

# A Recipe for Unity

## A Study of Philippians: Philippians 2:1-4

Two heads are not better than one.

Some think that getting people together to think through things helps, but it also can bring a lot more conflict and stress. I have a hard enough time agreeing with myself, but you add anyone else in the mix and conflict is ready to happen.

Why is it that we have such a hard time living in unity?

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What was the last conflict you had? How did it start?

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It seems like there is always someone mad at someone else about something. Humans just seem to have a problem getting along. Proverbs 30:25 (and 6:6-8) tells us that ants are exceedingly wise. They are not strong, but they unify together to prepare for each winter. It is amazing to see a line of ants carrying food or traveling to food. They are uniformed and working together to finish their work. That is, until some punk kid like me came and messed with them.

I always had to break the line. I think it is just a boy thing.

Unity is something that is hard to come by no matter what the situation is. Sure, there may be uniformity, but not necessarily unity.

What are some differences between uniformity and unity?

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Uniformity is like the grade school that requires school uniforms. There are certain clothes that the kids can wear, but each kid is still different. Recess is one place where their differences shine. Some may try to find trouble to get into while other are perfectly content with just sitting and reading a book during recess.

Unity, on the other hand, is working towards a goal with like passion and purpose. Maybe you've heard it said of a sports team that "they may not be the best, but they work as one." Unity is captured by comments like, "they are on the same page," "you can tell one and the other will know," or "they finish each other's sentences." Things like these capture the essence of unity.

But unity does not come naturally. It takes work.

Fortunately for us, Paul did not leave us hanging. All the while Paul has been stressing the need for unity. He has already written about serving together and being one spirit or body. Now Paul has come to the recipe for unity. He lays out four ingredients for unity which will draw a group of believers together.

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

Most glance over these few verses in order to get to the next section concerning

"Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer."  
Proverbs 30:25

*“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”  
Philippians 2:1-2*

Christ. The following verses are amazing, but if we jump to verse five we miss the intro to what Paul is saying. Paul gives these four ingredients and then shows how Christ is the perfect example. It is a classic teaching tool of providing the big picture in chapter one, breaking down the parts here, and then giving an example in the following verses. So enough talk, let's see these ingredients.

The first ingredient is Exhortation and encouragement. The Greek word is *parakiesis* and is difficult to translate because it carries so much meaning. It combines two thoughts from the Hebrew, comfort and counsel. In the Old Testament there would be those who would comfort others in times of need and then there would be others who would give advice or wisdom. The Greek word is often translated as counselor.

Paul calls the church to take the opportunity to encourage and exhort one another. There are times when you will need to put your arm around a believer. Other times you may need to exhort or confront a brother. This is the idea of community accountability. It is taking the responsibility to lift each other up and help each other out.

How can exhortation build unity?

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When was the last time someone exhorted or encouraged you? How did you feel?

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Comfort is the second ingredient. Here the Greek paints a picture of someone coming alongside of another. My wife tells me that sometimes she just needs a good cry. I am still figuring out what a good cry is, but during those times I need to sit and listen. I need to be a comfort to her. I may not even need to say anything; just being there is comfort.

How does it make you feel when someone notices you are hurting?

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How can comfort lead to unity?

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The third ingredient is one that many of us find easy. It is Fellowship. This is a word that pops up in Paul's writings on a regular basis. Here the fellowship is governed by the Spirit. This means we are not trying to find common ground like favorite team, number of kids, age, or anything like that. Our fellowship can take place because we have the same Spirit within us.

Sometimes it is difficult to start a conversation with someone. It is hard to start to connect. Here is a tip. Since we are talking about fellowship and our common bond is Christ, ask them how they came to know Christ as their Savior. I never grow tired of hearing someone's story.

How can fellowship promote unity?

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*“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

*Philippians 2:3-4*

Why is fellowship necessary for the believer?

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I hope you realize that every believer needs fellowship. Paul just finished talking in the previous verses about the team. He used an athletic term and a battle term to describe unity. A believer need not live alone, but in fellowship with one another. The likely place to find it is a local Bible-believing church.

Are you involved in one?

The fourth ingredient is Compassion. Compassion provides the cohesiveness for unity. Jesus showed compassion often and Paul is calling the church to show compassion for each other.

These are the four ingredients, but like with any recipe there are directions for the ingredients.

Paul explains in verse 2 that these ingredients need to be balanced.

How could imbalance tear at unity?

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If someone is deep on the exhortation side and sparse on the comfort side they will seem judging, yet too much fellowship and not enough exhortation bring no accountability. These ingredients need balance.

They also need to be heavily seasoned with humility according to verse three. Each of these ingredients can happen without humility, but humility is what makes the ingredients pure.

Paul then says in verse four it is a conscious effort. It takes work to think of others. It takes work to add these ingredients in a balanced way. Unity does not just happen.

This is true for the church, for marriage, and for any other team that you wish to be unified. These principles are principles for life, but before you think it is too impossible, Paul gives the finished product of what it looks like to have humility.

Jesus Christ.

Unity is possible, and when you think of the alternatives unity is your best option, so start working for it.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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