

**GROWING
AS ONE**



**GOING
TO MANY**

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Study 1 · Ephesians 4:1-16

We Are...

Growing as One, Going to Many

In 2008, designer Thomas Thwaites tried to build a toaster from scratch. So, he dug his own iron, crafted his own electrical wires, and poured his own plastic coating. Nine months later, he plugged his attempt into a power point and... it overheated and melted in 5 seconds!

What Thomas could buy for \$10 at the shops, he couldn't make himself – even after 9 months of effort. The same is true for many other areas of our lives: Individually, we have some power but together, united behind the same goal, we are much more powerful.

Our church theme for this year is 'Growing as One, Going to Many' and it draws on this idea. As Christians, as a church, we are united in Christ. So, we grow together, putting aside our differences to become more like Christ and like one another. And we go together, living as Christ's ambassadors in every setting He calls us to.

But we have to be careful as we do that because our purpose is to glorify God, not to please ourselves. Therefore, we need to make sure that our growing and our going are based on God's truths and are for God's purposes. The passage we're looking at today – Ephesians 4:1-16 – shows us how this should be done.

No one who believes the gospel can go on living exactly as they were. The Apostle Paul starts his letter to the Ephesians by reminding them of how they have been granted a new status before God by faith in Jesus Christ (chapters 1-3). Then, he goes on to explain the practical ways that our new status in Christ should impact our lives (chapters 4-6).

He doesn't begin this second section by focusing on how we should live as individuals, but on how we should live together as one body. Our lives must be lived in Christ-formed, Spirit-filled community with other believers.

Church unity and Christian mission go hand in hand. They are inseparable one from the other.



Thought Starter

1) Identify one thing in your life that is falling apart.

What will it cost to put it back together and are you prepared to pay the price?

“ ”

Here in Ephesians 4, *‘Paul turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done to what we must be and do, from mind-stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living. The first standard that he emphasises is unity’.*

John Stott - *Ephesians: Building a Community in Christ*

“ ”



Opening Prayer

Based on the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-21

Dear Father,

We pray for our church, that we may be one. Just as you and the Lord Jesus are united as one, may we also be united together in you so that the world may believe that you have sent Jesus as the only one who can save us from sin.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) The first three verses are one long sentence in which Paul lists the characteristics that are essential if we're to 'live a life worthy of our calling'.

Read verses 1–3.

Write down each of the virtues listed in verses 2–3. Then, next to each virtue, write one practical way that it might be seen in our church life.

Have you ever experienced someone putting verse 3 into practice? If so, share the story.

3) Read verses 4–6.

Paul repeats the word “one” seven times in these verses. Three of them relate to God’s unity (“one Spirit”, “one Lord”, “one God and Father of all”).

What’s the relationship between those three “one”s and the other four “one”s that Paul mentions?

We’re not going to focus on verse 8 just now, but here’s a quick explainer in case it’s confusing you.

This verse is a quote from Psalm 68, which celebrates God’s victory over his enemies.

During Jesus’ time, it was sung during The Feast of Weeks – a time when people would bring gifts to the synagogue to thank God for his provision of all good things.

4) Unity within the church doesn't mean uniformity. Having spoken about what we share in common, Paul now turns to the different gifts we have been given by Christ individually.

Read **verses 7–12**.

What do these verses say about Jesus' authority to dispense gifts to his people?

What would you say to a Christian who wishes they'd been given different gifts by the Lord? (You might also want to check out Romans 12:4-6)

5) Read verses 11–13.

What's the purpose of the gifts Jesus distributes to his church?

Using these verses as a starting point, come up with your own definition of '*Christian maturity*'.

6) Read verses 14–16.

What impact can false teaching have on the unity and mission of the church?

What can we do to prevent this from happening to us?

7) How should we go about “speaking the truth in love” in our church life and personal lives?

How do we make sure that “speaking the truth in love” doesn’t become ‘speaking with arrogant superiority’?



Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be ‘Growing as One’ this year?

What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be ‘Going to Many’ this year?

“ ”

Union has an affiliation with others but no common bond that makes them one in heart. *Uniformity* has everyone looking and thinking alike. *Unanimity* is complete agreement across the board. *Unity*, however, refers to a oneness of heart, a similarity of purpose, and an agreement on major points of doctrine.

Charles R. Swindoll - *Hope Again*

“ ”



Making It Real For You

9) After reviewing the entire passage, what links do you see between unity, growth, and service?

How should that shape our church life and your contribution to it?



Closing Prayer

Finish with prayer, following the pattern below:

- Thank God that we are united to him and to one another through Jesus.
- Thank him for opportunities to express that unity through our church.
- Confess to God the ways that you've failed to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."
- Ask him to change you and to work within our church so that we might "grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

A short, somewhat cheeky, poem on Christian unity:

Hezekiah 6:14

“The reason mountain climbers
are tied together
is to keep the sane ones from going home.”

I don't know who said it,
or when, or where,
but I've chuckled over it,
thought about it, and quoted it, too.

With a mountain of mercy behind me
and a mountain of mission ahead,
I need you, my sister, my brother,
I need to be tied to you,
and you need me, too.

We need each other...
to keep from bolting,
fleeing in panic, and returning
to the “sanity” of unbelief.

Wise words, whoever said them;
I've placed them in my “bible”;
they are my Hezekiah 6:14.

Gerhard E. Frost - *Blessed Is The Ordinary*

Study 2 · John 15:1-8

We Are...

Branches In A Vine

The Bible uses a range of metaphors to describe the church. Over the next four studies we'll be looking at some of those metaphors and asking, "What does this mean if we're to be 'Growing as One, Going to Many'?"

Our first metaphor is from John 15 where Jesus tells his disciples that they are branches in a grape vine.

An incredible amount of effort goes into growing grapes to make fine wine. You have to consider the variety of grape, the soil, temperature fluctuations, rainfall, the side of the hill it grows on, when to harvest, when to prune, sugar levels, and much more.

Fortunately for us, we don't have to understand all of that to understand what Jesus is saying here. His point is simple: If you want branches to bear fruit, they must remain in the vine. Another way of putting that is, if we want to grow as one and go to many, then we need to remain in the vine – we need to stay firmly connected to Jesus and the renewing life he gives.



Thought Starter

1) *“If I were to be cut off from _____, then my life would begin to fall apart.”*

Fill in the blank above (using something other than “God”).

What is it that makes what you wrote so important to your life?

How do you think you would compensate for its loss?

“ ”

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempters power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud or sunshine, O abide with me.

Henry F. Lyte - from his hymn, *Abide With Me*

“ ”



Opening Prayer

Father God,

Help us to understand how Jesus' words apply to our lives and to the life of our church. We pray that you would bring much fruit, that we might be a blessing to others and bring glory to your holy name.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Read John 15:1-8.

Jesus' instructions to his disciples are built around three symbolic references. In the table below write down who each symbol represents and what role it plays in bearing fruit.

	REPRESENTS	ROLE
The Gardener		
The Vine		
The Branches		

In the Old Testament the grape vine is commonly used as a symbol for God's people, Israel.¹ Almost every time this metaphor is used it's speaking about how the vine has failed to bear fruit and about the judgement that will come as a result. Let's look at one example...

Read Psalm 80:7-19.

What plea does the psalmist make on behalf of the vine?

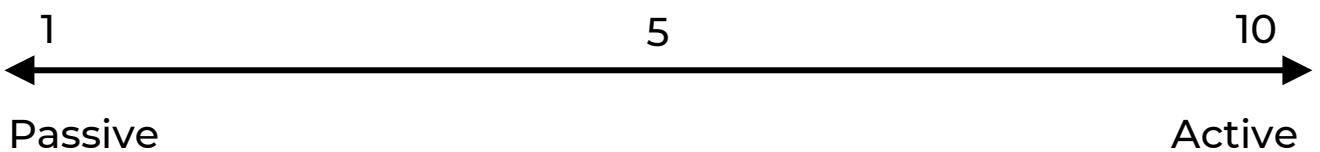
From where does the psalmist expect the hope of restoration to come?

