



UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Called To This | 9.6.26

Steve Frissell

(The following text is automatically generated and has not been edited)

Steve Frissell 0:00

Well, a couple weeks ago, we got to do something really awesome. We got to celebrate 50 years of Bentry, 50 years of let. Yeah, we can clap for that. It was it was a sweet, sweet weekend, a sweet day. It was 50 years of us celebrating, or it was us celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness, of lives being changed, families finding hope, 50 years of people walking across the street and going around the world. 50 years of reshaping our world with the love of Jesus. And it was such a joy to get to do that all together. And one of the things that's really sweet about taking time to look back is it also gives us space to look ahead and look forward and ask and wonder and even dream and have time to talk about who, as we look to the future, who is the church that we want to be as we step into this future together, and that's what this series has been all about. This is a short little series called to this, and Livin and I are wanting to take some time to talk about the way in which we Bentry want to walk into the future together. We're walking through four different things. These are four, not just values. They're actually four things that is like a guiding way. We we call it how we live. It's our ethos. It's the the way in which we want to function as a faith family as we step into the future together. Liban introduced all of these in the very beginning of the calendar year, and now we're taking some time to hop in each of them in more depth. So we're talking about being compelled by love, having unity and diversity, being gifted with purpose, and living sent on mission. Last week, Levin spent some time talking about what it looks like for us to be compelled by love. That love stays, love speaks, and love serves. Today we're going to be talking about unity and diversity. And in this series, Liber and I were sitting in Ephesians chapter four. So you can take your Bibles. You can flip there. If you've got an actual paper Bible, go ahead and flip a couple pages before that and put a mark at Ephesians two because we're going to go there in a moment. But we're using Ephesians four really as the anchor text for this series, because Paul in this section of the letter says, "This is the way in which you are to walk, worthy of the calling that you have, and he lists out a way in which we are to live. And it's in this passage that we see these four things showing up over and over again: that we're people who are compelled by love, that we live in unity in our diversity, that we are recognizing that we are gifted with a purpose and we live sent on mission. So we're going to go ahead and hop into Ephesians chapter four and see as Paul is explaining this walking worthy of the calling, what it looks like and how we are to live that. So with all humility and gentleness, we're walking worthy. We're walking in humility and gentleness with patience, bearing with one another and love, and this is what we looked at last week as Liban led us, and we want to make making every opportunity, or I'm sorry, making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. This is what we're thinking about today: is that we want to be a people who live in unity, unity in our diversity, that we keep and recognize this, and this live in this bond of peace. As Paul is writing, he's writing to this church in Ephesus, and he's calling them to this. And this is a church of Jew and Gentile. He's saying, "Hey, I want you to live in and keep this unity. And he describes this unity with a whole lot of ones. You can see what it looks like, what unity looks like, when you think about all the ones that we have and how we live. So look at look at all the ones that Paul lists. He says, "There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope at your calling.

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There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. This is what unity looks like. It's the one living as one body with one faith, with one Lord, stepping into this one calling all together. Now I want to back up again to verse three because there's a unique little word here that I want us to put our attention on. When Paul is calling them to unity, look, he says, "I want you to make every effort to keep the unity, which is interesting because he didn't say, "I want you to make every effort to work toward unity, to strive for unity, to create unity, to manufacture unity. He says, "I want you to make every effort to keep the unity, which means they already have it. Which leads us to

wonder where did it come from, how did it start, and if we take some time and think about this church. We also should marvel at how do they even have it. If you're not familiar with the challenge that it was for the first century church, Jew and Gentile are now coming together in one church, and Jews and Gentiles-the amount of difference between them. We don't really understand, like when we think of division in this world. A lot of times, what we think of just because of the world we're in right now is we think a lot about politics and Republicans and Democrats and how they just can never seem to quite get along. The amount of difference between Jew and Gentile makes the difference between Republican and Democrat look laughable. I mean, for Jews and Gentiles, think about this: they are different ethnicities, they have different cultures. Prior to trusting Jesus, they had different religious backgrounds, and there was years, generations of hostility between the two. The Jews, they had the law, right? We're pretty familiar with this understanding that this old covenant that they lived in, it was this list of standards, a way in which they were to live, to prove to the world that they are distinctly different, and to prove to the world who God is. And in all of this law, these regulations and commands, it had so many things: ways in which they had to keep their hair, the kind of clothes they would wear, the food they could eat, the food that they couldn't eat. They were to do Sabbath and take a whole day and rest. They had a whole system of religion and sacrifices in a temple that was all unique and distinct to them. They lived distinctly different. And about 200 BC, there was this challenging moment for the Jews, where Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a Seleucid ruler, decided to try and eradicate everything about the Jewish tradition and custom and put an end to it. He made it illegal for them to do their sacrifices. He made it illegal for them to keep their regulations. It was illegal for them to do all the things that was what made them distinctly different. Their Jewish culture was being robbed away from them. The way in which they were being had always worshiped was being robbed and taken away from them. And not only was he trying to like control them with policy, he also actually had people come and go to the temple where they worshiped and took all the treasures, anything of worth and value that they had in their temple was robbed from the temple. And he didn't just stop there; he had an idol brought in there, and they begin to make sacrifices to false gods at the temple where Yahweh has always dwelled. Think about what this was like for the Jews. Everything they had known, everything that was about the way in which they lived, has been now being persecuted, and they're being oppressed, and it's actually being taken away from them. This is what led to the Maccabean revolt, and they went in, and they had this long battle for them to fight for their independence. Now, for us to understand what this was like for the Jews, we're going to look at Maccabees one. Now, I know that's not in our inspired scripture, all right.

