

The Joy of Unity

Psalm 133 - NCBC, June 7, 2020

Main Point: **Spiritual unity is God's gracious gift to us.**

- **Cherish** our spiritual unity (1)
 - Spiritual unity is good
 - Spiritual unity is pleasant
- **Receive** our spiritual unity (2-3a)
 - Spiritual unity comes from God
 - Spiritual unity overflows blessings to all
 - Receive Christ's **life**
 - Receive Christ's **love**

Application: **Celebrate** our spiritual unity (3b)

- Abide in Jesus
- Reconcile with others
- Befriend others

Opening Announcements:

- **Next Sunday we return to our standard worship times of 8am and 10:45am with modified indoor services!** Watch your email next week for details, but every family will be invited to RSVP their attendance for one of three possible meeting locations for each service time. No childcare will be provided, so families are encouraged to sit together for worship, as we will all be joyfully patient with extra disruptions and distractions from our youngest attendees during this season.
- **You are also invited to our special Weds Evening Worship Gatherings** through the summer. 6:30pm on Weds nights in the Intersection. This week Kyle Krall will be leading us through some exciting Art of Neighboring training. You won't want to miss it!

<<Crown Him with Many Crowns>>

¹ Psalm 115:1



Good morning Church! What a great privilege to worship Jesus together this morning. He is worthy of every crown He receives! For Jesus is our good and gracious King who has rescued us from sin's death, and made us joint heirs of His kingdom together! Great is His mercy and faithfulness towards all who believe today!!

This morning is an incredibly special and memorable time of worship. I just want to add my public thanks to what the others have already shared. Church – it's such a privilege to be part of New Castle Bible Church with you! Not to us, not to us, but to the Name of Jesus be all the glory among us and through us!¹ Thank you for making Jesus look good!! It's a true blessing to be part of this family who is growing deeper and reaching farther together with His glorious Gospel!!

In a few minutes, we are going to have the privilege of celebrating the memorial of the Lord's Supper together. We've waited months for this special time of worship together... so a quick reminder to our online audience to make sure and grab some juice and some bread so you

will be able to participate along with us in just a few moments.

To help prepare our hearts for communion, please open your Bible to **Psalm 133**.

This is a fitting study for us today since we all have many different convictions and opinions about all our current events. We have lots of different opinions about what's helpful and not so helpful – even in this service right now! Yet we are united in Jesus Christ! And **Psalm 133** reminds us of the Immense Joy and Value of our Spiritual Unity together!

You'll notice that **Psalm 133's** superscript says this is a Song of Ascents written by King David. There are a total of 15 Songs of Ascent – from **Psalm 120** to **Psalm 134**, and 4 of them were written by King David.²

So how many of you find it helpful to listen to God-glorifying music as you're getting ready for Sunday's worship? Yeah...there's something about singing God-centered music that helps soften and prepare our hearts for the public worship assembly, isn't there?

So these Songs of Ascent are like a God-inspired playlist called, "Get your worship on!" For these were the 15 hymns God wanted Jewish pilgrims to sing together as they traveled up the mountain road three times a year for their national worship gatherings.³

And this particular song - **Psalm 133** – specifically recalls the glorious joy of spiritual unity. So if you're able, would

² Psalm 122, 124, 131, and 133

³ Passover, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles

you please stand for the public reading of God's Word, as I read **Psalm 133** from the English Standard Version:

- ¹ *Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!*
- ² *It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!*
- ³ *It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.*

This is God's Word. **Let's Pray Together.**

What do you believe is the greatest threat to our church's unity in these troubled times?

Some might say our church's different responses to the 3 R's - race, riots, and regulations. When we respond so differently to suffering and sin around us – this threatens our unity together.

