

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. I am so glad you are here with us today. We are in a series called Kingdom Culture 101: Learning to Live a Life of Values. We started this series by praying and asking God that He would interrupt and disrupt our lives. God is clearly answering that prayer. He's at work. He's moving. We want to slow down and stay in step with God. You see, half of my job is just to pay attention and call attention to that which God is doing. I'm just telling you, God is trying to interrupt our lives to get our attention.

In fact, I love this verse that says, "If my people who are called by my name," sometimes I think we want to be the people of God. We just don't necessarily want to walk in the ways of God. Sometimes I think we want to be called by His name, but we don't want to do what He says. "If we will humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wickedness, then He will hear from heaven and forgive our sin and will heal our land." I think God is interrupting our lives, inviting us to humble ourselves and turn from the things of this world to the things of God. So, Holy Spirit, we invite you in. Come, capture our hearts and set us apart. Interrupt our lives, disrupt our lives, and may the things You value become the things we value. Or we slow down, so we can have ears to hear and a heart to receive that what You want to say to us.

You see, whether you realize it or not, you live your life from your values. Your values might be defined and intentional, or they might be undefined and unintentional. But the values of your heart are creating the culture of your life. The culture - what other people see, feel, and experience when they are around you. The more you walk with Jesus, what's supposed to happen over time is the worldly values that are in your heart are supposed to be displaced by kingdom values. That's actually what it means to be a disciple, a learner, a follower, becoming like Jesus. The things that I value that were of the world get displaced, and the things that are valued in the kingdom become a core to who I am as a person. We've been saying that if you want to know what you value, just look at what you grieve. Because what you grieve really reveals that which you value, because when your values are broken, when they're trampled on, when they're violated, there's a grieving that takes place inside of you.

One of those values for our church is unity. We pursue unity with everything we have. We pursue unity, so we don't drift into division. When unity is violated, it grieves us. It grieves us deeply, why? Because it grieves God. This is a kingdom value. If you cut our church at the core of our heart, it is a value to us. It's a big deal to God, so it's a big deal to us. If you want to know why it's a big deal, you've got to go all the way back to the beginning. Then, God said, "Let us make man in our image and in our likeness." Sometimes, I think we forget that God exists in relationship. He exists in community. God exists in a unified state. It's His very character and nature.

The Trinity - God the Father; God, the Son; God, the Holy Spirit; three in one. God is the very definition of unity. When you look through the Bible, you will find no examples of gossip, division, slander, offenses, preferences between the Trinity. No, you see honor and humility and love and sacrifice. The Father speaks, and says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well

pleased." Jesus says He came to reveal the Father to the world. The Holy Spirit only testifies about Jesus. The Father exalts Jesus, Jesus has come to glorify the Father, and the Holy Spirit wants to turn our hearts to the Father by turning our attention to Jesus. His very character and nature is that of unity and we were made in that image in that likeness, which means you were created to live in unity. Every time you pursue unity, catch it, you reflect and reveal the very nature of God to this world.

If God exists in unity, then every time I choose unity in my life, I am literally reflecting and revealing the very character and nature of God. I am literally releasing the glory of God in the atmosphere around me. And when I choose unity, in that moment, God's kingdom just came, and His will was just done. No wonder Satan hates it. He's a divider and all he wants to do is divide. Go all the way back. What did he do? He divided himself from God by trying to set himself up over God. He thought he had a better way. Then, he divided a third of the angels from God. Then, he divided Adam and Eve from God by spreading a bad report, gossip, a little bit of slander, getting them to question God's goodness. Then, he divided Adam and Eve from their children. Then, he divided Israel from Judah. Then, he divided the disciples from Jesus. Then, he divided the first century church. Now, he wants to divide your heart and your mind, so he can divide you from the people of God, so he can ultimately divide you from God Himself.

He's a divider. In fact, Paul, when there was divisions in the church, says, "If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." Paul says, "Hey, Satan has only got one play, and you know what it is - it's division. So don't be outwitted, don't be unaware; he wants to divide you." Yet, sometimes our own pride, and selfishness, and emotions, and feelings, and flesh gets hooked in to Satan's schemes, even though we know the play he runs is division, and we get caught in the mouse trap. I mean, if we look back over these last couple of years, it was the most divisive season probably any of us have ever experienced in our entire lifetime.

