

The Letter to the Ephesians is a testament that contrasts the philosophy of existentialism. Instead of appealing to self-centered individualism, it puts an emphasis on a sense of community and unity. There is a meaning and a purpose to life and it all centers God: it's to live a life unified with Christ in one church, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. In other words, we are all called to be saints.

"But aren't saints all the same?" You may ask.

There's a beautiful paradox to the universal call to holiness and sainthood that answers that question. Bishop Robert Barron puts it this way: "We might think of God as an absolutely intense white light that, when refracted in creation, expresses itself in an infinite variety of colors. The saints reflect particular colors, and that is precisely why their variety is so important in the life of the church." By becoming one with Christ and following the call to holiness, we paradoxically maintain our individuality. By losing ourselves in Christ, we end up finding ourselves in Him.

Think of this letter to the Ephesians as a guide to sainthood. It starts with a mission statement, gives us guidelines for living a good and holy life, and instructs us about how we should treat other people as well as ourselves.

The Letter to the Ephesians Team



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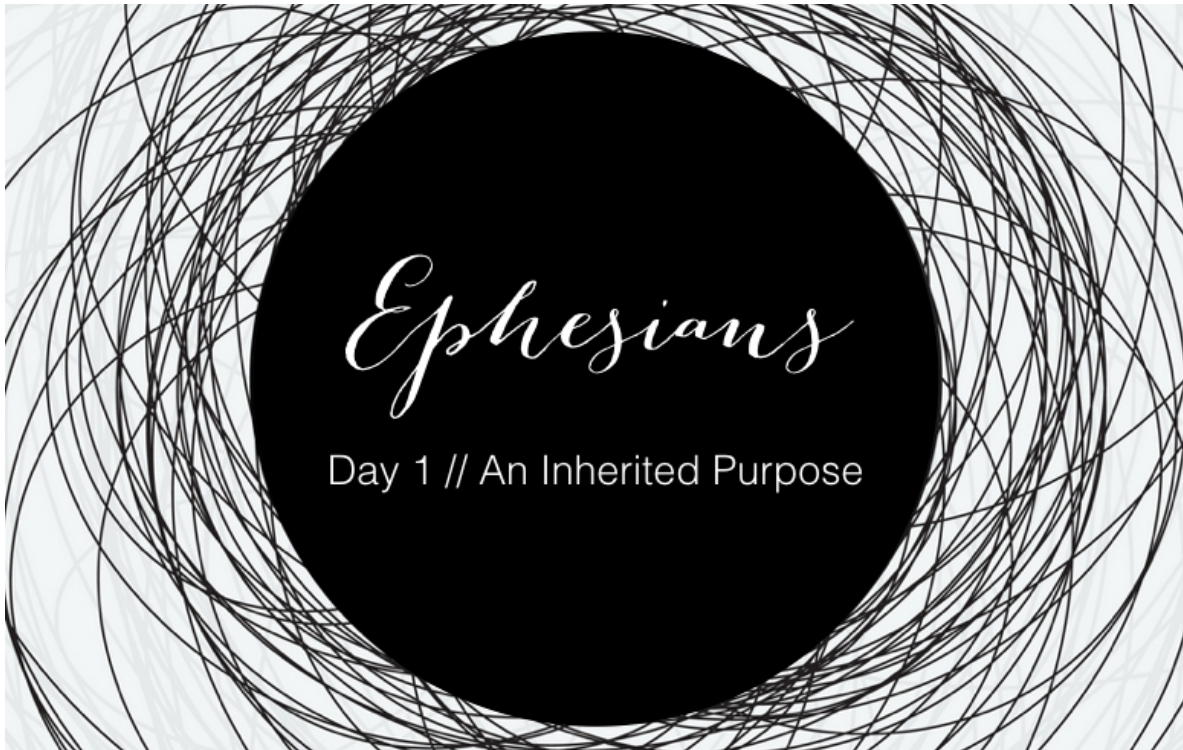


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Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-14, Romans 8:18-30