In light of these Old Testament references, what do you think Jesus means when he says, '*I am the true vine*' (John 15:1).

¹ See Isaiah 5:1-7, 27:2-11, Jeremiah 2:11, 12:10-13, Ezekiel 15:1-8, 17:1-21, 19:10-14, Hosea 10:1-2.

3) What's the only command given by Jesus in verses 1-4?

Jesus emphasises his main point in verse 5. Use the scale below to show how much this command motivates you to act, then explain your answer and share.



4) The gardener performs two types of pruning (in verse 2 and verse 6). What's the difference between the two types and what's the ultimate outcome of them?

What is the gardener looking for above all else (verses 2, 4, 5, 8)?

“ ”

The great hindrance to fruit-bearing is wood-bearing.

Andrew Murray - *The True Vine*

“ ”

Is our church bearing more fruit or wood?

5) Branches are meant to produce fruit, not other branches. What sort of fruit do you think the gardener is hoping to see produced by the branches?

(If you get stuck, see Isaiah 5:7, Colossians 1:9-10, Galatians 5:22-23, Hebrews 12:11.)

6) What's the relationship between effective prayer (verse 7), remaining in the vine, and Jesus' statement "apart from me you can do nothing" (verse 5)?



Making It Real For Us

7) What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?



Making It Real For You

8) In what ways have you experienced the Father's pruning?

What were the results?

9) There are three types of branches – those bearing no fruit, those bearing some fruit, and those bearing much fruit. Which category would you say you're in right now and why?

If you're not bearing much fruit, what's Jesus' counsel to you?



Closing Prayer

Father,

We give you our lives asking that you work in us to bear much fruit. Give us your strength and peace when we discover your loving hand pruning off that which is unproductive. Help us to rest in Jesus and be filled with his life and joy. Lord, we want our church to bear much fruit so that we might show ourselves to be your disciples before a watching world.

Amen

“ ”

If in everything you seek Jesus, you will doubtless find him. But if you seek yourself, you will indeed find yourself, to your own ruin. For you do yourself more harm by not seeking Jesus than the whole world and all your enemies could do to you.

Thomas à Kempis - *The Imitation of Christ*

“ ”

Study 3 • 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

We Are... One Body

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is written to a church experiencing numerous health problems – not the physical health of its members, but the spiritual health of the church. They are weighed down by division, immorality, and untruth. They are suffering and need healing if they are to complete the good works Christ has called them to.

In our passage today, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor to explain how a healthy church should function if it's to accomplish its God-given purpose.

Although written to the Corinthian church over two thousand years ago, Paul's instructions are applicable to every church in every age. A healthy church, like a healthy body, will be 'Growing as One, Going to Many'.



Thought Starter

1) List some of the things you do to care for your whole body and some of the things you do to care for one particular part of your body.

WHOLE BODY

e.g. Eat responsibly

PART OF BODY

e.g. Brush my teeth

How would your overall health be affected if you didn't do one of these things?

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4-5



Opening Prayer

Lord,

We thank you for our church and the unity you have already formed amongst us by your Spirit. May this same Spirit now give us insight as we study your Word. We ask that you would strengthen us to obedience so that our church might increasingly reflect the nature and beauty of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Paul introduces his body metaphor in verse 12.

Read verse 12.

Interestingly, he writes, “so it is with Christ,” when we might expect, “so it is with the church.” What does Paul’s word choice suggest about the importance of church health?

3) In a moment, read verses 12-14 and verses 19-20. As you read, count how many words there are that express unity and how many words there are that express diversity.