We were outwitted. Satan's schemes starting to work. You saw marriages divided, parents and children divided, friendships divided, partnerships divided, businesses, churches, cities, everything was divided. What do we do when Satan runs his play? We come with the opposite spirit, and "we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." Make every effort, as far as it depends on you. With focus and determination, and commitment, and grit with all your heart make every effort to pursue unity, so you don't drift into division. This has got to be the heartbeat of followers of Jesus. I mean, when was the last time you shut down someone who was gossiping about something in your life? When was the last time you wanted to grumble in the car with your family about someone else, but you just decided to just eat it and release it to the Lord? When was the last time you were offended at somebody and you genuinely and honestly forgave them?

That was a moment you made every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and honor God. See, we've got to catch how big of a deal this is to God. And lots of verses for you today, so just

stay with me on this. "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him." That should make your radar go up. "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, a man who stirs up dissension or division among brothers." Catch the gravity of that. God says He hates and detest division, and He puts it in the same category as murder. Why? Because division is stealing, killing, and destroying. If we're supposed to be the people of the kingdom, then what God values, we're supposed to value, and what God hates, we're supposed to hate.

The question you have to ask then is, "Well, if unity is such a big deal to God, what is unity?" This little word that gets thrown around in the world all over the place, but what does it actually, unity actually mean? Well, unity is not uniformity. Unity is not passivity. Unity is not abdication. Unity is not blind allegiance; it is not ignorant fellowship. Unity is not tolerance. Unity is not even when you and me agree with each other. Unity is when we agree with God. That's what unity is. The definition of unity is when you and me choose to come into agreement and alignment with God. It's when we're willing to submit our uniqueness and our individuality to the Lordship of Jesus for the good of others, and the glory of God. This has been important to us since the beginning.

I mean, when we first got started, we felt like God said to us, we were going to have a corporate anointing as a church. You say, what does that mean? It just meant that we really believed that we weren't going to be a church built on the gifts or talents of an individual, just a few people. No, no, no; we were going to be a bunch of individuals who are going to come together and submit our unique gifts and passions and talents and resources in life to a common vision for an exponential return. That's what we've been doing since day one - joyfully submitting and surrendering to each other because we believe so deeply in this concept of unity that God gave us. Psalms 133 is really a core verse for our church. "How good and pleasant it is when Brothers live together in unity." That's not how we think that verse should read. We think this verse should say, "How good and pleasant it is when I get to do me." Oh! "How good and pleasant it is when I get to do what I want, when I want, how I want."

Oh! "How good and pleasant it is when it is me, myself, and I." But we got to repent, and agree with what He says. He says, "It's good and pleasant when you're in My life and I'm in your life and we're in agreement with Him." "It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the color of his robes. It is as if the Dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there, the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore." Three things I want you to see real quick about the power of unity, and this first thing is this, is - unity is our anointing. Oil on the head was always a picture of anointing, the supernatural empowerment of God. There is an anointing when we unify together. One can put a thousand to flight, two can put ten thousand to flight. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs, in unity, to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and destroy the works of darkness. There is this anointing when you and I choose to come together in unity and we refuse to forsake the anointing for our preferences, for our offenses, and for our selfishness. I mean, if you actually can catch it, the anointing is actually the very person of God upon you, and, yes, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But together, we are the dwelling place of God. There is an exponential impact and power and authority when we unify. Second thing is, there's a protection in unity, the Dew of Hermon. Think of dew in the morning. When you wake up, and it's a dewy day, everything is covered. It's like this big giant blanket of protection that is laid over you and you come into unity, into agreement with God together. Like, this is why Jesus says that we're like sheep.

When are sheep safe? When they're in a flock, and unified, and pushing in to get as close to that shepherd as they can be. What is the sheep that's in danger? The divided sheep that has walked away over here. The wolf doesn't come for the flock. The wolf comes for the individual sheep that has wandered away. If you can catch it there as a protection in unity, and a lot of times we think, oh, unity, that's just something other people tell us to get us to do what we want. No, unity is about you not being the sheep that becomes lamb chops. I don't want to be lamb chops, and I don't want you to be lamb chops, so you've got to be in the flock. You've got to be unified in your marriage, pursuing unity over a decision, there's a protection and a power in that; in a business partnership, in families, in leaderships you've got to be unified because Satan is looking for the weak point. He's like pressing to look for that crack. But when we unify, there is no crack that he can shove his hand in.

