

Committed Relationships

A Short Introduction

¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:16

According to the principles outlined in Ephesians 4:16, the vision for this home group discussion series is: That every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people.

Here are some guidelines for this discussion:

- Bring your bibles: We will be reading a chapter of scripture each time we meet together as the basis of these discussions.
- Be honest.
- Allow others to challenge you without getting offended.
- Enjoy the ride!

Our goal is that you will personally embrace the value of being involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people, by the end of this study.

Committed Relationships

Part 1 – Our Calling

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. Who was your best friend in grade school? What did you enjoy about them?

Instructions: *Read Ephesians 3 and 4 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

2. What is **“the calling you have received”**? What verses in these two chapters give you insight into this calling?
3. Think about what you have read in the bible about “calling” in the past and then think about the passage you have just read. How does God seem to move in this world, through individuals or communities or both? Explain.

(QUESTIONS REFER SPECIFICALLY TO **EPHESIANS 4:1-6**)

4. In Ephesians 4:1-6, why do you think Paul emphasizes that unity between Christians is a vital priority? What effect does unity (or a lack of unity) have on our calling?
5. Read Ephesians 4:2-3. What are some practical examples of how you have seen these verses in action? Or maybe you have an example of how these verse were not applied. (Please maintain anonymity in either case). In the end, how is pursuing unity beneficial to our “calling”?

Here is a hypothetical situation to exercise your understanding of this topic. What would your advice be?

*Joe and Sally Saint begin to notice some disturbing trends in the communication between Bob and Irene Newlife. Both of these couples are on your small group. Bob continually communicates disrespectfully to his wife in public and dominates conversations with everyone in their small group. Irene seems to be fading from view and becomes reserved and outwardly insecure. Periodically, Irene will mention to other women in the small group that she doesn't respect Bob and feels trapped. Joe and Sally begin to talk to a third couple, Fred and Lucy Stronghope about how disturbing this whole “Newlife” situation is. They remarked that they are glad their marriage isn't like the Newlife's and that they really needed to do a marriage study that helped their communication. Fred and Lucy come to you and relay this whole story – **what do you tell them?***

PRAYER: Pray for the person on your right and ask God to give them humility, patience and gentleness along with a passion for peace & unity in their relationships.

Committed Relationships Part 2 -The "Mission Anchor"

Every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people (Eph 4:16).

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. What is your favorite story of friendship?

Instructions: *Read Ephesians 3 and 4 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

(QUESTIONS REFER SPECIFICALLY TO **EPHESIANS 4:7-16**)

2. Last time we discussed how each of us has a calling on our lives. In order to "live in a manner worthy of our calling" we are required to relentlessly pursue unity within our fellowship. In Eph. 4:14, Paul indicates again that we can have the tendency to "drift" in our spiritual life. What do you think could prevent us from being anchored in our mission together as a church or home group?
3. Where does 'individuality' fit into the success of our life mission (calling) and our fellowship?
4. Based on this passage, give a job description for each of the following; apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Have you thought about these roles before? How does understanding these roles help you understand how God desires to work with a group of people?
5. Ephesians 4:3 indicates that effort is required to maintain unity and pursue a mission together. What does it cost and what is required for individuals to live as part of a mission-driven fellowship of people? (Make a list as a group!)

Here is a hypothetical situation to exercise your understanding of this topic. What would you do if you were the coach in this situation?

You are the coach of a high school baseball team. The team has collected talent and ability and a couple of star players. They also have the backing of a prosperous school district. It is a team with a legitimate shot at the state title. A couple of weeks into the season, a couple of players (the starting pitcher and the short stop) start missing some practices and team functions. Soon others follow to the point where the players start to have a "practice-is-optional" attitude. When they are at practice it is pretty clear they are not giving their best.

The first games of the season are exciting and there are a number of victories. Several of the players are performing at there "career best" and batting very well. After 5 games, their errors increase, their hitting suffers and their pitchers are giving away more hits than ever in school history. Team morale declines and the team starts faltering. Still some players are still hitting their best.

*You address the problem by enlisting a policy that states "players that miss practice will not play in the following game. Players attend practice more, but their attitude is still poor at practice. Games continue to be high scoring and close but continually end in losses for your team. **How do you help this team become successful?***

PRAYER: Pray for the person on your right (based on your answers to #5) and ask God to give them extra grace so he/she may give what it will cost to live in committed relationships.

