



Letters About Unity

Lesson Aim: To learn what it means to have unity in the body of Christ.

THE WORSHIP

Who God Is: The Spirit Who Guides Us

THE WORD

What He Has Done: God led Paul to write about unity.

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32 **Key Verses:** Ephesians 4:4-6

Christ Connection: Ezekiel 11:19-20

THE WAY

The Big Question: Why do you think God wants believers to be united?

UNIT 5 FOCUS VERSE

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14

Unit 5: The Promise of Guidance			
	Bible Story	What He Has Done	Lesson Aim
22	Letters About Love, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 12-13; 1 John 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:8	God led Paul, John, and Peter to write about love.	To develop strong, godly love toward one another.
23	Letters About Unity, 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32	God led Paul to write about unity.	To learn what it means to have unity in the body of Christ.
24	Letters About Forgiveness of Sin, Romans 3:23-24; 6:23; 1 John 1:9; James 4:17; Galatians 5:13-14, 19-23	God led Paul and John to write about God's forgiveness.	To know we are all sinners who receive God's complete forgiveness through Jesus.
25	Letters About Forgiving Others, Colossians 3:12-15; 1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Matthew 6:12	God led Paul to write about forgiving others.	To follow Jesus' example in forgiving others.
26	Letters About Peace, Philippians 4:4-9; Colossians 3:15-17; Romans 12:17-18; 2 Corinthians 13:11	God led Paul to write about God's peace.	To pursue peace with one another and to pursue peace of mind.
27	Letters About Perseverance, Hebrews 12:1-3; Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18	God led Paul and the writer of Hebrews to write about perseverance by focusing on Jesus.	To learn that focusing on Jesus helps us to persevere.

LEADER'S ENCOURAGEMENT This week, read Romans 12:4-8. Please join us in praying, "Lord, thank You for the body of Christ. Fill us with Your Spirit so the students understand the importance of uniting to serve others. Amen."

Lesson Aims are based on reflecting God's character as we participate in His actions to, for, and in the world.

Take Home Elements: The Journal Entry, Action Card, and Family Discussion Card may be sent home to encourage students to reflect on the lesson. The Journal Entry is an in-depth personal study. The Action Card is a visual reminder of the Bible story, God's action, and how we can join into that action. The Family Discussion Card gives parents and guardians a way to engage their students in what they are learning.

Leader's Tip: For larger gatherings, teach THE WELCOME, THE WORSHIP, and THE WORD in a large group setting and divide into small groups for discussion with THE WAY.

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Getting started

THE WELCOME

Suggestion: Choose a game that focuses on ideas such as teamwork, connecting, unity, diversity, etc.

ACTIVITY OPTION 1: BACK-TO-BACK

Purpose: To learn what it means to have unity and work together toward a goal.

Supplies: None

Directions:

1. Begin with two people sitting back to back with arms linked. Challenge them to stand up straight without using their hands.
2. When the two students have accomplished that successfully, add a third person.
3. Each time the group is successful, add another person. See how many you can add.
4. For an additional challenge, play the game again but don't allow students to link arms. It can be done!

ACTIVITY OPTION 2: UNITY BALL

Purpose: To learn what it means to have unity and work together toward a goal.

Supplies: Volleyball, 2 blankets or sheets, volleyball net (or a rope about 30 feet long and tied about 7 feet off the ground)

Directions:

1. Divide the group into two teams. Each team stands on one side of the net.
2. Give each team a blanket (sheet). Team members stand around the edge of the blanket, stretching it so it is tight.
3. Practice: Give the ball to one of the teams. That team begins by placing the ball on their blanket, loosening then bringing the blanket tight so it 'throws' the ball over the net. The receiving team then uses their blanket to catch the ball and then throw it back.
 - Encourage teams to work together to see how many times they can volley the ball back and forth.
4. Play a game of "Unity Ball." Teams score a point if the other team cannot catch the ball and throw it back. The first team to score 5 or 10 points (depending on how much time you have) is the winner.



