

Introduction

Good morning. How's everybody? Better than the first hour! For the rest of you... like I told them, we'll see what we can do about that over the next few minutes. We are in a series called "Life Together" through the Book of Ephesians. The Book of Ephesians is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Church... the believers... at a place called Ephesus. So the people in Ephesus are Ephesians, so we have the letter to the Ephesians. Paul is writing to believers to say, "Here is the relationship that God has offered to you and given you in Christ, but also here are the relationships that God has given to you with each other, as the Body of Christ." That is why we have been talking about "Life Together"... as the Church... as the Body of Christ. We have been delving into that. Last week we talked about "God Welcomes." God welcomes all peoples into His family. There are no conditions on what type of person you have to be to be extended the grace of Jesus Christ... so God welcomes all.

Today we're talking about "God Unifies." I think this is diving deeper, taking it to the next step in that progression... Not just as God welcomes all to come in and be a part, but He has made us one with each other and with Him. There's something more there than just we're all different and together. We are the same. So we want to look at that and what God has told us in His Word about being the same. Let me pray for us.

"God, thank You for Your Word. I thank You for this text that You have given to us to look at today. There is so much in it, God. I pray that You would just move me out of the way and just communicate Your truth, that Your Holy Spirit would help up to understand what You are saying, God, and how we are to respond to it... how our lives are to be submitted and surrendered to the truth that You have given to us in this Word. I pray these things in the Name of Jesus. Amen."

We are going to start in Ephesians chapter 3, starting in verse 14, and then we'll read into chapter 4 a little bit: *"For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Chapter 4) *"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."*

So Paul is praying for the Church... for believers... for the family of God. He wants for them to know Christ, the love of Christ, to love each other in Christ... so that... (some things). That's the basic outline of what we're looking at today: Paul's burden for the Church and what God has called us to, in relationship to Him and in relationship to each other.

1. God Strengthens Us Internally

The first thing that jumped out to me, and this may be just because my mind looks for the "why" ... the motivation... behind these things. If you say, "You should be this way..." my question would be "Why should I be that way? What is the driving factor behind all of that?" So, if Paul is going to say, "Listen... this is how your life should look and here is why." I want to look at "why." Why should I be that way? Why should I feel that way? The first thing that jumped out to me was that God strengthens us internally. In verse 16: *"...according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being..."* So Paul says that our strength comes in our inner being, from the Holy Spirit. Paul is not saying, "Our strength comes from ourself, apart from Christ... and it's kind of just the outward circumstances that determine how strong or encouraged we feel." So it seems pretty simple, on face value, but I want to examine what he is not saying because I feel like what he is not saying is really kind of the way of the world, that we're tempted to walk by. I think we like to look for strength and motivational sayings. Right? We like to look for strength in self-help or catch phrases or profound hashtags or whatever that we think, "Well, that inspires me to feel better about today... to conquer today... to take on today."

That is not Paul's message here. Paul's message is not "man up... you have what it takes apart from Christ... dust yourself off... pick yourself up and try again... pull yourself up by the bootstraps." It's a world mentality of just "If you believe it within yourself, you can do it." That's not enough to overcome the world. That's not enough to face all of the challenges we are going to face. So we keep looking for "What's that next saying?" ... "What's that next encouragement?" ... "What's that next motivation?" Paul knew that the circumstances of life would be crashing down on us. Paul went through really hard circumstances. There is a resume of his tragedies in Scripture where it talks about shipwrecks and being left for dead and being stoned and beaten and bitten by... All of these kind of things that happened to Paul; he understands... imprisoned and in chains... he understands that the circumstances of life... you're not just going to be able to smile your way through them if you believe in yourself enough. If you see a pretty sunrise, you'll have a great day. He understands reality is real... the world is discouraging.