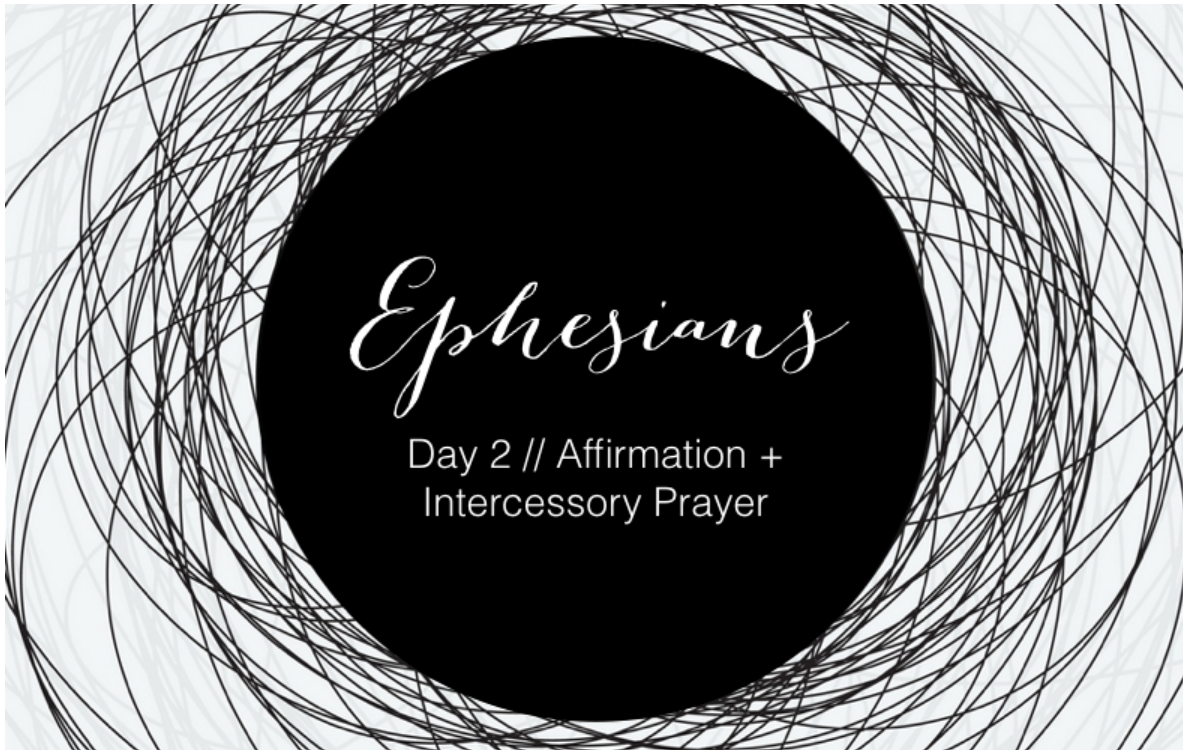
This first chapter lays out what a life in Christ consists of. For one thing, through choosing Christ, we have become part of His chosen people. Our destiny in God's love is to be Christ's adopted sisters, with our wills united to his Divine Will. Not only that, but we are free from sin and death through Jesus's death and resurrection.

This doesn't mean that our lives will always be perfect. Being a Christian means that we will encounter hardship in our lives. But the hard things we endure and the unimaginable things that we suffer don't take away from our calling or the promise that God made to us. Romans 8:18 says "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."

I particularly love this part of today's reflection:

"In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11-12 NRSV)

There's a difference between acting like you deserve something just because you want it (entitlement) and the inheritance that the letter talks about here. Inheritance is something freely given whereas something we feel entitled to is something we want to take or grasp at. We don't deserve God's forgiveness or redemption, let alone eternal life and a share of the riches of Heaven, and yet that is what we will receive when we live a Christ-filled life.



Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23, Mark 2:1-12

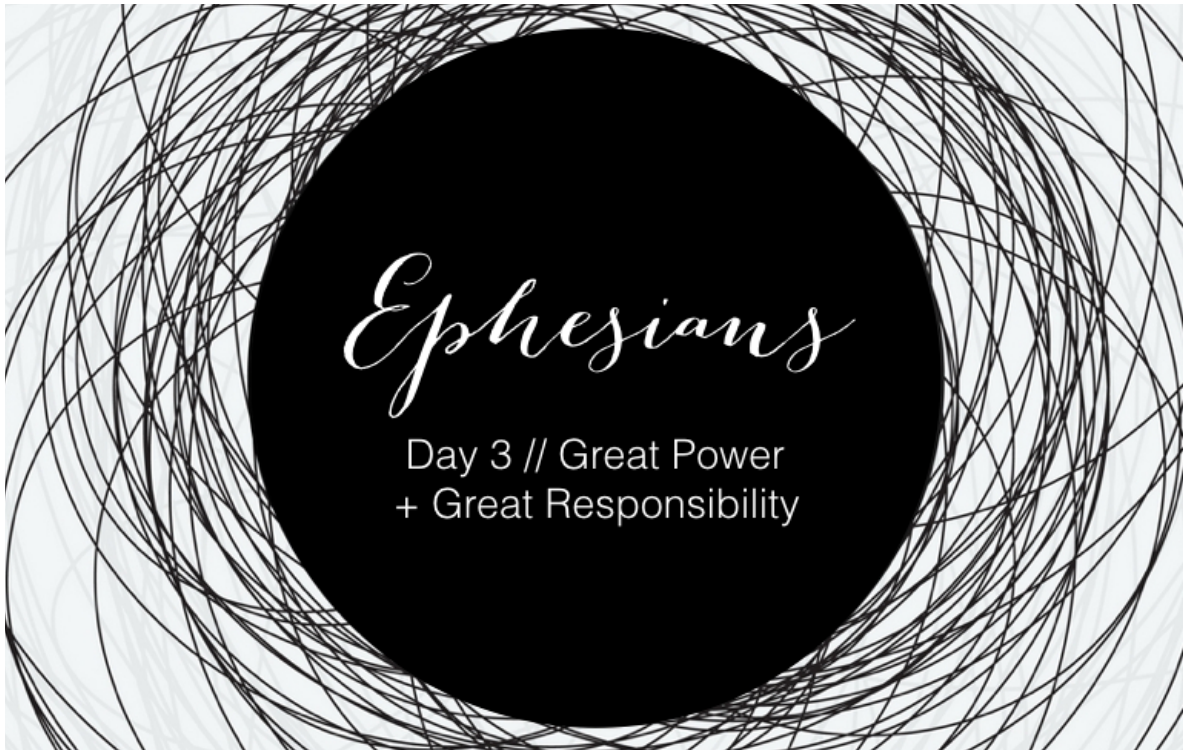
I still remember the retreat that changed my life. I had spent most of the year recovering from a traumatic anxiety attack that I experienced in the spring. I was making progress by volunteering at my parish and attending a retreat in the summer, but it was this retreat in September that ended up being my first major milestone on my road to recovery.

I was familiar with the concept of receiving affirmation notes from the retreats I went to in my college years, but nothing prepared me for the loving affirmation letters that I received on the last day of that September retreat. I had never met these people up until I got introduced to them at the retreat and yet, they have all been praying for me months before we ever met. So even though I was lost in my trauma, God was already working through these people to bring me out of the dark through their prayers.

Today's passage from Ephesians reads just like an affirmation letter. It praises the reader for their faith and goes into a long intercessory prayer, hoping that the reader will realize the greatness of God and receive His wisdom.

The passage also mentions the length of Christ's great saving power. There's an example of that from the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus heals the paralytic that came down from the roof through the help of his friends.

How amazing is it that God has the power to work through our prayers and lift other people out of whatever trauma that they have suffered?



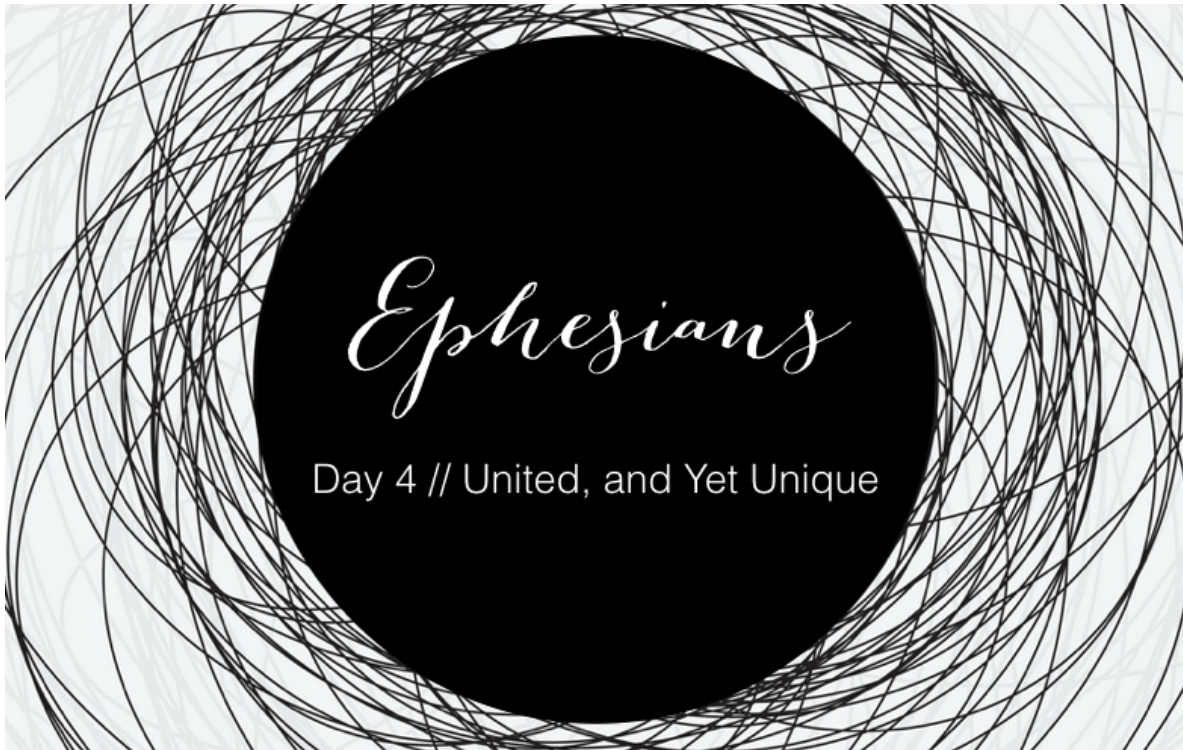
Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10, James 2:14-26

