



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N20 May 31, 2020

ONE OFF

“A Gang, a Mob, and a Blessing” Psalm 133:1-3

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Church

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today.

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”

Ephesians 4:15-16



Whence comes blessed unity?

Agreement creates unity; disagreement creates division. Differences of opinion exist; we all recognize this *abstractly*. But these differences create disruptive divisions when they find expression in discord within families and communities. For example, we all know some people are Republicans and others are Democrats. Recognizing as much *abstractly* produces little discord and makes little difference. But when political differences are aired around a family's Thanksgiving dinner table, nothing good comes, then or later, from the discord it breeds. No wonder talk of politics—and religion, too—are off limits in some families.

Perhaps, a little timelier example will help. A lot of discord exists around COVID-19, differences of opinion regarding the best way to either avoid it or treat it. It's all *theoretical* until you go to the grocery store where it quickly becomes intensely *practical*. Immediately, it's obvious that some people are taking recommended protocols more seriously than others. The more cautious are keeping their distance, wearing a mask, and following one-way arrows put on the floor to direct traffic up and down aisles. The less cautious are not. The discord creates divisions that often lead to ugly outcomes when, for example, a more cautious person bumps into a less cautious one going the wrong way in an aisle, or a less cautious person sans mask walks up right behind a more cautious one with mask in the check-out line.

These observations remind me of three New Testament examples of how discord creates division. *First*, when the gospel first went to Gentiles, some Pharisaic Jewish believers were convinced that Gentiles had to become Jews to become Christians, that is, had to “be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses” in order to be saved (Ac 15:5; cf., v. 1). Paul and Barnabas, among others, did not. The division was so serious it threatened the message of grace and the unity of Christianity. A council was convened, and following much testimony, Peter providentially put an end to the debate by agreeing with Paul. He stood up and told the assembly, “Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of

Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (vv. 10-11). James agreed, and the church rallied around his correspondence.

Second, some time later when Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, contemplating a second missionary journey, a personal dispute arose between them regarding John Mark. Barnabas thought they should take him with them to revisit the churches he and Paul had planted, but Paul disagreed, since Mark had deserted them earlier on their first journey in Pamphylia. The discord not only divided Paul and Barnabas, but it doubtless spilled over into the church—some agreeing with Barnabas, some agreeing with Paul. This time unity eluded them. When they could not agree, Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and left for Syria.

Third, later still, Paul found the church in Corinth divided by its members' allegiances to different leaders. The apostle wrote and rebuked them: “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?” (1Co 3:3-4). He then spent the rest of the chapter in an effort to turn discord into concord by convincing his readers that God was the one who deserved their allegiance. He wrote: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (vv. 5-7).

In a nutshell, concord, namely, *unity* is constructive; discord, namely, *disunity* is destructive. The first is a *blessing*; the second is a *curse*. No wonder Paul told the Ephesians: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” revealing that unity is from above, a work of the Spirit. Psalm 133 says much the same thing.

A song of ascents. Of David.

1 *How good and pleasant it is*

when God's people live together in unity!

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.

3 *It is as if the dew of Hermon*

were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing,

even life forevermore.

READ in another translation**A Song of Ascents. Of David.**

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. (ESV)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "God's people" in v. 1.
- Circle "unity" in v. 1.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 2.
- Circle "precious oil" in v. 2.
- Underline "running down" in v. 2.
- Box "as if" indicating *comparison* in v. 3.
- Bracket "dew of Hermon" in v. 3.
- Underline "falling on" in v. 3.
- Highlight "even life for evermore" in v. 3.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Psalm 133 is “a song of ascents” (cf., Ps 120-134). On what occasion would it be sung?
 2. “God’s people” (v. 1) is literally “brothers.” Is Psalm 133 a celebration of fellowship and unity in the family or in the believing community? Explain.
 3. The words “good” and “pleasant” (cf., Ps 135:3; 147:1) can have different *connotations*. “Unity” is “good” in what sense and “pleasant” in what sense? Explain.
 4. “Unity” is compared to “precious oil.” Identify the oil and explain its significance.
 5. Explain the point of the *comparison* of “unity” to “precious oil” in verse 2.
 6. Unity is also compared to “the dew of Hermon.” Identify its uniqueness and explain its significance.
 7. Explain the point of the *comparison* of “unity” to “the dew of Hermon” in verse 3.
 8. What does the threefold repetition of “descending” (“running down” 2x and “falling on” in the NIV) suggest regarding unity’s source?
 9. “For there the LORD bestows a blessing” (v. 3). “There” is where?
 10. **Discussion:** If harmony is a good thing, then discord is a bad thing. Contrast the *destructive* nature of discord with the *constructive* nature of harmony in the church.
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Commentary On The Text

Psalm 133 belongs to a collection of psalms with the superscription “a song of ascents.” These psalms (120-134) were likely sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the three annual Jewish festivals. One commentator introduces this psalm with these words: “In this short pilgrim psalm David exclaimed how wonderful it is for believers to dwell **together in unity**. This thought was appropriate for the religious festivals when Israelite families came together to worship their Lord” (Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 888).

