

Better Together

Built up in love

Ephesians 4:1-16

Welcome Have you participated in a team building day? What was its' purpose? Was it successful? Why/why not?

Worship As we enter a new year let's take time to focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Use this hymn as an invitation to him to be our vision this year.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqOB_XzuQWs

You may want to invite prayers based on the words of the hymn or on the names of God

Word Background: Paul writes to the Ephesians to enlarge their vision of Gods plan and purpose. In Ch 1-3 what Christ has achieved (doctrine). From Ch 4 onwards Paul moves to what we must be and do. In other words, how we are to live out our everyday lives (application).

Read vs. 1-6

Q. What does Paul urge us to do in v1? Why?

Q. What characteristics does Paul highlight as indicative of this calling? (v2)

Q. How does Paul emphasise the importance of unity? (v4)

Q. How will the qualities described in v2 help us keep unity? Can you give examples?

Read vs 7-16

Q. Who has been given gifts and by whom? Cf Ro.12:6-8

Q. Paul has identified four/five specific gifts of leading (v11). For what purpose? (Note: you may want to consider this in the context of the early church but be careful not to be side-tracked about apostles and prophets in the present day).

Q. What are works of service? Give examples

Q. Who does them and why do we do them?

Q. How does this passage help us to understand that to be a Christian should result in us being a part of a worshipping community of believers?

Q. What does it mean to “speak the truth in love” (v15) and how does this differ from just speaking the truth?

Q. What are the signs of maturity in a church?

Application: What gifts has God given you? How can your small group help you develop or enable you to use your gifts? What is the next step?

Witness Of the qualities in v2 which did you demonstrate best today? The worst? Thank God for the former and ask for his Holy Spirit for his help to be better at the latter.

Better Together

The cure for a hard heart

Hebrews 3:12-19

Welcome

What do you moan about the most? Why? Are there any consequences?

Worship (God of Grace by Chris Bowater)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWgHHsRv8NA>

Word

Background: verses 7-11 are taken from Ps. 95 where it refers to two almost identical incidents which occurred 40 years apart during the Israelites time in the desert (Ex 17:1-7 and Nu 20:1-13). You may want to read the Exodus account alongside the Hebrews reading.

Q1. What does it mean to harden your heart?

Q2. Do you think this is a instant or a gradual process?

Q3. What had the Israelites learnt about God and seen him do up to the incident in Ex 17?

Q4. Why then did they rebel at this point?

Q5. In what ways do/could we harden our hearts and why?

Q6. What was the ultimate consequence for the Israelites?

Q7. What warning is there for us?

Q8. What does the writer to the Hebrews suggest we do to guard against this?

Q9. What are the obstacles in doing this and how can they be overcome so that we can put it into practice?

Q10. In the last study we looked at the phrase: 'speaking the truth in love'. Is this applicable here? What does it require to make it happen?

Witness

You may want to give some time for each member to quietly reflect/examine themselves and give opportunity for prayer.

Read together Ps 95:1-7a to encourage one another to remain faithful to God and rejoice in his provision for us.

Remember also the Christians in The Diocese of Goma, our GLO partners and those known to Open Doors. In the trials they face may they know God's presence and provision and not fall away from the faith that they profess.

Better Together

The power of encouragement **1 Samuel 23:15-18**

Welcome

Who or what has encouraged you recently? Explain why?

Worship

Graham Kendrick (How good and how pleasant)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkzenMgGqYU>

or read Ps 133 together (on which the song is based).

Ask God for his blessing on your meeting and ask him to use this time to bring us closer to him and each other.

Word 1 Samuel 23:15-18 (also Luke 1:35-41)

Background: Saul was king of Israel but had been rejected as king by God 1Sa 15:23 and David anointed in his place (16:13). Jonathan was Saul's son and the natural heir to the throne. At the time of writing David was running from Saul who was trying to kill him.

Read 1 Samuel 23:15-18

Q1. What had David been promised (1Sa 16:13)?

Q2. Why then did he need to be strengthened in the Lord?

Q3. What qualities did Jonathan display?

Q4. Read what Jonathan says in v17. How would this encourage David?

Q5. How did Jonathan's actions back up his words? (v18)

Q6. What can we take from Jonathan's method that would help us when we seek to encourage others?

Going further: Read Luke 1:35-41

Q7. How do you think Mary's pregnancy would be interpreted by her family? her community? Joseph? (Matt 1:19)

Q8. In what ways could Elizabeth be well placed to be able to support and encourage Mary?

Q9. How can we apply this to our small group/church?

Witness

Think about our church and ask God to place on your heart someone who might need to be strengthened in the Lord. What could you do to encourage them this week? Pray for those in your small group remembering especially those who are absent – do they need a word of encouragement or some practical encouragement at this time?

Better Together

Love demonstrated

Romans 5:1-11

Welcome Have you ever been in a situation where you already knew the outcome? How did that knowledge affect how you approached the situation?

Worship Use this song as an opportunity to give thanks to God for the new relationship we have with him

I'm Accepted, I'm Forgiven

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyW9s_BllVI

Word

Q1. What do you understand by the phrase – justified by faith that Paul uses in verse 1? What does this imply about our relationship with each other before the Lord? Would it be the same if we could be justified by our works?

Q2. Note the past tense – it happened the moment we became a Christian. We cannot become more (or less) justified. Can you identify in v1,2 three benefits that Paul says result from being justified (they all begin 'we.....')?

Q3. Why should we rejoice in our suffering?

(Tim Keller - perseverance = single-mindedness, character = testedness.).

Give people opportunity to share examples.

Q4. How does this chain of events produce hope?

Q5. What evidence does Paul provide in v 5-11 that hope will not disappoint us?

Q6. How do we normally think and react to difficult situations and how does our understanding of this passage help us to approach them in a different way?

Q7. What support can a small group be in these situations?

Q8. What is required of the group to make this happen?

Witness

Use this time to look back over the studies in this series. Here are some things you could consider.

- What have you learned from these studies?

- As a group what can we do to strengthen and encourage one another in the Lord?

- As a group are there steps we can take to make us more welcoming and to encourage others to join this or another of the groups that meet?

- Consider the same question for the Church.

Close by listening to this song:

Grace be with you all – Michael Card

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX-x2vu-lpl>