

Shift

Week 3: HARMONY

BOTTOM LINE

If the church family cannot learn to live in harmony with one another, the world will not be able to look at the church and witness the grace and love of Jesus.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

The goal of this week's group is to look at what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus about harmony among people within the church family and what that means for us today.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:11-22, Ephesians 4:15-16, Ephesians 4:31-32, Philippians 2:1-2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share:** Considering that we do not get to choose who is in our family while growing up, we have to do our best to get along because we are family. Describe how your family got along while you were growing up. Was there a lot of fighting? Or did people tend to "play nice"?
- Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and discuss:** This is the theology of what happens when people who are different come together as one family called the church.
 - Verse 15 says : "...by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity..." What are some of the "commands" and "regulations" you have seen people within the church arguing and dividing over? Why do you think this happens?
 - In verse 20, what does Paul say is the cornerstone of the church? If the foundation is the same for the entire church, what do you think about different denominations or styles of worship or rules within the church? Is it OK?
- Read Ephesians 4:15-16 and discuss:**
 - Harmony doesn't mean that everyone will agree all the time. There will inevitably be times where people within the church disagree with one another. How are we to approach one another when this occurs? (verse 15)? Can you share an example of this being put into practice?
 - Having differences is a good thing. The body of Christ is not made up of one part, but many different parts. Share as a group some of the different ways you each contribute to being the body of Christ. (Maybe you know your spiritual gifts or talents or personality type or preferences and how you uniquely contribute to the body).
- Read Ephesians 4:31-32 and discuss:**
 - What are some practical ways you can move towards "getting rid of" these things Paul mentions?
 - When you experience the forgiveness offered by Jesus and you realize you did nothing to earn it, does it help open you up to be more forgiving of others?
- Read Philippians 2:1-2 and discuss:** Here Paul writes a similar message to another church. In verse 2 he says "work together with one mind and one purpose". What is the one purpose? Do you ever see disagreements within the body that take away from the one purpose?

Think about the beauty of a song that is performed in perfect harmony. Now think about a song where something is clearly off key and it lacks harmony. It can be so distracting that you find yourself focusing on what is wrong rather than the message of the song itself. Now imagine the world listening to the church as if it were a song. How might it sound to them?

"Harmony leads to a melody and message the world can sing together"

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TRY THIS

Pray and ask God if there is a relational conflict that you need to address by having a conversation and speaking the truth in love. Come up with some practical ways that you can move toward getting rid of bitterness, rage, harsh words, slander, and all types of evil behavior. Commit to putting something into practice this week.

Shift

Week 2: PURITY

BOTTOM LINE

Purity is defined as “freedom from immorality” and although we can pursue purity, we can’t achieve it just by trying harder. We can achieve it by believing and accepting the gift of power and freedom offered by Jesus.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

The goal of this week’s group is to look at what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus about purity and to discuss what he challenged them to believe and what he challenged them to do about it.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:2-5, Ephesians 2:8-10, Ephesians 5:8-15

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Share:** What positive change you have tried to make in your life and would you say you have had success? Explain what worked or didn’t work.
2. **Read Ephesians 2:2-5 and discuss:** Chapters 1-3 in Ephesians are primarily focused on belief. Chapters 4-6 are primarily focused on behavior. The following verses are about what happened when God sent Jesus to die on a cross. He is stating truth that is important for us to believe.
 - a. In verse 3, Paul states that we were “subject to God’s anger”. God doesn’t have anger and wrath towards people. What does God have anger towards?
 - b. In verses 4-5 How does Paul describe God’s character and feelings towards us? How does he describe what God did about it?
3. **Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and discuss:**
 - a. According to these verses, how can a person get salvation (deliverance from sin)?
 - b. Although verse 9 clearly tells us that good deeds do not earn us salvation, verse 10 talks about why we might want to do good things. Why would we be motivated to do good things?
 - c. Why do you think some people assume that Christianity is a worldview where your good deeds are measured against your bad deeds and if the scales weigh in favor of good, you get a ticket to everlasting life after you die? Do you think the church in Ephesus was leaning towards this way of thinking?
4. **Read Ephesians 5:8-15 and discuss:** Chapters 4-6 in Ephesians are focused on behavior. Paul is talking application about what this means for how we live our lives.
 - a. Verses 8-9 tell us how we can live lives of purity. How?
 - b. Next Paul gives us some practical steps. Talk about the 3 following action steps as they relate to the verses and share practical ways you might be able to take action in these areas.
DISCOVER (vs 10)
EXPOSE (vs 11-14)
EMBRACE (vs 15)

