

Transformation U Week 4: **Building Our Resiliency**

Proverbs 3:3–6 • Ephesians 4:1–7, 11–16

Eph. 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Eph. 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

...

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **12** to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Eph. 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Study

Context: The city of Ephesus was one of the great cities of the Mediterranean in the first century, and home to one of the Ancient Wonders of the World, the Temple of Artemis. Paul helped to found this church—helping them receive the Holy Spirit—starting in the synagogue and then moving to a nearby amphitheater. Eventually, an attempt was made to run Paul out of town, claiming that he was trying to destroy the worship of Artemis—the economic, cultural and religious heart of the city. (Acts 19) Although some of its earliest members were part of the synagogue, many of this fellowship's members were Gentiles.

Letter: Ephesians is one of Paul's "prison letters," perhaps written in Rome when he was under house arrest. Paul wrote his letter to be read aloud to the people of the congregation in worship, and then they were passed around to other churches in the area and read aloud there too. The church in Ephesus was one of the centers of the Christian faith—along with Jerusalem, Rome and Antioch. This letter has a more general feel in places than some of his other, more personal letters, yet Paul includes beautiful worship, prayer and metaphors. Some of the themes also appear in Colossians and other letters as well, but find their fuller expression here. Because of Ephesians' very different, more general feel, some scholars

question whether Paul himself wrote this letter. If Paul wrote this letter, it dates in the early to mid 60s AD. If Paul is not the author, then a date later in the first century is likely, perhaps before 85 AD.

Themes: Paul's primary themes connect the Good News of Jesus Christ—his cosmic nature and personal love—with how a congregation is meant to live, love, work and play together. Ephesians also emphasizes how Jesus came to bring down the “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles, unifying them in Christ.

Immediate Context: In Chapter 3, Paul goes from talking about how great Paul is to praying for the Ephesians. In Chapter 4, Paul turns to the life together. Chapter 4 begins (verses 1–6) with explaining how unity is meant to be one of the defining characteristics of the life in Christ. Then Paul turns to our diversity (verses 7–11; see 1 Corinthians 12), explaining how that diversity finds its unity through service that builds up the church. Paul closes the passage by describing Christian maturity and the shared life of the Body with Christ as the Head of the Church.

Words, Phrases and Chunks

Grace (*charis*) — related to gift and joy. The undeserved blessing of God.

Gift (*doreas*) — gift or bounty; something granted, not taken

Ascended...descended — Paul's digression takes more time to unpack than we have today. He is quoting Psalm 68:18.

Apostles, prophets, etc (v. 11) — list of spiritual gifts, similar to the list in 1 Corinthians 12, though shorter. This list is shorthand for a much larger diversity of spiritual gifts present with God's people.

Apostles — ambassadors of Christ; lit. those sent; esp. to found churches where there are none and encourage churches where there are.

Prophets — in the OT, people sent by God to deliver a message from God; they are esp. sensitive to sin and evil in people and systems. Do they see the future? Perhaps they just understand how God works so well, that they can see where the spiritual problems are going to take people/systems.

Evangelists — proclaimers of Good News, esp. the Good News of Jesus Christ. Good at explaining Jesus so that others can receive Him.

Pastors — shepherds of God's people

Teachers — instructors

“To prepare God's people...” (v. 12) — the purpose of our gifts, our work and our play together! Our gifts are for equipping people for service and building up the fellowship.

Prepare (*exartizo*) — equip, fully qualify, make fully adequate.

God's people (*hagios*) — lit. the holy ones, saints. Used of all the members of the church. This is not a “holier than thou” holiness (which is prideful), but those who have accepted Christ's holiness, and are trying to become like Him.

Service (*diakonia*) — “waiting tables” like the first deacons in Acts 6. Ministry or serving are good translations here too.

May be built up — connected with the word for house; the relationship is similar to the connection between edification (the building up and learning) and edifice (what is built). Note the passive!

“until we all reach unity...” (v. 13) — how we know we have “arrived” at our goal...unity, knowledge, maturity, fullness.

Faith and knowledge — what unites us.

Faith (*pistis*) — belief and trust.

Knowledge (*gnosis*) — in Greek there are two words for know—*oida* and *ginosko*. *Oida* is head knowledge, and *ginosko* is personal or knowledge that helps us become.

Mature manhood — adulthood for our context, with implications of strength, power, wisdom and discernment. Mature can also mean perfect, ripe, finished, complete.

Measure — think like a measuring cup for cooking

Stature — like Jesus in His prime

Full — abundant and fruitful

“Then we will no longer...” (v. 14) — Maturity brings steadiness, peace and discernment.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love...” (v. 15–16) — At the heart of the gospel are truth, love, growth, relationship and serving.

