Walking Together
Believers demonstrate the truth of the gospel by being unified in their actions.

**EPHESIANS 4:1-10**

**MEMORY VERSE: EPHESIANS 4:1**

**READ** Ephesians 4:1-10, First Thoughts (p. 74), and Understand the Context (pp. 74–75). As you read, keep track of how often Paul used the word “one.” Consider your response to the question, Why is unity so important to Paul?

**STUDY** Ephesians 4:1-10 using Explore the Text on pages 75–79. For further insight, review PACK ITEM 12 (Handout: Unity in the New Testament) and PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians). For more study helps, consult the Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.

**PLAN** group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 80–81), More Ideas (p. 82), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Add variety to your plans for your group in this session by using at least one idea from More Ideas. Consider how to implement the Suggested Music Idea (p. 82).

**GAIN** insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

**GATHER** the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Two prepared index cards (see p. 80 for wording suggestions). Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Ephesians). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark); □ PACK ITEM 12 (Handout: Unity in the New Testament); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Many churches have adopted recovery ministries to help people in addiction find freedom from substance abuse. In some cases, the focus in those congregations moved from “those people” to “us” as they realized their own need of deliverance. It is interesting how our perspective of others changes when we realize our own dependencies. The sense of solidarity among fellow strugglers cuts across the normal dividing lines of class, ethnicity, and political affiliations.

*(In PSG, p. 64)* How can a personal struggle or crisis bring us into a relationship with another person with whom we would not have connected under normal circumstances?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**EPHESIANS 4:1-10**

Ephesus was a confluence of many different cultures and religions. Though the predominant god of the city was the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana), this by no means indicated that all people in Ephesus were worshipers of this god. Many other gods and goddesses were worshiped in Ephesus, including Zeus, Apollo, Dionysius, Athena, and Cybele. It is important to keep in mind that the people of Ephesus were polytheistic. They did not believe in exclusivism when it came to their worship. They would merely add more gods to their worship experience. It was out of this context that many came to Christ in Ephesus. How could God bring unity to a group of people that came from so many religious backgrounds?

Other worshipers held to magic or folk beliefs. In Acts 19:13-20, Luke detailed the story of a man named Sceva who tried to add the name of Jesus to his ritual of exorcism, and the demon-possessed man attacked Sceva and his sons. This prompted great fear among those who held to these incantations and folk beliefs. They brought out their religious texts—which were valued at 50,000 pieces of silver—and burned them. How would Paul bring people recently converted from these folk religions to unity in the church?

Jews also dominated the landscape of Ephesus. It is estimated that between ten and twenty thousand Jews lived there. Paul began his mission in Ephesus by speaking for three months in a synagogue (Acts 19:8). However, he experienced tremendous opposition from those Jews and ended up preaching in a lecture hall nearby (Acts 19:9). Some of the recent converts in Ephesus were Jews, so how was Paul supposed to foster unity with the new church?

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**KEY DOCTRINE**

*Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Col. 1:21-22).

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**BIBLE SKILL**

*Compare Bible passages.*

Read the following Bible passages and take note of what they say concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2:38; 4:31; 13:52; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and Ephesians 5:18. What do these passages teach about the filling of the Holy Spirit? Write a summary statement about what you discover.
In the first three chapters of Ephesus, Paul had enumerated the blessings that were theirs in Christ because of God’s gracious offer of salvation. To begin the next half of the letter, he emphasized the unity that was there through the Spirit and His presence in the church. Unity could rise out of diverse backgrounds to bring even more glory to God.

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**WALKING WORTHY** (EPH. 4:1-3)

**VERSE 1**

In chapter four, Paul transitioned from beliefs about salvation to how salvation practically impacts a person’s life. One of the areas that salvation impacts a person is in his or her relationship with others. A person who has trusted Christ can have unity with others even though they have diverse backgrounds. With the transitional word, *therefore*, Paul focused his attention on what that unity would look like.

Paul first identified himself as a **prisoner in the Lord**. He had previously identified himself as a “prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1), but here he shortened it to *the prisoner in the Lord*. Like the previous reference, Paul indicated that he was physically imprisoned because he was carrying out the work of the Lord. Though the prison held his body, his spirit was captured by Christ. He was in prison because his passion for telling others about Christ was greater than his desire for personal convenience.

With this passion for fulfilling God’s will, Paul began to **urge** the Ephesians to take seriously their calling to follow Christ. The word can also be translated “to entreat” or “to exhort” or “to appeal.” Paul, who was already setting this example, appealed to the Ephesian Christians to **live worthy of the calling you have received**. The word *worthy* was often used of balancing scales where two sides came to be equal. He wanted their lives to match their professions of faith in Christ. He appealed to them on the basis of their calling. They had not worked for their salvation or achieved it on their own merit; it was a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-10). Therefore, they had a calling upon their lives to live in a way that their words matched their practice.

