



An Eager Oneness

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6

Bible Teacher Duffy Robbins

1. Prior to Sunday's message, how would you have described what a "movement of God" looks like? How did Sunday's message challenge or grow your understanding of revival? What was impactful?
2. Read Ephesians 1:15-23.
 - a. What does Paul commend the Ephesian church for in v. 15?
 - b. What does Paul pray for in vv. 17-23?
 - c. What relationship do you see between what Paul identifies as present in the Ephesians church and what he prays for? Do you see any overlap, and if so, why might that be so?
 - d. Why would Paul pray for something which they seem to already be exhibiting?
3. Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and 4:1-6.
 - a. What is the relationship between faith and works?
 - b. What examples does Paul give on ways that the Ephesian church, and by extension, all believers should "walk the walk"?
 - c. Duffy mentions that an "authentic faith is a lived-out faith", what does having an "authentic, lived-out faith" look like in the suburbs of Spring, TX?
 - d. Let's be real. This is hard. Duffy reminded us that the distinguishing mark of the work of the Spirit of God is our willingness to do something that is also going to be costly. (See Luke 9:23-24.) Why might God command such seemingly impossible tasks?
 - e. Following Jesus has a cost (Paul was imprisoned and killed. Dorothy Stang was assassinated). In fact, Scripture tells us that following Jesus guarantees suffering and persecution (Matthew 10:22; 2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29). Why does following Jesus all but guarantee suffering?
 - f. If we are not experiencing suffering or persecution, are we living out our faith?
4. Duffy referenced John 17:21 when talking about the importance of maintaining unity in the Spirit.
 - a. According to that verse, why is unity of believers so important?
 - b. What does unity accomplish?
 - c. How does maintaining unity in the Spirit serve as a witness to the rest of the world?
 - d. What kinds of things have you observed that occasionally sabotage unity among believers?
 - e. What do you think are effective ways of preventing or addressing these attitudes or actions?

- f. What are you doing to maintain the unity of the Spirit to build up the church, specifically at Faithbridge, on your Serve Team, in your Grow Group, and with other believers that you know?
- g. What do you feel God calling you to do to create a greater spirit of unity in your Christian community? Do you need to confess and repent of sin? Do you need to apologize to someone? Do you need to reach out to someone to try to reconcile a relationship you have shunned?
- h. Do you need to make a concerted effort to build relationships with those who you are in community with?

Challenge: Read Study Deeper. Unity is easier when we are only in relationship and community with those who are like us. But the body of Christ is diverse and what's distinctive about Christians is the unity we have even with people who are different than us. Do you need to make a concerted effort to build relationships with those in our community and church who are different than you?

Prayer: Daily prayer for other churches can be powerful. Here is a list of prayers you can use to lift others up to The Lord.:

Lord, May you bless the gathering of the Church everywhere today

Lord, may the weary find rest everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, may the doubting find faith everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, may the content be awakened everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, may your people be filled with the Spirit's power where the church gathers today

Lord, may the sorrowful find comfort everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, may the lost find salvation everywhere the church gathers today

Lord , may signs and wonders follow those who believe in your name

Lord, forgive sins and cleanse hearts everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, inhabit the praises of your people everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, speak through your word everywhere the church gathers today

Lord, May your church be united in love, mission and purpose

In Jesus Name – Amen!

STUDY DEEPER

True Unity in Small Groups - Diversity makes our unity stronger—but we have to work for it.

Five couples spread out in a Chicagoland living room. A young woman who grew up in a Korean church passes out the snacks. The empty nester couple helps set up chairs. A stay-at-home mom comes up from the basement where she helped her teenager set up games for the other kids. The business-owner husband of a couple with no kids prepares to begin the study for the group. Ten people with ten different stories that may have never intersected if it weren't for one thing: their love of Jesus.

Something special happens when our collective love of Christ saturates our lives so much that it manifests in a love for one another despite all the differences between us. Unity does not mean similarity. Diversity does not mean divergence. While the two concepts can seem to be at odds with one another, Jesus intends us to embrace and desire both. Like the concepts of grace and truth, we are called to embody two qualities that can cause tension but ultimately bring about more of God's glory. Diversity does not make unity easier. It does, however, make it better.

Unity and Diversity in the World Around Us

The culture around us speaks very highly about diversity. Given our nation's history of freedom fighting it's no surprise that we value having different views and people represented. But it's easier to claim the value of diversity without doing the work to live it out.

The Pew Research Center completed a [study](#) in 2008 that determined that about 60 percent of people stated they would prefer to live in communities that are politically, racially, religiously, and economically diverse. The same study, however, indicates that in the last 30 years our country's communities are becoming less diverse and more similar.

