



Leaders Guide: Change Your Plans

THE WIN

The win for this week is to help our members to grasp the importance of unity within the church and to identify their role in the plans that God has for his church.

3-5
minutes

SERMON RECAP: WHAT DID THE TEXT MEAN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

During this week's sermon from Ephesians 4:1-16, we learned that God has great plans for His church. These plans include:

- Keeping Unity
- Accepting Diversity
- Growing in Maturity

Question: What was your greatest takeaway from the message this week?

3-5
minutes

WARM UP

What are some of the greatest plans or goals that you have set for yourself? How about for your family? For this LifeGroup?

25-30
minutes

THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

Re-read Ephesians 4:1-16.

Chapter 4 marks a significant shift within the book of Ephesians. In the first 3 chapters, we have witnessed some of the most beautiful and compelling theology in the entire New Testament.

As we learned during the Identity Theft series, we are:

- Chosen (1:1-6)
- Redeemed (1:7-10)
- Wealthy (1:11-19)

As a result of our new identity in Christ, we have learned in ReBrand so far that we have:

- A New Display (1:20-23)
- A New Story (2:1-10)
- A New Team (2:11-22)
- A New Outlook (3:1-13)
- A New Powerbase (3:14-21)

Leaders: Read the text in this lesson to your group (or ask someone else to read) to help provide context to the questions and discussion.

As a result of all these amazing truths, Paul begins chapter 4 with "Therefore." Note: Anytime Paul uses "therefore" in his letters, get ready for some action! This marks a shift from *theology* to *practicality*.

Kent Hughes writes: "This shift can be expressed in many ways: from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct; from the Christian's wealth to his wail; from exposition to exhortation; from the indicative to the imperative; from high society to a high life."¹

In verse 1, Paul urges the Ephesians (and us) to "walk worthy of the calling you have received."

- According to verses 4:1-3, how can we walk worthy of this incredible calling?
- Which of these character traits do you struggle with the most?

Unity was a common theme for Paul to call for in the church, and it remains vital to the health of the body of Christ. One of the amazing truths is that the foundation for Christian unity is actually found in God himself.

- Read verses 4:4-6. Which members of the Holy Trinity are present in these verses?
- What are the implications of our unity being rooted in our Triune God?

John Stott describes the implications: "The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead."²

As brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I will never be separated! Our unity is more solid than Mount Everest and more enduring than the solar system.

Unity is found by keeping our eyes fixed on our Triune God. 1 John 1:3- "What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The closer we draw to God, the closer we will be to each other.

Kent Hughes provides this illustration:

Suppose for a moment that by a miracle we could bring some of the great Christians of the centuries together under one roof. From the fourth century there would come the great intellect Augustine of Hippo; from the tenth century, Bernard of Clairvaux; from the sixteenth, the peerless reformer John Calvin. From the eighteenth century would come John Wesley, the great Methodist advocate of free will, and along with him George Whitefield, the great evangelist. From the nineteenth century comes the Baptist Charles Spurgeon and D. L. Moody. And finally from the twentieth century Billy Graham. If we gathered all these men under one steeple we would be unable to get a unanimous vote on many matters. But underneath it all would be *unity*. And the more these men lifted up Christ and focused on him, the greater their unity would be.³

¹ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990).

² John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 151.

³ Hughes.

- If this is so, why are there outward divisions in the Church? Some Christian fellowships will not even speak to each other. How can this be?
- Have you experienced conflict with other Christians in the past? How did you work to resolve it?
- How can you proactively strive to maintain unity within your LifeGroup?

In addition to unity, Paul celebrates the diversity of gifts in the church:

Read 1 Cor 12:4-12 as a group.

- How are both unity and diversity in gifting reflected in this passage?

Leaders Tip: Acknowledge that there are differing opinions among Godly theologians on the role of some of these gifts in the church today (such as healing, prophecy, and languages). Don't allow the group to chase rabbits but stay on point. The main point to emphasize is that God gives a wide diversity of gifts but unity in the same Spirit and Lord.

Now re-read Eph 4:10-16 as a group.

- What are the different gifts mentioned in verse 11?
- According to v. 12, why did Jesus give these offices to the church?

R.C. Sproul gives helpful insight into how Jesus designed his church to work:

"This passage speaks boldly to the [twenty-first century] church. Somehow, somewhere, an idea emerged and became very popular in the Christian community; so popular in fact, that it has now become almost an iron-clad tradition. It is that the ministry of the church is to be done by the paid, professional, theologically-trained clergy. According to this view, the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits of ministry, in terms of preaching, counseling, comfort, and those other things that we seek to provide in the church. But the reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The church is to be a mobilised army."⁴

As we read in v.10, Jesus' ultimate design is "that He might fill all things." His ascent took Him to a place above the heavens. There is no area in the universe that is not subject to Christ; no place in creation without His presence. He is Lord of heaven and earth. As Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" What this means is that all of his gifts have been made accessible to the church. If he is truly to be worshipped in our community and our world as he deserves, it's going to take every single one of us participating in the role that God has designed us for.

- What has been your perspective on the roles of "professional" ministers vs other believers? How do these truths change that perspective?
- From vv. 15-16, how has God designed his church to grow?
- Are any of the plans that you identified in the Warm Up section holding you back from living out the greater plans that God has created you for?

10
minutes

DIGGING DEEPER

There is a helpful resource on RightNow Media entitled: "Creating a Missional Culture" by J.R. Woodward. The different gifts from Ephesians 4 are described by Woodward as:

1. Apostle: Dream Awakener
2. Prophet: Heart Revealer
3. Evangelist: Story Teller
4. Pastor: Soul Healer
5. Teacher: Light Giver

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 103.

<https://www.rightnow.org/Media/Series/2464>

Spend time watching each of these videos and have group members select which of these gifts you identify most closely with. Discuss how these gifts could be used to help build up your group and our church. **Note:** Woodward presents these gifts as characteristics of an "apostle" or "prophet" that some believers have. He is not suggesting that there are modern-day "Apostles" or "Prophets" with the authority of those recorded in the Bible. Scripture is our ultimate source for truth as God's inspired, inerrant revelation to mankind (2 Tim 3:16-17).

CLOSING THOUGHT

Hughes with a closing summary:

"How does Biblical church growth come? 1) Through gifted leadership which in dependence upon the Holy Spirit teaches and lives out God's Word. 2) Through discipleship in which God's people are prepared for works of service and are using their gifts to the fullest, whatever their parts may be. 3) Through a progressive corporate maturity of God's people, so all are riding high on the tide of one another's lives. 4) Through speaking truth in love — transparent, honest, loving speech and lives. This is church growth!"⁵

Close the session by praying together, asking God to continue to grow our church in each of these ways.

⁵ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990).