**VERSES 2-3**

Paul listed several virtues that would promote unity within the church. These are virtues that Jesus Himself displayed. The first of these virtues is **humility**. Few things are more destructive to a unified church than the lack of humility, also known as pride and arrogance. Humility is not the denigration of self or false assurances of one’s lack of worth. However, it does mean the willingness to surrender oneself to God and allow Him to serve as the supreme authority of life. Peter encouraged those in the Christian community to clothe themselves with humility (1 Pet. 5:5). It is hard to argue with the humble, and this in itself is a first step toward unity.
Paul also encouraged Ephesian Christians to live with gentleness. This implies self-control and a tempered spirit. Christ displayed this characteristic in His dealings with people (Matt. 11:29) and encouraged this quality (translated “meek”) in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:5). Paul also listed this characteristic as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23).

In addition to humility and gentleness, Paul included patience as a characteristic that promoted unity. One of the dangers of living in community with others is that anger can damage relationships through rage, bitterness, slander, or a spirit of vengeance. The key to controlling those powerful emotions in the context of community is patience. The Greek term for patience is the combination of a word for anger and a word for long. The word for anger is an explosive kind of anger, and put together these two words might mean to have a long fuse or to be slow to anger.

A final quality in verse 3 that promotes unity is bearing with one another in love. Forbearance is the result of patience. This also was a characteristic of Christ (Matt. 17:17). Those who love others are far more willing to endure others’ faults than those who do not love them.

Those who express humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance help foster a spiritual unity within the body of Christ. Therefore, Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians to be those who were making every effort to keep this type of unity. To be patient, gentle, humble, and forbearing does require effort. It doesn’t come naturally. But the results are worth it.

Unity in the church is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul referred to this type of unity as the unity of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent of this type of unity. As He produces fruit in the lives of believers, the Spirit creates the characteristics needed for unity in people’s lives (Gal. 5:22-23). Without His work, characteristics of pride, anger, and agitation threaten to dominate relationships. Unity in the church is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit. This unity of the Spirit occurs through the bond of peace. The word bond is used for that which strengthens something else, like the ligaments that hold the body together (Col. 2:19). As people are committed to peace with one another and are operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are held together in unity.

How have you seen the qualities Paul mentioned portrayed in your church recently?
LIVING UNIFIED (EPH. 4:4-6)

VERSE 4
Having listed characteristics that promote unity within the church, Paul then turned to common beliefs that promote unity. He proclaimed that there was one body and one Spirit. The church is not a gathering of many different bodies—it is one body. It is a single community made up of Jews and Gentiles who have been reconciled to God through Christ. Though this body meets in many places, speaks different languages, and serves in various cultures, the body of Christ is still one. The church can be unified because in its core nature it is one body. Instead of theology dividing the church into separate members, it actually brings them together under one body.

Paul also proclaimed that the church has one Spirit. Through this Spirit the body of Christ lives and moves (1 Cor. 12:13). The Baptist church doesn’t have one Spirit and the Pentecostal church another Spirit. There is not a Spirit for American Christians and a Spirit for Brazilian Christians. One and the same Holy Spirit fills every person who believes. We can have unity because we have the same presence of God indwelling all of us.

In addition to one body and one Spirit, Christians share one hope at your calling. Before coming to Christ, people are without hope (Eph. 2:12). However, in Christ believers have hope because they have been called to God through Christ (Eph. 1:18). The Jews did not share a different hope from the Gentiles. In Christ they had the same hope that was found in their salvation experience. Jesus’ resurrection assured the believers’ resurrection to eternal life. Those who share similar hopes for the future often stand together united based on their common hope. Football players hoping for a championship often stand together in unity to try and achieve the goal. Students working together with hopes of a scholarship often unite their efforts to achieve the goal. So, too, those who share a common hope of eternal life can gather together in unity, knowing the outcome of their calling.

VERSES 5-6
Paul listed three more unifying beliefs in verse 5. First, he acknowledged that believers share one Lord. Though Ephesus had an inclusive religious climate—adding one god upon another—Paul reminded the Ephesians that Christians had one Lord, Jesus Christ. The most basic confession of a Christian was Jesus is Lord, and this could only be claimed through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). More than a belief, this was a common allegiance shared by all Christians to the person of Jesus Christ. Anyone could give lip-service to this saying, but only those who embraced its calling were truly unified with the body of Christ.