You may have seen in classes growing up... they had that poster with that cat... "Hang In There"... hanging off the tree... (Laughter) I feel like sometimes we feel like that's going to get me through life. In second grade that might be like, "Yeah... alright... I can do this. I'm going to get picked last for teams, but it's okay. I'm going to hang in there." It might get you through lunch... maybe. But real life is going to be louder than the "Hang In There" poster. It's going to be tougher.

So Paul would also write to the Church at Corinth in II Corinthians 4:16... *"We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."* First of all, just take the focus off of... it's not going to be all encouragement and sunshine on the outside. So it's got to be internal. But beyond that, it's not just what I have in myself on my own. It's from the Holy Spirit. It's a power source outside of myself that helps me get through all of these things.

There was a school district organization that used our facility years ago to have a district-wide event. They would bring in motivational speakers to encourage the students and hype them up and just get them excited about life. There was one, in particular, that just made me cringe and bite my tongue... it was tough to sit through. The culture in the room was hype and they were eating it up. But this guy who was almost like... had eight espresso shots and four "5-Hour Energy's and then sat on a mouse trap and jumped on stage and was ready to go. He was just bouncing all over the place. He was one of those people that raise your blood pressure. He doesn't make you angry necessarily, but when they start

bouncing off the walls, you're just like... "Calm down... sit down..." You want to put yourself in a happy place because there is just too much... too much. You feel like they are just going to explode. But he was one of these guys. He gets up and his whole schtick and spiel was just, "Choose... declare that the day is going to be great and awesome and it will be." He had this Superman cape and he says, "Look... I just choose awesomeness and then everything is awesome." It was almost like the Lego Movie... (Laughter) ...this guy's life motivation was like, "Yeah... yeah... everything is awesome. As long as I think that it's awesome and say that it's awesome, everything is awesome." He said he would wake up in the morning and his alarm clock would go off and he would just hit it and be like, "Awesome... today is going to be awesome." That would be it. That's all you had to do to have a great day. And I'm in the back going... "No.... This is not what these students need to hear!" That might get you through lunch... maybe you would get through lunch and maybe get you through to the end of the day... if nothing goes wrong. But if enough stuff happens that's real that you can't control... choosing to be awesome and wearing a cape is not going to make you have a great day. And even beyond that, I knew that there were students... high schoolers in the room that were struggling with real dark scenarios. They may be from broken homes... and not just broken homes but abusive and aggressive, degrading... never hearing that they're good or valuable or smart or beautiful. Choosing to be awesome is not going to overcome that message. Right? Students who were going home and cutting themselves... harming themselves because they didn't feel worth or value in and of themselves. They don't need the message of "Just choose to be awesome and you will overcome that darkness." They needed to hear that Jesus Christ was the living hope, the Eternal Lord and Savior that could bring them encouragement and hope and confidence and worth and value. They didn't need to hear a ten-minute song and dance with laser lights. It got them hyped up in the moment, but I thought, "This is not what these students need to hear." Some of the students from our church who were in that room came on Sunday so I got to come back behind them and say, "Listen... you heard this the other day and some of you didn't. Here is what you needed to hear. Here's what you need to be your foundation, and what you need to stake your claim in is Jesus Christ." It's God the Father who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. That's where hope comes from; that's where strength comes from. It's not from a motivational speaker who points to nothing but the world and the power within ourselves. So, God strengthens us internally.

You might be thinking, "I thought we were talking about 'Life Together'. This is still all about me." There's two points that we haven't got to yet... so hold on. If it seems a little odd talking about personal inner strength, just continue on. Look in verse 17. He prays for inner strength from the Spirit "...so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith—that you..." (that's a plural "you" – so for Texans... "y'all") (Laughter) I love it. We were talking about this the other night. We need a Texan version of the Bible where none of the important stuff is changed but just the pronouns: y'all, them... that kind of stuff.

"...y'all, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." That y'all would be rooted and grounded... you all.