You've probably these questions in relation to salvation: Are we saved by faith alone? Do Catholics believe that if they do all these good things, you'll get into heaven? As a cradle Catholic, the doctrine of salvation being a combination of faith and good works was basically drilled into my head for as long as I could remember. Today's passage from Ephesians, however, gives a little bit more clarity about how salvation works.

In spite of what people may think, doing good deeds is not the Catholic way of "buying our way into Heaven." Ephesians 2:10 says "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

Think of salvation this way: Grace and faith have been given to us in the same way that superheroes unexpectedly get their powers. And as we all know, "With great power comes great responsibility." Comic book heroes who are given great powers are often compelled to use those powers to help those in need. One classic hero whose story revolves around power and responsibility is Spiderman.

Most people know Spiderman's story from the movies: Peter Parker gets bitten by a radioactive spider and gains the abilities of a spider: web-slinging, being able to sense oncoming danger, and a bit of extra strength and agility. The various comics, tv shows, and movies center on Peter Parker balancing life as a superhero with his everyday life.



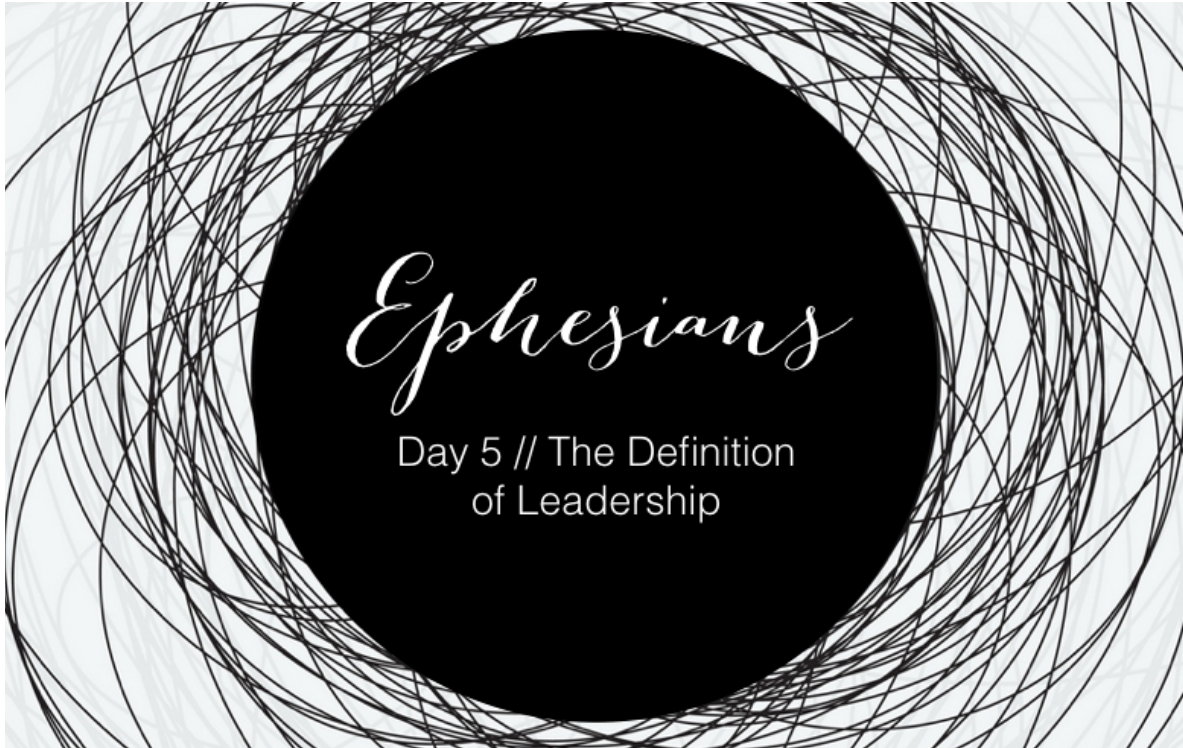
Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22, Galatians 3:27-29, Matthew 20:1-16