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So, but this is between Old Testament and New Testament, and it gives us some cultural context, some understanding for what it was like for Jews and the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, so Maccabees one. In here we see he and Tioius Epiphanes took the silver and the gold, the costly vessels. He took also the hidden treasures that he found, and this was all from the temple. He took them all and he went into his own land. He shed much blood, spoke with great arrogance. Israel mourned deeply in every community. All of Israel was mourning, and look at how this describes the mourning that they were experiencing. Rulers and elders groaned. Young women and young men became faint. The beauty of women faded. Every bridegroom took up the lament. She sat at the bridal chamber and was mourning. Even the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame. What this did to the Jewish people was so devastating, such a significant trauma and pain for them, that they couldn't see beauty anywhere. That even on the best days, they had nothing to celebrate. They felt like they were clothed and covered with shame. So they revolt, they fight back, and they fight for their independence, and they get it. But then it's short-lived because in just 100 years later, Rome becomes the big empire, and Pompey the Great leads a Roman army into Jerusalem. There's a three-month battle where 1000s of people die, and eventually Rome takes control of Jerusalem again. The Gentiles come in and oppress the Jews, and not only did they take over Jerusalem, Pompey the Great, after he has this victory, he goes in, walks right into the temple, right where they worshiped, walked into the whole. Of holies, you may remember this. The Holy of Holies. This is the place where the high priest would put a rope around his waist because he might die in the presence of God and need his body pulled out. Pompey, a Gentile Roman officer, walks right into the Holy of Holies, looks around, and thinks how pathetic is this people with a pathetic God that isn't even in here? He desecrates the temple. This is just just decades before Jesus coming onto the scene, and so as we fast forward just a little bit in time, Jews and Gentiles. Now they're coming to find Jesus, and these first-century churches are Jews and Gentiles now sitting together in worship. And the hostility that the Jews had for Gentiles-it went both ways. The Gentiles, when they would look at the Jews, they're like, "Your traditions, all the things that you do-it's ridiculous. You think you're so much, but you are nothing. Both groups look down on each other so much, with such hatred and disdain and hostility. And then Jew and Gentile find Jesus, and now they're in community together. This was one of the biggest challenges that the first-century church is facing. This is a challenge that the church in Ephesus is facing. And Paul's saying to this church, "Keep the unity. How could they have it? What does that mean? That these two groups, with so much

division and hatred, already have unity. Well, for us to understand what Paul is saying to this church in Ephesus, we have to back up just a couple chapters and look at chapter two. What he's already said to both Jew and Gentile, and what Jesus has done. And here's just one other thing I want to remind you of as we hop into this part of the letter. Ephesians, this letter, this was not written to us, but it was written for us. There was an original audience that was not Bentry Bible hanging out here today. There was an original group of people who were real people who were in Ephesus, who were the church, and this was a letter that Paul wrote and was brought to them and delivered to them. And the way it was delivered is they all were gathered together, and there was a person who read the letter to them. So just think about that as we're walking through this Jew and Gentile who trying to figure out how to do this faith thing together are hearing these words? Here we go, Ephesians 211.

