

Community Group Guide



The Church at Martinsburg
“Some Things Never Change”
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16
Jason Mansfield
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Scripture Passage

Have a volunteer read the following scripture passage(s).

Ephesians 4:1-7

“¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”

Ephesians 4:11-16

“¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Discussion Questions

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.

1. Before joining a community group, did you see your need for Christian community? How has participating in a community group grown you into greater maturity as a believer?
2. Identify each of the things God has given to the church according to v. 11. What purpose do they serve and what are the results of these gifts?
3. As believers, what does maturing in community protect us from? See v. 14.

4. Why is love such a significant element in Christian maturity and the building up of the body of Christ?
5. According to v. 15, how are Christians to “grow up”? How does Paul’s illustration show that being in community non-negotiable for the Christian?

Prayer

As you pray with your group, consider praying for the following things:

- Any personal requests. Pray for the personal requests that may have been shared in your group.
- A desire to have the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of your fellow group members (Col. 3:16).
- Ask the Lord to help you, through the community of the local church, to grow into full maturity in Christ.

Weekly Scriptures

Encourage your group members to consistently read Scripture. The daily Scripture reading plan from the church is be a helpful place to start.

Monday: Romans 12:4-5

Tuesday: Hebrews 10:24-25

Wednesday: Galatians 6:2

Thursday: 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Friday: 1 Corinthians 1:10

Saturday: Hebrews 3:13

Weekly Update

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

Gospel Class: Our next Gospel Class will be this Saturday (February 21) from 10A-2P. Encourage those in your group who are not members yet to pursue membership by attending the Gospel Class! You can register at martinsburgchurch.org/membership.

50 Monroe – Home Stretch! In just a few short weeks, we will be transitioning from meeting at the Regal Theaters to 50 Monroe Street! There are lots of projects for you and your group to take part in. Shoot an email to contact@martinsburgchurch.org to see how you and your group members can help transition our church in the home stretch to 50 Monroe!

Follow-up

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.

- Challenge your group members to pray for each individual in your community group and to find a way to encourage them this week.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

Commentary¹

Eph. 4:1 prisoner. Paul’s imprisonment for the sake of the gospel is for the Lord (see 3:1). His exhortations have great power, since he himself has taken these matters seriously enough to suffer confinement in the Lord’s service. Christians are to live in a manner worthy of the adoption, holiness, and unity to which they were called (see 1:4–5; 4:4).

Eph. 4:2 Humility was regarded as distasteful by the pagan world of Paul’s day. Pride was more highly prized. All of the virtues mentioned—humility, gentleness, patience, and most of all, love—were displayed in Christ’s own character and are to be evident in the daily walk of every Christian.

Eph. 4:3 Peace is a state of reconciliation and love and therefore acts as a bond to unite believers in Christ. Believers do not create unity but are to preserve the unity already established.

Eph. 4:4 Spirit. Just as a human body has one spirit that animates it, so Christ’s body, the church, is enlivened by one Holy Spirit who enlivens Christians to eternal life. one hope. Christians do not have separate “hopes” but are together called to eternal life and to enjoy God forever in resurrection glory. They are also called to express that unity this side of eternity. On the church as a body, see Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:12–31.

Eph. 4:5 One Lord refers to Jesus Christ. One faith refers to the doctrinal truths Christians commonly confess. “One Spirit” (v. 4), “one Lord [Christ]” (v. 5), and “one God and Father” (v. 6) constitute a Trinitarian formula. **One baptism.** Christians have disagreed about the proper mode of baptism beginning in the early history of the church. “One baptism” here, however, may refer to the baptism of all believers into one body (as described in 1 Cor. 12:13), which is the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when one becomes a genuine believer in Christ. If this view is correct, water baptism would be an outward sign of the inward reality of the believer being in Christ as the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5, 8; Titus 3:5). There is therefore a profound spiritual unity of all genuine believers who are “in Christ” (see John 17:21, 23), founded on “one faith” in “one Lord,” irrespective of denominational differences. Others hold that the reference here is to water baptism, but would disagree concerning the proper mode.

Eph. 4:6 over all ... through all ... in all. God is omnipresent (see Ps. 139:7–12; Isa. 66:1). Thus the Christian church is “one body” (Eph. 4:4), wherever its separate congregations may be found throughout the world (see Rom. 3:30).

