

## Happy Trails - Psalm 133

Today we are finishing up our look at the Psalms of Ascent and while we have looked at only 4 of them, I want to encourage you to take some time to read all of them. They are wonderful psalms that can strengthen our faith and help us to be more faithful in our own faith journey. Today we are going to end with a psalm that addresses a very timely issue in our nation, unity. The psalm is going to be read by some of our youth who were at Impact. For them to get to the place of worship at the camp, they have to climb a hill, so on their ascent they are sharing with us Psalm 133. **Video**

***How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Psalm 133:1***

In light of the shooting 2 weeks ago in Butler County, there has been a lot of talk about unity. Sometimes we think unity means that we all have to believe the same thing, think the same way, do the same things and be exactly alike, but that's not true. Unity doesn't mean uniformity in all things, it means learning to live together in peace.

Believe it or not, democrats and republicans can be unified. Progressives and conservatives can live in unity. Unity doesn't mean we all have to think alike and have the same answers to life's problems, it does mean we have to love one another despite our differences and work together for the wellbeing of others. Unity means lifting others up instead of tearing them down. It means that in many areas of our nation and world there is more than 1 way to solve a problem and while we disagree, we can respect those political, economic and social differences.

Unity has always been important to God. The book of proverbs tells us that God loves unity because He hates division.

***There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. Proverbs 6:16-19***

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Stirring up conflict in a community creates division. Devising wicked schemes and lying to others creates division. A prideful attitude creates division. Seeking evil that destroys others creates division. The thing God hates most is when we create division, so the one thing God must love the most and long for is unity.

In the New Testament, we also hear that unity among God's people is a goal.

***Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14***

***Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:3-6***

There is one God in 3 persons and while each person of the trinity is unique and different, they are still 1. Unity is who God is and so unity is important among God's people. We who are many should learn to be 1 and we can be 1 if we focus on being one in Christ.

And one of Jesus' final prayers was for unity among His followers. ***I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. John 17:11***

Being one in Christ doesn't mean we all have to think the same way, vote the same way, live the same way and have the same gifts, it means we learn to come together with all the unique gifts and graces and differences that God has given us so that we can show the world the love and power and truth of God.

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When we are not one, our witness of God's love is harmed. . When in pride we stand against our brothers and sisters instead of standing with them in compassion, God's witness is weakened. While the Bible does give us some guidance on how to live and order our life in this world, even in the areas we struggle to agree shouldn't cause us to live apart. We have to find ways to remain united.

The Psalms of Ascent were read and sung as people gathered in Jerusalem from all over Israel. As they came together, there would have been many differences. They would have brought different offerings, spoken different languages and had different accents. They came with different money, different forms of dress, and different traditions for their family, and yet they were coming as one to worship God. I'm sure it wasn't easy to be unified, which is why as they traveled to Jerusalem, they were reminded how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. As they made their way to Jerusalem they were told to strive for unity.

We also have to strive for unity and there are 3 things that can help us build unity. The first is **Humility**.

There is no unity without humility. If we are only looking out for our own interests, wanting our own way, or pridefully promoting our own agenda at the expense of others - there is no unity. We have to set aside our pride and self-centeredness so that others can be lifted up. We need to remember that every part of the human body is different and yet needed. We are also all different and yet we are all needed. To build unity we have to respect and love others. In **Philippians 2:2-4** we are told

*Have the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

The second thing that builds unity is **Trust**.

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To be united we have to be able to trust others and for trust to develop there has to be honesty, vulnerability and transparency. To trust others, we have to be willing to own up to our mistakes and take responsibility for our own actions. Maybe this is why we don't have a lot of unity in our political world today, there is no trust.

No political leader wants to own up to their mistake. No business leader wants to be vulnerable. Most leaders don't want to own up to their mistake. To say we made a mistake is seen as a sign of weakness and we think weakness will destroy our position. What's sad is that most people are actually looking for leaders who will be honest and tell the truth and if they did that, they would be trusted more and more likely to be successful.

The third thing needed for unity is **Dogged Determination**

Unity does not come easily, it takes determination, and not just determination but dogged determination. It takes tenacity. It takes grit and perseverance. It takes sticking with people for better or worse and till death do us part. Unity doesn't just happen and it doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build trust and it takes time to learn how to live together and work together despite all our differences. It takes time for humility to truly shape us and help us love others with a love that will last.

Maybe this is another reason why unity never seems to take hold in our country, we give up too easily and aren't willing to put in the effort. It is not easy to stick together when things get difficult, whether that is in a marriage, at a job, on a team, or in our political world. If things don't go our way it is just easier to quit, but if we quit, if we walk away, we remain divided.

Unity is not easy, but if we humble ourselves, build trust among one another and never give up - we will experience unity and with unity comes three tremendous blessings.

The first blessing is that **Life gets good**.