The last thing is, "He bestows His blessings." There is a blessing in unity. Other translations literally say "commands His blessing," His life, His goodness, and His favor in unity. The Lord gave us this little illustration that many of you have seen, but many of you have not. This is a religious organization. There's no vision, there's no values, it's got a terrible culture. It is an exhausting way to live. It's defined by preferences, selfishness, offenses, and fear and all the people are going in different directions just smashing into each other. If you've ever been in one of these, you know how miserable this is. The person with the loudest voice can pull the whole thing this way. The person with the biggest agenda can pull it this way. The person who's got the best gossiping story can pull it all this way. It is an exhausting, completely ineffective way to live. But then there's a movement of hope that has a clear vision and values, guardrails, a culture that's been created by unity, sacrifice, forgiveness and love and we all start moving in the same direction for the good of others and the glory of God.

Like a bunch of little streams coming in, we become a raging river that starts to move together and flow and shape and carve the landscape or the world around us. From time to time, you will be the arrow that begins to drift, but you'll bump into that arrow and it'll push you right back down. All of a sudden, other people in your life, it's good and pleasant. Why? Because I bumped into them, and they pushed me back on the road that I'm supposed to go to follow Jesus. It becomes impossible when this is moving the way that it's supposed to, to be a

counter arrow to come upstream. Why? Because the force is so unified and so strong that it will either flip that arrow back into alignment or kick it out of the river all together. Either way, win-win. Now, some of you are like, "That's cool but I don't really care about the church." Great. Put this into your family. This is a chaotic family. There's no vision, there's no values, and everything is defined by the person with the loudest voice.

This kid's select sports, this kid's theater, this parent's job, this parent's job, this person's attitude or drama - exhausting. But what if, all of a sudden, you had a vision to say, "Me and my house, we will serve the Lord. We're going to define some values. We're going to work together to pursue unity as a family to be who God has called us to be." How about a team? This is a team with the kid with the drama mama kid, and the person with the biggest talent, and the person with the biggest issue and all of the preferences and opinions. What if you just became a team that says, "No, no, we're a team and we have a vision. This is the direction that we're going." How about work? This is the person with this program, and this department, and this agenda, and this person's attitude, and this person's preference - it exhausts some of you. I'm literally defining your life. We have a vision - let's unify together for something bigger than ourselves.

If you're a leader in any area of life, you are responsible to create this. We'll just help you real quick. Parents, bosses, coaches, teachers, you're responsible for this. You're supposed to define the vision, set the guardrails or the values, and then hold people accountable when their arrows are going in the wrong direction. If you're not a leader, you're responsible, what I would call, to be the first follower. Not to be the last arrow with passivity and abdication way back here. No, no, you're the first follower and when the boss or the coach or the teacher says, "This is what we're doing," you rally everyone else together and say, "Okay, everybody, let's go. This is the direction that we're going." Everybody loves a unified environment. But most of us don't want to pay the cost to create a unified environment.

To actually create unity, look at these verses with me. "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." If you're actually going to pursue unity, it can't be about you. You've got to let go of your preference, your opinion, your right, your desire, your perspective, how you think it should go, and you've got to think what's good for others? What's good for others? What's good for the whole? Because ultimately, what is good for others and what is good for the whole will be what's best for you. Or how about this, "Above all, love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins." If you're going to pursue unity in anything in life, you're going to have to be a person with love, because there are going to be a whole lot of offenses that take place. Because people sin and they make mistakes and they fail and they fall and what is Satan looking for? The crack! The Bible says, "Gossip separates close friends, but love covers and draws back together." Love covers, so it can heal. Fear exposes, so it can condemn. If we're actually going to pursue unity, we've got to be people that cover over the mistakes of others with love to bring it back together, so Satan doesn't outwit us.

