

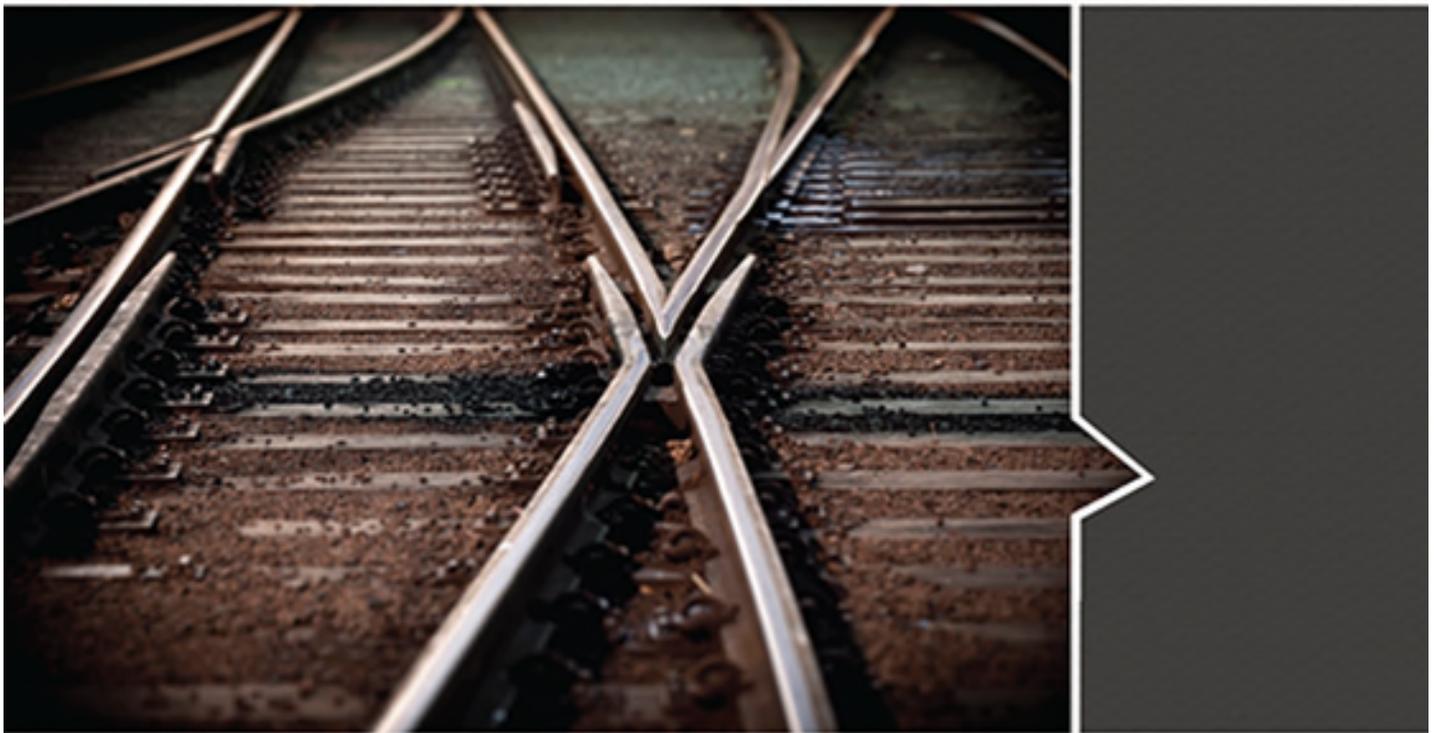
SESSION 2: CONNECTED IN UNITY

SMALL GROUP MEMBER BOOK



CONNECTED

MY LIFE IN THE CHURCH



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Question #1: When have you been in a situation where working together was a necessity, not an option?

The POINT

Unity is a given, but staying unified takes work. **The Bible Meets Life**

The Bible Meets Life

“Let’s roll.”

Those two words became the rallying cry of our nation in one of its darkest hours. On the same morning terrorists crashed commercial airplanes into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, they also hijacked United Flight 93 with the goal of destroying another target. When passengers and crew members realized what was happening, they pulled together as a group and stormed the cabin to thwart the terrorists’ plot.

“Let’s roll” was the phrase that signaled the beginning of that final, courageous act. Travelers from different backgrounds, races, and age groups set aside their differences and bonded together for a common mission. United by their urgent goal, they selflessly disregarded personal safety to work as one. They became heroes.

What if the church operated with such courage and resolve? No, we don’t always agree. But we can still set aside our differences, sacrifice our personal comfort, and work together to fulfill our call.

What Does the Bible Say?

Ephesians 4:1-6 (HCSB)

¹Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, ³diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope, at your calling— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Key Words

Humility and gentleness (v. 2)—“Humility” is the lowliness of spirit that enables one to defer to others. “Gentleness” is the meekness that enables restraint rather than overbearing use of strength.