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How good and pleasant it is when we are one. Life gets good because when we are unified, our relationships with others are strong and healthy. We were created for relationships. When God looked at Adam alone in the garden He said, that isn't good. Adam needed others, he needed relationships, so God created Eve and then a family and then a community began. When a family and community are united - it is good, extremely good. When that family or community is not divided, when people are cutting one another down, pushing for their own agenda, and demanding their own way, life can get really bad.

For me, one of the great blessings of Faith Church is that there has always been and remains today a remarkable sense of unity. There is humility and trust and a determination to stay together for the glory of God. Because of that, there is joy we experience in worship, small groups, ministry teams and in outreach and mission. It's great to see people enjoy being together and when we come with a humble spirit to work together - there is great joy.

There was great joy when we united for VBS. There will be great joy when we unite for BOB. If you want to experience and celebrate some joy - sign up to help and build relationships with others and together serve God and our community. There is joy when we come together to learn and pray and support our brothers and sisters in other places - like Ukraine. There is joy in small groups, working with children, serving those in need. When our circle of friends grows, there is joy. When we know we aren't alone and people are there to love and support us, there is joy.

It is good and pleasant when we are united. We see it in our families, we can experience it at work, on teams, and in the church. When we are united - life is just better.

When we are united, **Teams become more vital.**

The Olympics started this past week and if there is no unity on a team, there will be no gold medal.

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In basketball, volleyball, rowing, and table tennis, if there is unity there can be success. I am amazed at things like synchronized diving where there has to be complete unity for there to be any chance of a medal. I have no idea how they train in synchronized diving, but you must have to watch what the other is doing while keeping an eye on what you are doing and adjusting all along the way. You have to trust your teammates to do their job and have your back. There is a lot of dogged determination in preparing for the Olympics, but when they are truly united - teams are vital and successful. If one person on the team is filled with pride or can't trust their teammates, things fall apart. Unity builds vital teams that lead to success.

We hear this alluded to in **Psalm 133:2** *It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.*

Oil was poured on the head of Aaron to anoint him for the work God had for him. The oil set him aside as a servant of God and it was a sign of God's blessing on the work they would do. But Aaron couldn't do it alone, he had to have others. When there is unity among God's people there are opportunities for us to serve God and fulfill God's mission. There is a blessing.

When there is unity in the church, we can do more to build the Kingdom of God and find new ways to share God's love and grace and power with those around us. When there is unity, we can be a blessing to those in need. When churches come together in a mission or ministry - great things happen.

We are blessed to have Ruslan and Archie with us from Raising Hope Ukraine and their ministry is a great example of this. As God drew more people to them and a unified vision and plan developed, they have been able to do amazing things. They have been able to be a light and beacon of hope in a nation that still grapples with war. Unity helps us be more vital in all the work God has for us.

The third thing unity brings is the **Strength to carry on.**  
*It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*  
**Psalm 133:3**

In our May sermon series on Simon Peter, we learned a little bit about Mt. Hermon. It is north of the Sea of Galilee, and it has snow on it all year round. The snowmelt from the mountain and the dew that falls at that elevation is caught up in the streams that flow from the mountain and provides water for the entire Jezreel Valley which is lush and fruitful and provides food for all of God's people.

Unity is like that dew that can sustain a valley and provide food and life. When we are unified, we don't dry up, wither and die. Unity gives us strength from one another and helps us find the power to keep going. On our own, we will get tired and fall. Divided, we will run out of resources, but when we are united, we can carry on.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.*

*But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*  
**Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12**

When we are united, we can carry on through all adversity. If we fall, we will be able to get back up. If we are cold, we can get warm. If we are attacked, we can defend ourselves. Unity brings longevity, it brings God's blessing to life not just for us now, but forever more.

In our divided world, we can show a better way. Let's build unity through humility, trust and dogged determination. Let's work together in all the opportunities God gives us so that we can experience the blessing of life now and forever.

## Next Steps

### ***Happy Trails - Psalm 133***

Read Psalm 133. Why is unity so important to God?  
Reflect on these scriptures: Proverbs 6:16-19,  
Colossians 3:12-14, Ephesians 4:3-6, John 17:11

### **Three things that BUILD unity.**

#### Humility

Read: Philippians 2

Why is humility necessary for unity? Where can your humility bring about unity at home, at work, in school, on teams, at church?

#### Trust

Why is trust necessary for unity? When have you seen trust lead to unity and the breakdown of trust lead to division?  
How can you become more trustworthy and help build unity?

#### Dogged Determination

Why is determination and perseverance necessary for unity?  
Where do you need to stick it out and keep going in life?

### **Three BLESSINGS of unity.**

Life gets good - Read Psalm 133:1

When has unity at home or at work been a blessing to you?

Teams get vital - Psalm 133:2.

What teams are you part of that need to be unified? What can you do to help bring about that unity? What opportunities for mission and ministry come when the church is unified?

Strength to carry on - Psalm 133:3

How does unity refresh and strengthen us?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

***Read all the Psalms of Ascent: Psalm 120 - 134***