Others might say, No, actually Satan is the greatest threat to our unity – after all He is the father of all murder⁴ and from the beginning Satan sowed discord and delighted in separating other angels and then human beings from God Himself.⁵

But I wonder if the greatest threat to our unity is not inside each of us? Certainly, difficult circumstances and

⁴ John 8:44

⁵ Ephesians 4:26-27; 6:10-13; c.f. Proverbs 6:19

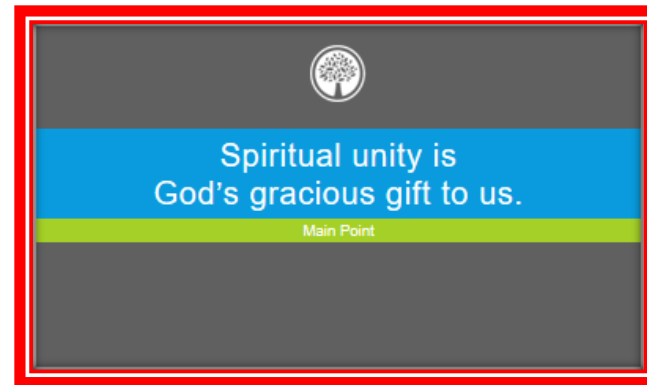
Satan's divisive attacks are real threats – and not to be discounted.⁶

But I wonder if the greatest threat to the unity of New Castle Bible Church is not actually apathy. Apathy. Just being indifferent to our unity together.

As long as we aren't actively fighting or arguing with anyone, we're ok coexisting without true unity. We don't really think that often about unity, except when we find ourselves in active conflict with someone, and then we superficially believe we've experienced unity once the fighting stops...even while we continue to drift farther and farther apart from actual oneness with each other.

Listen carefully, the opposite of unity is not discord or hostile fighting. The opposite of unity in the Scripture is separation. And Satan loves nothing more than the cold, indifferent drift that seeps into a marriage or a church over time – separating the very ones whom God has intended to be one body together.⁷

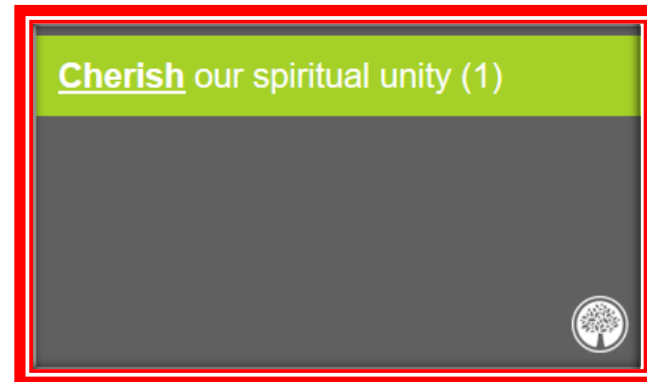
And so, God purposefully puts this song in His Worship Prep playlist – because the main point of **Psalm 133** is that,



Spiritual unity is God's gracious gift to us.

Spiritual unity is something to be cherished, received, and celebrated by all of God's family.

Verse 1 is a call to,



Cherish our spiritual unity.

Don't you love how the song starts? *Behold!* Stop what you are doing... and take a look at this! It is extraordinary that people from all ages and backgrounds

⁶ C.f. Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Titus 3:10

⁷ For marriage, c.f. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31-32. For the church,

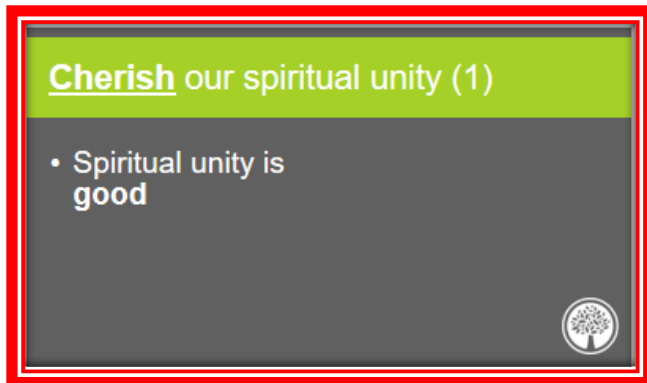
c.f. John 17:21-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

and skin colors and income levels and educations can truly live as one body together!

Behold!! Take a moment while you're preparing your heart to celebrate God's grace...and ponder deeply the glories of an united church family!! The unity of Christ's body is nothing to ignore or take for granted.

