

Small Group Study Guide

"Toxin and Prayer: Building Unity in the Church"

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by praying for open hearts, honest conversation, and the Holy Spirit's guidance as you discuss maintaining unity and health in your church family.

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

This week's sermon addressed two critical aspects of church life: dealing with toxic situations and the power of prayer. As we continue our book study on becoming a revived church, we're learning that healthy internal relationships are essential to effective external ministry.

Ice Breaker Question: Share a time when prayer helped you through a difficult relationship situation.

Key Scripture Passages

- **Ephesians 4:30-32** - Avoiding toxicity and practicing forgiveness
 - **Philippians 4:6-7** - The power of prayer over anxiety
 - **Matthew 18:15-17** - Biblical conflict resolution
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Discussion Questions

Part 1: Understanding Toxicity in the Church (20-25 minutes)

1. **The Reality of Our Humanness**
 - The pastor said, "When we are saved, when Christ comes into our heart, he does not eradicate our humanness." How does this reality affect our expectations of ourselves and others in the church?
 - What does it mean that we still have "a toehold of humanness" even after salvation?
2. **Identifying Toxic Patterns**
 - What are some symptoms of toxic behavior mentioned in the sermon? (Bitterness, holding grudges, spreading negativity, always seeing the glass half-empty)

- How is a "critic" different from a "toxic member"? Why is this distinction important?
- 3. The Spread of Toxicity**
- The pastor used the illustration of yeast spreading through dough. Have you witnessed how one negative attitude can spread through a group? Share your observations without naming names.
 - What makes us vulnerable to being influenced by toxic members?

Part 2: Biblical Conflict Resolution (20-25 minutes)

- 4. Addressing Problems Directly**
- According to Matthew 18:15-17, what is the first step in addressing a conflict with another believer?
 - Why do you think we often avoid this first step? What fears or concerns hold us back?
- 5. The Danger of Ignoring Problems**
- The pastor said, "Have anybody ever seen a relationship problem get better by ignoring it?" Why do we sometimes choose to "sweep it under the rug"?
 - What happens to our witness to the world when we have unresolved conflicts in the church?
- 6. Self-Examination**
- The pastor challenged us to ask: "Are you always seeing the glass half empty? Is the idea not good because you didn't come up with it first?"
 - How can we honestly assess whether we're contributing to toxicity rather than unity?

Part 3: The Power of Prayer (20-25 minutes)

- 7. Prayer as the Antidote**
- How does Philippians 4:6-7 instruct us to handle anxiety and conflict?
 - What does it mean to pray "with thanksgiving" even in the midst of problems?
- 8. Jesus Praying for Us**
- The pastor reminded us that Jesus is currently interceding for us at the Father's right hand. How does knowing this change your perspective on your current challenges?
 - What does it mean that Jesus has "prayed for us" when the devil wants to "sift" us?
- 9. Corporate Prayer**
- Why is it important to have dedicated prayer warriors in the church?
 - How can consistent prayer protect the church from division and toxicity?

Key Takeaways

1. **We are still human** - Salvation doesn't remove our humanity, but the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome our fleshly tendencies.
 2. **Toxicity spreads** - Like yeast through dough or poison through a nervous system, unchecked bitterness and negativity will spread through a church body.
 3. **Ignoring problems doesn't solve them** - Biblical conflict resolution requires direct, loving confrontation following the Matthew 18 model.
 4. **Unity is essential for mission** - We cannot effectively reach the world for Christ when we're divided internally.
 5. **Prayer is powerful** - Prayer connects us to the most powerful Being in the universe and provides supernatural peace that guards our hearts and minds.
 6. **God is relational** - The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the model for our relationships with one another.
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge (Choose 1-2):

Individual Actions:

- **Self-Inventory:** Spend time in prayer this week asking God to reveal any toxic attitudes you may be harboring (bitterness, unforgiveness, negativity, jealousy).
- **Make It Right:** If the Holy Spirit brings someone to mind with whom you have unresolved conflict, take the Matthew 18:15 step this week—go to them privately and seek reconciliation.
- **Prayer Commitment:** Commit to praying daily for unity in your church and for any specific conflicts you're aware of (without gossip).

Group Actions:

- **Become a Prayer Warrior:** If you feel called, let your pastor know you want to be part of the church's prayer warrior team.
- **Study Matthew 18:** As a group, commit to learning and following the biblical model for conflict resolution.
- **Accountability Partnership:** Partner with one other person in the group to pray for each other's relationships and check in on progress toward reconciliation.

Reflection Questions for Personal Journaling:

1. Am I currently harboring any bitterness or unforgiveness toward anyone in my church family?
2. Do I tend to be a critic or an encourager? How can I shift toward building up rather than tearing down?
3. What situations in my life am I anxious about instead of taking to God in prayer?
4. How can I be part of the solution to unity rather than contributing to division?

Closing Exercise (10 minutes)

Silent Confession and Prayer: Take 3-5 minutes of silent prayer where each person can:

- Confess any toxic attitudes to God
- Ask for forgiveness for any relationships you've harmed
- Request God's peace that "surpasses all understanding"
- Pray for unity in your church body

Group Prayer: Close by having each person pray a one-sentence prayer for the person on their right, asking God to help them be a peacemaker and unifier in the church.

Looking Ahead

Next week, we'll continue our study on becoming a revived church. Come prepared to discuss how you applied this week's lessons and what God revealed to you about your role in maintaining church unity.

Homework: Read chapters 4 and 5 of the book study if you haven't already, and be ready to share insights.

Leader Notes

- **Be Sensitive:** This topic may bring up real, current conflicts. Create a safe space where people can share without gossip or naming names.
- **Model Vulnerability:** As the leader, be willing to share your own struggles with maintaining unity and dealing with conflict biblically.
- **Redirect Gossip:** If someone begins to share specific details about conflicts involving others, gently redirect them to focus on their own heart and actions.
- **Encourage Action:** Don't let this just be a discussion—encourage real steps toward reconciliation and prayer.
- **Follow Up:** Check in with group members during the week, especially those who committed to difficult conversations.

Discussion Questions

How can we practically shift our church focus from being a cruise ship congregation to becoming soldiers on an aircraft carrier, actively conducting missions in our communities?

In what ways might we be unknowingly grieving the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, and how can we become more sensitive to His leading?

What are the dangers of allowing bitterness to take root in our hearts, and how does unforgiveness act as a toxin that spreads throughout the church body?

Why do you think many Christians never pray with another person to receive Christ, and what fears or obstacles prevent us from fulfilling the Great Commission?

How can we distinguish between being a healthy critic who offers constructive input and being a toxic member who spreads negativity and division?

What does it mean to follow the Matthew 18 process of conflict resolution, and why is it important to address issues privately before involving others?

How can we cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving even in the midst of trials, trusting that God is working before we see the results?

In what ways does prayer connect us to the most powerful being in the universe, and how should this truth change our approach to problems we cannot solve on our own?

Why is unity within the church family so critical to our witness to the outside world, and how does internal conflict hinder our evangelistic effectiveness?

What does it mean that God has prayed for us and continues to intercede on our behalf, and how should this truth impact our confidence in facing spiritual battles?