When on autopilot, we gravitate toward what is comfortable. It's just plain easier to be around people who share your life experiences and attitudes, and [social science research](#) has shown that we feel safer around people who are the same as us. As Christians, however, we are called to the mission of God, not to safety and comfort.

Unity in the Bible

Few people in our society talk explicitly about unity, especially in the church. Yet it's one of the primary characteristics of the early church that is discussed in the New Testament. About one third of the "one another" commands in the New Testament are about the body of Christ getting

along in one way or another. We see verse after verse telling us to avoid infighting and go out of our way to humbly serve one another.

Unity is to be one of our defining characteristics as Christians, and it's to be a big part of our witness to the outside world. In Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the church to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). He reminds his readers and us that there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5–6).

So, how does unity look in a small group? Here are some indicators that a small group embodies biblical unity:

- Members share goals and encourage and support one another to meet those goals.
- The group does not consider conflict bad because conflict leads to resolution.
- There is healthy communication with no secrets or gossip.
- The members think about each other often and communicate between meetings.
- Members confess and forgive one another.
- Members step up with help, support, and prayer when one member of the group is struggling.
- The truth is spoken in love for the purpose of building one another up.

Diversity in the Bible

As Christians, we're also commanded to diversify. In the Great Commission, Jesus calls his followers to make disciples of "all nations." John, in the book of Revelation, sees people "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). And [James 2](#) reminds us not to make distinctions between rich and poor in our assemblies. There are countless more examples that epitomize a Christian worldview focused on inclusion and variety.

Remember that verse about God knitting you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139)? The psalmist draws the comparison to this slow, methodical, and individual practice of how God made you. We are not mass-produced, but instead we are all made uniquely and individually—and that's a good thing.

Forging Unity Through Diversity

So, how can our groups be unified and diverse at the same time? We can picture the unity of a group and the variety of those who belong as two sides on a continuum. While it's very easy to slide to one side and lose touch with the other, it's very possible to have both. We just need to be purposeful and hold some tensions.

In [Romans 12:12–31](#), Paul draws a comparison between the body of believers and the human body. While each member is completely distinct and different, at the end of the day we all belong to the same body.

Why is it that the picture of a foot having comparison issues with a hand strikes us as absurd, but people comparing themselves to one another in the church or in our groups is a common experience? Why does an eye saying to a hand, “I don’t need you!” seem silly, but we do the same things with our thoughts, words, and actions to one another in our very own communities of believers?

Paul reminds us that even though we’re different, we belong to one another, and ultimately we belong to Christ. If we really take this seriously, it changes the way we treat one another. Just like different members of the same human body we communicate, support, and take care of one another as if our lives depend on it.

Consider How This is Already Happening

The Great Commission compels us to reach outside of ourselves while the body of Christ compels us to have shared life and mission under the banner of Christ. These are lofty tasks and it can seem intimidating to drive for both in a group setting.

The reality is that you’re already doing this in many ways. I volunteered at a local organization for a while that put volunteers in consistent work groups. One weekend I stopped for a moment to realize that my work group consisted of a middle aged Jewish woman, a corporate real estate executive, a 20-something Latino student, a 30-something from China on a work visa, and a practicing Muslim. It sounds like the setup for a joke, right?

To tell you the truth, I hadn’t thought twice about it up to this point. We had a task at hand, and we were all working toward it. We had shared value in the completion of the project, and we were unified in completing it. It made the differences between us suddenly less important. A strong bond of unity was formed because of manmade tasks and values. Consider the strength of the bond that is available to us when we connect around God’s values and mission.

Consider the arenas of your life where you have unity with people very different than you. Do you work in an office of people in different life stages? Are you involved in your community? Where do you serve, and who are the people you interact with? Think about the ways you have found meaningful connections with people different than you.

Next Steps

Since these are concepts that define the culture of a group and not an objective to be completed, growth takes time and effort. Have a frank discussion with your group (see questions below) and allow others to take ownership of these values.

Discuss the many times and ways we see this dynamic in Scripture (Jesus and the sick in Luke 17:11–19, Paul talking to young, divided churches in Ephesians 4:1–16, Jewish and Gentile integration in Acts 15—it can be easy to forget just how remarkable the joining of these groups under the banner of Christ was).

Finally, pray that God does his work to shape the hearts of your group members. Ask him to transform your attitudes and create opportunities to bring about his glory in this specific way.
—Jon Noto is a Community Life Pastor and licensed clinical counselor at Willow Creek Community Church's North Shore campus.

Discuss

1. If an outsider observed our group for a month, how would they rate us on unity? How would they rate us on diversity?
2. What are 1 – 2 ways you have been blessed by another group member's differences? Take time now to encourage them and celebrate them.
3. How will we know we have grown in this area?
4. How can our group be more intentional in serving and showing love to people who are different than us?