Galatians 3:28 puts it like this: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!*

O the unity of God's church is something to be treasured and cherished. First because,



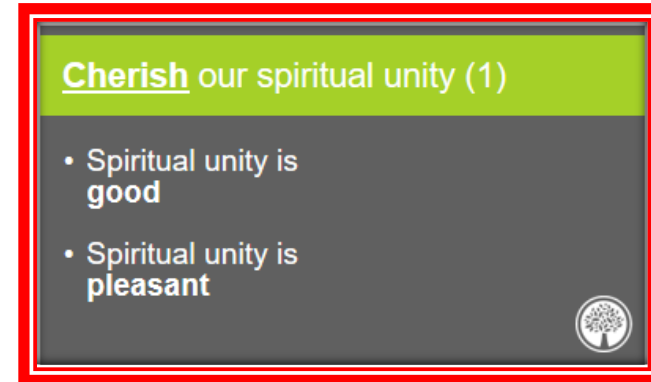
Spiritual unity is good

Look at this – how good ... it is when brothers dwell in unity!

⁸ We don't know when David wrote this hymn. Perhaps it was 7.5 years into his reign when finally all the tribes of Israel united as one kingdom and recognized David as their king? But whatever was going on when David wrote this, he wants us to think deeply about the value of unity as we prepare for worship. C.f. 2 Samuel 5:1-5; 1 Chronicles 12:38-40. For the Page **4a** of 12

Spiritual unity is good.⁸ It is healthy. It is beneficial. It is nourishing and life-giving. Unity in God's family is a really, really good thing.

But it's not only good...



Spiritual unity is also pleasant.

Think about how sweet and enjoyable and lovely and pleasurable and refreshing it is when Christians are one.

So notice... spiritual unity is *both* healthy and enjoyable!! Now that's powerful combo isn't it!?

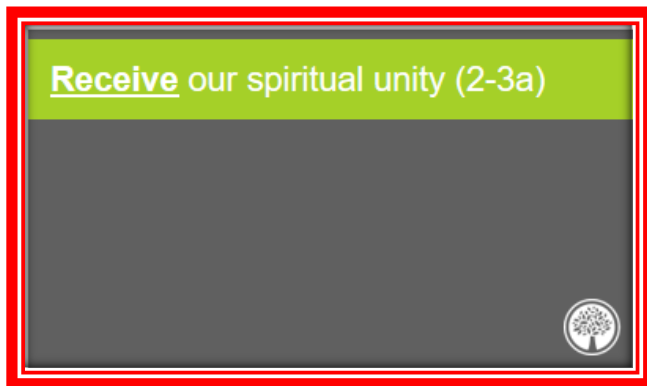
Kids – have you ever noticed how rare it is to find something that is *both* good and pleasant?

For example...lima beans are good for you, but not that pleasant to eat. Chocolate is very pleasant to eat, but not that good for you. Etc. Etc.

first 7.5 years of David's kingdom, he reigned from Hebron over only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. It wasn't until 7.5 years into his reign that the other tribes agreed to submit David and recognize him as their king and installed him as the king over all Israel, reigning from Jerusalem.

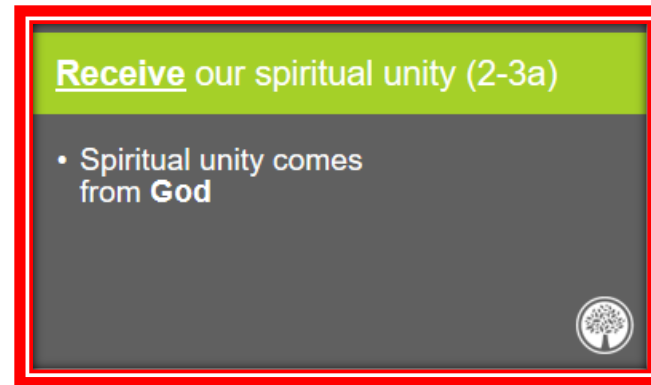
But Behold!! The oneness of God's family is something we should all highly value and find supremely beautiful!!

So then **verses 2-3** go on to picture the joy of spiritual unity when it is experienced by God's people. And these two word pictures – first when Aaron was anointed as the nation's High Priest, and second when Mt. Hermon's dew brings life to all of Israel – invite all of us worshippers to,



Receive our spiritual unity.