Or how about this one that says, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." If you're going to pursue unity, you've got to deny yourself. Which means you have to give up the right for your voice to be heard. You have to take your dream and put it on the altar. You have to be willing to give up the need to defend yourself, to justify yourself, to explain yourself, and just straight up, deny yourself. It's in the pursuit of unity where the character of Jesus actually gets formed and shaped in our life. Tell me something else in your life that will form the character of Jesus in you, like the wholehearted pursuit of unity. Here's what we say - we say things like, "Well, I can't unify to that because I've got to be true to myself, and my dream, and what's in here." Being true to yourself is not doing what you want; being true to yourself is pursuing unity, because that's the image and likeness in which you were made.

If you actually want to be true to yourself, make sure you start with the pursuit of unity, because that's the very character formation that God imprinted into your spirit in a divine way being made in His image, and His likeness. With me on that! One more of these, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Some of you are like, "You had me until that word." I know. Everyone's unified until they're not. Everyone's submissive until they have to submit to someone or something they don't like. Here's what we think - submit, that's what weak, insecure people do. It's what the world has told us. "Submitting is what weak, insecure people do. I am a strong and secure person, so I'm not going to submit." Do you even know what the word submission means? Break it down sub, mission. It means to come under the mission of someone else and lift them up so they can increase and advance and succeed - sub, mission.

If you say only weak and insecure people do that, how do you explain Jesus? The strongest, most secure person who ever lived, lived in complete submission to his father. See, submission is surrendered strength. It's not weakness. It's surrendering my strength to come under, and Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing, went where He saw the Father going, said what He saw the Father saying. Jesus submitted to sinful parents, Mary and Joseph. He submitted to synagogue rulers. He submitted to the Roman authorities. He submitted to Pilate, a demonic man who sent him to the cross. It's said He uttered no word. He defended himself in no way. He came under to lift others up. You sit here and say, "Yeah, but you don't know my boss, or my teacher, or my parents, or my leaders." You're right. I don't need to.

I just know this, Daniel submitted to four dark demonic kings. David submitted to Saul for ten years while Saul was trying to kill him, and Joseph submitted to Potiphar, the jail master and ultimately, Pharaoh. The question is this, are you secure enough to surrender your strength for the good of others and the glory of God? Are you secure enough to surrender your strength? You say, "But my boss doesn't get it, and he doesn't have the right ideas. I've got such better ways of doing stuff." Okay, here's my question. Do you think God wants you to do it your way, the better idea, or do you think He just wants you to walk in his ways? Are you catching me on this? You don't do it for them. You do it for Jesus. It's not out of reverence for them, it's our reverence for Jesus and reverence for Jesus will give you a reverence for them.

The moment you place yourself or God places you in any scenario, a family, a business, a team, a church, whatever that thing is, you are now responsible to pursue unity in that space with everything that you've got. If God's put you there in that marriage, that family, that business, that team, that church, you now have a responsibility, what, to steward what God has given to you to come under to help others increase and advance. The moment you're there, you've lost the right to gossip, grumble, slander, and divide. You never had it in the first place, but we think we do. But the moment God's placed you there, you lose it. Why? Because now I'm submitting for the reverence of Christ. Whatever I do with all of my heart is doing it for the Lord. I'm not unifying with that team as if I'm unifying with Jesus. I'm unifying with that boss that I don't like as if I'm unifying with Jesus. Are you catching me?

Let me make it super practical for you because some of you, it's just like you need the nuts and bolts, ready? Students, ready? "Honor your father and mother as the Lord, your God, has commanded us so that you may live long and that it may go well with you." Submit, surrender, unify with your parents. Do what they say, follow their rules, embrace their values, walk with them, do what is important to them, what they value you need to embrace and value and do it with all of your heart. Why? Because there is a life and a blessing in unity. Couples, "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one. They are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate it." Husbands and wives, you're supposed to pursue unity together. Forgive, love, apologize, die to self, meet their needs, do what's important to them. Get on the same page with how you parent, how you use your money, how you spend your time, what's acceptable, what's not acceptable, what are the values and the vision of our home? Pursue unity as a marriage.

