

Words, Wheat, and Weeds

Praying and Leading in Divisive Times

By Geoff Eckart

More than any time in our lifetime, the Church in America is more divided than ever. The Super Bowl proved this.

This was the year Super Bowl advertisers tried to avoid airing a commercial that would be seen as controversial. And no commercial emerged as controversial—except one. One commercial stood out and broke that rule. And everyone was talking about it.

The *He Gets Us* campaign produced what is known as the “Foot-washing” commercial, designed to get people talking about Jesus. And it worked. People not only talked about this commercial, but they also debated it from every angle you could imagine.

The reaction was divided, but in a way you may not expect. People who don’t favor the Christian faith were against it. No surprise there. But while many Christians liked it, many were opposed to it. I’ll admit, the amount of negativity from Christians towards this commercial surprised me. While some believers saw it as a great way of engaging in a cultural conversation about Jesus, other believers didn’t see it as a good representation of their Christian faith.

A Different Approach

This split reaction within the Church is indicative of the hyper-polarization that exists between believers in America. My friend Will Ford says, “God will use a united church to

reach a divided world.”

I agree! Oh, that the Bride of Christ would be united in love and purpose.

In addition to an already divided atmosphere, we are also in a presidential election year. Many are bracing for the worst when it comes to debates online and disagreements in our churches. In fact, one of my longtime online “friends” is permanently leaving all social media platforms to avoid these discussions altogether, solely because of the upcoming election.

Due to the “weather” surrounding the 2024 election and the “climate” of a longer-term cynicism enveloping our culture, a different approach is needed. What will unite us? Will marketing campaigns? Will social media strategies? Will events? Will theological agreements? Will strategic partnerships?

While all might help, they will fall woefully short. So, let me state the obvious.

Prayer Unites

Prayer is our best and most effective strategy to unite the Church. Here are three ways to pray and lead within your church in a divisive time:

1. Lift Up the Church to Others with Your Words.

If you’re reading this, you have a platform. Use it for building up the Church, not tearing her down. There’s no room for publicly criticizing the Church. Even with all of her (our) faults, she is still the Bride of Christ and the primary way God has chosen to show His love to the world.

Imagine saying to a friend of yours who is married, “I just posted on social media all the things I don’t like about your

wife because the world needs to know.”

I don't think that would bode well for the future of that friendship!

Remember the words of Jesus in John 17:20–23, where Jesus reveals His heart for the unity of His Bride:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Believers must be mindful that the world is listening to our words about the Church. Before every spoken or published word about the Church, we must carefully weigh the reality that those outside of faith are being influenced by what we are saying.

2. Lift Up the Church to God with Your Prayers.

I've lived in Grand Rapids, MI, for the last 25 years. Living in West Michigan, I've become accustomed to the non-collaborative ministry environment that exists there. God recently reminded me that although in the past and present this has been our “normal,” I should not settle for it staying that way in the future. And I've been personally praying for the people of God in West Michigan to unite in new and unprecedented ways.

Do you pray for unity in the Church locally, regionally, and nationally?

Praying for unity is needed now more than ever. As

intercessors, we must continue to keep this prayer for unity at the forefront of our hearts as we lift up prayers for the saints.

The greater the unity, the more effective the Church.

3. Work with the Wheat, Not the Weeds.

In Matthew 13:24–30, Jesus tells a parable about wheat and weeds.

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

“‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Workers discover weeds in their master’s crop and offer to remove them. But the master says no—that they should wait until the harvest. At that time, the weeds will be separated out. This story has a simple yet startlingly profound conclusion: *Don’t spend your energy on the weeds, but rather on the wheat.*

As I’ve pondered this parable, the ramifications of its

message seem revolutionary. What if we stopped focusing on what is wrong and instead put our efforts towards the good that God is growing?

An entire genre of ministry has emerged in the digital age that focuses on scandals and wrongdoings—the weeds—in the Church. Popular podcasts and YouTube channels are dedicated to pointing out faults in people’s teachings or how others are doing ministry “wrong” by their standards. Lots of people in the Church are basing their ministry on negativity towards others.

When it comes to leading in a divisive time, the question is this: Is our time better spent on weeds or wheat?

Unprecedented Times

I have hope for new wineskins of unity in the Church. I join the prayer and heart of Jesus for the Bride of Christ to find a unity we’ve never known.

In a time of unprecedented division, we must pray in unprecedented ways for unity in the Body of Christ.

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For further study on this theme, check out a Bible study written by Cynthia Hyle Bezek. You may also access the study at <https://prayerleader.com/issue-57-study-guide>. This is great for personal study or discussion with your small group.

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