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**Prepared by the WDP Committee of Palestine**

**March 1st, 2024**

**“I Beg You… Bear With One Another in Love”**

**Bible Study – Ephesians 4:1-3**

**Preparatory notes:**

* Organize the Bible Study prior to the Worship Service to reflect on the theme in connection with an understanding of the Palestinian Christian context.
* Ask the participants to bring their own pictures or take pictures from magazines/newspapers showing what women are bearing in their context or in the world. Give them a chance to talk about it.
* Conclude the Bible Study with a collage of the pictures.
* Optional: Create a space in the Worship Service for the participants to show and explain their collages.

**Introductory Notes**

Ephesians is considered one of Paul’s “prison letters,” written in Rome around 60-61 CE. Paul wrote this epistle to strengthen the community of faith in Christ, the grace of God and the Gospel. He also wrote to encourage them to continue their work of living in holiness and service in response to God’s saving grace. Ephesians therefore carries themes of exhortation and assurance.

The first three chapters of Ephesians discuss God’s salvation and the gift of unity, while the last three chapters describe the response of believers to God’s plan of salvation. This year’s World Day of Prayer program comes from the first six verses of chapter four. In these verses, Paul encourages the Ephesians to live a sanctified life, bearing with one another in humility and love in order to maintain the gift of unity that God had given them. Paul reminds the Ephesians that God chose both Gentiles and Jews to be saved, bringing together people of very different backgrounds through the shared promise guaranteed by Christ to all the members of his church. Paul urges the Ephesians to live a life worthy of the calling they received, as people united with one another through Christ’s saving work.

This calling is not easy. It requires patience, self-denial, and love. Paul reminds the Ephesians to be united in one spirit by the hope they share in Christ. And so, we Christians spread throughout the world, can also find our unity and hope in this text.

**Opening Exercise**

Before reading the text, invite participants to stand or sit in a circle, joining hands by placing palms together, with the left-hand facing palm-down and the right-hand facing palm-up, so that each participant lifts up the hand of the person on their right and is lifted up by the hand of the person to their left.

Ask participants to reflect on how this exercise feels, and what it suggests to them about the nature of community.

A picture containing person, wall, indoor, hand

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**Scripture Reading**

Read Ephesians 4:1-3 (NRSV) -

*“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

Consider reading the same text in several versions, as well as in other languages familiar to the group. After reading the text, discuss the following questions:

* Why does Paul “beg” the Ephesians rather than command them? What does this tell us about how we as Christians are called to resolve conflicts with each other?
* What does it mean to “bear with” someone? What are some examples of this?
* Why is community important for Christians, and for the world in which we live?

**Reflections on Theme**

In Paul's address to the Ephesians, he begs the community to bear with one another. The word “beg” is a strong word. It can also be translated from the Greek as “implore,” “urge,” or “request.” This word tells us something about Paul and his relationship to the Ephesians. Despite being an authority figure for the Ephesian church, Paul does not order or command the Ephesians. He begs them, treating them as the higher and more powerful party in the relationship. This is a gesture of great respect and humility. It suggests that Paul loves this community greatly, and that what he is asking is more important than pride and protocol.

And what is Paul asking? He is asking the Ephesians to live a life worthy of their calling. To be worthy of their calling, the Ephesians must live with humility and gentleness and patience. To be worthy of their calling, the Ephesians must bear together in love.

Living under occupation, Palestinians know how hard it is to bear together in love. Occupation attempts to divide Palestinians from each other. When some Palestinians are given privileges that other Palestinians are denied, it divides the community. When some Palestinians have more freedom of movement than others, it divides the community. When some Palestinian faith leaders are treated better than others, it divides the community. Although bearing together in love under occupation is a challenge, Palestinians are determined to remain a community.

Another aspect of this theme that is difficult for Palestinians is the question of who is included in “one another?” Do we also have to “bear in love” with those who are doing evil to us, and to others? When children in Hebron are arrested simply for walking to school, must we bear with our oppressor in love? When young people are beaten for speaking Arabic in Jerusalem, must we bear with our oppressor in love? When people are not allowed to pass through military checkpoints to visit family or go to work, must we bear with our oppressor in love? It is difficult to hear Paul’s words to “bear with one another in love” in the face of injustice.

In Arabic, the word for “bearing” is *hamel*, which literally means “to carry.” It is a word used in many contexts, including when a woman is pregnant. Women bear life, bringing human beings into the world. And women bear so much more: not only work, family, and community, but also the weight of inequality placed on them by patriarchal societies. Gender-based violence and discrimination creates an unjust burden for women around the world.

Today, some churches around the world, including in Palestine, are working for gender justice. These churches believe that women and men are created equally in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), and that in Christ, there is no longer male and female (Galatians 3:28). Bearing with women in love means treating them as human beings worthy of dignity and justice. Bearing with women in love means lifting up their voices, callings, and leadership.

**Discussion**

Ask participants to reflect on their own contexts. Ask people to discuss these questions with a neighbor, in small groups, or in the large group. If participants brought pictures, this is a time when they can share about them.

- What are some challenges that you bear?

- What do women bear in your culture, community, and church?

- What are ways we can bear with each other?

**Closing Prayer**

God of Unity, you bear with us in all of our trouble. Help us to bear with each other in love. Free us from the sin of human conflict and disunity. Heal your church wherever we are divided, that we may bring the good news of your grace and love into the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Optional Social Media Activity**

Invite the group to write down their responses to these questions, or to gather the pictures they brought or cut out of magazines. Take photos and post them on social media with the hashtag #WDPwebear, including your location.

Example: “We bear occupation.” #WDPwebear #palestine

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