Second, Paul identified one faith. This could have been a reference to the belief needed to embrace Jesus as Lord, or it could have been a reference to the truths about Jesus. Certainly a person is saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). However, the word faith sometimes refers to a body of truth (1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1,6; Titus 1:4; Jude 3). Either way leads to the same
conclusion—that Jesus the Lord and object of faith is the One who brings real unity to those who are otherwise different.

Third, Paul spoke of one baptism that bound people together in unity. Some difference of opinion occurs in interpretations of this passage. Some believe that it is referring to water baptism. If that is the case, the meaning would be clear—Christians are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ and no other. Water baptism is a clear confession of faith in Jesus Christ and distinguishes them from all others who have not experienced baptism. Other scholars believe that baptism here is a reference to Spirit baptism that occurs the moment a person believes in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). All believers share the experience of being baptized in the Spirit, and that is what creates unity within believers. Whether this verse intends water baptism or Spirit baptism, it sees baptism as a unifying factor within the church.

Paul listed one final belief that united everyone in the church. They all shared one God and Father of all. Christians are brothers and sisters who share the same Father. This Father is above all and through all and in all. Nothing in existence would be without the creative activity of God, and He is the Father of all those He adopted into His kingdom. Theology should not divide the church. Properly understood, it should unite the church around its great truths.

Which of the unifying factors Paul mentioned has helped you most in uniting with others?

ENJOYING VICTORY (EPH. 4:7-10)

VERSES 7-8

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people.

How does the grace of God unify the body of Christ?
Paul used an illustration from a military victory parade in Psalm 68 to introduce the idea of believers receiving gifts. To do so, he summarized the entire psalm here in verse 8. Psalm 68 was a victory hymn written by David to celebrate the conquest of a Jebusite city. It described a victory parade that took the conquerors physically up Mount Zion and figuratively into the presence of the Lord in heaven. This parade found its ultimate expression in Christ, who conquered His enemies and ascended back to His Father’s throne in heaven.

The victory parade described a conqueror who ascended on high and took the captives captive. The application of this passage in relation to Paul’s discussion is that Christ overcame His enemies and took captive for Himself those who were captive to sin. He then gave gifts to those He had taken captive. Unlike conquering warriors like David, Jesus gave tribute to the ones who were once held captive.

VERSES 9-10

Jewish Rabbis interpreted Psalm 68 in light of Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the law. Paul applied Psalm 68 to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Jesus first descended to the lower parts of the earth. This is a reference to His incarnation, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14). After living a perfect life but dying a sinner’s death, Christ ascended to heaven in victory. This verse is a reminder that Christ came all the way down to earth (Phil. 2:5-8) and ascended all the way back to heaven (Phil. 2:9-11). The victory of the unified church was accomplished not through human means but through the obedience of Jesus to His Father.

Paul made it clear the one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens. Jesus, the incarnated Son of God, came to earth, died on a cross, and was resurrected by the Father. The reference to heavens could have been a nod to the Jewish calculation of seven heavens, or it could have been a way of stating that Jesus ascended to the highest place. Not even death could hold Jesus back from His rightful place in heaven.

Paul ended his use of Psalm 68 and the victory parade analogy by emphasizing the reason for Jesus’ return to the Father. He did so in order to fill all things. As head of the universe (Col. 1:18), Jesus took His place at the throne. However, He did not abandon those on earth as orphans. He told His disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn’t see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (John 14:16-18). Again Jesus told His disciples, “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26). Jesus went away to send the Holy Spirit who would fill all believers, uniting them together in Christ.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, write the words Group Project in large letters on the board or a sheet of paper. Ask: When you heard those words in a high school or college class, what was your gut reaction? Did they excite you or fill you with dread? Invite the group to share their best and worst experiences with group projects. Discuss: How do you respond to the idea that church is intended to be a group project?

TRANSITION: Using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians), point out that Ephesians 4 is a turning point in Paul’s letter: For the first three chapters, Paul discussed what the church believes. But in chapter 4, Paul transitioned to talk about what we as believers do, and more importantly, how we do it. As we get into the passage, you’ll hear one word repeated over and over.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: While a volunteer reads aloud Ephesians 4:1-3, direct the group to listen for four key attitudes that should characterize the way believers interact with one another.

ASK: Do any of these attitudes come easy to you? When, or with whom, is it most difficult to display any of these attitudes?

HIGHLIGHT: Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) to anyone who does not yet have one, and point out this session’s memory verse. Read the verse in unison. Ask: If people do not display these attitudes, are they living unworthy of the calling they have received? Why or why not?