Eph. 4:7 Grace ... according to the measure of Christ’s gift does not refer to different levels of saving grace but of grace given to serve Christ’s church. To hold an office in

¹ Taken from the ESV Study Bible Commentary.

Christ's church (see 3:2; 4:11–16) requires a special calling from Christ himself, who rules his body as its head (see 1:22; 4:15; 5:23).

Eph. 4:11 Christ gives specific spiritual gifts to people in the church whose primary mission is to minister the Word of God (v. 12). For apostles, see note on 1:1. Regarding prophets, different views on the nature of the gift of prophecy in the NT affect one's understanding of this verse (see notes on 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:10). Since the Greek construction here is different from Eph. 2:20 and 3:5, some see this verse as a broader reference to the gift of prophecy generally in the NT church, rather than a reference to the "foundational" prophets mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5. From the Greek word for the "gospel" (*euangelion*), evangelists denotes people like Philip and Timothy who proclaimed the gospel (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). Shepherds (or "pastors" [esv footnote]). In the OT these are kings and judges (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7). In the NT, elders "shepherd" by watching over and nurturing the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–2). There is some uncertainty as to whether "shepherds and teachers" refers here to two different ministry roles or functions, or whether the reference is to a single "shepherd-teacher" ministry role (cf. esv footnote), since Paul uses a different Greek conjunction at the end of the list, joining the two nouns more closely together than the other nouns in the list. If "teachers" are a separate group, they can be understood as a special branch of shepherds (overseers, elders) responsible for instruction in God's Word (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

Eph. 4:12 Those church leaders with various gifts (v. 11) are to equip the saints (all Christians) so that they can do the work of ministry. All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used in ministering to one another (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Eph. 4:13 The diversity of gifts serves to bring about the unity of Christ's people. Mature manhood extends the body metaphor used earlier for the church and contrasts with "children" in the next verse (see Heb. 5:11–14). Some people think that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is people who divide the church, whereas the knowledge of the Son of God (both knowing Christ personally and understanding all that he did and taught) is edifying and brings about "mature manhood" when set forth in love (Phil. 3:10). The work of the gifted ministers (Eph. 4:11) was to proclaim and teach the word centered on Christ rather than on speculative or eccentric teachings of their own (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2). **Measure.** Christ Jesus is the standard of the maturity to which the church must aspire. Christ's fullness is the full expression of his divine and human perfection (see Eph. 1:23; 3:19; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

Eph. 4:14 children. Immaturity in the truths of Christian doctrine makes the church like gullible children tossed helplessly by the waves and wind of cunning and deceitful schemes of false teachers (1 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1–3; Jude 4; Rev. 2:2).

Eph. 4:15 The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience but must always be presented in love. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up into Christ. As head, Christ leads, directs, and guides the body (see 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3).

Eph. 4:16 joint. Paul continues the body metaphor to describe the church's maturity. Every member (i.e., every believer, viewed as a limb, or unit, in Christ's body) plays a crucial role in this growth. in love. There is no Christian maturity or true Christian ministry without love

(1 Corinthians 13), and every act of love in the name of Christ is valued and remembered by him, as each part is working properly (illustrated in Eph. 4:25–32; cf. Matt. 25:31–43; 26:6–13).

Recommended Reading

Read the following article(s) for additional help to put the sermon's passage into practice in your everyday life.

How Christ Enables the Church to Upbuild Itself in Love | Sermon excerpt from John Piper

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Typical American Christians' Church Experience: Organically Flawed?

My aim this morning is to persuade you and plead with you to get into a small group relationship with other Christians to experience the fullness of supernatural church life as the New Testament pictures it.

Sometimes I wonder if the frequency and seriousness of many problems that Christians face is not owing to the fact that most Christians in America do not experience relational, interpersonal, supernatural church life the way the New Testaments describes it. Psychological problems, marriage problems, parenting problems, self-identity problems, financial problems, career problems, loneliness, addictions, phobias, weaknesses—I wonder if the epidemic of emotional and psychological woes is not the symptom of an organic flaw in the way most Christians experience corporate church life.

