

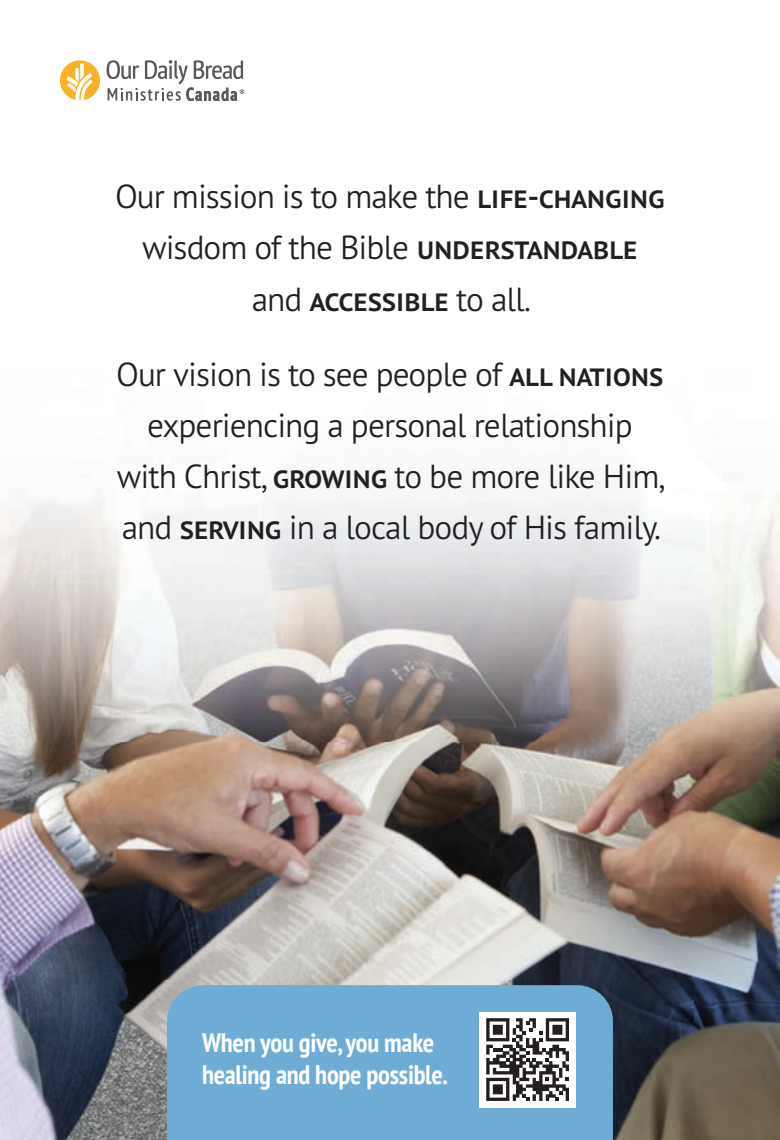
UNITY IN JESUS

**10 REFLECTIONS ON
CHRISTIAN UNITY FROM**

Our Daily Bread®

Our mission is to make the **LIFE-CHANGING**
wisdom of the Bible **UNDERSTANDABLE**
and **ACCESSIBLE** to all.

Our vision is to see people of **ALL NATIONS**
experiencing a personal relationship
with Christ, **GROWING** to be more like Him,
and **SERVING** in a local body of His family.



When you give, you make
healing and hope possible.



UNITY IN JESUS

10 REFLECTIONS ON
CHRISTIAN UNITY FROM



Our Daily Bread®

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Paul Brinkerhoff, Tom Felten, Tim Gustafson, Regie Keller, Becky Knapp,
Monica La Rose, and Peggy Willison

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

© 2022 Our Daily Bread Ministries® • All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

Unity in Jesus

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. John 17:21

Having served as a pastor for more than twenty years in three different congregations in the United States and having been privileged to work with pastors around the world, I have a great love for the church. Yet in my work I've also seen and experienced much that concerns me. The night before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for the unity of His people—His church—“that they will all be one” (JOHN 17:21). At the turn of the twentieth century, there were some two thousand Christian denominations, but today there are tens of thousands of denominations worldwide. Clearly, as author and social critic Os Guinness wrote, “differences make a difference”—and some of the differences that tend to divide us are of great importance.