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So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcised by those called the circumcised, which is done in the flesh by human hands. Think about it. All right, the person's reading the letter out loud. Jews and Gentiles in the room, and he speaks directly to the Gentiles. They're thinking about, okay, these are Paul's words to us, and Paul says, "Hey, Gentiles, I want you to remember when you were called the uncircumcised. Which this is an insult. This is something Jews said, looking down on the Gentiles. He's like, "Hey, I want you to remember that. Which, do you think that was awkward in the room at the moment? I would imagine it was right that Gentiles are like, "Oh, I remember. Paul's calling them to remember something much deeper, though. He doesn't want them just to think about the insult. He's inviting the Gentiles and indirectly the Jews to remember something much more significant, something much deeper. Look at what what comes next. What he says as they're remembering at that time, you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, you are without hope and without God and the world. He's wanting them to remember where they came from. There was a time where you were without Christ, which meant you were excluded from the citizenship. You were foreigners to the covenants. Ultimately, though, this is what you didn't have. You are without hope, and you are without God. This is what your existence used to be. So, Paul's trying to get all of them to recognize, both Jew and Gentile. Yes, there was this distance between the two of you, but ultimately, the greater tragedy was the distance that both of you had from God. You were separated from God because you were not yet in Christ. It was what Jesus had to do to bring all of you to Him. That's what you needed most. What Paul is saying is, I want you to remember grace. I want you. Remember what's been given to you, what God's done for you, and who Jesus is to you. I want you to remember where you came from and what you've been restored to. I want you to remember that you didn't have hope, and now you have hope. And here's why I think Paul wanted to make sure that they were thinking about this in this moment is because for the Jews and for the Gentiles, they had their traditions, they had their world that they lived in, and because it was the world that they lived in, it was the water that they swam in. This is what seemed right to them, so they would look to the other culture as less than my culture is better than yours is less than, and this is a temptation that we face too. Like for me, my generation. I have a way in which I see the world because of the time that I grew up in. Every generation has some things about themselves, and it's the the things and the ways in which we view our world. It's also true about our the cultures that we have and our ethnicities. There's so many things about the world that we've grown up in. It's the water we swim in, and we see it like this is this is what makes sense. This is what I've grown up in, and then what I can like accidentally believe is that this is right. This is the right way, not just a way. This is the right way. This is how everyone should live. I start to think that my priorities and my preferences are right, and I can think that other cultures or other generations, that their priorities aren't, and I can unintentionally see me as better than my culture as higher than, and this is what can make diversity so difficult, is because when we're in proximity with someone from a different culture, and their beliefs and the way they're experiencing Jesus challenges our assumptions or our beliefs, now we have this cognitive dissidence. So we can find ourselves needing to separate. This is part of what makes diversity so hard, and so Paul is calling them to recognize what grace has done, because grace eliminates any better than thinking that makes diversity so hard.

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So Paul says, "Hey, I want you to remember. I want you to remember what your life was like without hope and without God, and recognize the grace that you've been given. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, remember where you came from. That's the first of three movements in this passage that we're looking at today. It starts with him saying, "I want you to remember. Now we're going to look at the second movement in this passage of Ephesians two. He transitions. Paul says, "In but now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Now we're moving from here. I want you to think about where you came from and the grace you've received to. Now I want you to look at what Jesus has done and look. It says Jesus has brought you near. You didn't find Him. You didn't seek Him out. You didn't earn your way. You've been

brought near to Jesus by the blood Of Christ, and Paul goes into a list of all the things that Jesus has done for Jew and Gentile. Look at the next thing he says. He says, "For He, Jesus, is our peace. He is our peace? Jesus didn't proclaim peace. He didn't offer peace. He didn't suggest a strategy for peace. He is peace. So when we find unity around our agreement, if our unity is based on agreement, well, then as soon as there is any disagreement, unity falls apart. If unity is around our similarities, any time a difference shows up, unity falls apart. But when unity is based on Jesus, then we have something, someone keeping us unified that is far greater than anything that makes us distinct. So Jesus is our peace, and here's what He did: the one who is peace made both groups won and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. And for Jews who were hearing this letter read, they may have thought about when they were in the temple. There was this outer edge of the temple where all were welcome, but then as you got closer to the center of the temple, the holy of Holies, where God was, there was a wall that separated the Gentiles. They couldn't go any further, and on that wall was a sign letting the Gentiles know: if you move further in, it may cost you your life. What Paul is wanting everyone who's hearing this letter to hear is that this dividing wall of hostility, all the generations of pain and frustration and wounding-it's all been taken down. There is no longer a wall of hostility between you, Jew and Gentile. Okay, what else we have here? This is the next thing that we see Jesus. In his flesh, in his body, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and express in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from two, resulting in peace. In his body, he made one new body, and so he makes this new man. Jews didn't become Gentiles. Gentiles did not become Jews. He took both and he made something new. Neither of them, neither of them assimilated to. Jesus made something new, right? And and this is what's so beautiful is Jesus redefined us. What's your us? It might be a politic. It might be a generation. It could be something we all have an us that we can find ourselves landing in. The Jews had an us. The Gentiles had an us. And what Jesus did is He redefined us. We're a new humanity in Christ. There's a new us, and our deepest belonging is not in all the other things that we find us in. Our deepest belonging is in Jesus Christ. Now, all the things that made Jew and Gentile still existed; they were still distinctly different. But there was a new us. So, what that means is your culture matters, your story matters, your ethnicity matters, your lived experience matters. All of that matters, and we stay who we are as we enter into one new us in Christ. Here's what else Jesus did. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, by which he put hostility to death. So he's reconciled us to him. He's reconciled us to each other, and He has taken the hostility and put an end to it.