2. To Experience Christ's Love Corporately (Together)

God strengthens us internally to experience Christ's love corporately or together. Corporately... we take that term, that root there... you see "corpse"... body... that's together. It's not like corporately like an organization or building formally. No... it's togetherness. Bodily together. To experience Christ's love together. We receive love from Christ; we show love to others. Together we share this experiential knowledge of Christ's love. He dwells in our hearts by faith.

Paul uses a couple of terms here. He kind of mixes two different spheres of society here. He says that we would be rooted, and then he says "grounded or established." So "rooted" is a botanical gardening term. So that we are planted, that we put roots down, in love, that we might grow in love and flourish in love like a plant... so that we would be rooted in love.

Then he says, "...grounded or established." That's an architectural term, like the foundation of a building... a solid...rock solid, firm, secure foundation. So this love of Christ, this receiving love from Christ, giving love to Christ, and then with others. It is something that we plant ourselves in so that we might grow and flourish like a plant, but also it is secure and firm and unshakable, like the foundation of a building. So he says that he wants us to be rooted and grounded in love.

He talks about measuring it but really what he is pointing to is how it is immeasurable... breadth, length, height, depth... he is experiencing how it is just in all directions. It just goes out in all directions. It's not that you can actually measure the love of Christ and say, "Well, it's this many miles..." or whatever. He is trying to paint a picture that it goes out in all directions; this love of Christ is unending. As you experience love together, loving Christ and loving each other in the right way, it's a firm foundation. You will grow in it and it is limitless, this love of Christ.

It's also something...again, this is a little crazy... he says that you would know that that surpasses knowledge... know the unknowable. The Greek here and just ... I took two Greek classes, so this is not from my own knowledge. Experts have told me, as I have read from them... Paul wants us to "katalambano" – so that's the term "to know the unknowable"... he wants us to know. "Katalambano" is to lay hold of, to obtain, to comprehend, to understand that which surpasses "gnosis." That's another word for "knowledge" there. It's not the same one as "that we would know the unknowable." "Gnosis" is like information... info, data... it's not an experiential understanding of that information. I think I've used this example before. I was a better Spanish student than a Greek student, so for me it's the difference between "conocer" and "saber." If you "conocer" something, you understand it, you are familiar with it, you have understanding of it, and you lay hold of it. If you "saber" something, it's just data... it is information. So Paul is not saying it is some mystical journey that you can obtain the knowledge that no one else can obtain, even though it is unobtainable... He is saying that you would experience that which goes beyond just mere data and information. That's why Jesus coming to earth... as He lived life as a man, He then gained experiential knowledge of what it was to be a human, even though He was on mission and knew the data and everything that it meant to be human. So Paul's prayer for us is the same... that we would not just know of the knowledge or data of Christ's love but that we would live and walk and experience the love of Christ, giving and receiving love with Him and to each other... that we would experience that which goes beyond mere knowledge.

The result of experiencing this love of Christ together is being filled with the fullness of God and seeing Him *"...do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..."* Now that verse, I think, gets thrown around a lot as a motivation to see, "look at the awesome things God can do." *"...far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..."* If you look at that in context with what we just read... *"...according to the power at work within us..."* ...well that's the power of the Holy Spirit. So if we really want to see "far more abundantly than we can even ask or think," it's not the power that we have, it's the power of the Holy Spirit. As we love Christ and love each other, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God will start to do things that we couldn't even think or ask of. And we don't even know what those are. We can't think of them. I think we're too satisfied and content with getting the things that we ask for and can think of. We are surprised that God is not doing things that we

didn't ask or think of... but why are we surprised if we're not living by faith in Christ, according to the power of the Holy Spirit within us, not our own power. If we only get what we ask or think of, it is because we're doing things in our own power. Do you want to see God do something that you couldn't even think to ask for? Live by the power of the Holy Spirit. How do we do that? We surrender to the love of Christ and we love others with the love of Christ, not with the love that comes from within ourself.