Many of the differences between denominations are significant, and I'm not suggesting that the existence of different denominations is necessarily a bad thing. Nevertheless, this high degree of division isn't the ideal. Instead, what we're called to rally around as our point of commonality is described by Paul, who wrote:

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said (1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-4).

Notice that Paul says that this is “most important.” The gospel becomes the common ground upon which we can stand together. How exactly? First, because it unites us in the work of the Savior who bought us with His own blood, and second, because that good news gives us a mission to unite around. This unity, I think, occurs on two levels—at the local church level and at the global body of Christ level. Our focus will be on the local church.

Within any local church family there will always be differing opinions about concerns facing the people there, so church leaders and all believers must be prepared to work through the resulting disagreements.

Pastor Arthur Jackson wisely reflects on the challenges we face:

The journey to realize and live the oneness we have in Adam (as humans) and in Christ (as believers) is fraught with dangers, toils, and snares. This is especially true given the social and political realities we currently face. While we needn't be paranoid, we do need to be self-aware and careful so that biblical correctness will win over social or political allegiances. My prayer is that the body of Christ would genuinely lead the way in showing what common decency looks like and what it means to truly follow Jesus in treating all people fairly and respectfully.

It can be overwhelming to conceive how this might happen on the level of the fragmented global body of Christ. But we can begin in our local churches and the communities

that we serve. How? By loving one another as the truest of neighbors (LUKE 10:27) with the love of Jesus and the respect deserved by an image bearer of God. The Scriptures don't ask us to sacrifice important doctrinal distinctives or to ignore or condone sin. Those same Scriptures, however, do urge us to "keep [ourselves] united in the Spirit, binding [ourselves] together with peace" (EPHESIANS 4:3).

Notice that it's the *Spirit's* unity that's in view here. As believers in Jesus, we're not called to *create* unity but to maintain (keep) it—or, at the very least, not to disrupt it. And as we await the time when we'll be with Christ, we'll need to humbly work through many issues for which we don't have perfect understanding. Our thinking is to be guided by the wisdom of the Bible and the Spirit of God who dwells within us, His children, so that our church communities on earth now reflect the unity that will one day be complete when we share this oneness of God with His people forever together in unbroken harmony.

As John Fawcett's timeless hymn put it:

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

As we endeavor diligently to maintain the unity found in the Spirit, may that like-mindedness be our goal. I'm confident that Christ's presence and guidance can lead us to experience a deep love and purpose as He helps us engage our conflicts and differences with His unifying wisdom and grace.

BILL CROWDER

The following reflections are provided to help you celebrate, cherish, and seek to experience more deeply the unity believers can enjoy in Jesus.

Community Garden

The community garden near my house has more than twenty plots available to rent. After paying a small fee, neighbors can cultivate their own plot all summer long and get the use of shared tools, water, soil, and fencing. By pooling their resources, neighbors who wouldn't normally have the space or tools to garden get access to a whole network of resources. At harvest time, those with an abundance of one kind of produce can share with others so that everyone has enough.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were united in heart and mind.

The community garden is a beautiful picture of what Christ-honoring relationships and stewardship can look like. In Acts 4, Luke describes the united community of the early church. As more believers in Jesus were added to their number, Luke says they were “united in heart and mind” (v. 32), a beautiful description of unity that Jesus prayed for before His crucifixion (JOHN 17). But in addition to spiritual unity, they also “shared everything they had” (ACTS 4:32). Some disciples were moved to give generously of their own resources and property to assist those in need (vv. 34–35). By participating in fellowship, serving together, and helping each other, they grew beautiful spiritual fruit of kindness, generosity, and love.