How Most Christians View Corporate Church Life

For most Christians corporate church life is a Sunday morning worship service and that's all. A smaller percentage add to that a class of some kind, perhaps Sunday morning or Wednesday evening in which there is very little interpersonal ministry. Now don't misunderstand me, I believe in the tremendous value of corporate worship and I believe that solid teaching times are usually crucial for depth and strength. But you simply can't

read the New Testament in search of what church life is supposed to be like and come away thinking that worship services and classes are the sum total of what church was supposed to be.

The inevitable effect of treating church as worship services and classes is to make the people of God passive and too dependent on ordained experts. And could it not be that this pervasive relational passivity and dependence of millions of Christians—I mean passivity in interpersonal, spiritual ministry—rob us of some of Christ's precious remedies for a hundred problems? If God designed the church to function like a body with every member ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit to other members, in regular interpersonal relationship, then would it be surprising to find that the neglect of this regular interpersonal, spiritual ministry cripples the body in some of its functions and causes parts of the body to be weak and sick? Isn't that what you would expect?

The Felt Need for Professional Psychologists

I wonder if the incredible felt need for professional psychologists—with the common assumption: Where else could you possibly turn?—whether this feeling is owing in large measure to an organic flaw in the way we experience corporate church life. Think about this for a moment. How do psychological counselors help people? (And many of them do!) It seems to boil down to three things: 1) personal one on one conversations, called counseling or psychotherapy; 2) personal group meetings with others facing similar struggles; and 3) medications, usually some form of antidepressant. Now I think we can be thankful for these things in many cases.

But isn't it amazing that when Christians are in distress and seek help from professional psychologists, short of medication, the help we get comes through one-on-one or group sharing? When confronted with the pain of people's personal problems, where do professionals turn? They turn first to one-on-one conversation. And when more is needed, they turn to small groups. Isn't that remarkable! That the multi-billion dollar ministry of psychotherapy that we have created to help hurting people is built almost entirely on the ministry of conversation. They talk. That is the ministry—the power of conversation. In the best settings, wise, insightful, prayerful, loving conversation.

A Source of Various Distresses and Dysfunctions?

Someone might conclude from this: So the church has failed to provide for this and should now be providing support groups—for all kinds of distresses and abuses. Yes, perhaps so. But the question that is troubling me more these days is more fundamental than that. I am asking whether generations of flawed organic church life is a significant part of the origin of some of our dysfunctions and distresses. It's the difference between asking whether the job of the church is to have programs to distribute vitamin C tablets to remedy a scurvy epidemic, or whether we should have all the while been eating oranges.

If I am anywhere close to the truth here, then we might ask whether those who experience church in small groups get victory over their problems more often than those who don't. Yes, perhaps that would tell us something. But the problem is deeper. Are most of the small groups that exist experiencing what the New Testament pictures as interpersonal, supernatural ministry in the power of the Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Let me give you an illustration of what may be the case in many small groups, and plead with you to move toward New Testament life together.

An Illustration of What Small Group Life Could Be

A visiting pastor in Auckland, New Zealand, was asked by the pastor of a church to come to a small group to help it understand its function. He came early for dinner and the husband was not there. The wife was embarrassed and explained that the husband owned a construction company and worked late.

The group arrived after dinner and the visiting pastor taught for a while on how to use spiritual gifts to build each other up. Then he asked them to get alone for a few minutes to seek God for how each one might channel God's grace to the others for their upbuilding.

When they came back together, he assumed they knew each other's needs because they had been together for several years. The husband came home, showered, and joined them in a few minutes. When the opportunity was given to speak or to pray for each other, there was an awkward silence. They had never done anything like this before—seeking the Lord for how he might want them to minister to each other in that moment to build each other up.

The visiting pastor felt a fiasco was on his hands and turned the meeting back to the pastor to close. The pastor asked if anyone had a special problem they would like prayer for. The hostess said yes and showed the group the rash all over her arms. She said that the doctors had prescribed medicine but it hadn't helped. They invited her to put her chair in the middle for prayer. And as they prayed, Christ, the head of the church, did his ministry. The pastor said, "I sense in my heart the Lord is telling me your problem is the result of great anger."

She was silent for a moment then began to cry softly. Then she confessed, "I am so angry at my husband. He promises to be home for dinner, but night after night we eat without him . . . He's broken his promises to me over and over, and I feel I am a widow as I raise our children."

There was an awareness that something had just been revealed that two years of small group meetings had not revealed. And the husband was blushing with embarrassment.