Unity:

Diversity:

What does this tell us about the nature of the church?

4) Read verses 12-20.

In verse 13 Paul mentions some differences that might lead to disunity in the Corinthian church – “Jews or Gentiles, slave or free”.

What differences might Satan use to bring disunity into our church today?

In verses 15–17 Paul presents some of the negative attitudes that might exist in the body. How might we see those attitudes in the life of our church?

What unifies and binds the church together despite its diversity? (See verses 12–13, 18.)

5) Read verses 20–26.

When we think of our church body at Central, which parts might we think of as “less honourable” (even if we don’t mean to)?

What can we do to treat these parts “with special honour”?

How might doing this act as an ‘insurance policy’ against division within the body?

Can you recall any times when you’ve seen the whole body suffer or rejoice with one particular member?

6) Read verses 27–30.

God distributes gifts for the building up of his church. As Paul lists out some of them, he begins with those that are foundational for every church and that might, therefore, be considered 'more presentable'.

We know from earlier that Paul isn't trying to give more honour to people who have gifts that are higher-up the list. So what is he trying to say in these verses? See if you can summarise your thoughts in ten words or less.



Making It Real For Us

7) What do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?

“ “

When the world asks, “What is God like?” we should be able to say, “Look at the church.” As the body of Christ, we are to be like Jesus so that we too reveal God to the world.

William R.L. Haley

” ”



Making It Real For You

8) What gifts do you think God has given to you in order to build up the church? (Perhaps ask others in your group for their thoughts.)

How “honourable” do you feel your gifts are? Why?

How can you be more intentional in exercising your gifts to bring health and unity to the body of Christ?



Closing Prayer

Praise God that we were baptised by one Spirit into one body, the body that is our church.

Give thanks that people as odd as us have been joyfully embraced as members of the body of Christ in our church.

Recognise God's wisdom in giving us the people, personalities and gifts that are in our church family.

Confess those areas where we've felt either superior or inappropriately inferior as members of the body.

Pray for one person or group of people in our church who might feel that they are "less honourable."

Commit ourselves to working for the health of the entire body, so that we might bring glory to God and reflect the very nature of Christ.

“ ”

The true church is not an organisation, nor does one join it through the noisy mechanics of denominational machinery. Rather it is a living organism, a body, and believers are joined to it by the quiet working of the Holy Spirit.

Cornelius Stam

“ ”

Study 4 • John 10:1-21

We Are... One Flock

Jesus often used everyday objects to illustrate spiritual truths. We've already considered his vine and branches metaphor in our second study, and the body metaphor in our third study. In this study Jesus portrays himself as a shepherd caring for his flock of sheep. Just like with the vine, this is a metaphor that was frequently used in the Old Testament, that Jesus now applies to himself.

Our first two metaphors both suggest life and vitality: They give us something to desire. But sheep in a flock! How can that be something to desire?! Sheep are passive; they're dependent; they just seem to follow the leader.

How can sheep in a flock be 'Growing as One, Going to Many'? What lessons does Jesus want us to learn from this metaphor? Let's find out.



Thought Starter

1) Name a person or organisation you always trust. Why do you trust them?

Now name a person or organisation that you find it hard to trust. Why are you reluctant to trust them?

What makes the difference?

Six hundred years before the coming of Jesus, God made great promises of security and peace for his people through the prophet Ezekiel:

I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:22-24



Opening Prayer

Dear Father,

Help us to hear the voice of Jesus as we study your Word, and to respond with joy as we follow him. Lead us into abundant life as we seek to do your will.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) In John 9 a blind man is healed by Jesus but is then thrown out of the synagogue by the religious authorities. Jesus challenges the religious authorities (John 9:40-41) and contrasts their behaviour with that of a good shepherd.

At the time Jesus lived, shepherds would lead their flock into a large, guarded enclosure at night (a sheepfold). In the morning, when the shepherd came to collect his sheep, the sheep would hear his voice and follow him because they knew and trusted him. Jesus takes up this imagery as he continues to challenge the religious authorities.

