

THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 2: THE PICTURE OF A DISCIPLE
UNIT 3: A DISCIPLE EMBRACES CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
LESSON 29: DISCIPLES SHARE A
UNITY IN THEIR CALLING

What we want students to learn: That embracing Christian community means being unified with the other Christ-followers in their community.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To identify factors that cause Christ-followers to not be unified, and to commit to avoiding, or working through, these issues.

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 4:1-6

Supporting Scripture: Acts 4:32-33, Acts 2:44

Overview: So often, teenagers don't yet have the sense of what it means to be in the greater Body of Christ. This lesson's aim is to help them begin to see what it means to be unified with other Christ-followers in their calling and mission. Being unified doesn't mean that we are identical to one another. We share our own convictions and passions to be sure. And it doesn't mean that denominational distinctives are trivial. But what it does mean is that we are called to be on the same page when it comes to our calling and our mission as Christ-followers. This lesson will challenge your students to consider what it means to be unified with others in their local church, and in the greater Church.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 29 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 29, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

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- **Time frame:** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- **Purpose:** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

THE SETTING

The fourth chapter of the book of Ephesians marks an important turn in the book from teachings on theologically foundational truths to the application of those doctrinal principles in daily Christian life. The apostle Paul, who was known as the apostle to the Gentiles, sets the stage with an explanation of the power of the Gospel based on grace and the sufficiency of Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins. After rejecting all works-based doctrines of salvation, Paul lays forth the crucial understanding of unity and fellowship in the body of Christ. He does this through a careful explanation of the necessity of Christian community in the church for every follower of Jesus.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point we want to make is that true Christian community means being unified with other Christ-followers in their community. God has commanded every believer to understand that being a part of His family means being unified in mission and calling as Christ-followers. This does not negate the doctrinal differences between specific denominations but instead, is meant to help students understand that they are a part of the mission of God across the world. This lesson will help your students to identify factors that cause Christ-followers to not be unified with the other Christ-followers in their community.

LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to understand that they are a part of a larger Christian community.
- **Set-Up:** You will want to make sure you have a laptop or tablet that is connected to the Internet to look up the following video. Watch the following clip and then facilitate a discussion with the questions provided.
 - o https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiqdA1B3_Nc

FIRST, tell your students that you are going to watch a scene from the movie "Remember the Titans." Explain that the movie is about two teams of football players in the 1960's who are forced to desegregate their schools and become one team. During this transition, racial prejudice caused disunity and dysfunction between team members of different races. When their coach sees the disunity tearing his team apart, he gives some words of advice.

NEXT, play the clip from the movie included in the link above. Be sure to draw your students' attention to the words of the coach. Explain the significance of unity on a sports team. Say something like:

- **The words that the coach shares with his team show the huge importance of unity on the football field. In a sport like football, unity and trust are absolutely crucial parts of winning. The coach's**

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players were distracted by feelings of hate towards one another because of their differences, instead of focusing on one goal: winning football games. The truth is, unless each player is striving toward a common goal and trusts one another to carry their individual loads, they will be unable to reach their goal.

NEXT, explain that in today's lesson they will be examining the importance of unity in the church toward a common goal and mission. Say something like:

- **Today we are going to look at the importance of unity in the church. The apostle Paul makes clear in our passage today that the church is supposed to be unified in community and in mission. Yet sometimes we as the church get distracted from our goal and are caught up in disagreements and selfish desires.**

Ask the following questions to facilitate a short discussion:

- **What are some examples of the types of disagreements you have seen between Christians?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What are some of the distractions that cause disunity in the church?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What is the goal of the church?**
 - Answer: The goal of the church is to reach the lost with the message of Jesus Christ and to help Christ-followers to fully follow Jesus in everything they do.

FINALLY, explain to your students that this was simply a fun way to get them thinking about what distractions cause disunity in the church, and what the real mission of the church should be in the world. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn that as Christ-followers they are called to embrace Christian community by being unified with Christ-followers in their community.

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of the lesson.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students see that embracing Christian community means being unified with the other Christ-followers in their community.
- **Set Up:** You'll benefit from a dry-erase board. Make sure students have a Bible or that they are able to look along with a friend. Each student will need a notecard and a pencil to write their definition.

FIRST, give each student in your group a notecard. Ask your students to take a moment and define community on their notecard. Once they have written their definition, ask some of them to share with the group. Then, write the following definition on the board and compare.

- **Community: A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.**

Explain to your students that God has always intended for the church to be the kind of community that was united under the good news of Jesus. Say something like:

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- As followers of Jesus, we need to be certain that we understand the importance of community in the church. The church was not designed to be a social club or a place where we sit in judgment of others. Instead, it was made to be a place where fellowship with others results from sharing a common belief in Jesus Christ and a common goal in sharing the Gospel.

THEN, explain that Scripture talks at length about the importance of community in the church. Tell them that in today's lesson you are going to look at the book of Ephesians to understand the importance of unity when it comes to community with other Christ-followers. Tell them that before you dive into your passage in Ephesians, you want to remind them of a passage they studied in lesson 25 from Acts 2.

NEXT, read or have a student read Acts 2:44. Remind them that this verse forms the foundation for the biblical definition of community they discussed in lesson 25. Explain to them that you are going to build on this concept by looking at a picture of unified Christians from Scripture.

Explain that the early church not only believed in Christian community but put it into practice every day by the way they lived sacrificially. Say something like:

- Early believers in Jesus Christ were the minority in their cities and towns, and they knew that they needed one another to accomplish the Great Commission task that Jesus had given them. They not only believed that they had "all things in common," but they shared all things with one another.