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Hostility has been put to death, and He proclaimed. He He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away, and to you who were near. For through Him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. This is what Jesus has done: is He's reconciled us. All those things that He's told them to remember was all redone and undone in Jesus Christ. We have a family. We have a citizenship. We have belonging. We've been reconciled. We have hope. We have God because we're in Christ. This is what He wanted the Jew and the Gentile to hear. And then Paul steps into the next little movement of this section of the passage that we're looking at. We go from I want you to remember, remember where you came from. Here's what Jesus has done, and here's how we live. Look at what the next part says here. So then, now we are. This is the way in which we live. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and the members of God's household. Liban taught this passage a couple of years ago, and I learned something new in this passage as he taught all of us on it. That there's this interesting thing that Paul does here. He has three metaphors, and there's a progression in them. The first metaphor is now as this new new creation, this new new people, we are fellow citizens, Jew and Gentile, you are fellow citizens in the kingdom, following the same king. And a citizen, citizens share an identity. We share the identity of being citizens of this kingdom, following this king. This is our identity. So now, Jew and Gentile, and all their differences, and all that stuff, all that stuff is still true, but now what they share is an identity. But we can be citizens of a place, of an organization, like of a country, and not really do life together, though. So it progresses from Citizenship to family. This is not only are you citizens; you are also members of God's household. Just a second ago, we were looking at the verse that says that we are God's family. We all share the same father, which means we are sister and brother under one father, Jew and Gentile. You are now family, and while citizens share an identity, family shares a life. Like you're doing life together. It's in a family where you find your deepest belonging. And one of the things that Lindsay and I so want for our kids is that when they grow up in our home, and not just like the physical house, but in our home, the family is that this will be a place where they feel their deepest sense of belonging, that they can be their most unhinged self and know that they still belong. You're not just welcome here; you belong here. Now, unfortunately, they are growing up and becoming adults and not leaving. So I'm rethinking. That parenting strategy, but it's in the family where you find belonging, and this is what Paul is saying is true of the church. Jew and Gentile, you and me, we are a family. This is where we belong together. See, just diversity by itself says who's in the room, but unity in diversity pushes us to go: Are we acting and living like we belong to

one another in this room? And Paul moves from this metaphor of family and progresses to something else. Here's the next one: You're built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. In Him, the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him, you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. So first, we're a citizen and we share an identity. Then He goes to family and we share life together. And then He says, "Now he goes. It's his metaphor of a temple, and as a temple, you share purpose as the dwelling place of God. You are God's temple. Now, for these first-century Ephesian church members, what they would have thought of when Paul goes to temple language, is the temple that was right there in Ephesus, the temple of Artemis.

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There's a single pillar that still that was actually reconstructed, and and so that you can get an idea of where the ruins were and what it might have been like. This is what's left today, but here's an artist rendition of what it likely looked like at the day when Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians is a massive temple that dominated the landscape. You couldn't help but see it as you go through Ephesus. So, with that in mind, Jew and Gentile in the in the Ephesian church together, Paul says, "Hey, I'm building you. I'm putting you together to be my temple, my dwelling place. What he's saying is, I'm not you like putting you you as an individual to be the temple. It's you together, all of you, brick by brick, person by person, each one a little different, being built together, put together to be the temple of God, where we don't just coexist, but we actually lean into each other and need the other to real unity and diversity, sharing this purpose as the dwelling of God. What this means is that when the Jews used to live distinctly different for people to see what God is all about. Now it's here's here we are as His temple. The world gets to see who Jesus is because of our unity and our diversity. The way we can be distinctly different now isn't following the commands and the regulations. It's about us being beyond our differences and having unity in our diversity, and unity and diversity goes so deep as a faith community. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to just look around the room, like for real. Look around the room. Don't look at me anymore. Look around the room and look who's in the room. Look at who's here. We've got so many generations in the room, so many ethnicities, so many cultures, so much beauty in this room, and when I look around this room, I think you and I both look around the room and we go, "I'm so glad you're here. Like I'm so glad that you're here. Those of you who are different than me, I'm so glad you're here. What Paul is describing in Ephesians and what we have the opportunity to be is a step past that. For us to look at people who are different than us and not go, "I'm glad you're here, but to look at the people who are different and go. I need you here. I need you in my life. See, those of you who are older than me, I need you in my life. I I need your lived out experience. You have an understanding of God's faithfulness that will help me live in more patience and trust in Jesus. You've got wisdom and life perspective that I desperately need. There is so much I don't know, and I don't know what I don't know. I need those of you in the room who are younger than me, because you're asking questions I'm not asking, and your curiosity and your willingness to step into the hard questions inspires me and challenges me, and I need you in my life. I'm grateful for the people who are younger in my life who've shaped and changed my thinking in very good ways. Those of you who are here and you have a different culture than me, I need you in my life because as I walk with you, I get to see where I'm confusing Christianity and my culture. As I walk with you, I get to actually see a bigger, better, fuller version of what the kingdom really is all about. I need people. I need those of you who have lived a really different life than me. You have different life experiences. You read the same Bible as me, but you will see things that I won't see because of what Jesus has done in your life that's uniquely different than my life. Those of you who have special needs, I need you in my life, not because I need a charity case to make me feel better about myself. I need you in my life because I need genuine, real, authentic friendships, and you do those beautifully, and I get a better understanding of what courage really looks like, and the way you live your life and walk with Jesus.