Notice I said "receive" spiritual unity, instead of create spiritual unity... because these two words pictures clearly teach that,



Spiritual unity comes down from God

Three different times the same Hebrew word is sung here – "running down," "running down," falling down." Because spiritual unity is a good and pleasant gift that comes down from the Father of lights.⁹

Spiritual oneness among all different kinds of people – experiencing unity together in one family of God – is a supernatural gift – a heavenly blessing that comes down bringing joy and life and refreshment to God's people!

Now if you're like me when you first read **verses 2 and 3** you start scratching your head. Uh.... David... you lost me. How does oil and dew relate to unity? So let me explain this so we understand these beautiful lyrics.

Verse 2 teaches that spiritual unity is like the oil that was poured on Aaron's head when Moses anointed him as the nation's first high priest.¹⁰

Exodus 30:22-24 actually give us the recipe for this holy oil: 12.5 lbs of myrrh, 6.25 lbs of fragrant cinnamon,

⁹ C.f. James 1:17
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¹⁰ Exodus 29:7-9; 30:22-33; Leviticus 8, especially vv. 12, 30.

nearly 19 lbs of other perfumes¹¹ – all mixed together in one gallon of olive oil.

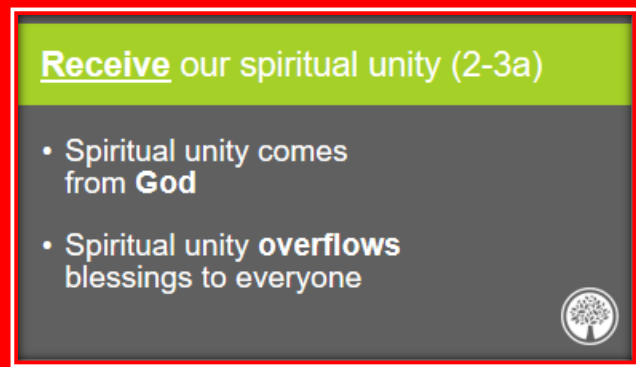
In other words... this was a lot of really good smelling oil...and when Moses called Aaron forward in front of the entire nation to anoint him as their high priest... Moses would have poured the oil on Aaron in such abundance that it would have poured off his head onto his big beard...and then ran down off his beard onto his robes... all while the fragrant aroma of this oil would have wafted through the entire watching congregation... refreshing them with the sweet reality that God had now given them a mediator – a high priest – who would represent them before holy God Himself and offer sacrifices for their sins!

So **verse 2** teaches we should receive spiritual unity from God just as the people joyfully received God's provision for their first high priest!

In **verse 3** then spiritual unity is compared to the dew running down Mt. Hermon which even refreshes Mt. Zion.

Now Mt. Hermon is the tallest mountain in Israel – some 9,000 feet above sea level – and it's located at the very Northern border of Israel... some 200 miles north of Jerusalem and the top of Mt. Zion in Central Israel. Mt. Hermon was quite different than Mt. Zion. Mt. Hermon was known for its moisture. Mt. Zion on the other hand, was surrounded by a dry desert in central Israel and only 1/3 of Hermon's height.

So don't miss the picture:



Receive our spiritual unity (2-3a)

- Spiritual unity comes from **God**
- Spiritual unity **overflows** blessings to everyone

Spiritual unity overflows blessings to everyone.

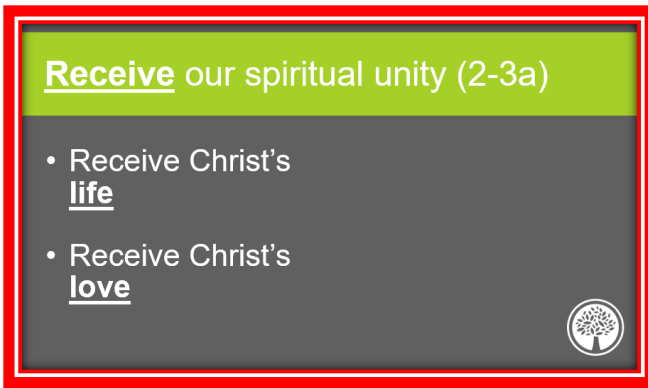
Just like the dew at the top of Mt Hermon runs down and creates life and lush refreshment for all the lower regions ... so likewise spiritual unity spreads joy and refreshment to all of God's people whenever they experience it!