THEN, read or have a student read Acts 4:32-33. Explain to your students that this passage gives us the perfect example of what selfless and sacrificial community looks like. Say something like:

- Christians in the early church were closer than families. They shared everything with one another and were willing to sacrifice their wants and needs for each other. This passage shows that the foundation for true Christian community can be found in the Gospel. These believers understood that community among Christ-followers was rooted in the sacrificial and selfless love that Jesus showed all believers on the cross.

THEN, tell students that this picture will form the basis for your study on unity in Christian community. Ask them to turn in their Bibles to Ephesians 4. As they turn, explain the context of Ephesians using the Bible Background provided at the beginning of this lesson. Be sure they understand the situation in which Paul wrote Ephesians and to whom it was written. Read or have a student read Ephesians 4:1-6. When students have finished reading, lead them in a short discussion. Refer back to verse 1. Ask something like:

- What is the basis on which Paul urges the Christians reading his letter to be unified?
 - o Answer: "To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called"
- What do you think Paul means when he urges these Christians to "walk in a manner worthy of their calling"?
 - o Answer: Paul wants his readers to understand that the basis for unity in Christian community is the Gospel itself: that to which they have been called.

Say something like:

- Paul wanted to emphasize that we should walk in unity with one another not because we all agree on every detail of church life, but because it is the worthy way to walk according to our calling. This means that we walk in unity because of the Gospel calling we have on our own lives. As Christians, we are no longer motivated to live for ourselves but for others, just as Jesus did. The basis for maintaining unity in the church is the

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sacrificial love of Jesus and the message of the Good News that we have been forgiven.

Tell students that this is the “why” of maintaining unity in Christian community. Tell them to keep this in mind as they study the remainder of the passage. Direct your students’ attention to verses 2-3. Ask the following questions:

- **What characteristics does Paul give in these verses that produce unity in the body of Christ?**
 - Answer: Humility, gentleness, patience, love, peace (write these on the board)
- **What do each of these words mean in the context of Christian community and how do they promote unity between believers?**
 - Answers will vary. Walk through each of these terms and define them in terms of how Jesus exemplified them in his earthly ministry and death on the cross.

Say something like:

- **Paul knew that true unity couldn’t be found in the holiness of the church members. Neither could it be found in their ability to agree in all things. Instead, the apostle Paul draws his reader’s attention to qualities that Jesus emphasized during his life here on earth. Jesus was gentle and humble. He was patient and loving. These qualities are all characteristics that we as believers should try to replicate in community because they produce unity.**

NEXT, tell students that these qualities are important to remember as you finish your study of Ephesians 4. Then, direct your students’ attention to verses 4-6. Ask the following questions:

- **What important foundational truths does Paul give here that unify us as believers regardless of denomination or traditions?**
 - Answer: Belief in One God in three persons, belief in Jesus Christ as Savior, belief in one faith/baptism and one Spirit.
- **Why do you think Paul listed these truths instead of preferences of worship or other factors of church life?**
 - Answer: These truths are the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. Choices of worship style and other minor preferences, although important to consider, are not grounds for disunity and disagreement among believers who affirm the truths Paul gives.
- **If the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the affirmation of one faith are the most important beliefs of the Christian church, why do you think the church is so often divided by trivial disputes and arguments?**
 - Answer: The church too easily becomes about us instead of about the good news of Jesus Christ.

Say something like:

- **In our society, the church has become a sort of religious country club. It’s a place where many people come simply to see friends and collect knowledge. But this is not what God intended the church to be. The church was never meant to be distracted by trivial arguments and disagreements, but instead to sacrificially and lovingly serve one another as a testimony of Jesus’ sacrificial and selfless love on the cross. When we follow the principles given by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, we can be unified with the entire church in order to accomplish the mission of spreading the Gospel in the world.**

FINALLY, explain that although there will always be disagreements between followers of Christ, and that doctrinal disagreements shouldn’t be taken as trivial, as long as our fellow Christ-followers affirm the truth of the Gospel we can live in unity of calling with them and strive towards our common purpose as believers. Say something like:

- **Sometimes as teenagers it can be easy to get caught up in the details of church life and become distract-**

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ed from our universal mission as the Church. We can become disillusioned with traditions and beliefs that will cause us to want to challenge our fellow believers. But as we see in the book of Acts and in Ephesians, the unity of the church is crucial for accomplishing our mission. When we live selflessly and sacrificially as Jesus did we can promote unity and look past differences in order to accomplish our goal to spread the Gospel across the globe.

Ask if there are any questions, and if there are none, transition into *The Last Word*.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To identify factors that cause Christ-followers to not be unified, and to commit to avoiding, or working through, these issues.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to print off the Case Study PDF, cut out the case studies as needed, and distribute a case study to each of your groups. You'll need to make sure students have something to write with as well.

FIRST, set-up the activity by saying something like:

- **Disagreements and disunity are not new problems in the church. In fact, even in the early church there were disagreements between Christ-followers. But how do we recognize key factors that cause these disagreements, and how can we avoid them or deal with them when they come? The question is not whether they will come, but when. In every disagreement, we want to be like Jesus: humble and gentle, yet unflinching in truth.**

Explain that you will split the room into two teams. Distribute each team one of the case studies provided in this lesson as well as a pen and paper. Allow each team 5-10 minutes to discuss the case studies and identify the main factors that are causing disunity in the church described in the case study. After they have been given time to work, call them back together and go over the answers.

FINALLY, show students that in each of these case studies, the people involved were not concerned about maintaining unity but about their own reputations and preferences. Explain that in order for us to maintain unity in Christian community, we must imitate Jesus by being selfless and sacrificial in our love and service of others for the greater goal of spreading the Gospel in the world.

Make sure there are no closing thoughts and then close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.

WEEK 29: LESSON PLAN
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