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We need people who are different than us in our lives. See what what Paul said to the Ephesians, and what's true for them, and that is true for us. If I could summarize this whole thing, is that because we belong to Jesus, we belong with one another. Because we belong to Him, because of everything He's done, and how He's made us new, and because we belong to Him, we belong with one another in all of our diversity, and so as we live our lives with people who are different than us, the thing we have to recognize is He's not just putting different people around us; He's building us. He's making us new by the people who are different who are around us. I need people who are different. Go to the next slide for me. I need people who are different in my life because it's those people that God is using to build me. God isn't just merely putting different people around you; He's using different people to build you. Your life and my life is richer, fuller, and we experience more flourishing when we live in unity and our diversity. When we move beyond proximity to vulnerability, so the question for all of us today, for us to think about Bentry, is this: Who have you been content to sit beside that Jesus may inviting you to

actually belong to? Who is it that we've been content to have proximity with? That Jesus is saying, "No, I actually want you to move from proximity to vulnerability. I want you to live like what's actually true of you, and that you belong with one another. Because we belong to Jesus, we belong with one another, and we can take a deeper step into and not just experience diversity, but unity in our diversity. Pentry, hear me. I love what Jesus is doing. When I look over the last five years, who we're becoming and the people that are here, it gets me so excited. The generational diversity, the ethnic, the culture diversity, the fact that we have political diversity among us-I love all the diversity. It is so beautiful. And may we be a people that isn't just content with the diversity happening in this room, but this diversity grows to our small groups and our serving teams. That the diversity grows into the our kitchen tables, and while we sit around and have meals together, that this diversity grows, and the people we share our story with, that our diversity grows, and the people whose burdens we carry and who carry our burdens. I can't wait to see what Jesus has, because as we are a people where generations don't just mock or make fun of each other, tolerate each other, but actually learn from one another, as we're people who recognize the beauty of different cultures and understand the deeper, fuller perspective of the kingdom, as we can be a people who let those minor, secondary issues that. Divide us, politics, and all the nonsense. When we can get past all of that, and we can look to one another and go, "Sister, brother, I love you. I need you. We belong with each other. That's the kind of church that is distinctly different. That lets everyone see how good Jesus really is, because finding community and our similarity is easy, and the world does it over and over again. But we have an opportunity and a place to be uniquely and distinctly different. We don't just have to find affinity and preferences; we can find affinity in the person of Jesus and stand out in this world to where it can only be explained as Jesus. May we be a people that looks around a room, sees people who are different, will look at them and say, "I'm glad you're here, and I need you here. I need you in my life. We're going to take a moment now, and we're going to pause here in a second. We're going to worship through song, and we're going to take communion together. But before we do, I want us to just to be still for a moment and let the Spirit speak to us in our thoughts.

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I want us just to not run to the next thing, and our and our brains go to the next thing, but just sit, pause, and be still to contemplate and think about Jesus, who He is, how loved you are, and what He has for you, Jesus, speak to us now. We're taking a moment just to be still, to pause, to not run to the next thing, so that we can hear Your sweet, loving encouragement and kind voice. Would you speak to us right now? Let our mind wander to the places you want it to wander to, and wherever our mind goes, help us to ask the question, Jesus: What are you showing me with what I'm thinking about right now? What do you want to reveal to me about myself and about you?