When our power is from the Holy Spirit, and we lay hold of the love of Christ and experience it together, loving each other the way Christ loved us... then we will see God do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. And then we walk in a manner worthy of our calling that He called us to.

3. To Maintain A Unity Found Only In Him.

So God strengthens us internally to experience Christ's love corporately, and to maintain a unity that only can be found in Him. This difference between "together but still separate" and "we're the same." We are one in Christ. That's what Paul is moving us toward. That's what Paul is walking us on a path of.

He says, "Maintain the unity." So that tells me a couple of things. First of all, that unity is established in Christ. I didn't create that unity. I didn't establish that unity. It's not grounded in me and my thoughts, my ideas. It's the Holy Spirit, the work of God... unity established by the power of the Holy Spirit. But we are to maintain it. So there's a way that we can cultivate, or experience, and walk in that unity that's already been established for us. And that's what he is calling us to do. He says, *"...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..."*

Have you ever been to one of those places and you see a sign that has some kind of a warning on it or a rule and you think, "That's the weirdest rule I've ever seen." That sign is there because somebody broke that rule. Right? Some knucklehead thought of some crazy thing to do and they said, "Well, he shouldn't do that." So they put up a sign that says, "Don't do that." And you would say, "What sane person would ever do that?" Well, somebody did. (Laughter) What Paul is telling us here is to walk in humility, have patience, and bear with one another with love. Do you think that he would have to tell us that if the unity we pursued was just with people that we liked and get along with? No. If our tendency, which it is... is to get along with people like us, for the most part, to enjoy their fellowship and be in community with people that we like and are like, he wouldn't have to tell us that. But because Paul is saying, "Hey, the unity that you have in the Body of Christ, to maintain that you are going to need patience and humility, deferring to each other, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love... it must mean that it's not natural. It's not easy to find unity in the Body of Christ. If you are really together with people not like you, it takes humility and patience and bearing with one another in love.

It's like when I drop my son off for MDO... for class. I don't tell him the things that he is going to already do. "Hey... today, it's all about you, so whatever is on your agenda, just go with that. If they tell you to take a nap and lay down... don't do that..." (Laughter) "All the toys are yours; no one else can play with them. Be loud and pee on the floor if you want to." (Laughter) Right? No. What reminders do I tell him? The things that he is not inclined to do. "Listen and obey. Use nice hands. Be kind to others. Lay you head down and close your eyes when it's time to take a nap." Those are the things that he is not naturally inclined to do, so that's what I remind him of.

That's what Paul is reminding us of, Church. It's the things that we are not inclined to do. But it's natural to notice differences and to let them divide us. This challenge that we have already mentioned here is to

maintain unity with those that it's not easy to maintain unity with because of circumstances or preferences or ideas. That's what is natural. That's what's worldly. We always find disunity where we can.

I came across this story in Boyce's commentary on Ephesians. Boyce, who authored the commentary, relays a story about Scottish preacher John T. McNeil. You don't have to remember any of these names. I just wanted to give credit where credit was due. If you're trying to follow along, John T. McNeil, Scottish preacher and evangelist, told this story. He imagined a conversation that might have taken place between the man who had been born blind, whose story is told in John 9, and the other blind man who is healed by Jesus, whose story is told in Mark 8. The difference between these two stories is that in John 9 Jesus healed the blind by spitting on the ground and making clay which He used to anoint the man's eyes. This did not happen in the case of the man whose story is told in Mark 8. McNeil imagined these two getting together to discuss how Jesus healed them. The man who had been healed without the spittle would tell his story, and the man who had been healed with the spittle would tell his. He would say to the other, "But you left out the part about Jesus spitting in the dust, making clay, and placing it on your eyes." "Well, I don't know anything about that," the first man would reply. And the man from John would answer. "It has to be that way because that's the way that Jesus gives sight to the people. You must have forgotten it. He spit on the ground, He made clay, and He put it on your eyes, and He told you to wash in the pool of Siloam." "Oh no," the man from Mark says. "He didn't do that with me. He just spoke and I received my sight." The first man digs his heels in. "That isn't right," he says. "Jesus heals with clay. If you haven't had that experience, I'm beginning to doubt whether you can really see." Thus originated in the early Church, the two denominations of the Muddites and the Anti-Muddites. (Laughter) Two divisions right there; a Church split.