“Love in response to goodness isn’t love, but reward. Fortunately for us, that’s not God’s way. Our relationship with God is not a matter of reward, but of love. And that’s why we can enjoy such staggering freedom in his presence.”
~Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom



TRY THIS

We highlighted 3 practical steps from Ephesians 5:10-15. Take some time to reflect on what practical action step God is challenging you with most. DISCOVER (what pleases Him). Are you pursuing Him? Do you care about what God cares about? EXPOSE (the dark to the light). What are some things in the dark that need to be brought into the light? EMBRACE (wisdom and opportunities). Are you looking to the godly wisdom of others around you? Is God asking you to pay attention to someone who loves you and is pointing you in the right direction? Are you looking at every day as an opportunity to do the most good?

Shift

Week 1: UNITY

BOTTOM LINE

Though there are many Christian denominations and expressions of the church, there is unity in one belief, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And there is unity in one mission: To make Christ known.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

The goal of this week's group is to discover what Jesus had to say about unity among His followers and to discuss what unity might look like for us in practical ways today.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16, John 17:20-22, Acts 10:28-29 and 34-35, and Acts 15:5 and 15:19

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Share:** Has disunity in the church ever made it difficult for you to come closer to knowing Jesus?
2. **Read Matthew 16:13-18 and Discuss:**
 - a. In Verse 18, Jesus says that He will build his ecclesia (church) on "this rock". Although the name Peter translates to "rock" in Greek, it is believed that Jesus was not talking about building his church on a person, but on one belief. What is the "rock"?
 - b. Churches may differ in many ways, but what would you say is the ONE belief that unites all followers of Jesus?
3. **Read John 17:20-22 and Discuss:**
 - a. In these verses, Jesus is praying for you! How cool is that? He could have prayed for ANYTHING. What did He pray for?
 - b. Have you ever encountered a follower of Jesus who seemed believe that being right was more important than being loving? Have you been tempted to believe or act this way? Why?
4. **Read Acts 10:28-29 and 34-35 and Discuss:** This conversation takes place 10 years after the resurrection. Peter had never set foot inside the home of someone who was not Jewish! It's hard to imagine. But it would violate Jewish law. That's a big deal for a religious guy like Peter.
 - a. What made Peter decide to violate his religious conscious and enter this Gentile home? Was it OK for him to break a Jewish law?
 - b. Peter says that "God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean". Does the modern church treat some people as impure or unclean? How?
5. **Read Acts 15:5 and 15-19 and Discuss:** Consider how emotional this was for those who believed that their scriptures were clear. They truly believed circumcision was required and imperative. Basically, they are questioning "Are we supposed to set the whole bible aside so the Gentiles can become Christians?"
 - a. Verse 19 says "we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." In what ways does the modern church do this today? Have you ever experienced a church that made it difficult for you as you were turning to God?
 - b. Is it fair to say that love, unity, and oneness was more important to Jewish believers than the scriptures they grew up with? Does that cause any tension for you to consider?

When you read the bible, it's OK to experience tension. For example, how can we hold every scripture as "God breathed and useful in teaching rebuking and training" (2 Timothy 3:16) when we just looked at a time when Jewish believers were told to let go of some scripture they were holding so tightly (Old Testament)? The Word of God is alive (Hebrews 4:12) and is meant to be studied, wrestled with, and interpreted. Jesus is the full revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-3). So, it isn't trivial to ask yourself "What would Jesus do?" When you are feeling the tension within scripture, turn to the gospels and be sure to look at the way the "Full revelation of God" lived. And don't be afraid of the tension. It's OK to wrestle!



TRY THIS

If you are completely honest, is there is a person or people group you think of as outside of the love and grace of Jesus? Or maybe you have justified yourself in judging, excluding or even hating someone within or outside of "the church"? If so, pray for God to give you His eyes to see every person through the lens of His love. Ask Him to help you love those who are difficult to love. Ask Him to help you see if you are more concerned with being right than being loving.