Just like the whole nation was blessed by the anointing of one high priest, and like the whole nation is blessed by moisture on Mt. Hermon... so likewise the God-given blessing of spiritual unity spreads joy to all who experience it!!

So let's apply this to us today.

In order to receive spiritual unity from God, we must

¹¹ 6.25 lbs of Calamus and 12.5 lbs of cassia



Receive Christ's life and Receive Christ's love

After all, spiritual unity is not external uniformity. No. Spiritual unity is oneness with Jesus. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all!¹²

Christian unity is more about agreeing with Jesus than it ever is about agreeing with one another. The basis for all spiritual unity is life in Christ. You must have unity with God before you can have unity with any of God's children. That's why **James 3** teaches us that God's wisdom is first pure, before it is ever peaceable.¹³ Because spiritual unity in God's family is a *result* of receiving union with Christ.

Listen. US Military Cemeteries are very uniform...but their members have no unity among themselves... for they are dead. Spiritual unity requires spiritual life!

You must repent of your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to receive Jesus' life before you can ever experience spiritual unity.

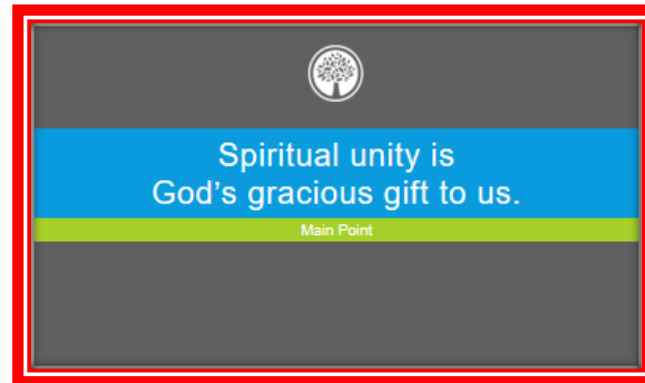
¹² Ephesians 4:1-6; c.f. Romans 12:5, 15:5-7; Philippians 2:1-8

¹³ James 3:15, 17-18

Then you must receive Christ's love. The fruit of God's Spirit – working patience, humility, gentleness, and mercy in real-life relationships. The fruit of God's Spirit is love.

So receive the life and love of Christ. It's no coincidence that **Psalm 133 verse 2** had people thinking about God giving them a priest. Because the reconciliation of sinners is the wonder of spiritual unity!

And the basis for our unity today is the atonement of Jesus Christ – our perfect High Priest – who secured our redemption through His blood and baptized us together in one body through His Spirit!¹⁴



Are you seeing afresh how **Spiritual unity is God's gracious gift to us?** No wonder David sings at the end of **verse 3**,

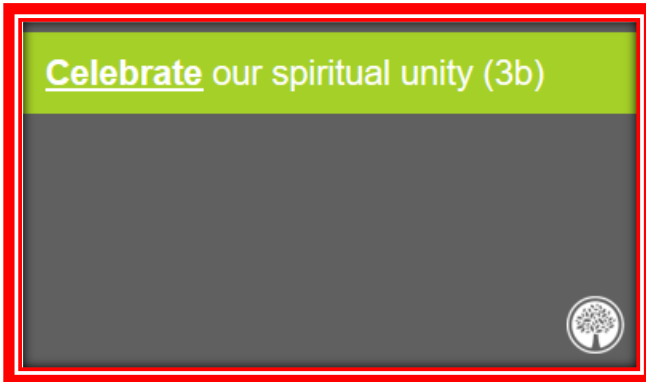
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing – life forevermore!

