

# life groups discussion guide

## philippians 2: attitude adjustment



LIFE GROUPS

doing life together

*“The thing I most fear in the church is disunity, discord, disruption, division. And I really believe that at this particular time in our church and in many other churches in our country [that it] is the major thrust that the enemy is making against churches like ours.”* — John MacArthur

*“I have watched for a number of years and even presently am watching the inability of human beings to orchestrate unity. It can’t happen. It can’t happen on a fleshly...human level; it will happen only on a divine level.”* — John MacArthur

Merriam-Webster defines “unity” as such: 1) the state of being in full agreement ; 2) a way of combining the parts in a work of art or literature so that they seem to belong together

In the work I do in the world of design, marketing and communications, unity (or its absence) is something I talk about with clients often – because it speaks volumes to your audience. Unity in a brand fosters confidence and engenders trust. On the contrary, disunity evokes suspicion and sows seeds of doubt that bear the fruit of distrust.

It is nearly impossible these days to turn on a news broadcast and not see that our country is swimming in a raging sea of disunity and disharmony. We see it in riot-filled streets and along NFL sidelines during the national anthem. There seems to be no place that’s safe from the epidemic spread of the virus of disunity. We wonder how we could be stuck with such bombastic, polarizing figures as our two main candidates in the upcoming election – and yet it occurred to me this week that they are merely a very accurate reflection of what we’ve become as a country. We bemoan the gossip, finger-pointing and name-calling from the candidates – but camp out in the comment sections of political posts on social media and you will see exactly the same...if not much worse.

The point of all this dismaying commentary is not to depress everyone. Instead, it’s to sound the alarm that if we are not careful, the same thing can become a problem within the church. And make no mistake, the bar is set much higher for us as believers than for the two presidential wannabe’s – and for the rest of the world really.

Q :: Where do you see disunity in the world right now? How does it manifest and what are its consequences?

Q :: The second quote from John MacArthur at the top of the page expresses his belief that human effort to achieve unity will always fall short, and that it will only transpire “on a divine level”. Do you agree with this idea? Might our lack of national or cultural unity be at all tied to our spiritual condition as a nation? Explain.

The crucial nature of our unity as followers of Jesus is something that the Bible strongly underscores. We see it play out in the opening four verses of Philippians 2. However, in studying this passage I think the NLT neuters this idea a little bit when compared to the NIV, which, I believe, makes the point a bit stronger.

*1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (underlines mine)*

The purpose of the underlines I’ve added is to highlight either a mention of unity, a description of what it looks like lived out, or a prescriptive behavior for bringing it about. The idea is truly woven throughout the passage.

And the word “if,” because it is a first-class conditional, is best translated “because,” so it would read this way: “**Because** there is encouragement from being united with Christ, **because** there is comfort from his love, **because** there is common sharing in the Spirit, **because** there is tenderness and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind.” In other words, your unity is motivated *because* of these very things.

Q :: Is our unity, or our efforts to foster it, driven by these things – or by something else? If something else, what?

A passage to also consider in connection to Philippians 2 is Ephesians 4, as it provides further support to the thoughts that Paul will give us in this section of Philippians. In Ephesians 4:1 he writes, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” In other words, he says “act like a believer.” How does a believer act? “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” A Christian acts this way toward his fellow Christian: humbly, gently, patiently, forbearingly and lovingly, and does everything he can to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. The reason is given in verse 4. There must be unity because “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” And because of all that inherent supernatural oneness, the church then is to maintain its oneness as the outworking of its very calling. So we are called to unity, and our unity is based upon a profound theological unity within the very Trinity itself.

Q :: Do you think believers see unity as the outworking of their calling – or something less than that? Explain

Other passages in Scripture further underscore the vital nature of our Christian unity. Jesus Himself had it weighing heavily on his mind as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night He was arrested. After praying for His disciples, He said (in John 17:20-23):

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Did you catch that? It is shocking and profound when you don’t read past it. The word “Then” that begins that last sentence, indicating that what follows is a result of the previous action. Jesus is saying that the world believing that He was sent from God and that God loves them is a **direct result** of us, as believers, being in complete unity. Another way to say it is that when the church is out of unity, it hinders the spread of the gospel.

Q :: How might this truth had played out in the days of the early church? How might it play out today?

Q :: Do you think we consider our Christian life to be something that’s **lived out** privately or corporately?

In closing, I will reveal my rationale for that last question. In a recent study of Daniel 9, I felt the Spirit prompt me to study the prayer that opens the chapter instead of just the prophetic goodies that follow. When I did, I was struck that Daniel, as he realizes after studying Jeremiah that the time of Israel’s captivity is drawing to a close, focuses the entirety of his ensuing prayer corporately instead of individually. It’s clear that Daniel was viewing his faith as being inexorably tied to the other Jews. They were in this together and what befell the whole impacted each part. My fear is that we do not view our faith this way today. We see this unity of believers reflected in other prayers in Scripture as well. The Lord’s prayer might be the most famous, as all requests that appear in the prayer are corporate, not individual. In this prayer Jesus wanted to teach us the truth of His intended connectedness of the church and the vital nature of our unity, and I fear we’ve missed it. But if we strive to reclaim it then maybe our unity leads to the world knowing God loves them and sent Jesus for them – just like He prayed it would!