Read verses 1 – 6.

How do the thief and shepherd differ in their approach to the sheepfold? Why do they have these different approaches?

The message in today's passage is mostly comforting. So, why do you think Jesus starts his message this way?

What warning is there here for us?

3) Use your own words to describe the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd.

How should we, as individuals within a church family, respond to Jesus?

How do you (or don't you) see this happening in our church at Central?

4) The sheep know the shepherd and respond obediently to his voice. What about the religious leaders? (See verses 6, 19-21.)

Do you identify more with the sheep, or the religious leaders, or some combination of the two?

5) Read verses 7-10.

What does Jesus mean when he describes himself as the 'gate' for the sheep?

What happens for those who enter through the gate?

How have you experienced this in your own life or in the life of others? If so, share your experience of 'entering the gate'.

6) Read verses 11–15.

How does the good shepherd demonstrate his commitment to his flock?

What do these verses suggest are the source of our unity and the cause of disunity in the church?

7) Read verses 16–21 then read the explainer box below.

“ ”

The sheep pen Jesus speaks of in verses 1-5 “represents Judaism. Jesus calls his own sheep out of that fold, thereby constituting his own flock; the sheep that remain in that pen are, presumably, the unbelieving Jews. If Jesus has *other sheep that are not of this sheep pen*, the reference must be to Gentiles (the non-Jews). When he calls them, they, too, will respond to his voice, *and there will be one flock and one shepherd*. Thus, salvation which is ‘from the Jews’ (4:22) must first be announced to the Jews, but opens to enlist Gentiles as well (*cf.* Rom 1:16).”

D.A. Carson – *The Gospel According to John*

“ ”

According to these verses, how do people come to faith?

According to these verses, what causes do we have for hope?

According to these verses, how do we see love?

Why do you think these words caused such a stir amongst the Jewish authorities?



Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He refreshes my soul.*

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Psalm 23:1-3

Does the Lord Jesus fulfil this psalm for you?



Making It Real For You

9) How can we encourage others to hear the voice of Jesus and respond with obedience?

Sheep, by nature, follow the crowd. What can we do make sure we don't end up following thieves and robbers instead of following Jesus?



Closing Prayer

Praise the good shepherd who laid down his life for us.

Give thanks for the security and abundant life we can enjoy as part of the Lord's flock.

Pray for those we know who aren't yet in the Lord's flock, that they might hear the voice of Jesus and respond in faithful obedience.

Pray that our church would be protected from thieves and robbers.

Ask that all of us in this flock might have life and have it to the full through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

“ “

Obedience is the road to freedom, humility the road to pleasure, unity the road to personality.

C.S. Lewis – The Weight of Glory

“ ”

Study 5 • Ephesians 2:11-22

We Are...

One People, One Family, God's Holy Temple

In the last three studies, we've seen three metaphors for the church. We, the people of God, are branches in Jesus, the vine; we're one body with Jesus as the head; and, we're one flock led by Jesus, the good shepherd.

In today's study, the Apostle Paul uses three more metaphors for God's church. Unlike the other metaphors, these ones don't dominate the passage but instead appear briefly at the end. Still, they help us understand who we are and what it means for us to be *'Growing as One, Going to Many'*.

In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasises the radical change that occurs when someone puts their faith in Jesus as Lord. In verses 11-22, he focuses on the reconciliation and unity Christ has achieved for his people through his death on the cross.

Paul was writing at a time when there was great division amongst Christians. Some people were teaching that non-Jewish believers had to become Jews in order to be included in the people of God, while others disagreed. The tension between the two sides was threatening to split the church.

Paul consistently rejected those teachings and emphasised how all people – Jew and non-Jew alike – are reconciled with God through faith in Jesus, not through being certain people or doing certain things.