Regarding these annual gatherings, another explains: “Once Israel entered the land of Canaan, the three great feasts of the year (the Feast of Unleavened Bread accompanying Passover, the Feast of Harvest or Weeks, and the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles, as seen in Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18-25; Deut. 16:1-16) were to be occasions of pilgrimages to the central sanctuary by ‘all’ male Israelites. Thus the Hebrew word for *feast* (*hag*; e.g., Lev 23:6, 34, 39; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13) includes the idea of a pilgrimage and can be aptly translated ‘pilgrim feast’ (cf. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 303)” (F. Duane Lindsey, “Leviticus,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 205). In a nutshell, Psalm 133 celebrates the fellowship and unity of the Jewish community manifested when it celebrated its three annual festivals.

The psalm is short, with only three verses. It opens with an *exclamation* regarding unity (v. 1), followed by two supporting *comparisons* (vv. 2, 3a), and concludes by *locating* unity’s origin in the LORD. In verse 1, the psalmist exclaims, “How *good* and *pleasant* it is when God’s people live together in unity!” The specific connotations of “good” and “pleasant” are difficult to discern. Taken together, the two can be translated “How delightfully good” (CSB), but most English versions translate them individually, suggesting two positive aspects of unity. The connotations of these two aspects are likely related to the two comparisons to “precious oil” and to “the dew of Hermon” that follow.

Regarding the first, the “precious oil poured on the head” of Aaron (Lev 8:12) identified, set apart, and prepared him to function as the high priest. Likewise, the unity that marked the pil-

grims on their way to worship in Jerusalem identified, set apart, and prepared them to function as God’s worshiping community. One commentator writes: “This imagery from the priesthood was appropriate because of the pilgrims being in Jerusalem. The oil poured **on Aaron’s** head flowed **down** on his **beard** and shoulders, and onto the breastplate with the names of all 12 tribes. The oil thus symbolized the unity of the nation in worship under their consecrated priest. As the oil consecrated Aaron, so the unity of the worshipers in Jerusalem would consecrate the nation under God” (Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 888).

Regarding the second, “the dew of Hermon,” was proverbially heavy, sustaining the mountain’s lush greenery even during the summer months. Likewise, the unity of the pilgrims invigorated the nation. The same commentator writes: “The dew of Hermon was heavy; it symbolized what was freshening and invigorating. The refreshing influence of the worshiping community on the nation was similar to the dew on vegetation” (Ross, 888). So the unity on display during the pilgrim festivals was “good” and “pleasant” in that it identified, set apart, and prepared the pilgrims to function as God’s worshiping community and in that it refreshed and revived the nation. In the words of one writer, unity made for “social happiness and national vitality” (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, SBB, 439).

In verse 3, the psalmist makes explicit what he left implicit in verse 2. “Unity,” identified as “good and pleasant,” is a blessing bestowed by the Lord. The thought implicit in the repeated use of “flows down” in verses 2a, 2b, and 3 (NET) is made explicit in the statement, “there the Lord bestows his blessing” (v. 3). “There” is where? “There” is “Mount Zion.” The place the Lord chooses to manifest his presence is the place he bestows his blessing, namely, “even life forevermore.” As far as quality of life is concerned, this life is life in all its fullness; as far as duration of life is concerned, this life is life that endures forever in communion with God’s people, namely, “eternal life” (NET).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *How good . . .* “Verse 1 is reminiscent of the proverbial sayings which praise the good fortune of those who know true wisdom, i.e. the law of God. Also, the comparisons in verses 2 and 3 show that the poem should be classed as a Wisdom Psalm” (A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 73-150*, 885).

v. 1 *God's people* Cf., “brothers” (ESV); “when brothers live together” (NET). “The clause, *when brothers dwell in unity* (lit. ‘when brothers dwell also together’), has a fairly close parallel in Deuteronomy 25:5, where it merely refers to an extended family living at close quarters. Some have therefore seen the psalm as a plea to restore or preserve this social pattern, or as praise for the family reunions which the pilgrim feasts made possible (note the emphasis on Zion, 3). But this is unduly narrow. All Israelites, including even debtors, slaves and offenders (cf. e.g. Deut. 15:3, 12; 25:3), were brothers in God’s sight” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 488).

v. 1 *unity* The psalm’s superscription identifies it as “a song of ascents,” which belongs to “a collection of Psalms chanted by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem . . . Taylor (*PIB*, p. 639) describes the collection as a ‘handbook of devotions for the use of pilgrims’, while Mowinckel (*PIW*, II, p. 208) calls it ‘The Songs of the festal processions’ which may well be right . . . The Psalmist is thinking of the fellowship of the Covenant community in Jerusalem, during the pilgrimage festivals” (Anderson, 848, 885). “During the pilgrimages, the Israelites enjoyed an ecumenical experience on their way toward and in Jerusalem. The pilgrims came from many different walks of life, regions, and tribes as they gathered for one purpose: the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem” (Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed, vol. 5, *Psalms*, 935-36).