To make the story shorter, several of the men began to speak about how they had wrestled with the same problem in their homes and had almost ruined their marriages. One in particular spoke of a deep meeting with God in such a crisis and how God had made everything new.

By the grace of God the husband knelt down in front of his wife and wept into her lap, as the group prayed for them more earnestly than they had ever prayed. The visiting pastor commented later, "The Lord had invaded His Body, and the gateway into the supernatural world had been crossed by us all."

The following Sunday the visiting pastor was to preach and saw the small group gathered on the parking lot outside the church. When they found him inside, the woman pulled up her sleeves and said, "Look, no rash anywhere!" The husband approached and said, "I've cut back my workday to eight hours. I took the kids to the zoo yesterday. We have a new home." (Ralph Neighbor, *Where Do We Go From Here?* pp. 161–164)

In other words, it is possible to turn a small group into just another impersonal time where we learn some more about the Bible, but do not minister to each other in an interpersonal way in the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it is possible to lay hold on the supernatural supply of the Holy Spirit by faith and minister to each other in ways that, over generations, might rebuild a healthy church body with less weakness and sickness and immaturity and fruitlessness than we see today.

So what I am pleading for this morning is a serious reconsideration of whether you are experiencing corporate church life the way Christ reveals it in the New Testament.

Paul's Description of Church Life: The Building Up of the Body

Let me take just a few minutes to sketch what that looks like from Ephesians 4. Start with verses 16,

. . . from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Now this is a description of how the church, the body of Christ, "causes growth" and is built up in love.

From Christ

Notice two things. First, the verse begins with the words, ". . . from whom." The growth and building up of the body is "from somebody." Whom does "whom" refer to? The answer is the last word in verse 15: ". . . who is the head, even Christ . . . from whom . . ." So the first and most important thing to say about how interpersonal church life happens as the church is built up is that it happens "from Christ." That is, it is supernatural. Christ lived once, died for our sins, rose again, ascended into heaven. He reigns there today and, as he promised, he is building his church. He is not passive and distant. He is a living, dynamic, active head of the body. He is supplier and guide by his Spirit. But will we receive his supply? Will we expect it and channel it to each other? That's the first thing to see: Christ is the living source of church life and growth.

"The Whole Body . . . Causes the Growth of the Body"

The second thing to see in verse 16 is that, even though the growth and building up of the body happens "from Christ," it is the body itself that is the immediate active cause of that growth. Verse 16: ". . . from whom the whole body . . ." That's the subject of the sentence; now where is the verb? What does the whole body do? The verb is way down in the last line: "the whole body . . . causes the growth of the body." Everything else in that verse is explains how. But the basic sentence is "the whole body . . . causes the growth of the body."

So even though growth and upbuilding are from Christ, the head, it is the whole body that builds the body. And the word "whole" is important. The whole body builds the body. That point is emphasized in the words, "according to the working of each individual part." The whole body—that is, each individual part in the body properly functioning—causes the growth of the body.

Where and How Does That Happen?

Now I ask you, where and how does that happen in your corporate church life? Can we ever create enough programs that every person would be involved using some particular gift? That's probably not even the right question to ask. Isn't it more likely that Paul envisions a kind of regular gathering of the body in groups small enough so that every member of the body can minister to others with his own unique spiritual gifts?

Look at verse 7:

*To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Therefore it says, When He ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.*

Notice: "To EACH one of us grace was given." And then in verse 8 that grace is expressed in terms of gifts: "Therefore, it says . . . he gave gifts to men."

So what verse 16 means when it says that "the whole body causes the growth of the body" when "each individual part is working properly," it means that all the members have gifts, and all of those gifts are to be used in building up the body "in love." And this is how Christ, the all-supplying, supernatural Head of the body, builds and cares for his church.

Conclusion: Is Significant Change Needed?

So I close by asking again, Is there not implied here an immense resource for healing and joy and power and strength and mission that most Christians miss because they only experience church as worship services and classes? Is there an organic flaw in this pattern that may account for untold weaknesses and discouragements in the body of Christ?

I invite you to put this matter to a test. Are you living normal New Testament church life in personal spiritual ministry with others? Or are you part of a flawed and disfigured pattern of life that may account for more weakness and woe in the church than we can imagine?