Thought Starter

1) List down some characteristics you associate with the following words:

PEOPLE GROUP
(i.e. NATION)

FAMILY

TEMPLE

In what ways do you associate those words with our church?

“ ”

Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society, in fact a new humanity, in which alienation has given way to reconciliation, and hostility to peace. And this new human unity in Christ is the pledge and foretaste of that final unity under Christ's headship to which Paul has already looked forward to when he wrote...

God has made known to us the mystery of his will... to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
(Ephesians 1:9-10)

John R.W. Stott – *The Message of Ephesians*

“ ”



Opening Prayer

Dear Father,

As we study your Word, grant us a deep appreciation of all the blessing we have in Christ. Then fill us with a passion to see those blessings fully realised in the life of our church.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Read verses 11–13.

What transformation does Paul say the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) have experienced? How did it happen?

What does it mean to be “in Christ” “by the blood of Christ”?

The Jewish temple in Jerusalem had a wall that separated the inner temple from the Court of the Gentiles. There was an inscription on the wall that banned any foreigner from going inside. That was a significant barrier between Jews and Gentiles.

The greater barrier between them, however, was the Law that was embraced by faithful Jews. The Law clearly separated Jews from Gentiles and the differences between the two groups frequently led to hostility.

3) Read verses 14–18.

How many times do these verses speak about 'peace'?

How many times do these verses speak about unity in Christ?

According to Paul, knowing Jesus brings peace, but what's the scope of that peace? Peace between who? How? Where? How is it experienced?

According to Paul, Jesus brings unity, but what's the scope of that unity? Unity between who? How? Where? How is it expressed?

It has been said that *'the church is a world without walls'*. How can this idea be better expressed in our church?

4) What does Paul mean when he writes that Jesus "preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near"? (Verse 17)

What are the implications of this for our mission?

5) Read verses 19–22.

Paul uses three metaphors for the church, each one representing a different aspect of Christ’s unifying, peace-bringing ministry: Each one showing greater spiritual intimacy.

What are the implications for unity and peace in our church if we’re...

a) One People – “fellow citizens with God’s people”

b) One Family – “members of God’s household”

c) One Holy Temple – “a holy temple in the Lord”

Who is king over his people? Who is master of the household?
Who is the cornerstone of the temple? Could it be the same
one who is the vine from which the branches grow and bear
fruit, the one who is head of the body, and also the one who is
shepherd of his sheep?

JESUS IS LORD!

6) The unity and mission of our church should be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone”. (Verse 20)

How do we express this well?

Where do you think we can improve?



Making It Real For Us

7) What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be ‘Growing as One’ this year?

What, if anything, do these verses say to us as we seek to be ‘Going to Many’ this year?



Making It Real For You

8) Are there currently any barriers between you and God?

Are there any barriers between you and others?

How does your understanding of who we are in Christ shape your response to these barriers?

“ “

The temple in Old Testament days... was above all the special meeting-place between God and his people. It was the place on which the glory of God descended, the place of his presence. When Christ came, he made obsolete the tabernacle or temple made with hands. He himself was the place of the divine dwelling among men... The temple is no longer among men, but now God seeks as his *habitation* the lives of those who will allow him to enter by his Spirit.

Francis Foulkes - Ephesians, An Introduction and Commentary

What an awesome and glorious responsibility. That we, the church, should now be the holy temple of God, where God lives by his Spirit.

“ “



Closing Prayer

Thank God for how he has united us to himself through Christ and for he how breaks down every wall that isolates.

Pray for the unity of your small group – that you might bear one another's burdens and spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

Pray for the unity and mission of our church – that we would build our lives on Jesus and look to him as our head in all things.

Ask that the Holy Spirit would work amongst us so that we shine like stars in the universe and increasingly become a Landmark, Lighthouse, and Home that represents Jesus in the city of Sydney.

Psalm 133

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

*It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.*

*It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.*

As we continue this year, may we continue together in unity,
Growing as One and Going to Many.

centralbaptist.org.au