v. 2 *like* “In two similes, [unity] is compared to things that ‘come down’ (the NIV’s **running down** and **falling** both translate the same Hb. Participle, *yōrēd*), namely **oil** and **dew**. This thrice repeated participle may be inviting us to look heavenward for its origin, especially in the image of dew. The same implication of divine origin also resides in the image of oil” (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 474). “Another emphasis of the psalm, which is made by a three-fold repetition, [is] partly lost in translation: literally, ‘descending (2a) . . . descending (2b) . . . descending’ (3a). In short, true unity, like all good gifts, is from above; bestowed rather than contrived, a blessing far

more than an achievement” (Kidner, 489).

v. 2 *precious oil* “The oil prepared for use in the tabernacle was a special, fragrant oil, whose recipe was not to be imitated (cf. Ex 30:22-22). In addition to being used for the consecration of the Tent of Meeting, only the high priest and the priests could be anointed with this oil, associated exclusively with priestly service (cf. Ex 30:30-33)” (VanGemeren, 936).

v. 2 *running down* “The oil poured on **Aaron’s** head flowed **down** on his **beard** and shoulders, and onto the breastplate with the names of all 12 tribes. The oil thus symbolized the unity of the nation in worship under their consecrated priest. As the oil consecrated Aaron, so the unity of the worshipers in Jerusalem would consecrate the nation under God” (Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 888).

v. 3 *dew of Hermon* “It is likely that ‘the dew of Hermon’ was a proverbial expression for ‘heavy dew’” (Anderson, 886). “The picture of oil running down (v. 2) no doubt suggested dew coming down from Mount Hermon in the north onto Mount Zion. The dew of Hermon was heavy; it symbolized what was freshening and invigorating. The refreshing influence of the worshiping community on the nation was similar to the dew on vegetation” (Ross, 888).

v. 3 *falling on* “The psalmist does not intend to suggest that the dew from Mt. Hermon in the distant north actually flows down upon Zion. His point is that the same kind of heavy dew that replenishes Hermon may also be seen on Zion’s hills. See A. Cohen, *Psalms* (SoBB), 439” (The NET Bible, 7sn on Ps 133:3). “During the summer months (from May to October) virtually no precipitation falls on Jerusalem, even in the form of dew. During these months at least two pilgrimages were held: the Feast of Firstfruits in May/June and the Feast of Booths in September. Regardless of how harsh the conditions of the pilgrimage, life, or nature, the fellowship of the brotherhood of God’s people was refreshing” (VanGemeren, 937).

v. 3 *life for evermore* “Where God’s people are living together ‘in unity,’ ‘there’ the Lord sends blessing by his ‘command’ (NIV, ‘bestows’). The nature of the blessing is specified in the second part of this verse: ‘even life forevermore.’ ‘Life’ with its fullness of enjoyment in the presence of God is a gift of God” (VanGemeren, 937). “In particular ‘the blessing’ manifests itself as life in all its promised fullness bestowed by ‘the Maker of heaven and earth’” (cf. 134:3)” (Broyles, 474).

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APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Unity in the family of God is a blessing he bestows, setting his people apart to worship and serve him.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I don't know about you, but I am a hugger. It always feels like the perfect way to show my friends that I am excited to be with them and that I care for them. Covid-19 has changed my ability to show care for my loved ones in this way, but it has not removed my ability to care for them in other ways. I have been able to write letters, spend lots of time on Facetime, and even had virtual game nights and Bible studies. I have been investing so much time in these things so I can stay connected with those that I love. This helps to create and sustain strong relationships, and having strong relationships with other people is not only fun, but it is Biblical! Psalm 133 celebrates the fact that we get to have relationships with others and be unified with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Verse 3 says that unity is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. My study Bible says that the dew being talked about here is crucial for the vegetation in a dry season. Unity is crucial for us! It will provide blessings and will bring new life to our hearts. What a beautiful picture, especially in this challenging time. We must remember that we can still be unified with our brothers and sisters in Christ while in quarantine, and the Lord is calling us to do so. Let's receive the blessing the Lord has for us in being unified!

* This week's edition of Family Talk is written by Madison Houston, Children's Ministry Intern.

What Does The Bible Say?

What does the Bible say? Read Psalm 133.

1. What does the exclamation point tell you about these verses?
2. What does it mean to be in *unity* with others?
3. What does verse 3 say will come from the Lord when we dwell with others in unity?

What Do You Think?

How can we as believers stay in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ even though we cannot see them in person like we are used to? What is a practical thing you could do to build unity with other believers in quarantine?

What Do You Do?

Loving other people takes work and diligence. Write a letter to someone that you are excited to see when we all get back to church! Email kidpix@wearecentral.org a picture of the letter to receive one token.

CORE COMPETENCY: Biblical Community

I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 133:1

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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