The Spirit who guides us

THE WORSHIP

Note to Leader: The instructions below are suggestions only. Adapt this time of worship to suit your environment, resources, and cultural expression. Encourage students to broaden their view of corporate worship by including a variety of expressions such as group prayer, group praise, silent meditation, singing, listening to music, reading scripture, collecting an offering, drama, dance, visual arts, and/or a physical exploration of nature or neighborhoods.

Ideas for Optional Visuals: _____

Today, we worship the Spirit who guides us to unite as the body of Christ. The body of Christ is everyone who believes in Jesus. Every believer is like a part of the body because each one has a special role, but God created us so we can unite and work together just as the parts of our bodies do.

Believers are different but united in worshiping the one true God. Believers are united because they belong to Jesus. Also like parts of a body or people in a family, believers belong to one another.

Read the Unit 5 Focus Verse: Colossians 3:12-14.



Sing worship songs and guide students to focus on the Holy Spirit who guides us.



Read 1 Peter 2:9.



Invite students to offer sentences of praise to God by completing the following sentence:
"Lord, we worship You for _____."



Letters about unity

THE WORD Presentation

Note to Leader: Adapt this segment to your setting (Sunday School class, youth group, multi-age gathering, youth camp, retreat, etc.). In some settings, you may choose to have a student read the scripture aloud, and then have the leader, in his or her own words, briefly communicate the Teaching Points, the Christ Connection, and the Big Question. In other settings, a teacher, pastor, or other experienced speaker may present a lecture or extended message that includes those same elements.

Ideas for Optional Visuals:

You may choose to include an object lesson, video clip, drama, dance, song, or work of art to illustrate the teaching points.

Option 1: See Object Lesson: The Domino Effect at the end of this Leader's Guide.

Option 2: _____



TEACHING POINTS

Consider current culture and influences impacting your students, and adjust the teaching accordingly.

Read the suggested scripture and communicate each of the points noted.

Last time, we read what Paul, John, and Peter wrote to the Church about love and we discussed ways to develop strong, godly love toward others. Today, we will read what Paul wrote about unity in his letters to the Church. Unity means "being one." Paul frequently refers to all believers as members of one body—the body of Christ. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he explained the importance of each part of the body.

The leader or a student reads 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26.

- All who believe in Jesus belong to Him and are members of the family of God, which is also known as the body of Christ. Each member of the body of Christ has a different role and different gifts.
- The Corinthians thought some spiritual gifts were more important than others. Some were jealous of those who had more "important" gifts. Others looked down on those who they thought had lesser gifts. Paul wanted them to understand that no gift and no person is more important than another.
- Just as every part of a human body is essential for that body to function, Paul showed that every believer is essential to the church.
- God designed each of us to have different roles and gifts. This diversity causes us to unite and depend on one another in order to accomplish God's mission for the church and the world. He desires for us to unite as the body of Christ to help others come to know Jesus.
- (Verses 24b-26) Rather than being envious of others, we should unselfishly love and care for each other, suffering with those who suffer and rejoicing with those who are honored.

The leader or a student reads Ephesians 4:1-6.

- By mentioning his imprisonment again, Paul is reminding the Ephesians that he understands what the cost of being a faithful believer can be.

THE WORD Presentation *continued*

- Paul explains what unites us as one, listing several things we have in common:
 - We have one **body** which is the group of all believers, known as the body of Christ.
 - We have one **Spirit** who guides us in God's ways and convicts us of sin.
 - We are called to one **hope** which is eternal life through the resurrection of the dead, accomplished for us and given to us by Jesus our Savior.
 - We are under one **Lord** who is Jesus. He has authority over heaven and earth.
 - We have one **faith** which God gives us to believe Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead.
 - We have one **baptism** symbolizing our turn from our old life to new life in Jesus, identifying us with His death, burial and resurrection, and joining us with the body of Christ.
 - We have one **God and Father** of all.
- Even when we have differences, it is important for us to remember the things we have in common. Paul instructs us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.
- (Verses 4-6) Paul mentions the Spirit, Jesus (Lord), and God the Father to emphasize that, although they have unique roles, they are an example to us of unity.