Ephesians 4:1-2

God clearly wants His children to get along. His will is for Christians to be unified. But unity doesn’t just happen within a group of people simply because they all decided to join the same church. Unity takes work. It takes sacrifice. It requires individuals who recognize they can serve as a unifying or divisive force within the body—and choose to seek unity.

Paul emphasized this choice in Ephesians 4:1-2 when he challenged his readers about the way they treated one another. He pleaded with them to live in a manner worthy of their calling as members of God’s kingdom. The word translated “worthy” in the original language typically referred to balance, as in the balancing of scales. In essence, Paul was saying, “Let your actions equal what you profess.”

The same principle applies to those of us in the church today. If we say we are following Jesus, our treatment of other believers ought to corroborate our testimony, not conflict with it.

So, how should we treat one another today as followers of Christ? Paul laid out several characteristics in verse 2: humility, gentleness, patience, and loving acceptance.

Gentleness is linked with humility. Being gentle isn't the same as being a doormat. It isn't being weak or cowardly. Rather, it involves showing kindness. It means being considerate of others. Those who are gentle don't demand their own way or grasp for power. Jesus showed gentleness by welcoming little children who wanted to be near Him (see Matt. 19:14). He was gentle when He offered encouragement rather than condemnation to the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:10-11).

In addition to humility and gentleness, Paul called for patience among believers. Patience carries the idea of putting up with others' faults and failures and not seeking revenge when wronged—which goes hand in hand with accepting one another in love. It's the willingness to forgive and not bear a grudge. It's the Christlike view that says: "I see your imperfections, but I love you anyway. I forgive you because God has forgiven me."

Each of these attributes is vital to maintaining unity within the church.

Question #2: What in these verses do you find most difficult to apply?

Paul never said maintaining unity in the church would be easy. In fact, he anticipated it would be difficult. That's why he emphasized the importance of hard work in verse 3. Paul's words convey the necessity of striving with determination to overcome obstacles for the sake of unity.

Question #3: Why does staying unified require so much effort?

We need the power of God's Spirit living within us to enable us to consistently respond to others with gentleness and humility. The Spirit helps us to bear patiently with others' faults and forgive when we are wronged. In other words, the Spirit makes us one, and the Spirit empowers us to maintain unity by guiding us to think and act like Jesus. Therefore, by staying attuned to the Spirit, we remain in tune with one another. When we're controlled by the Spirit, we avoid actions and attitudes that creep into the church and destroy unity.

Unforgiveness is an enemy of church unity. Holding onto hurt feelings until they grow into bitterness is like nursing cancerous cells in the body of Christ. Refusing to let go of anger is a sure way to create divisions and sow discord. For these reasons, Paul urged the Ephesians to deal with their anger promptly before it could produce destruction (see Eph. 4:26).

Forgiveness isn't easy. It may require us to let go of resentment over and over—every time anger rears its ugly head. But those who truly comprehend the depth of their own sins and the wonder of God's grace can never withhold forgiveness from others.

The common denominator of any action that interrupts unity in the church is selfishness. The desire to get the upper hand on others runs counter to the work of the Holy Spirit. But it takes work to put aside our own interests and serve

others. Unity requires that we are diligent about living in the peace given to the church through the presence of the Spirit.

Question #4: Since churches are diverse, what unifies us as the body of Christ?

Why is unity so important? Because we have a mission to complete as the body of Christ (see Matt. 28:18-20), and we can't complete that mission as individuals. We need one another. Unity is critical.

But beyond the need for teamwork, there's a very real sense in which believers are spiritually bound together. We've been designed to live the Christian life in connection with the body of Christ. In fact, Paul used the word "one" seven times to explain the different elements that tie us to one another as the church.

- Though made up of individual Christians, the church exists as one body.
- Within the church you will find people of all ages, races, classes, and more. We are completely diverse, but one Spirit indwells us all.
- The Spirit's dwelling within us is our guarantee of the one hope we share (see 2 Cor. 1:22).
- Our common hope is that we who trust in Jesus Christ will spend eternity with Him in heaven.
- Christians are bound together by one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We're united by our common belief that Jesus alone is Savior (see John 14:6). We proclaim this belief publicly through the symbol of baptism.
- All Christians worship the one God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The "oneness" of God is the foundation for our unity as the church.

Question #5: What steps can we take to model unity in our church and community?

Live It Out

You have a choice. Your actions this week will contribute to unity or division in the church. With that in mind, here are some practical ways you can apply what you've learned:

- **Don't participate in gossip.** Stop gossip when it's shared with you and look for ways to encourage people instead.
- **Forgive.** We've all been wronged. Identify any grudges you've been harboring and forgive the people involved.
- **Seek forgiveness.** Work with the Holy Spirit to identify ways in which you have contributed to division within your church. Confess your actions and seek forgiveness.

Like the passengers of United Flight 93, we as Christians find ourselves bound together by a purpose larger than ourselves. We have an urgent mission and a divine calling. We have a chance to heroically strive for unity in the body of Christ.