



# bridging the divide

## SERMON NOTES

### UNITY

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I so have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23)*

Our **unity** is grounded in our **union with Christ**.

#### **Why is this important?**

The gospel brings different types of people together.

To live in **unity** requires a **new identity**.

#### **How do we live this way?**

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” (James 3:13-18)*

#### **Portrait of a Peacemaker:**

- Humble (willing to sacrifice)
- Pure (open to God’s Spirit)
- Peace-loving/considerate (agent of grace)
- Submissive (open to reason)
- Full of mercy and good fruit (takes initiative in investing in others)
- Impartial (resists “group think”)
- Sincere (uncomfortable being a hypocrite)

# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

WEEK TWO: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4; JAMES 3:13-18

## Description for Series

Several years ago, a national research study examined the different political groupings at work in American society; they concluded that a large number of people are part of the “exhausted majority.” Maybe that’s how you feel right now - exhausted and frustrated with the division, polarization, and tension that’s present in our culture.

As we go through this unexpected season, our church is working on building bridges with others. Yet, to do that well means that we may have to overcome certain cultural factors that separate us from one another. So, how do we do that well? Given the reality of divisive political and social issues, in this series we will discuss how can we “bridge the divide” both inside and outside the church.

The devotional guide will continue the same rhythm that we used for the last devotional guide where we practiced the 3 x 20 pattern. Spend at least 20 minutes, 3 times a week in God’s word. Each of the three days you will be asked to implement the **Read. Reflect. Respond.** pattern to help get more deeply into God’s word.

How do we create unity when differences abound? What does God’s word teach us about how to create a culture where people have different viewpoints but are still able to live in harmony with one another?

## DAY ONE

**Read** Philippians 2:1-4.

- What will make Paul’s joy complete (2:2)?
- What is the basis for Paul’s appeal for unity (2:1)? Are you experiencing these blessings from God?

**Reflect** on what it means to have fellowship with the Spirit.

**Respond** by confessing your attitudes and/or actions to the Lord and asking Him to help you, in future opportunities, to create unity instead of division.



## DAY TWO

**Read** Philippians 2:1-4 again.

- Define “selfish ambition and vain conceit.” How are they the opposite of humility? How did Jesus respond to the false praise he was given?
- What words does he use to describe how these believers in Christ should relate to each other?

**Reflect** on these verses. Be honest with yourself and identify recent interactions where you were more interested in your own ambition than the welfare of the other person.

**Respond** by choosing humility this week in your interactions with others. Look for ways to put others first.

## DAY THREE

**Read** James 3:13-18.

- What does James say is the evidence of wisdom in James 3:13?
- What does earthly wisdom produce? What is the result of spiritual wisdom?
- List the characteristics that comes from heavenly wisdom.

**Reflect** on the characteristics you just listed. Which one(s) are most challenging for you?

**Respond** by practicing the qualities listed in the James passage. Look for opportunities to intentionally respond in wisdom instead of reacting out of emotion.



# FAMILY TALK

1. What questions or thoughts do you have from what was shared? How would you define unity? How can you have unity with people who do not agree with you? How does unity look, or how should it look, in the church?
2. Take some time to read 1 Peter 4:1-11 together. What does this passage tell you about unity in the church? How can you help foster unity in the church?
3. What would look differently in your life if you embodied the character traits in James 3:17? Which of these is the most difficult for you and which ones are more natural for you? How can you practically work on these traits in your life?
4. Spend time praying together for unity as a family and as a church. Ask God to help you be a peacemaker and a unifier for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is unity important for the Church?
2. What does Christian unity look like? Is it unity at all costs?
3. How can we disagree and still be united? How have you handled disagreements with a Christian brother or sister? What are some ways you and your group could live out verse Philippians 2:4?
4. Based on James 3:13-18, what are the character traits of a peacemaker? Which of these qualities do you find challenging to display? Which come easier for you?
5. Talk about ways you can be a unifier in your spheres of influence?
6. What does it look like to disagree in a way that leaves someone more unified than less unified?
7. Take time to pray for the unity of Hershey Free Church.

PREPARE FOR WORSHIP NEXT WEEK BY READING  
THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES:  
EPHESIANS 2:11-18 AND ACTS 6:1-4