

ONE IN CHRIST EPHESIANS 4 BEYOND SUNDAY

9.17.23

Use these questions in groups or by yourself to consider the message series, One in Christ. This week focuses on the character of a believer.

1. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2) What are the marks of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? Paul lists four characters: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing. What do they mean?

In inverse order:

Bearing one another in love: The New Living Translation says, "making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." NLT suggests that we make room for the foibles of others. No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone sins. How do we live with each other in a manner that reflects the values of the Kingdom of God? One approach is to hold a mirror up to the person who has fallen short of God's expectations, like a prophet calling out people. Another is to "make allowances" for the other person. Do I tend to point out people's faults? Or do I tend to "make allowances?" This isn't to say that we excuse someone's behavior. It is to say that we forgive. Are we a forgiving kind of person? Please note that the word love is agape: God's very special kind of forgiving love.

Be patient: Patience is difficult. And when we need to practice patience, it means that we are probably more frustrated than ever. Henri Nouwen, noted Catholic theologian, said, "A waiting person is a patient person. "The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us." When you are facing trying times that demand patience, ask yourself, "What is God trying to teach me? What am I supposed to learn?"

Gentle: Here are some synonyms: kind, forgiving, benevolent, kind, compassionate, tender, moderate. Which of these words mark your character?

Humble: C.S. Lewis wrote: "True humility is not about thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." Are you predisposed to think about others? Or yourself? In what situations are you prone to defend yourself or assert yourself? Is it about your ego? Correction?

2. In Luke 14:7-11, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet where a man sits in a place of honor. Here is a parable in the gospels about the man who automatically sits at the head table without invitation and a man who sits at the lowest place. The man who sat at the head table was asked to vacate his seat, and the man who sat at the lowest place was given a more honorable seat.

In what ways are you like the person who automatically sits at the head table? At the lowest place? What might God be teaching you about your own sense of propriety and humility?