Instead of focusing only on our own garden—our efforts, resources, and goals—let's tend our community garden and by God's grace produce something beautiful.

KAREN PIMPO

What “community garden” is available to you? How can you share work, resources, and fruit with your faith family?

May I be united in heart and mind with other believers, Jesus. Help me to better reflect You in community.

Called to Care

Our small-group Bible study had a problem. We'd grown to more than thirty people. The deacons suggested we split the group, but no one wanted to leave. So we stayed together.

It hadn't always been that way. When we started with just a few people, most had been reluctant to speak. Soon, however, we realized we could honestly share with each other. We prayed. We helped each other in practical ways.

For the first half of his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote about *who* we are in Jesus. We're God's blessed, chosen, forgiven, and adopted children (EPHESIANS 1:3-14). We're the revealed mystery of Christ (3:2-6), Jews and gentiles coming together to form God's church.

Then, in chapter 4, Paul tells us, "Lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God" (v. 1). This will reveal itself in practical ways. "Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love" (v. 2). These are qualities that don't come naturally. We need the Holy Spirit's help to forge a unifying bond of peace (v. 3).

As David wrote, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (PSALM 133:1 NIV). This is our calling. It's who we are.

TIM GUSTAFSON

Ephesians 4:2

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

When have you experienced disunity in the church? When have you experienced unity, and what do you think made the difference?

Father, help me to be patient today.

Turning Together to God

Their walls went up quickly. Their emotional walls, that is. On one side, a professor who teaches racial harmony skills explained to his Christian audience how, with God, he can study grueling facts about cruel history without losing hope. On the opposite side, however, a man raged at having to hear such information. “Why are you spreading such lies? My nation isn’t racist,” he said. Back and forth they went until a soft-spoken woman stood and simply asked, “Will you join me in prayer?” Suddenly, the room quieted. “Might we turn together,” she added, “to God in prayer?”

Her calming plea can be heard in Paul’s instruction to rid ourselves of “anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language” (COLOSSIANS 3:8). Writing from prison to a church torn by competing views about Jesus, Paul implored battling factions to turn not against each other—but toward each other in unity.

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” How? “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you” (VV. 12–13). As Jesus Himself said, “Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart” (MATTHEW 12:25). May we heed this wisdom today and listen with love as He leads us.

Colossians 3:13

Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.

PATRICIA RAYBON

How do you respond to other believers’ views? What can you do when you disagree with them? What can you do to follow Paul’s instruction to bear with each other when we disagree?

God, soften my spirit to hear different views with Christ’s love.

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

Being light in the world is a collective effort, the work of the body of Christ, the work of the church.

KEN PETERSEN

As we view our shattered lives, there's no need for despair. God is working His beautiful restoration.

WINN COLLIER

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

COLOSSIANS 3:13-15

As we remember what Jesus did for us while “still sinners” (Romans 5:8), it reshapes our hearts, making us people who can extend forgiveness and grace.

ADAM R. HOLZ

Jesus embraces and unites all who turn from sin and put their trust in Him.

MIKE WITTMER

Cooperating with fellow believers to pray and serve others as God leads and empowers us accomplishes much more than we could ever do on our own. It has been said, “Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean.”

JENNIFER BENSON SCHULDT

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:24–25

Our identity in Christ is a collective one. We are united to Christ, and in Christ we are united to one another. . . . The unity of the church is a function of our union with the one God through the one mediator.

GRANT MACASKILL

Love Leads to Love

At church that morning, I sat in a chair closest to the exit door. I wrestled with pent-up anger, resentment, unforgiveness, and fear that had built up throughout my life and helped me keep people at a distance. As soon as the preacher stopped talking and the music began, I rushed to pick up my children. Turning to my oldest son, I said, “Take your brother to get a donut and meet me by the car.” The last thing I wanted to do was talk to people.