Paul gives us very specific instructions on what behaviors to avoid to keep unity within the body of Christ.

The leader or a student reads Ephesians 4:29-32.

- Notice that the behaviors we are to avoid are followed by behaviors we are to follow. God doesn't call us to just avoid doing wrong; He calls us to do what is good and right.
- (Verse 30) We don't need to fear losing the Holy Spirit, but when we sin we grieve (make sad or bring pain to) the Spirit.
- Following Paul's instructions will most likely involve changing some of your habits and attitudes. God gave us the Holy Spirit to help us with those heart changes. Without the Spirit, it would be impossible to consistently make these kinds of changes.
- Changing our habits and attitudes doesn't just make us better people, it brings unity to the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit.



Connecting the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Us

CHRIST CONNECTION

In the whole story of God, what's the connection between this New Testament story and the Old Testament?

- It has always been part of God's plan to unite His people. He promised Ezekiel He would unite them over 650 years before Paul wrote letters to the Church.

The leader or a student reads aloud Ezekiel 11:19-20.

- God's promise to Ezekiel has come true for all who believe in Jesus—we are His people!



THE BIG QUESTION

Introduce and elaborate on this question. Students will answer it in their discussion group.

Why do you think God wants believers to be united?



THE WAY Discussion



GETTING STARTED Display and review the Discussion Group Covenant below:

**We will include everyone here, treating one another with respect and kindness.
We will encourage everyone here to express their thoughts and opposing views.**

Every student shares his or her best experience or greatest challenge of the past week.



READ IT AGAIN

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32 silently or aloud.

How would you explain “the body of Christ” to someone who has never heard of it?

Who designed the parts of the body of Christ and assigned them their roles and gifts (1 Cor. 12:18)?

Paul lists 7 things all believers have in common (Eph. 4:4-6). Which one(s) are most meaningful to you? How should knowing we have these things in common help us to work together despite our differences?



THE BIG QUESTION Invite students to share their answers.

Why do you think God wants believers to be united?



TAKE ACTION Lead students in a discussion using the questions below.

Give an example of a time when your unique gifts combined with another person’s gifts helped bring someone closer to God.

Do you have an easier time suffering with those who suffer or rejoicing with those who rejoice? Why?

How could you help bring unity in the body of Christ?

Ask each student to complete this sentence: **God calls us to make every effort to keep unity SO THAT others might _____.**



PRAY Share prayer requests and answered prayers.

Have students pray with partners, or have the whole group pray together.



FINAL FIVE MINUTES When only 5 minutes remain, begin this segment.

Give each student Action Card #23 and Journal Entry #23. **Take home today’s Action Card as a reminder of how we can join in what God is doing. Use the Journal Entry as your personal devotional study. Complete your Journal Entries at home and keep them together in a notebook or in your Bible.** Optional: Provide parent or guardian with Family Discussion Card #23.

PROPHETS & PROMISES

JOURNAL ENTRY #23

Letters About Unity

1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

- **Pray!!!** Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants you to learn from this passage.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-18, 24b-26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32**
- In what way are believers like a human body?
- Why is diversity in the body of Christ important?
- List the 7 things in Ephesians 4:4-6 that all believers have in common.
- How can a Christian grieve the Holy Spirit?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- How should we view people whose gifts differ from ours?
- How does Paul's points about suffering and joy show that the body is truly unified as one?
- Does Paul's description of the body of Christ help you see your role or the role of others in God's family? Why or why not?
- Why do you think God wants believers to be united?

WHAT CAN I DO?

- When have you experienced suffering because a friend was suffering or joy because a friend was joyful?
- What gifts has God given you to contribute to His kingdom?
- Think about your habits over the past few weeks. Reread Ephesians 4:29-32. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to consistently change our behavior. Prayerfully, write down specific changes you'd like to make in your attitudes and actions. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make every effort to use you in bringing unity to the body of Christ.

Action Card #23/P&P

LETTERS ABOUT UNITY

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12, 15-18, 24B-26;
EPHESIANS 4:1-6, 29-32

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WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE EVERY
EFFORT TO *KEEP UNITY*.

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