

Big Idea: Jesus calls us to live in unity.

Primary Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6

Supporting Scripture: Proverbs 11:2; Matthew 11:29

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- Have you ever been stuck in a group project where no one could agree on anything?
 - The frustration when your grade depends on people who can't decide or work together.
- Or maybe on a sports team where everyone wants to be the star player and nobody passes the ball.
- Today we'll learn about someone who showed us what unity looks like when the stakes are much higher.
- The story of Lynda Blackmon Lowery.
 - In 1965, Lynda, a teenage girl, lost her mother at age 7 because a hospital refused to give her a blood transfusion due to her race.
 - By 13, after hearing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak, Lynda became involved in peaceful protests for voting rights.
 - At 14, she joined the famous Bloody Sunday protest in 1965.
- The March on Bloody Sunday changed everything.
 - 600 peaceful protesters, including Lynda, approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.
 - The police attacked with clubs and tear gas. Lynda was injured, requiring seven stitches above her eye and twenty-eight stitches on the back of her head.
 - The powerful images from the event shocked the nation, leading to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Last week, we began our "Level Up" series from the Book of Ephesians, where the Apostle Paul challenges believers to take their faith to the next level.
- Today, we'll talk about unity.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Have you ever noticed how something simple, like deciding where to eat, turns into chaos?
- Now, imagine getting your whole school to work on a project together.
- That's what we see in Ephesians 4 where Paul is calling us to unity as followers of Jesus.

¹Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. (Ephesians 4:1 – NLT)

- Quick context: Paul wrote this letter from prison, literally in chains for preaching about Jesus.
- He was emphasizing that following Jesus isn't just about saying you believe, it's about living it out.
- Paul says our lives should reflect our belief in Jesus.

²Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3 – NLT)

- Notice the words Paul uses are humble, gentle, patient.
- These are the opposite of what social media and society often promote.
- Our culture says things like:
 - "You do you."
 - "Don't let anyone tell you what to do."
 - "Stand up for yourself."
 - "Don't let people walk all over you."
- Paul is saying true unity requires putting aside our "me first" attitudes.

⁴For there is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you have been called to **one** glorious hope for the future. ⁵There is **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, ⁶**one** God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 – NLT)

- Paul uses "one" seven times to emphasize unity despite differences.
- Like social groups, we naturally stick to those like us, but Paul says unity in Jesus transcends those divisions.

- We're unified because we belong to the same God, not because we're the same.
- This unity shows the world how people can be united by something greater than themselves.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Unity requires us to live differently.

- Paul didn't just suggest we live worthy of our calling - he begged us to.

¹Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. (Ephesians 4:1 – NLT)

- Our calling means a complete change, like being adopted into a new family. Everything changes.
- One key change is how we treat each other, as Paul highlights "one body and one Spirit."
- Paul calls us to live differently, not just get along. Unity shows the world how God makes us new.

2. Unity comes from *character*, not *circumstances*.

²Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. (Ephesians 4:2 – NLT)

- Paul focuses on character, not just agreeing on everything or trying harder to get along.
- He highlights three traits that make unity possible: humility, gentleness, and patience.
- **Humility**

²Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2 – NLT)

- Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.
- Humility shifts the focus from "me" to "others."
- Unity is impossible if everyone focuses only on themselves.

- **Gentleness**

- Paul compares it to a powerful horse controlled by its rider.
- Jesus, full of power, chose to be gentle.

^{29b} Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29b – NLT)

- Gentleness is strength used to put others first.

- **Patience**

- It's the ability to stay steady and calm despite frustrations.
- It's not just about waiting, but how we respond during difficult situations.
- Patience allows space for others to grow, heal, and move forward.
- Relationships require patience for unity to last.

3. Unity is built on what we share, not what divides us.

*⁴ For there is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you have been called to **one** glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, ⁶ **one** God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 – NLT)*

- Paul uses the word "one" seven times in three verses to emphasize unity over division.
 - **One body:** We are part of the same family.
 - **One Spirit:** The same Holy Spirit lives in us.
 - **One hope:** We share the same future with God.
 - **One Lord:** Jesus is our leader.
 - **One faith:** We believe the same truths about God.
 - **One baptism:** We've publicly committed to following Jesus.
 - **Most importantly, one God:** The same God who created and loves us.
- Our unity is rooted in belonging to the same God, not in shared preferences.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Practice, practice, practice.

- This week, practice one way to live in unity.
- **Humility:**
 - Give credit when people succeed.
 - Listen before sharing your own ideas.
 - Admit when you're wrong (even to a younger sibling).
- **Gentleness:**
 - Respond kindly when frustrated.
 - Use a softer tone when disagreeing.
 - Think about how your words impact others.
 - Encourage instead of criticizing.
- **Patience:**
 - Count to ten before reacting when annoyed.
 - Give others the benefit of the doubt.
 - Stay calm under pressure.
 - Keep your cool when others lose theirs.
- The goal isn't perfection, but progress.

2. Learn the *Unity Pause*.

- A practical skill to develop is the Unity Pause, which is the moment between what happens and how we respond.
 - Pause to collect your thoughts instead of reacting emotionally.
 - Remind yourself that this person is valuable to God, just like you.
 - Ask yourself: "Will my next action build unity or create division?"

3. Build unity.

- Look for opportunities this week to be a bridge-builder:
 - Help two friends who are fighting work things out instead of taking sides.
 - Invite a new kid at school to sit with you at lunch.
 - Refuse to pass along gossip or speak up when you see someone treated unfairly.
- Ask God to help us build unity this week, remembering we're not alone. The same God who calls us to unity is working in us to make it possible.