1 John 4:19

We love each other because [God] loved us first.

This cycle of avoidance continued for months. As I listened to the sermons and began reading the Bible on my own, eventually I asked God to help me accept His love personally. Over time, my knowledge of God and my confidence in His intimate love for me grew. Now, I can barely contain my love for God and His people.

The apostle John describes this type of heart and mind transformation as a response to the ultimate display of God’s love for us (1 JOHN 4:19). Jesus took the punishment we deserve because of our sins and gave His life for ours through His death on the cross (VV. 7–10). Accepting the depth of God’s sacrificial love changes us (VV. 11–12) and gives us the ability to receive love and extend love toward others in the church and beyond (VV. 13–21).

Though we may struggle with feeling unlovable, God can lead us to accept and share His love.

XOCHITL DIXON

When have you struggled with receiving God’s love for you? How can He help you better love others in healthy and holy ways?

Loving God, thank You for working in my heart and mind as You lead me to love You and others as selflessly as You love us.

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first.

²⁰ If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹ And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

Reconciliation We Hunger For

The film *Places in the Heart* tells the story of Edna Spalding, a mother of two whose husband, Royce, is accidentally killed by a boy named Wiley. Set in Texas in the 1930s, the final scene takes place in a church Communion service.

In the front row sits Edna's sister, who's been in the process of divorcing her husband but who now lovingly holds his hand. Next we see Moses, an African American man who's helped Edna with her farm. In that segregated era in the United States, it's a surprising sight. After Edna takes Communion, we see something else shocking—she passes the bread and wine to her husband, who's alive again, and he then passes them to Wiley, his killer.

Some viewers have burst into tears at that final scene; I think because it portrays the reconciliation we all hunger for. As Jesus explained, the Communion bread represents His body and the wine His blood, broken and shed to reconcile us to God (MATTHEW 26:26–28). And as that reconciliation is passed on to others, marriages are mended, racial divisions are erased, and victims and killers become friends. One day, Jesus will even reunite the living with the dead (V. 29; COLOSSIANS 1:20).

Each of us needs reconciliation with God and others. Every time we take Communion, we tell ourselves and the world that such reconciliation is available because of what Jesus has done.

SHERIDAN VOYSEY

Matthew 26:28

This is my blood . . . poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.

With whom do you need to be reconciled? How can Jesus' sacrificial acts guide you toward that?

Jesus, help me to reconcile with You and others.

We're All the Same

One evening at a fast-food restaurant, my four-year-old nephew and I were looking for a table. There was one beside a group of tough-looking men, but their appearance and raucous laughter made me hesitate. Since there was no other table, however, Caleb and I sat beside them. Minutes later, the men bowed their heads and prayed, then brought out Bibles. They were a Bible study group!

The discovery filled me with shame. I'd seen the men as unsafe. But God showed me how prejudiced I was toward them.

This experience made me think of people God used for His kingdom, people many of us would perhaps view with prejudice. One such person was Rahab. The two Israelite spies chose to hide in her home (JOSHUA 2:1)—a surprising choice given her occupation. Yet, because of Rahab's faith in God (VV. 9–11), she and her family were “not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God” (HEBREWS 11:31). Not only that, but the former prostitute from Canaan became an ancestor of Jesus Himself (MATTHEW 1:5).

Rahab's story—and my experience—reminds me that God sees people differently. In His eyes, we're all the same—sinners in need of His grace. And when we respond in faith to Him, He can use us for His glory, no matter what our past might be.

KAREN HUANG


Hebrews 11:31

By faith . . . Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God.

What prejudices might you have against others?

How can you change your thoughts and attitudes with God's help?

Heavenly Father, please forgive me for the times I've been prejudiced against others.

 ¹ Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, “Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.” So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.