One wonderful thing about having a life in Christ is that we are no longer defined by our pasts. Even if, like me, you're a cradle Catholic, you can probably think of a time when God changed your life forever. Cradles and converts alike are all given the same grace, just like the workers of the vineyard all receiving the same wage, no matter how long they worked.

The fact that the owner of the vineyard gave each of the workers an equal wage is actually a fair and generous thing. God doesn't play favorites. And since we are all equal in God's eyes, we are compelled to see those who come into the faith late in life as equal to those who were raised in the faith from the beginning.

One example of a woman who found her place in the Church and held onto her unique identity while being unified with Christ is Dorothy Day. When she attended Mass, she noticed that both the rich and poor, educated and uneducated, were kneeling side by side. However, she was also an activist. After she converted to Catholicism, she worked with Peter Maurin to create the first Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York. She also created the Catholic Worker newspaper, which presents articles in relation to Catholic social teaching. It's still around today, being sold for a penny a paper. I would often find issues of the Catholic Worker around my college campus.

In contrast, take a look at Saint Gianna, a contemporary of Dorothy Day who lived in Italy. She was a cradle Catholic who studied to become a pediatrician. In her young adulthood, she spent time discerning



Scripture: Ephesians 3:1-13, 2 Chronicles 22:10-12, 2 Kings 11, Mark 10:35-45

One of the paradoxes about having a life in Christ is that in order to be leaders, we have to be willing to serve. So many women fight for positions of leadership in major corporations, but they often forget that there is more than one way to be successful in life.

Let's look at two women: A queen from Biblical times and an American woman. Although these two women were known for being leaders, they couldn't be any more different from each other.

Athaliah was the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Upon the death of her husband and her son, she decided to seize power by killing all of her grandchildren. She didn't want to be regent, a mere placeholder until the rightful king was old enough to reign. Nor did she want to accept her loss of power that would come with being a widow. In short, she wanted to hold onto her power at any cost. That cost came at the expense of the lives of her own grandchildren. Athaliah's self-imposed reign lasted a short seven years until Joash was anointed as the rightful king of Israel. The evil queen paid for her treachery with her life, all because she grasped at power that didn't actually belong to her.

Understand that while Athaliah has a lot of bad things going on, her biggest flaw wasn't the fact that she was a woman in power. Her tragic flaw was the ambition to take power at any cost, to hoard it all for herself.

In contrast, let's take a look at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. One thing you should know about Elizabeth Seton is that she was born in America back in the Colonial era. Her family was part of New York society.

But instead of leading an idle life, Elizabeth Seton devoted her life to serving her community. Eventually, she became a treasurer of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows With Small Children.

Life wasn't easy for Elizabeth Seton, though, because she had to raise a lot of kids and suffered some economic hardship upon the death of her father-in-law and the War of 1812. Her husband suffered from tuberculosis and died when Elizabeth was only 30 years old.

It was through her husband's friends that Elizabeth was introduced to the Catholic faith. Her eventual conversion was met with a lot of backlash from both her family and friends. In spite of that, though, she founded a religious community called the Sisters of Mercy. She established the first free Catholic school in America. To this day, there are six religious congregations that can trace their roots back to Seton's Sisters of Mercy and many schools that bear her name.

What made Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton a great leader wasn't her wealth or her connections, but her selfless devotion to her community and her desire to serve God. She stuck to her newfound faith even at the disapproval of her family and friends. What she lost in wealth and prestige, she gained in her historical legacy and sainthood.

