

Small Group Guide

UNITY: THE VICTORY OF JESUS CHRIST OVER RACISM, ETHNOCENTRISM, AND CULTURAL SUPERIORITY

The Church at Brook Hills

Deric Thomas

January 15, 2012

Ephesians 4:1-6

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Welcome—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

UNITY: The Victory of Jesus Christ Over Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Cultural Superiority Ephesians 4:1-6

The Source of Unity for All People (Gen. 1-3, Acts 17:26, Jn. 17:3, Matt. 22:36-40, Isa. 43:7, Rom. 3:23)

- Every human being is made in the **image** and likeness of God.
- Every person on earth belongs to the human race and has the same **roots**.
- Human beings were created by God to know him, love him, and glorify him.
- Human beings were created to live in a diverse, loving community with other people.
- We all have a common enemy—**Satan**.
- None of us are without sin.

The Source of Unity for God's People (Eph. 4:4-6, Eph. 1—6)

- The **gospel** is the only solution for our desperate predicament.
- Every Christian knows the ONE true God as Father.
 - We are all a part of his perfect plan.

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- Our Father **loves** us deeply.
- Our Father calls us personally.
- Our Father is the sovereign ruler of the universe.
- The Father's diverse people are ultimately citizens of one kingdom and one **city**.
- The Father's diverse people are ultimately members of one family.
- Every Christian has come to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in a personal way.
 - We have a personal Savior.
 - We have ONE Lord.
 - We have ONE faith.
- Jesus Christ is our Prince of **Peace**.
- Jesus Christ is the Unifier all our hearts long for.
- Jesus Christ has reconciled us to **God** and to each other.
- Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the holy temple that we are being built into.
- We are each members of the diverse Body of Christ.
- We are the multi-colored, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural **Bride** of Christ.
 - We have ONE unshakable hope.
- Every Christian has the Spirit of God living in them.
 - We have all experienced ONE baptism.
 - We have the **power** to maintain our unity through the Holy Spirit.
 - True unity is worked from the inside out through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Only a Spirit-filled people will live out the unity amidst diversity that God has called us to.

The Heart of Unity

(Eph. 4:1-3)

- Maintaining the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" will take loving, sacrificial crucifixion of self.
 - We must be clothed in humility.
 - We must learn to relate to one another in a spirit of gentleness.
 - We must be very **patient** with each other.
 - We must walk in forbearance.
 - We must be rooted and **grounded** in love.
- Maintaining the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" will take intentional, passionate commitment from us all.
- This maintenance work will result in unity among all of God's people.
 - We already have this unity positionally.
 - We are commanded to maintain this unity **visually**.
 - We are commanded to maintain this unity practically.
 - We are commanded to maintain this unity continually.

The Goal of Unity

(Ps. 133, Rev. 7:9-17, Acts 2, Jn. 17:23, Rev. 5:5-14)

- The **Church** will experience great joy and great growth!
- The lost will be saved through faith in Jesus Christ!
- The ONE true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who himself is a loving unity amidst diversity, will receive the glory that he alone deserves forever and ever!

Message Summary

In studying Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6, we see that Jesus Christ is victorious over racism, ethnocentrism, and cultural superiority for the purpose of uniting His Church for the spread of the gospel. The unity of all people—both believers and nonbelievers—finds its source in our creation by God in His image; all people came from one man, Adam, and are created equally in God's sight. The unity believers find in Christ is rooted in the gospel as we know the One, true God as Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. To find that

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diversity and to walk in it, believers are led by the Spirit of God, who transforms us from the inside out and gives us power to maintain unity with each other.

Diversity is seen in the Trinity—our God is One God in three persons—a loving unity amidst diversity. To live with a heart of unity, believers must surrender themselves daily and be humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, and grounded in love. This process requires daily effort. Unity has a vast and great goal: God's glory. As the Church unifies, we experience great joy and great growth and the lost come to know Christ because they see Him in us.

Group Discussion

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- What are racism, ethnocentrism, and cultural superiority? Why are they so detrimental to the Church and the mission of the Church?
- Read Acts 17:26. What is our basis for valuing every human on the planet?
- As you have come to know and submit to God as Father, how has the way you value other people changed?
- How is the gospel fundamentally opposed to racism, ethnocentrism, and cultural superiority?
- Do you live in community with or fellowship with believers of different race or culture? Why or why not?
- When you consider Pastor Deric's comparison of child sacrifice in Togo, Africa, to Planned Parenthood in Birmingham, what motivates each act of murder? How do you see the same enemy, who hates people, at work in each place?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in believers' unity?
- How does the unity of believers in Christ provide a source of power for believers?
- Read Ephesians 4:2. How does living by these characteristics eradicate racism, ethnocentrism, and cultural superiority?
- What does it look like for us to practice these Biblical admonitions toward those of other races or ethnic groups?
- Is it possible to be unified with other people apart from the Holy Spirit?
- How is the advancement of the gospel related to believers' obedience to God's command to be unified?
- How does maintaining your own body on a daily basis give you an example of how you must also maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace? Is this easy or difficult for you?
- Read John 17:20-21, part of Jesus' prayer to His Father just before His arrest. What was the purpose of Christ's prayer for believers' unity?
- Read Revelation 7:9-17. How do these verses spur you toward unity this week?
- What in particular do you—as individuals and as a small group—feel God leading you to do in response to today's message? How can you support each other's obedience?

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

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Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church.

Weekly Prayer Focus . . .

- **Pray for Our Lives:** *This week we are studying God's call for His people to live in unity and harmony with one another. Pray that we will all walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Pray that we would live with humility, gentleness and patience toward one another. Pray that we would love one another as Christ loved us. Especially pray for racial reconciliation throughout Christian brothers and sisters in our city, country and world. Pray that we would all hold up the truth of the gospel as what unites us together.*
- **Pray for Our City:** *This week we are praying for racial reconciliation and unity in the Body of Christ in Birmingham for the sake of the advancement of the gospel. We are also praying for New Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church, Thomas Beavers, Pastor.*
- **Pray for Our World:** *This week we are praying for our Long-Term Missionaries Chris and Vicki Nichols, who are serving in Quito, Ecuador. They both serve at the Alliance Academy International School and are integrating their lives into the community to share the gospel, make disciples and strengthen the church. We are also praying for our Short-Term teams serving in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.*