² But someone told the king of Jericho, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” ³ So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: “Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.”

⁴ Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, “Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from.” ⁵ They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.” ⁶ (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) ⁷ So the king’s men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the

Jordan River. And as soon as the king’s men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

⁸ Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. ⁹ “I know the LORD has given you this land,” she told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror.” ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. ¹¹ No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.

¹² “Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that ¹³ when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families.”

No Favoritism

Returning from vacation with his mother and brother from a French seaside resort, little Jack (only eight or nine at the time) declared to his father that he was prejudiced against the French. When his father asked why he felt this way, the boy declared, “If I knew why, it would not be a prejudice.” Jack’s (young C. S. Lewis’) statement recorded in Harry Lee Poe’s book *Becoming C. S. Lewis* is accurate. The word *prejudice* means an unreasonable preconception that’s formed *without* knowledge.

Acts 10:34

Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.”

Unfortunately, we sometimes fall into the trap of having a negative opinion about others without full knowledge. In the Bible, the Jews viewed the gentiles as unclean and lesser than themselves. As we read in Acts 10, however, God made it clear to Peter that this shouldn’t be the case. Peter declared this message: “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean” (v. 28). Peter explained that “God shows no favoritism” (v. 34). In fact, that day, “the gift of the Holy Spirit [was] poured out on the Gentiles, too” (v. 45).

God wants all people to be a part of His family. Let’s set aside any preconceived notions we have about others and welcome all with joyful hearts.

JULIE SCHWAB

What are some prejudices you’ve had or have about others?

How can God help you love others as we’re called to love?

Heavenly Father, please forgive me for judging others based on preconceptions.

²⁸ Peter told them, “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.

³⁴ Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. ³⁵ In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶ This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. ³⁸ And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹ “And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not

to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. ⁴³ He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”

⁴⁴ Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵ The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God.

Then Peter asked, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” ⁴⁸ So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Good Ideas and Good Deeds

His name was Dino Impagliazzo, but he was better known as “chef of the poor.” Impagliazzo, a 91-year-old renowned chef in Rome, found new purpose in preparing delicious entrees. He prepared and delivered meals to the homeless via his nonprofit organization. Assisted by about 300 volunteers, Impagliazzo delivered 32,000 hot meals annually to those in need in Rome until his death in 2021. The initiative began in 2006 under the name “Quelli del quartiere,” or “the neighborhood people.”

Hebrews 10:24

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

Impagliazzo came up with the idea when he was walking through the Tuscolana train station in Rome. A man approached and asked him for money. He got to know the man and realized that “perhaps instead of buying one sandwich, making some sandwiches for him and for [his] friends who were there would be better.” And while it started out with just food, the nonprofit now distributes blankets, clothing, and hygiene products. Impagliazzo said, “We try to involve more and more people so that Rome becomes a city where people can love each other.”

As God’s people band together under the direction and power of the Spirit, we can spur or prod one another toward “love and good works” as the writer of Hebrews encourages (HEBREWS 10:24). And while such ideas often start in the mind and heart of an individual as the Spirit guides, they are best accomplished when we serve together. Such work is a beautiful picture of caring for “the least of these” (MATTHEW 25:40). JOHN BLASE

***What needs could be met in your neighborhood if you had some help?
How might God be inviting you to initiate such beautiful work?***

Dear God, give me the eyes to see the needs around me.

Family Likeness

As I stood outside a sports venue waiting for friends to arrive, a woman approached me and asked, “Are you a Jackson?” Though acquainted with my parents and some of my siblings, she was a stranger to me. Yet there was something about me that resembled them, and this compelled her to identify me as “a Jackson.”

Who among us hasn’t noticed a facial feature, smile, or some other trait that resembles that of another? Sharing the physical, emotional, or personality likenesses of those with whom we share DNA is the way life works.

Is there something about us that would make others ask, “Are you a believer in Jesus?” In Ephesians 4:32–5:2, two family features of the family of Christ come into view: *forgiveness*—“forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (4:32) and *love*—“live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ” (5:2).