Message:

The last several years one of the buzzwords out there has spawned all sorts of articles, papers and books on resilience and resilient systems. So what is resilience? What does it mean to be resilient? I think the basics of it are much easier to see. So could I get a couple volunteers?

3 Things — an egg, a stuffed animal, and a tennis ball

Can you make a prediction? Which one will bounce the highest? [We try dropping each of these from about shoulder height onto a hard flat surface. If the tennis ball is fresh, the tennis ball will win.]

Why do you think that is? [made of rubber, full of pressurized air, etc]

The egg and stuffed animal are the *least* resilient because they break or just lie there. The tennis ball is the most resilient because it bounced back the highest. The curious thing is that people can be resilient too. In their amazing book, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*, Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney write that resilience is “the ability to ‘bounce back’ after encountering difficulty.”¹ Psychology Today fills in the picture some: “Resilience is that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes. Psychologists have identified some of the factors that make someone resilient, among them a positive attitude, optimism, the ability to regulate emotions, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback. Even after misfortune, resilient people are blessed with such an outlook that they are able to change course and soldier on.”² What does that look and feel like? How many of you have ever felt like you have received a crushing blow—the loss of someone you love, an experience that

¹Steven M. Southwick and Dennis Charney, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 7.

²*Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/resilience>

made you question everything, a profound failure, or a pile of stress that lands on you all at once? Sometimes we feel like we are going to be the egg and go splat. Sometimes we feel like we are the stuffed animal and just lie there. What I think most of us wish we could do is to be like the tennis ball and bounce back. We would all like to be resilient. In our passage for today, we learn about Paul, a man whose faith helped him be resilient. What does Paul say are the secrets to resilience? How can those things help us?

The first key to resilience is unity grounded in embracing our differences. One day, a highway patrol woman pulled over a car for speeding. As the officer was writing the ticket, she noticed several machetes in the car. "What are those for?" she asked suspiciously. "I'm a juggler," the man replied. "I use those in my act." "Really? Show me," the officer demanded. The juggler took out the machetes and started juggling them; first three, then more until he was tossing seven at one time—overhand, underhand, behind the back—putting on a dazzling show in the breakdown lane of the highway and amazing the officer. Just then, another car passed by. The driver did a double take, and said, "My God. I've got to give up drinking! Look at the test they're giving now." In this one story, we capture the problem churches—including our church—have faced in the past, and also the solution God intends. One reason some people don't come to church is they are afraid people are going to ask them to do something really hard, perhaps something they don't want to do—don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to juggle machetes! The solution is to change how we think about ourselves and God, to stop for a moment and rethink why we are here and what we are hoping for. Think about the juggler in our story: for the juggler, what the officer has asked is really easy, a demonstration of something the juggler not only knows how to do but loves to do. I believe that's what God desires of each of us, living out our spiritual gifts in a way that we think is normal, but others look at and say, "Amazing!" But more importantly, we will be growing—deeper in our relationship with God, wider in our understanding of what it means to serve, stronger in our desire to walk with God. Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (vss. 3, 7) As we embrace each other's and our own giftedness, we find that we are in it together. Unity grounded in embracing our differences.

The second key to resilience is staying on mission. Anybody here get distracted? What are the kinds of things that distract people easily?

[Take responses from the congregation.]

And then I suppose there are those of us who are distracted by...oh...everything. I was watching a movie awhile back, and the villain was running from the hero. The villain kept throwing things in the hero's way—furniture, glass, dust, fruit—and then would try to take quick turns, jump through windows, jump over gaps between buildings. Each time, the villain would look back and there was the hero, still in hot pursuit. It was making the villain crazy! Staying focused on our mission is the key. Not distracted by obstacles, or confused by smoke screens, we stay in pursuit of our goal—growing up to be like Jesus. Paul writes, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Like the flexing of the tennis ball, the dynamic tension of unity that embraces differences helps us flex, adapt, and still be at peace with each other no matter the challenges we face. When we receive a challenge, solutions will come from different quarters, perhaps in ways different than we had in mind. Like the pressurizing of the tennis ball, when we stay on mission, we create a channel for God's strength to flow into us until we are pressurized, ready to bounce back. As Paul writes in Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) By embracing our differences and staying on mission, we build our own and our fellowship's resilience. As individuals and as a fellowship, we have great challenges ahead, and we will need stronger relationships with Jesus and each other to win through. Margaret Wheatley writes, "It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another."³ She adds, "There is one core principle for developing these relationships. People must be engaged in *meaningful work together* if they are to transcend individual concerns and develop new capacities."⁴ Bringing our giftedness to bear on the mission Christ has given us—to serve and to become. By God's grace and with each other's help, we won't just bounce back...we will bounce forward.

³Margaret Wheatley, "When Change Is Out of Control," *Writings*.
(www.margaretwheatley/articles/whenchangeisoutofcontrol.html).

⁴*Ibid.*