

## FRIDAY: Unity – through Prayer

**Read:** Ephesians 1:16-19a <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...

<p><b>Reflect:</b> Have you ever been in the presence of someone whose prayers simply held you captive? You could tell their whole being was into the prayer as they fervently praised God and sought His will. I imagine Paul was one of those people.</p> <p>Undoubtedly the people to whom Paul wrote had sick loved ones. Quite possibly some had an upcoming vacation and wanted safe travels. Others likely faced financial stresses. Yet upon what does Paul focus his prayers?</p> <p>Paul prays again in 3:14-21. Perhaps we are guilty of not asking enough of God. Yet keep in mind that what follows next in Ephesians is a focus on “right living.” It starts with “unity” (4:1-16) then proceeds to “holiness” (4:17-32), then “love” (5:1-6), then “light” (5:7-14), and then “wisdom” (5:15-6:9).</p>	<p><b>Respond:</b> If your mind wanders when you pray...have you ever considered writing it out and then praying it?</p> <p>Read Eph6:18-20. If Paul requested that prayer for himself...how much more should we request it?</p> <p>Who is someone you can encourage today by letting them know you pray for them when you think about them?</p>
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**Pray:** Ask God to help make you more consistent in your prayer life. Ask for God’s continued blessing on NLCC’s Sunday evening prayer gatherings. Think of a part of NLCC’s body (a person) and pray for them...pray Eph1:16-19 for them; pray Eph6:18-20 for them...and yourself.

## SATURDAY: “Head Control”

**Read:** Matthew 9:35-38 <sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

<p><b>Reflect:</b> What is the significance of Jesus’ ministry while on earth? There is the “obvious” – His death and resurrection makes the forgiveness of sins possible and guarantees our future resurrection. As we’ve seen this past week...He also has given us gifts to build up His body.</p> <p>Jesus is depicted as the “head” of the church (e.g., Eph4:15; 5:23). What is the significance of your head to your body? Do the things upon which your head focuses (through sight or thinking) influence what you do?</p> <p>The question is obvious. Do the things of Jesus concern us as a part of His body? Do they concern you? Are you aware of the things that concerned Jesus? How did Jesus interact with people? What was Jesus’ focus? It’s not “<i>What Would Jesus Do?</i>” but “<i>What Did Jesus Do?</i>”</p>	<p><b>Respond:</b> Read Mt10:1-4; apparently Jesus was a man of action (cf. Eph4:1-16).</p> <p>What do you think when you see a person engulfed in a sinful lifestyle? Are you quick to judge...or are you compassionate because they need a shepherd?</p> <p>What are two ways this past week that your concerns reflected that which concerns Jesus?</p>
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**Pray:** Pray that God’s world-wide church will do as Jesus did. Ask for God’s blessing on our worship tomorrow; that our guests are welcomed, and that God is glorified.

# Reason...Nature...Purpose

May 4 – May 10

A college professor of mine (Loren Deckard) once explained the need to distinguish between the “reason” for the church, the “nature” of the church, and the “purpose” of the church. He said...

- “Reason” answers the question of why something came into being...
- “Nature” answers the question of how it works...
- “Purpose” answers the question of what it is supposed to accomplish.

Using those differences he gave an analogy of why he got his wife a dishwasher...

- “Reason” – I love my wife...
- “Nature” – a dishwasher washed dishes...
- “Purpose” – by buying this dishwasher I eased the work of my wife...

When we speak of “the church” we can make the following distinctions...

- “Reason” – because God is gracious and merciful and He loves us (cf. Eph1:3-14)
  - Paul talks about God lavishing His grace upon us (Eph1:7-8).
  - It is in God’s nature to be merciful.
- “Nature” – the church is made up of a variety of parts...
  - of people who were once dead but are now alive (Eph2:1,5)
  - of people who were created for good works (Eph2:10)
  - of people who were once “far off” but are now brought near (Eph2:12,13)
  - of people who were aliens/strangers, but are now citizens (Eph2:19-22)
- “Purpose” – to unite all things in Christ (Eph1:7-10)
  - nothing is outside the scope of God’s redemptive plan...

If “the church” seems to have faltered, is it because “She” has lost “Her” purpose? If we don’t fulfill God’s purpose – who will?

Remember, 66 congregations in the “Emporia Area” alone...500 people in each of those congregations every week still leaves at least 3,000 without a church home in Lyon County. A line that grows a half a mile longer each day...the number of “unsaved” people in America alone...

Somebody ought to **do something about this!!!!** God already has...

- Will we do our part?

**Monday: Unity – Preexistent**

**Read:** Ephesians 4:1-3 <sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**Reflect:**  
Paul is once again in prison. Despite the inner peace he had from his relationship with God (e.g., Phil4:7), much of his physical, daily life sure seemed to be engulfed in turmoil. Prior to following Jesus he persecuted the church (e.g., Acts8), but after switching sides he himself was persecuted (e.g., Acts14:19f; 17:5f; et al).  
  
