

Week Twenty-one: “Protecting Your Church”

Day One: “Protecting Your Church”

Read: Ephesians 4:1-6 (*Freedom in Christ Bible*, p. 1359)

Read: *Purpose-Driven Life*, p. 160 to top of 162

Reflect: A few weeks ago we focused on unity. How have you been doing—are you making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace? (Ephesians 4:3, NIV).

Dig: What is the ‘bond of peace’ mentioned in verse 3? See also Ephesians 2:14 (p. 1357).

In reference to verse 14, what ‘two were made one’? See Ephesians 2:11-12.

What was Christ’s purpose in this? (Ephesians 2:15b-16)

What ‘dividing walls of hostility’ tend to creep up within Madison Square Church?

In light of these how can we ‘keep the unity of the Spirit’?

How is celebrating our rich racial and cultural diversity in harmony with keeping the unity of the Spirit?

Apply: Think back over your interactions with fellow church members over the last month. In what ways did your actions/words protect unity and peace within the church? Ask God to reveal to you tangible ways you can protect unity.

Were any of your actions/words working against unity? If so, take time right now to confess that to God and to follow his leading with respect to reconciling with others.

Week Twenty-one: **“Protecting Your Church”**
Day Two: **“Be Realistic In Your Expectations”**

Read: Acts 6:1-7 (*Freedom in Christ Bible*, p. 1243)

Read: *Purpose-Driven Life*, pp. 162-163

Reflect: “Longing for the ideal while criticizing the real is evidence of immaturity. On the other hand, settling for the real without striving for the ideal is complacency. Maturity is living with the tension.” (*Purpose-Driven Life*, p. 162)

With respect to this definition, how mature are you?

Dig: On page 162 of *Purpose-Driven Life*, Rick Warren writes, “Other believers *will* disappoint you and let you down, but that’s no excuse to stop fellowshiping with them.”

Note how, as the early Acts church grew, there were also problems and fighting within that church. Which group of people was ‘let down’ or disappointed here?

How was the situation handled?

Note other examples of discord/quarreling and Paul’s response to them:

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (p. 1305) and 3:1-3 (p. 1307)

Philippians 4:2-3 (p. 1370)

If we truly adhered to the advice of Ephesians 4:2, how would that transform the churches above as well as our church? “Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.” (NLT)

Apply: On page 163 Warren writes that every church should hang out a sign that says “No perfect people need apply. This is a place only for those who admit they are sinners, need grace, and want to grow.”

Is Madison Square Church a place that would welcome such a sign?

How much grace flows through you--would others within the church expect to see *you* carrying such a sign? Ask God to reveal to you ways in which you need to be more patient and gracious.

Week Twenty-one: “Protecting Your Church”

Day Three: “Encourage Rather Than Criticize/Don’t Listen to Gossip”

Read: Romans 14 (*Freedom in Christ Bible*, p. 1298)

Read: *Purpose-Driven Life*, p. 163 to top of 165

Reflect: Do you have a critical spirit or a congenial spirit?

Dig: What differences of opinion are the focal point of this chapter?

What are some issues that would be similar points of contention within the church today?

When we allow such issues to become divisive, what results? See verse 20a.

So how should we handle such differences of opinion? See verse 13, 15, 19.

Where should our focus be? See verse 17.

Apply: Allow God to search your heart and to see if there is any offensive way within you (from Psalm 139).

Specifically address the following questions: In what ways do I judge other people for doing things that I consider ‘unholy’? In what ways do I look down on other people?

Confess these to God and ask him to “create in you a clean heart and renew within you a right spirit” (from Psalm 51) instead of a critical spirit.

Week Twenty-one: **“Protecting Your Church”**
Day Four: **“Support Your Pastors and Leaders”**

Read: Hebrews 13:7, 17-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13 (*Freedom in Christ Bible*, pp. 1437, 1385)

Read: *Purpose-Driven Life*, bottom of p. 165 to 167

Reflect: Do you respect and hold in the ‘highest regard’ your pastors and church leaders? Have you prayed for your pastors and church leaders within the past week?

Dig: What reason is given in Hebrews 13:17 for obeying our church leaders?

What reason is given in 1 Thessalonians 5:13 for holding our leaders in highest regard?

What does it mean to hold our leaders in highest regard *in love*? (This would be a good place to remind yourself of the specific characteristics of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, p. 1320.)

Apply: Take the time to drop a note of thanks and encouragement to your pastors and to other leaders who minister to you.

As a conclusion to this chapter, read the blessing in Hebrews 13:20-21. Open your hands to receive it even as you read.

Week Twenty-one: **“Protecting Your Church”**
Day Five: **Lectio Divina**

Using the **“Lectio Divina”** method of Bible study (see page 3 of this booklet), **meditate on this scripture:**

“You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue together in this way.” Ephesians 4:3 (NCV)

Lectio divina (a Latin expression which means Sacred reading) is done in three stages:

- reading: you read the passage slowly and reverentially, allowing the words to sink into your consciousness; after you have memorized the text, write down one word which strikes you and draws your attention and note why you chose that word.
- meditation: you allow the passage to stir up memories within you, so that you recognize in it your own experience or that of people who have touched your life; write down memories of events or conversations or other scripture passages.
- prayer: you allow the meditation to lead you to prayer – thanksgiving, humility and petition. Write out a prayer based on the passage.