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Part 3 - "Therefore..."

Every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people (Eph 4:16).

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. How would you describe your natural conflict resolution style?
 - a. SKUNK – When hurt, offended or angry you spray words all over and there is a stink for days.
 - b. TURTLE – When hurt, offended or angry you retreat into your shell applying the age-old principle "ignore the problem, it will go away."
 - c. RAT – Run from any problem until there is no escape from confrontation and then you turn into a mean, scrappy fighter.
 - d. WHITETAIL DEAR – You are constantly on the lookout for confrontation and you flee at the first sign of it.
 - e. PICK YOUR OWN ANIMAL – Explain...

Instructions: *Read Ephesians 4 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

(QUESTIONS REFER SPECIFICALLY TO EPHESIANS 4:17-32)

2. What makes a follower of Christ able to have genuine, committed relationships that are deep and purposeful?
3. How does this passage give you an indication of the condition of your heart as a Christ-follower?
4. a) Put verses 22-24 into your own words. Write it out below:

b) Verse 25 begins with "Therefore, each of you must..." Another way of putting this phrase is: "Because these things are true, you must..." What is required from us as a result of the truths in vs. 22-24?

5. What grieves the Holy Spirit of God?
6. What specific areas of your life need to change if you are to live out verses 25-32?

PRAYER: Pray for the person on your right (based on #6). Ask God to give extra grace to grow in _____ so they might put off the 'old self' and put on the 'new self' in Christ.

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Part 4 - "Humility"

Every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people (Eph 4:16).

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. Who do you know that is genuinely concerned for the interests of others? How is that displayed?

Instructions: *Read Philippians 2 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

(QUESTIONS REFER SPECIFICALLY TO **PHILIPPIANS 2**)

2. What do you see in this passage as the essential components to being unified in mind and purpose?
3. According to Paul what is true humility? Why is it important in our relationships with one another?
4. What do you think it means to work out your salvation with fear and trembling? How would you describe the attitude that Paul is asking people to embrace and live out here?
5. Why do you think is Paul asking us to live this way?
6. Paul describes Timothy and Epaphroditus, as reflecting many of his opening comments in Chapter 2. What do you feel God would like you to model from their life (v. 19-30) or bring into your life from the beginning statements of Chapter 2?

PRAYER: Share one prayer request per person based on #6 and pray for the person on your left.

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Part 5 - "And let us consider..."

Every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people (Eph 4:16).

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. Everyone needs a cheerleader. How can your friends cheer you on in life? (What specific actions or words inspire you?)

Instructions: *Read Hebrews 10:1-25 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

2. What would you describe as the overall theme to this passage?
3. Why do think that right when the author is at the height of developing his theme, he refers back to the importance of our relationships? (v. 19-25)
4. Do you think authentic Christian relationships are essential to living out the new life Christ provides for us? Why or why not?
5. Why do you suppose the author emphasizes "meeting together" faithfully?
6. Describe a specific time when you needed your Christian friends to help you draw near to God.

LARGE GROUP

PRAYER: Pray for God to unite your home group, to create authentic relationships that really do "spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

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Part 6 - "Now you are the body of Christ..."

Every couple is involved in transparent, committed relationships with other married people (Eph 4:16).

PRAY AS COUPLES TO BEGIN.

LARGE GROUP

1. Share a strength you have noticed in the person sitting on your left.

Instructions: *Read 1 Corinthians 12 together silently for 10 minutes, taking notes as you read and then answer the following questions.*

SMALL GROUPS (4-6)

2. What would you describe as the overall theme to this passage?
3. What is powerful to you about the picture of many different parts making up one body? Do you think this implies there should be many different visions for the body? Why or Why not?
4. Read verses 25-27 again. What insight do these verses give you into the importance of the deep relationships we have explored in this series? Why do you think it is important to unite in helping one another stay healthy and focused on Christ through good speech (no gossip), correction, humility and encouragement?
5. Do you have an understanding of the gifts that the people around you possess? Why is that important?

PRAYER: In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called the "accuser of the brethren". His job is to lie and to accuse. Most of the battle (to stay united, to work together for Christ's glory and experience authentic relationships) is in the MIND. He will try to divide the home group you are in today through tempting accusations.

Covenant together today through prayer that you will not give in to Satan's schemes and that you will fight his accusations with the sword of the Spirit (the word of God) that you have learned in this study.