Where can you experience the blessing of eternal life on

¹⁴ Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:11-12

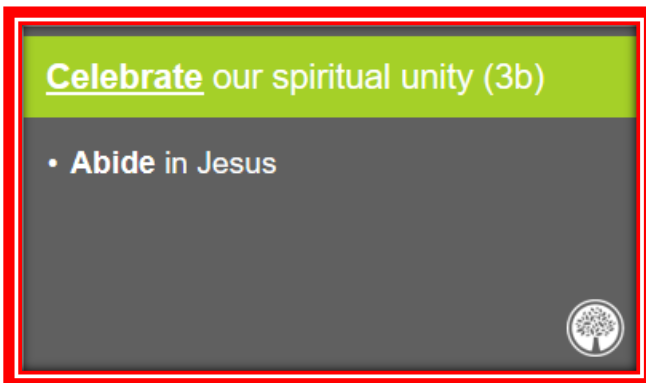
earth? There—wherever brothers and sisters actually live together in unity!

In other words, we shouldn't just cherish spiritual unity, and receive it from God...but we should also,



Celebrate our spiritual unity! For a church experiencing spiritual unity through union with Christ is a good and pleasant taste of heaven on earth!

So quickly, let me just offer a few practical encouragements as we enter this time of communion where we celebrate our spiritual unity in Christ.



First, Abide in Jesus. There is no spiritual unity where there is separation between you and Jesus. So draw near to Him by confessing any sins that are presently separating you from God Himself.

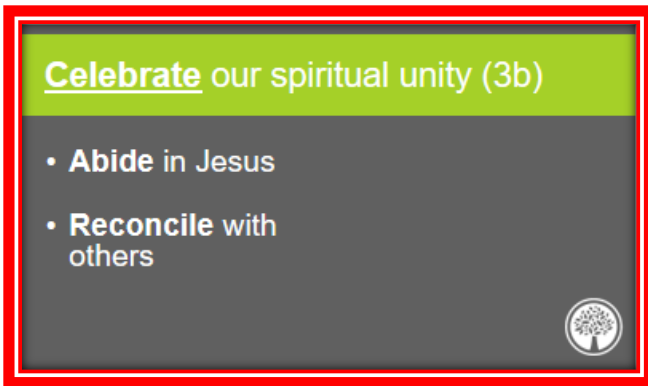
1 John 1:9 says *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So before we go any further in our worship... pause and ask God to forgive your sins.

Have you responded to recent events with anger or lust or greed or covetousness? Agree with God that these sins will never lead to your eternal joy, and repent.

Have you been lying, or stealing, or gossiping, or holding bitterness or resentment in your heart against another? Believe that God is eager to forgive and accept you in Christ.

As we come to the Lord's table this morning...bring your sins while keeping your gaze fixed on the beauty of a Holy God who loves to bring Himself glory by forgiving undeserving sinners like you and me. We ask God to forgive us based on the sufficiency of Jesus' death and resurrection alone!

Second, we must commit to,



Reconcile with others.

We can't say we love God if we continue to hate our brother or our sister.¹⁵ So we shouldn't try to celebrate Jesus making peace with us if we're still unwilling to make peace with others.¹⁶

So if your marriage relationship has grown distant and cold...or if a parent-child relationship has grown silent and icy... or if there's anyone in this church family whom you no longer have sincere care and affection for... then God's Spirit is calling you to the joy of spiritual unity!

Jesus died to give you a new heart and bring sinners like you into His family. So in the words of Jesus,

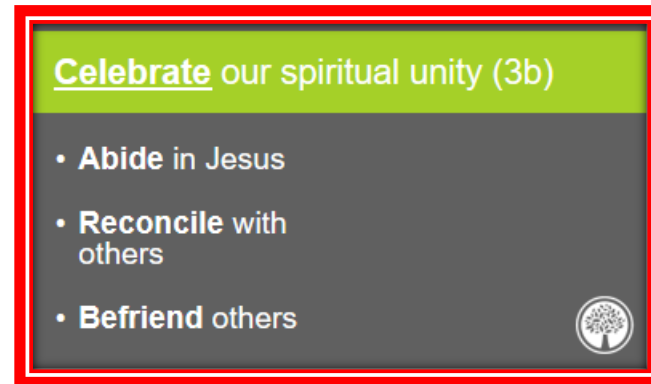
Leave your gift before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and continue your worship!!¹⁷

¹⁵ 1 John 4:20

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:27-30; c.f. Matthew 18:21-34

We must awake from our contented apathy and see spiritual unity as a higher priority than attending the corporate worship gathering itself!