As those who identify as believers, we should have core characteristics of the Father and the Son that define us. Relationships, however, can be tough. We’re prone to wound and scar each other through our words and actions (SEE 4:31). But in those same challenging situations, through the power of God’s Spirit, we’re able to demonstrate our kinship with other believers and with a loving, forgiving Father.

ARTHUR JACKSON

What about you causes others to see you’re a believer in Jesus?

Where do you find it difficult to be forgiving and loving?

Father in heaven, I’m honored to be called Your child. Please help me to better represent You.

John 13:35

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

True Harmony

There's a scientific principle that on their own, things tend to become increasingly disordered. But scientists today are describing another mysterious principle known as "synchronization"—ways in which our universe seems drawn inexplicably *toward* order. Hearts beat regularly; fireflies flash in synch; and pendulum clocks placed near each other will spontaneously synchronize, for reasons researchers are only beginning to understand.

Colossians 1:17

He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

Reflecting on the ways in which forms of order and harmony emerge in all spheres of a world that often seems otherwise chaotic reminded me of the mysterious truth that—despite its brokenness and corruption—creation is still united by its source in Christ. Paul explains, "Through him God created everything . . . He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together" (COLOSSIANS 1:16–17).

And though our world is often blind to God and His goodness (JOHN 1:11), it remains true that Jesus is also the way in which God has chosen to bring healing and harmony into a disordered and chaotic world: "through him God reconciled everything to himself" (COLOSSIANS 1:20).

Every day, Christ brings light, life, and harmony into our confusion, brokenness, and chaos. And one day all will be united in worship of Him, "in heaven and on earth and under the earth," every voice celebrating "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (PHILIPPIANS 2:10–11). MONICA LA ROSE

How has God allowed for both freedom and harmony in the world? How have you experienced those things from Him?

Creator God, thank You for Your amazing creation.

CONCLUSION

The Beauty of Family Unity

Brian, one of our local church pastors, regularly prefaced his words to the congregation by referring to us as “family.” “Family, I want to share my heart with you today.” “Family, we’ll be gathering later this week for a special service.” Like a garment that fits perfectly, the term “family” appropriately adorns believers in Jesus who by reason of their faith in Him are members of the family of God. “For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (GALATIANS 3:26).

The status as family is reinforced when we take Communion as young and old, Black and White, and all believers make their way to a common table for the family meal. Each one takes a piece of bread from one loaf and dips the morsel in a cup. “Though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body” (1 CORINTHIANS 10:17).

Unfortunately, the sense of togetherness that’s enjoyed by those who gather in the name of Jesus can dissipate when the setting changes. We can go from what’s much like a nice photo op to exhibiting very different attitudes and conduct in the home, at work, or in the public square.

A Sad Picture

If there's ever a sad picture, it's when people who share the same blood or the same name or some other affiliation live as enemies or strangers. When those on the same team, who wear the same "jersey," live and function as if they're foes.

It's sad when conflict and confusion abound, when brothers rise up against brothers, sisters against sisters, one ethnic group against another—when other allegiances prevail over our primary allegiance. And if we allow ourselves to drink the murky waters of our culture, those who share fellowship and Communion together on Sunday may find themselves at war with each other on Monday.

From what we see in Scripture, the unity that believers in Jesus embrace at the Communion table (actually or spiritually) should inform our everyday living when the shared experience is over.

The Beauty of Unity

Psalm 133 captures the beauty of unity: "How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!" (v. 1). This short psalm is among the collection of psalms known as the Songs of Ascent. Also known as "travel songs," the children of Israel would sing them as they "traveled to" or "gathered at" the annual feasts in Jerusalem. Though they came from different locations geographically, they were family—men, women, and children whether native-born Israelites or foreigners living among them. The gathering itself would be a reminder of the breadth of this extended family. What a gathering! If this took place today, I could imagine someone creating T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Children of Abraham"!