By choosing to serve God and others instead of seeking the empty promises of ambition and power, we are paradoxically granted the grace to become great leaders. As Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

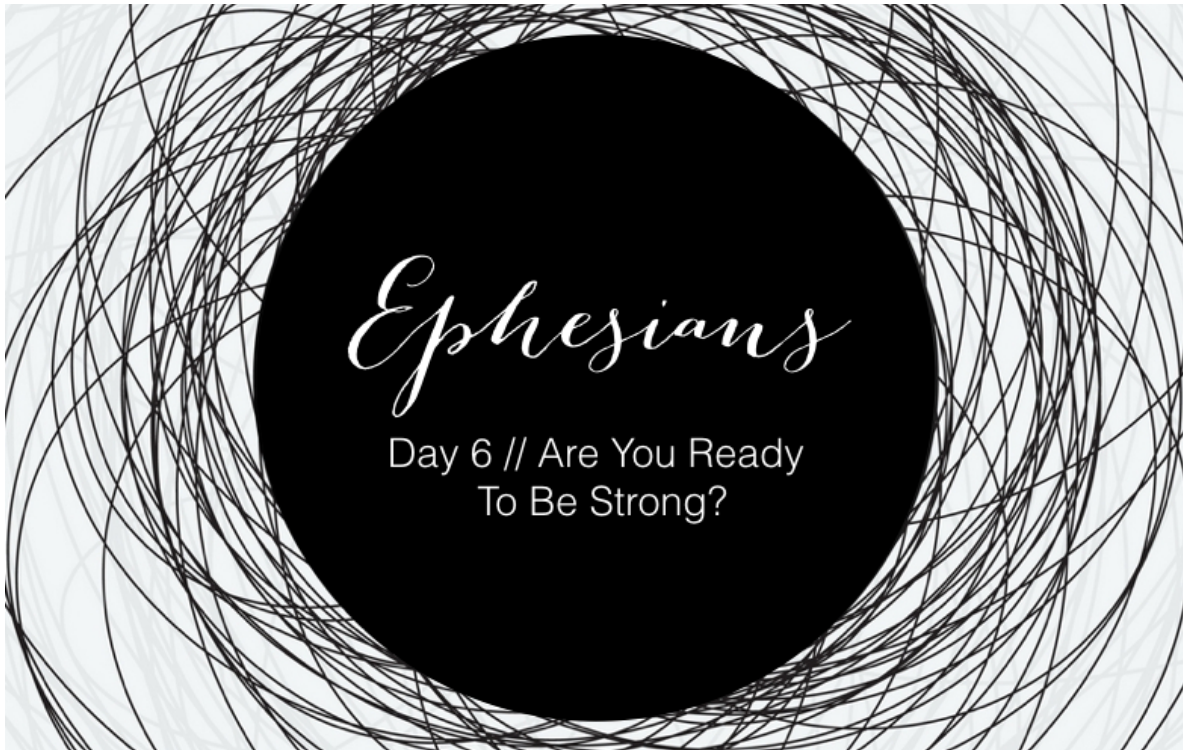
I pray that you will find opportunities to lead through serving today, dearest sisters in Christ.

- Monique

Reflection: Think of a time when you were in a position of power or involved having authority over others. How did you take responsibility as a leader?

Reflection: What do you think is the difference between grasping power and being given power?

Act: Practice co-operation amongst co-workers. Don't demand credit for a job well done, but celebrate privately and thank God for helping you with your work.



Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21, Philippians 4:11-13, Galatians 2:20, Nehemiah 8:10

Whenever I go to Mass in one particular parish in my diocese, the pastor of this church always starts his homilies with “Jesus Christ is our joy and our strength.” I think that his opening statement summarizes today’s passages perfectly.

Our strength does not come from ourselves. As strong as we can be on our own, we are only human and our strength has limitations. Even though our nation prides itself on “do it yourself” and getting guidance from self-help books, it often gets overlooked that at some point, we have to admit to ourselves that we are not strong enough on our own and have to rely on a higher power to get out of our problems. This is where God enters in.

Philippians 4:13 says “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” It basically summarizes how I’ve overcome the trials and tribulations that I’ve experienced. I know for a fact that I could not have gotten out of my constant anxiety on my own. I needed to reach out to my community and friends for support. I had to live a more active life. Most important of all, I prayed constantly.

A lot of people take Philippians 4:13 out of context and think that it means that Jesus can help us do or be anything we want. However, the preceding verses speak to the contrary. Jesus gives us strength to deal with whatever situations come our way, in good times and in bad.

When it comes to overcoming trauma, the strength doesn’t come overnight. It’s a long-term process. For some, it could last for a lifetime. But there will be times when God will let you see how far you have come