Kind of corny and kind of cheesy, but how profound is that, and how often do we find ourselves in those situations? To say we start with some common ground of "Yeah... God is working in my life. This is what He did." And you say, "Whoa... what? You use a hymnal? I don't think you're really worshipping God there. You don't have cool projectors? You have a pipe organ?" "You do have projectors and you don't have a pipe organ?" We get into these things and we start to judge each other to say, "Well, if you're not worshipping like me, you are probably not worshipping correctly." God forbid that that's the attitude that we take with the Body of Christ. That's not where our unity is found. If you go to a small church somewhere across this country in a rural place, they don't have what we have. Does that mean that they can't worship God? No. If you go to Africa and they worship under a tree, does that mean that they're not having a worship service? No. Are they worshipping the one true God in spirit and truth? Then they are worshipping the one true God in spirit and truth. They are bringing glory to His name. They are lifting high the name of Jesus, just like we are trying to do. Just because we have a different style doesn't mean that we are doing it right and they are doing it wrong, and vice versa. But we find these things to disagree on. We find these things to fight over. But what Paul is trying to bring us back to is that here are the things that are important. Here are the things that are the same.

Does anybody here watch Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood? I know my son does... Yeah. So parents of preschoolers or grandparents of preschoolers... you might be familiar with this. Or if you just have free time at 7:30 a.m. and want to watch Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood... there are a lot of songs in Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood. They teach you to do all kinds of things, from personal hygiene, to how to get along with others, and all kinds of catchy tunes. (Singing) "If you have to go potty, stop and go right away." (Laughter) (Continues singing) "Flush and wash and be on your way." (Laughter) They are catchy; they help us to learn. They are helping little kids to know, "Oh... these are the basics of life. This makes sense to me." I think it would be really helpful if they had adult versions of these things. (Laughter) Right? (Singing) "Run your dishwasher at night so they're clean in the morning." (Laughter) That would be helpful, right? I

wish I would remember that. (Singing) "Don't drive far on empty... or you'll have to walk to the gas station... like a dum-dum dummy." (Laughter) That would be helpful to remember... a catchy jingle. (Singing) "Don't eat that donut because millions of calories are going to end up on your thighs or your midsection." That one's not really catchy but I'd like the reminder. Anyway, Daniel Tiger is very helpful for kids to not just learn to handle themselves but to react with other people. In one of them, there's a great episode where there's a little girl who is handicapped and she has leg braces. They want to teach kids, "This girl is different but let's not focus on the differences; let's focus on where we're alike." And so the song goes. (Singing) "In some ways are different, but in so many ways we are the same." ...Very simple but very profound. Now, you think, "Oh yeah... that's very cool for kids to not judge others who are different from them."

Let's look in the mirror, Church. Right? In so many ways we are different, but in so many important ways, we are the same... in so many way more important ways, we are the same. That's what Paul lays out here, in verse 4 and 5. *"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, on baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* That's it. That's the unity of the Church... not one denomination, one worship style, one hymnal, one service hour, one Sunday School class... No. One faith, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism. What is Paul saying here? This is where our unity has been established. This is what is eternally the same about the Body of Christ. One Body... believers are connected and here for each other. One Spirit... believers all have the same agent of conversion, power source, and guide into all truth. One hope... believers all share a secured future and are pursuing the same eternity. One Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... believers all submit to the same authority in Jesus Christ, come to faith in the same Jesus to enter into the family of God. One faith... we all believe the same saving truth about that Jesus. There's not a different Gospel for different types of people. There is one Gospel because there is one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and there is one means of salvation that is faith in Him. One baptism... believers publicly identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. When you are baptized, you illustrate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, but also your death to self and the creation of a new spiritual life that didn't exist before so that you can walk in the newness of life. One God and Father who is over all and in all... All believers exist to glorify the same God who created them and is sovereign over every corner of the universe.