The principle given in verse 1 is illustrated with two pictures in verses 2 and 3. Though there are no commands

here, this psalm celebrates the beauty of unity and harmony among those who share a covenantal bond in God and invites us into it.

“In Christ!”

Believers in Jesus come from varied backgrounds—socially, ethnically, tribally—but our primary identity is that we are “in Christ.” “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (EPHESIANS 1:7 NIV).

As those who identify primarily as “in Christ” (experiencing union with Him through the Spirit), we shouldn’t be swayed by agendas and influences that compete with the supremacy of Jesus and our allegiance to Him. Rather, we’re to be a force that counters the darkness in our divided world.

Paul’s words in Colossians 3:12–17 encourage Spirit-led conduct that should characterize those in God’s family. He also reminds us of the breadth and inclusivity of those in the family: “In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us” (V. 11 NLT). The exhortations that follow bring into focus healthy family dynamics that are essential for unity.

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” (VV. 12–14).

What is seen here is so attractive, relationally desirable—and so *beautiful*. Who wouldn’t want to be a part of a family characterized by such things?

The encouraging thing about all of this is that those in

the family can grow in these qualities and thus in unity as the Holy Spirit works in and through us. And as for those not yet in the family of God, there's room in the family, at the table, for you: "to all who believed [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God" (JOHN 1:12). *ARTHUR JACKSON*

Learn more here: <https://odb.org/personal-relationship-with-god/>

Through His cross
and empty tomb,
Jesus welcomes us
to believe in Him and
receive forgiveness,
so that we may
become God's
cherished sons and
daughters and begin
life anew in His love.

JAMES BANKS

We have been given a clear picture
of what [God's] kingdom is to look
like—multiethnic, multicultural,
multigenerational, multiclass—
and we need to be on the side
of that coming kingdom now.

JOHN M. PERKINS

The Spirit is at work
throughout the world
seeking to restore people
to communion with God,
one another, and with
the whole creation.

L. GREGORY JONES

Often, we look to our own
interests—taking care to
secure our position in social
environments, to curry favor
with those who hold more
prestige or power, or simply
to preserve our own comfort.
Yet Jesus' words call us to
see how we can care for and
benefit others in His love.

KIRSTEN HOLMBERG

In a section of Scripture written to help believers in Jesus live together in unity, Paul refers to the essential role forgiveness plays in daily relationships.

After urging his readers to choose “tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Colossians 3:12) in their relationships, Paul adds the encouragement to “forgive anyone who offends you” (v. 13). Most importantly, all their interactions with each were to be guided by love (v. 14).

LISA SAMRA

When unchecked anger toward others threatens to consume us, we desperately need the Holy Spirit to fill and control our hearts so that our human tendencies can be replaced by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19–23). Then love, joy, and peace can mark our relationships.

BILL CROWDER

Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold. Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy.

JOHN 17:11–13

MEDICINE FOR A FRACTURED WORLD.

Subscribe to *Our Daily Bread*



“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” —Ephesians 4:3

We could use a little more unity, don't you think?
The good news is that because of Jesus, we can.

Jesus died on the cross with the sin of the world on His shoulders so everyone who believes can experience forgiveness, abundant life, and the perfect unity He came to give us.

Living in perfect unity means living in peace with God and neighbour. This type of living is how we can be witnesses for Christ in a spiritually starved world.

Unity in Jesus: 10 Reflections on Christian Unity from Our Daily Bread focuses on biblical themes of unity. In a time of unprecedented turmoil and division, this resource refocuses our attention on the hope of Jesus and the importance of Christian unity to a watching world.

Our Daily Bread Ministries Canada
PO Box 1622, Windsor, ON N9A 6Z7



**Our Daily Bread
Ministries Canada®**

ourdailybread.ca



UM311W