ASK: How do the attitudes and actions identified by Paul in these verses serve as a demonstration of the gospel? How do they help us share Jesus with others? (PSG, p. 67)

GUIDE: In advance, prepare two index cards. On the first, write phrases such as, “Too many people are dying without knowing Christ! We can’t afford to waste time making sure we all love each other!” On the second card, write, “We shouldn’t get bogged down in differences of opinion about doctrine or theology. Let’s focus on the things that unite us, not the things that divide us.” Enlist two volunteers. Give each volunteer one of the prepared cards. Say: Imagine you’re putting together an evangelism team for our church. You have one more slot on your committee, and you have to choose between these two people. Who would you choose, and why? Instruct the volunteers to read their cards. Discuss: How do we balance the urgency of the gospel message with the command in verse 3? And how do we make sure we don’t compromise the message of the gospel for the sake of keeping the unity of the Spirit?

STUDY: Create small teams. Distribute copies of Pack Item 12 (Handout: Unity in the New Testament). Direct the teams to review the PSG (p. 67) and the handout. Encourage each team to determine ways to balance the two extremes presented. Call for ideas.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 4:4-6, as the group keeps track of how many times the word “one” is used.
**EMPHASIZE:** Point out that these verses highlight a different Person of the Trinity. Lead the group to discover what the passage teaches about the Spirit (v. 4); the Son (v. 5); and the Father (v. 6). Refer to Pack Item 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians) to aid the discussion.

**ASK:** How should a believer’s relationships with others mirror the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? (PSG, p. 70)

**SUMMARIZE:** Each Person of the Trinity has a different role. God is the Creator. Christ is the Redeemer. The Holy Spirit is the Indwelling Presence. They are distinct, yet united. While we can never fully comprehend this reality, the Trinity should guide us in our effort to be more unified with one another.

**TRANSITION:** When we walk worthy of our calling and live unified with one another, we can live in celebration of the victory won by Jesus.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:7-10, directing the group to listen for what the passage says about gifts.

**ASK:** What gifts do believers receive as a result of Jesus’ victory?

**HIGHLIGHT:** The first time we read about something given to believers is in verse 7. We receive grace as a gift from Christ, which is His sacrifice on the cross. Verse 8 says that He gave “gifts”—plural—to people. What does this mean? Emphasize from the PSG (p. 70): With the gift of salvation came other gifts of God’s grace that were to be used to build up the body of Christ.

**ASK:** How is the giving of spiritual gifts a celebration of Jesus’ victory?

**DISCUSS:** Read the paragraph under verses 9-10 in the PSG (p. 71). Solicit reactions. Ask: What does walking in victory look like in the life of a believer? What about in the life of a local church? (PSG, p. 71)

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**DISCUSS:** Review the statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 72) to present a summary of the study. Ask: Do you believe we can have victory in Christ if we do not have unity in Christ? Why or why not? In what particular attitude could you grow and thereby benefit the unity in our church relationships?

**CHALLENGE:** Call attention to the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 72): How could your small group become more visible in its celebration of the victory won by Jesus?

**PRAY:** Lead in prayer, asking God to help the group maintain the unity of the Spirit this week.
PRACTICE

- Reach out to those who were not present to secure any prayer requests and ministry concerns. Give a summary of the session and encourage them to study the passage on their own, using their copy of the PSG.
- Consider your social media presence this week. Are you contributing to or detracting from unity by the things you are posting? Be honest about your own social media activity in light of what you taught this week.
- Encourage group members to exercise their spiritual gifts in service through the church in some tangible way this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, write the following on separate strips of paper and place in a hat: football teams, instruments in a symphony orchestra, items in a balanced diet, and jobs listed in movie credits. Direct the group to form small teams of three, draw a strip of paper from the hat, and come up with as many items in that category as they can. Discuss which of those roles are most important, and what would happen if any of those were removed, or stopped working. Introduce the topic of unity within the body of Christ.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of Ephesians 4:1-3, ask for a show of hands of anyone who has broken or injured any body part from their hips to their toes. Ask: What impact did that broken bone or injury have on your ability to walk? How did it affect your balance? Discuss how every part of the leg is necessary for walking properly. Emphasize the connection between walking worthy and living in unity.
- To enhance the study of Ephesians 4:7-10, print several pictures of sports fans celebrating their team's victory. Lead the group to explain how a championship can create a sense of pride and accomplishment for an entire city or even country, even though the people celebrating had nothing to do with winning the game. Compare the illustration to experiencing the blessings of Christ's victory, even though we had nothing to do with it.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group in brainstorming how they can contribute to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace this week. Discuss the connection between your community's receptivity of the gospel and your church's expression of unity. Ask from the PSG (p. 71): How might the current level of unity in your church impact receptivity to the gospel in your community? How could you change this for the better?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play the song “Make Us One,” by Jesus Culture, as your closing prayer. For a more traditional alternative, play the hymn “Bind Us Together,” by Bob Gillman.