It seems like a pretty solid list of similarities that we can come together on that has been established and we can maintain. And yet we find things to argue about. We find things to disagree about. We find things to say, "Brother or sister in Christ..." I'm not even talking about hating on unbelievers or the sinning pagans of the world... this is family. "Brothers and sisters in Christ, you have upset me. You are dead to me." That's going to make heaven awkward. They're in Christ; you're in Christ. Guess who's going to be in heaven? That person... alive in Christ always trumps dead to you. Okay? So we don't have the luxury, we don't have the opportunity to say, "I don't like you so you are not a thing to me." We also don't have the luxury to just say, "I'm going to do the Christian life with people like me." ...Because when you get to heaven it's not going to be, "Oh... what's your age and life stage?... what are your preferences?... favorite TV show? Your area of heaven is over there." False. The Bible says that we are a family. In your family there is diversity. You don't get to pick it, but you're still family.

Unity established in Christ. It comes through this list. Not all of the things we have added to it. It comes through this list. That's where we are the same. That's where Paul is saying, "This is where your unity is found." It doesn't just apply to the racial differences that we've talked about in the past weeks. Again, Church, think about your preferences. Think about the way that we... and I say "we" as the American

Church over the last however many years, have created environments where we can suit them so specifically to your needs and preferences that you are then tempted to think, "I can't worship in another way." We have too many options. I get on a little soapbox here because I've been burdened by this for a long time. I think if we had enough Sunday School classrooms we would have a left-handed Bible study. Someone could come up and say, "I want a Bible study just for people that write with their left hand. "We have that for you because we are big enough and we have enough space." Guess what, Church? If you went to a church that was 45-people big... it would maybe "Adult Bible Study." ...Maybe. I'm not saying that it's bad that we have opportunities for young marrieds to get together, senior adults to get together, singles to get together. That's important, that's awesome, that's a privilege that we have because we are the size that we are. The danger in that is, "I can't fellowship with someone who is not in my life stage. May that never be our testimony because, God forbid, your life stage changes. What happens? "I can't be in this community anymore? I have to go over here and find people who are like me now?" If we would love each other like family, older to younger, different life stages and areas of life... that's diversity but unity in the things that matter: one Lord, one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all. May we never lean on those preferences. May we never exalt that identity of our life stage or circumstance over our identity in Christ. Again... hear me. There is nothing wrong with finding affinity with people like you, but if it comes at the detriment to your fellowship with people who are not like you, that's a problem. I confess that I've added to that problem... that I've been a part of that system... that I've tried to tailor circumstances to get people right to where, "Are you comfortable? Is nothing going to conflict here?" Not that we should shove people into conflict... "Here, practice humility now." (Laughter) But if we never have to walk in patience and humility and love and bear with one another in love then we're probably not living in the unity that God has called us to. Which do you think is a more powerful testimony to a lost and dying world? Right? The stronger testimony as Christ prays in John 17, starting in verse 20: *"I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent me and loved them even as You loved Me."*