Lastly, may every church member truly,



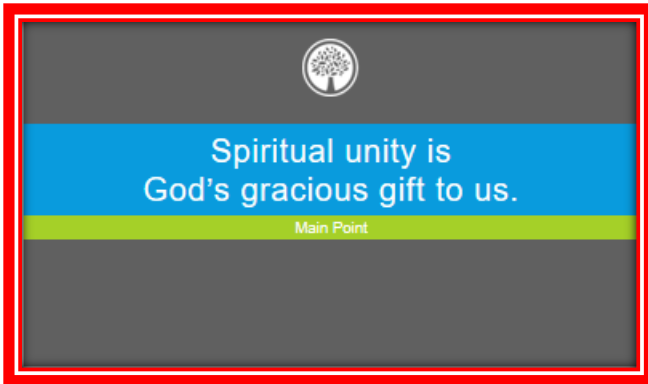
Befriend others.

Spiritual unity is a result of Spirit-born hearts practicing a Spirit-produced love for one another. So even during this season of "physical distancing" ... may God transform us more into a body of spiritual oneness and spiritual friendship. Our church is more than a gathering! In Christ we are all members of one another.¹⁸

So **Psalms 133** prepares worshippers by encouraging us to truly cherish and desire the experience of this spiritual joy.

¹⁷ Matthew 5:23-24

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27



Without a doubt, **Spiritual unity is God's gracious gift to us.** It is a God-given blessing from above which spreads joy and refreshment throughout God's entire family.

So let's celebrate the wonder of God's gospel now that reconciles sinners to Himself! We're going to sing about the power of Christ's Cross – where Jesus died in our place and secured the forgiveness of all our sins – uniting us in His life and love. And as we sing, I urge you to pray the lyrics ... just as the Jewish worshippers would have purified their hearts by singing **Psalm 133** together – confessing all sin and trusting God Himself for the power to unite us all together in His eternal life!

Let's sing together.

<<The Power of the Cross>>



All those who have trusted in Jesus for the salvation of your sins are invited now to partake of this memorial feast together with us.

We will start by lifting the very top flap of your communion package...which will expose the wafer.

Jesus taught us that this bread represents His body which was broken to bring us to God.¹⁹

Let us eat together. Amen.

Next, carefully peel the lid off the cup, exposing the juice which symbolizes Jesus' blood that covered our sins.

And when Jesus instituted the church's communion, He taught us that *this cup is the New Covenant in His blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of what He did to pay for your sins.*

Let's drink together.

<<Prayer of Thanksgiving>>

¹⁹ Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24
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Remember to take advantage of the Downloads links!

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

²⁴ My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1 Corinthians 16:23-24

Recommended Resources on The Joy of Unity:

- Exodus 29:7-9; 30:22-33
- Leviticus 8, especially vv. 12, 30
- Deuteronomy 25:5
- Matthew 5:9, 23-24
- John 10:16; 17:21-23
- Romans 5:5; 15:5-7; 16:17
- 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:12-13, 25-26
- Galatians 2:20
- Ephesians 4:1-6, 13
- Philippians 1:27; 2:1-8
- Colossians 3:14
- Titus 3:10
- Hebrews 13:1
- 1 Peter 3:8
- 1 John 4:7-8

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/psalms/133>
- <http://bethanycentral.org/resources/by-scripture/psalms/psalm-133/>

- *Unity in Action*, John MacArthur
- *Getting to the Heart of Friendships*, Amy Baker

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Psalm 133:1. When is the last time you thought significantly about the value of our spiritual unity? How important is it to you that our local church experiences God's blessing of unity?
2. Read James 3:17. Is true spiritual unity ever opposed to purity? Why is it so important that purity (oneness with God) must always come before unity with others?
3. Review Psalm 133:2-3. How does unity bring refreshment and productive life to God's people? Where does unity come from?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:3. Since unity is a gift from God, how can we practically make every effort to keep the unity of God's Spirit experienced among us? How could you help spread the joyful spirit of unity with others?
5. Read Matthew 5:23-24. Since Psalm 133 is a Song of Ascents that the Jewish pilgrims would have sung together on their way to worship at Jerusalem three times a year, discuss God's priority of reconciliation for worship. Why is it impossible to maintain separation with others while we pursue intimacy with God?