Yet Paul was steadfast in his commitment to God. We need to keep in mind that this isn't the only time he exhorts his readers to walk in a "worthy" manner (cf. Phil1:27; Col1:10; 1Thess2:12). But what does a "worthy walk" look like?  
  
In a word, unity. A worthy walk in Ephesians looks like a group of people who are united in their purpose to bring God glory. The ironic thing is that this unity is preexistent (i.e., you don't "maintain" something that isn't there).

**Respond:**  
Do you face any persecution due to your faith? If you do, how do you handle it?  
  
Have you ever been guilty of creating any amount of disunity in Christ's body? Have you repented? What did you learn?  
  
The word "eager to" is a word that means "do your best." What is a concrete way in which you can "do your best" to promote unity at NLCC?

**Pray:** Thank God for the blessing of worshipping Him with other believers yesterday. Pray for your desire and ability to live a "worthy" life to increase. Pray for the worldwide unity of Christ's body.

**Tuesday: Unity – Based on "Ones"**

**Read:** Ephesians 4:4-6 <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

**Reflect:**  
What happens if you divide what was never meant to be divided? You either **a)** kill it, or **b)** it doesn't work as intended. When Luke tells of Barnabas and Paul splitting company in Acts, it seems like a simple reporting of the facts (Acts15:36-41). Many will say that more people were reached as a result of this 'split.' Yet notice the lack of a "growth statement" after this movement of the church (cf. Acts2:47; 5:14; 11:24). Personally, I don't think God was pleased.  
  
The church is "one." This doesn't mean there can't be different expressions of it (i.e., different locations), but the purpose is the same; to bring everything under God's benevolent authority (cf. Eph1:7-10).  
  
Our hope is being with God (v4). For those "in Christ" it is our destiny (Eph1:18), but we were all once without it (Eph2:12). Given those examples we can see that biblical hope is an expectation that the thing in focus will come to pass. It's not merely wishful thinking.

**Respond:**  
In what ways do you see NLCC truly working as one body? Are there areas in which you don't see it?  
  
Is there an area of your life in which God doesn't reign? How might this contribute to disunity in the body?  
  
What can you do today to remind yourself about the "universal oneness" of the church?

**Pray:** Thank god for the clarity of His word. Pray for God's blessing and guidance on the upcoming "Natural Church Development" health assessment that NLCC will be taking. Pray for the unity and purity of NLCC.

**WEDNESDAY: Unity – Not "Sameness"**

**Read:** Ephesians 4:11-13 <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until 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,

**Reflect:**  
God always meets us where we are at. He loves us. He cares for us. But He loves us too much to allow us to stay where we are at. He also loves us too much to demand life-change without providing help...  
  
You'll notice there isn't a "clergy" (e.g., paid staff) and "laity" (e.g., everyone else) distinction in Paul's thinking. Everyone is involved in "ministry." It is the only way that unity and maturity will be attained.  
  
In some ways it's easy to think that Paul is out of his mind. Yet attaining the "measure" of Christ is possible because He has already given us the grace (v7) needed to achieve it.

**Respond:**  
Did you notice "shepherds" instead of "pastors" in v11? The word is "shepherd" – but practically every English translation says "pastor." What do you make of that?  
  
Are you involved in some area of "ministry" (i.e., service) here at NLCC? Why or why not? Would you like to be? What can you do about that?  
  
Are you aware of your Spiritual Gifts? Would you like to be if you're not?

**Pray:** Thank God for the leaders of NLCC – pray for their wisdom as they seek to guide NLCC. Pray for the Youth Group that will be meeting tonight – thank God for Tammy Krause's service in this area. Thank God for the privilege of serving in His kingdom.

**THURSDAY: Unity – Possible**

**Read:** Ephesians 4:11-16 <sup>11</sup> And he gave... <sup>14</sup> so 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from 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.

**Reflect:**  
Growth is a natural part of life. If something is alive, and healthy, it grows. Notice that Jesus gave gifts to the body for the purpose of growth. Are we being faithful with what He's given us?  
  
Earlier Paul said that we are to be "gentle" and "patient" with others (v2). Here (v16) we see how that is possible – God has empowered us. Due to His love He's given us a "spiritual blessing" (cf. Eph1:3-4). This blessing enables unity...  
  
Verse 15 is often used as an example (basis) of how we can (and should) tell someone a "hard truth" that we think they need to hear (i.e., "I'm only telling you this because I love you...brother/sister..."). Yet with all the talk of unity and building up the body...does it seem like affirmation is likely in Paul's mind?

**Respond:**  
Has your lack of Spiritual growth and maturity (we all have it) ever concerned you? Have you done anything about it?  
  
Who is someone of NLCC that you can affirm and build up? Who is someone (outside of any congregation) that you can affirm? Will you do these two things?  
  
Would you like to be solid and grounded in your faith? What steps are you taking to enable that to happen?

**Pray:** Pray for "F-F-F" that will be coming up this Saturday at the building. Pray for all of God's churches to grow in healthy ways. Pray for a more affirming heart, mind, and mouth.