The powerful testimony of the Church: When God starts to do abundantly more than we could ask or think, is when we, in humility, patience, and love, bear with one another that have nothing in common except one Lord, one faith, one hope, one baptism, one Father. That testimony screams to the world... "Listen... you don't have to fit a certain mold. All you have to do is respond to the grace of Jesus Christ and then you're a part of the family and you are one with everyone else. It's not, "Hey, we're all on the same bus and there are enough seats for everybody." We're all the same. We're all going to the same place. We're all living for the same reason. We're all motivated by the same goals. We're all worshipping the same Lord and Savior. All of our goals and hopes and dreams and aspirations are all surrendered to the same Lord. It's not like, "Hey, yeah... there's room; we accept and welcome you." That's not the extent to what God has called us to. That's the beginning of what God has called us to. Yet, we will never reconcile the lost world to ourselves if we can't even reconcile ourselves to each other and tear down the walls that we've built up. There's such great value in finding someone who is younger than you that you can teach as well as finding someone who is older than you who can teach you. How dysfunctional would a family be if we said, "Okay... children, you do sit in that room and teach each other and figure it out. Teenagers, you go in that room and teach each other and figure it out. Adults..." If you never talk to your children or talk to your parents and there's no relationship amongst the generations biologically, how dysfunctional would that be? It's the same in the Church. Your identity is not in "Are you married?" "Are you not married?" "Are

you retired?" "Are you in your twenties?" "Are you single?" "Are you this or are you that?" That is not where your identity is found, Church. It's in Jesus Christ. So that when we come together we don't say, "Oh... well, let's look at what we have in common, and maybe we can find some common ground and then we can fellowship together. If you are in Christ and I am in Christ, we have got enough common ground to do far abundantly more than we could ever ask or think because the Holy Spirit is inside both of us. If we are only achieving what we can ask or think of, we are not doing what God has called us to. It is going to take some surrendering, some humility, some bearing with one another in love.

We want to respond to this truth. I struggle again with some of the instruction here. I'm asking what you can do or what your options may be. As far as Scripture indicates, there are two types of people in the world: those who are in Christ and those who are apart from Christ. So if you are apart from Christ and you are here today or even if you are in Christ and you are here today and you thought, "I'm just going to church because I'm down and I need to be encouraged. Today is not as bad of a day because the sun is shining." What happens if it gets cloudy and rains again? We look for these short, momentary bursts of motivation to encourage us. Let me tell you. We are not here to just encourage you for a day and send you back out into the world. What you need is the hope of Jesus Christ in your life. It will fight through every circumstance of this world. We say, "Jesus' name... we want to lift higher than all He has overcome." He has overcome the world. We won't just say, "Hey, have a great day. We love you." Which is true... and that's all you need to get through life. It's not all you need to get through life. You need Jesus Christ, the hope of your salvation and the hope of glory, and the hope of all the universe. I want you to hear that today.

If you are a Christian in here today and you are thinking, "I'm not sure what to do with this message"... pray about that. Just as you were challenged a couple of weeks ago to find someone of a different race to help you answer some different questions, maybe find somebody who is in a different life stage than you and in different circumstances of life and just love on them and don't just highlight "Here's how we're different." That's weird. Talk about, "Hey... how is God working in your life? Here is how God is working in my life." Guess what? The same God is still working... just different circumstances. There is unity in that. But we are never going to reach the lost world different from us in their lost-ness if we can't reconcile with each other who are the same. We are one Body in Christ.

Our musicians are going to come and play. We are going to have prayer partners down here, if they want to go ahead and make their way up here, to pray with. You can use the steps to kneel on. You can pray right where you are. Our heart in this moment is that you will respond to the truth of God's Word. As the Holy Spirit prompts you, right? Not as your emotions build with the song or your guilt overcomes you, but to respond to the Holy Spirit and the truth of God's Word... that He would show you. What is the next step you need to take toward living the abundant Christian life that He has called you.

"God, I pray for faith for the unbeliever... that they would come to know You, that they would surrender themselves to You. God, I pray the same thing for the Church, Lord, that we would surrender our agendas, our preferences, our ideas, our differences, God... our false idols, our golden calves, that we would surrender them, lay them down, destroy them... that we might see others as You see us and You see them. Children of God, in Christ, that we are united to as Christ prayed, that we are one, just as Jesus and the Father are one... brothers and sisters in Christ, that we may be one... not just in word only, God. God, I pray for unity... real unity in our church. A flourishing community, a body that is alive, loving You and loving each other the way that You have called us to. We pray this in the Name of Jesus. Amen."