That they may be one series: Study 1 Bringing Everything Together

(Ephesians 1:9-14)

## BEFORE THE LESSON

Paul penned the letter to the church at Ephesus while in prison in Rome around 60 AD. He knew the congregation in Ephesus well, having taught and preached there for three years during one of his missionary trips, and wrote this letter as an encouragement to the believers there. In this brief but expansive letter, Paul speaks of Jesus as the great unifier – the one who brings together all things under his reign – things in heaven and on earth. And though followers of Jesus were (and are!) a diverse group, this letter also emphasizes the ways that God has broken down dividing walls through Christ, and how he is establishing one unified people of widely differing backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, personalities, and giftings as they all live under God’s rule and work toward the same goal – loving others as Christ has loved them, and joining God in extending his rule and reign over all things.

## STARTING THE LESSON

When we think of *unity*, it’s easy to define it as *uniformity*: a group that looks and thinks and acts the same. But Biblical unity is not uniformity. Instead of requiring conformity among the group, it asks for conformity to the person and teaching of Jesus, expressed by each of us through our own unique personality and giftings. As we discuss the importance of unity among believers today, let’s remember the thing that binds us all together — God’s all-encompassing love for us in Christ, made living and active in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

## starter question

**TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS**

Collective experiences are instances where a group shares in the same feelings or actions together. It’s the communal feeling among a sports team’s fans when they win a championship, or joining in the laughter of the entire audience at a funny moment in a play. These experiences do not diminish our individuality, but remind us that we are part of something greater. As Christians, we can find joy, hope, and solace in being a part of the greater community of Jesus’ followers.

* Which collective experiences are your favorite to participate in? Being in the crowd at a sporting event, in the audience at a movie or concert or theater, or something else? What do you most enjoy about those experiences?
* When do you feel the most connected to other followers of Jesus, either in your local church community or the church at large? (i.e., while serving together, during the Christmas/Easter seasons, at a prayer or worship service)

## Opening PrAyer

“Jesus, thank you for being the unifier that brings us all together. We may have different personalities and interests and gifts, but it is through your love for us that we can come together to praise your name and love others on your behalf. Help us to be even more united with one another as we draw closer to you. Amen.”

## Discussion questions

### Question 1

**BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE**

Ephesians 1:9-14 **NLT**

9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

12 God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. 13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. 14 The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

* In what ways does God’s will feel mysterious to you? What helps you to find clarity as you seek his will for you?

Answers will vary. None of us know God’s will with 100% clarity, but we can gain more insight through prayer, studying scripture, seeking wisdom from other Christians, entering into a more intentional discernment process, etc.

### Question 2

* Paul explains that Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection are part of God’s “own good plan.” What is the plan?

According to verse 10, the plan is to bring everything in heaven and on earth together under the authority of Christ.

### Question 3

* Why do you think this plan — to create unity through Jesus — is a good one?

By bringing everything together, everyone has been welcomed and adopted into God’s family — now we are all benefactors of his love and grace. This is very good! Other answers are also likely.

### Question 4

* According to verse 11, because we are united with Christ, what have we received?

We have received an inheritance from God.

### Question 5

* An *inheritance* is something that is given from someone in power to someone they have determined worthy to become their heir, sometimes even before the inheritor is born. Considering how inheritances work, how do you feel about getting one from God? What do you think it says about how God thinks about you?

Getting an inheritance is an honor, it indicates just how highly God thinks of us — that we are worthy of taking hold of his blessings and possessions. He chose us as his heirs based on his love for us even before we were born, not based on anything we have achieved or accomplished ourselves.

### Question 6

* What was God’s two-fold plan to reach humankind, based on verses 12-13?

God’s plan to bring unity was to remove the divide between the Jews and Gentiles and to make everyone equal inheritors of his love through Christ. By sending Jesus to atone for our sins we became co-inheritors with Jesus of his father’s kingdom and love.

### Question 7

* What is the truth that first the Jews, and then, because of Jesus, the Gentiles learned?

They learned the good news that God saves us, both Jew and Gentile alike. This simple truth would reconcile all people to God and bring them into his kingdom, according to his plan.

### Question 8

* God didn’t just accept believers and give them an inheritance, but marked them as his own. What do all believers have that indicates they are part of God’s people?

The Holy Spirit. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, when he went to be with God, he left believers with the Spirit, an intercessor that would help us to connect with Jesus and the Father and continue to reveal God to us. And it is the Spirit who unifies us far beyond all our differences and knits us together as one people who belongs to God.

### Question 9

* If the Holy Spirit is given to all who believe, our experience with the Spirit is a unifying element among all Christians. How does this affect how you relate to others who share your faith, but who may not otherwise have much in common with you?

Despite our differences, we can know that we are all connected by our love for Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This can help us to see what God sees in others and to value them as he does. And this inclines us toward making the unity we share in the Spirit with others very different from ourselves a greater and greater reality in our earthly lives.

### Question 10

* Throughout this passage, Paul is explaining that God has a plan – that God chose us in advance to be part of something greater, together. According to verse 14, what is the ultimate goal behind this plan?

That we would praise and glorify God. God loves us and goes to great lengths to show us we are loved by him. In return he wants to know that we love him and wants us to put aside our differences and come together as one unified people for a collective experience of mutual love. Both the purpose of, and the power and the motivation for working toward unity is the love of God lavished on us in Christ and made active in us by the Holy Spirit.

##  Prayer ministry

* **Suggestion 1: Bridging the International Divide**
*Leaders: Grab or* [download a copy of the latest MIX magazine](https://vineyardcolumbus.org/themix) *before starting.*When there is little else in common, we can find connection to other believers knowing that they also love Jesus and have the Holy Spirit. The presence of God transcends worship styles, locations, even languages. Vineyard Columbus partners with churches all over the world to speak the message of Jesus. Turn to the Global Impact section of the most recent issue of the MIX magazine and read aloud some updates from international congregations. For prayer time today, choose one of the regions and spend time as a group praying over the requests. Ask each group member to adopt one of the other requests and pray specifically for the person who sent it in over the next week, and that they might know they are being supported by a fellow believer a world away.
* **Suggestion 2: Giving Praise and Glory**
*Leaders: If you don’t typically include worship in your small group meetings, intentionally plan a worship session for today, even as you are continuing to meet virtually. Lyric videos of worship songs are very helpful for leading remotely!*
Our purpose in being united with God is to bring him praise and glory as a way of showing him we love him for first loving us. Let’s take some time as a group (even if we are physically apart) and praise God by joining together in song to express our praise. Consider taking some time after worship to take turns praying a brief blessing over one another before you close.

**Note:** **This study was written as an act of service by Wesleigh Mowry.**