Workers, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." What do you do with that? Like in all seriousness, when we were going through these notes, now, two weeks in a row on the pre-stuff, when we walk through it, I just like, look at this on the monitor, and I just want to be like, what do you do with that? Because it's in the Bible, so you've got to like either decide the Bible is not real, or God made a mistake on this one.

Submit, come under the mission of the authorities that God has placed in your life because they've been established by God. If you rebel against that leader, you're rebelling against God Himself, He says. Catch the gravity. "If my people who are called by my name." I want to be the people of God, I just don't want to walk in the ways of God. I want His name; I just don't want to do what He says. So come on. Are you a joy to lead? Do you go first? Are you willing to submit your creativity, your ideas, your gifting to your supervisors, to your leaders, whoever God has placed in your life, and then church people, "be completely humble and gentle and

patient bearing with one another and love make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." It takes humility and patience to forgive and love and apologize and build. How do you pursue unity with someone you have no relationship with? Across the aisle, across the campus, across the team, across the Circle, we've got to pursue and love and pursue unity with one another.

I know some of you, you're sitting here and you're like, "Bro, yeah, yeah, yeah, all of that. No, but I got me and Jesus. I follow Jesus. I don't need any of that." Okay, but if you follow Jesus, then Jesus is Lord. Jesus is either Lord of all or He's Lord of none. You get to pick. But if He's Lord, and it's you and Jesus, then Jesus would say, "If I'm Lord, then I want you to honor your parents. I want you to pursue unity with your marriage. I've asked you to submit to the leaders I've placed in your life and I want you to make every effort to pursue unity in the church." See, every time God gives you an opportunity to unify, He's teaching you how to practice unifying with someone you can see so you can learn how to unify with the God that you can't see. Every time you unify, in that moment, you just released the glory of God and in that moment, God's kingdom just came and His will was just done. Come on.

In fact, God takes it personal when we don't. "The Lord has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." Just catch it. When you gossip, slander, divide, it's not actually at the leader. God says you're doing it at Him. It means you're questioning His goodness and His character and His wisdom and His faithfulness. "Well, if God knew my boss, He'd you know..." God doesn't know, or he doesn't see the character deficiencies in you that He wants to place you in that situation to do something in you. Come on. I mean, you remember the story of Jonathan and the armor bearer. Great story. The Israelites are supposed to go to fight the Philistines and destroy the enemies of God, but they're apathetic and so they're lounging, hanging out under a pomegranate tree. Jonathan says to his armor bearer, "Let's go climb up that hill and fight the Philistines and watch what God will do." The armor bearer looks at Jonathan, "'Do all that you have in mind,' his armor bearer said. 'Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.'"

The two of them go up on this hill, and they fight, and they kill 20 Philistines in the matter of a few moments. There is an anointing in unity. God moves on their behalf, sends an earthquake, awakens the Israelite army, they go in, they completely defeat the darkness, and all of the Israelites are suffering. I love this concept. "I am with you heart and soul." Here's my question for you. In the places that you are in, in your life, is this true of you? Your family, your parents, your marriage, your workplace, your team, our church. I am with your heart and soul. Because if it's not this, what's the answer? I'm with you with half my heart and half my soul? I don't even think that's with. Actually, I think that's against.

Because if I'm with you with half my heart and half my soul that means I'm against you with the other half of my heart, and the other half of my soul. Really, I don't even think we would say that. I think most of us would say, "I am with you so long as it's good for me. But the moment this marriage, this team, this church, this business, this employment is no longer good for me,



I'm out." See, what I love is, Jesus is the armor bearer. He said to the Father, "Do all you have in mind, I am with you heart and soul," and he went up on a hill called Calvary. He fought a great battle and won a great victory that set the people of God free. He now invites us to do the same with all our heart, and with all our soul. Why? Because a house divided against itself cannot stand. Division always leads to destruction. Always. You with me on this?

You see, sometimes I think the world gets this concept better than we do. In fact, in Genesis chapter 12, is the story of the Tower of Babel. People came together with one voice in unity and said, "Let us build a tower to the sky that we may build a name for ourselves." They use their freedom for their good, and their unity for their glory. God came down and He looked at what was happening. Freedom is always meant for the good of others, and unity is always meant for the glory of God. But because they were using it in a counterfeit unity, He scattered them and divided them among the nations. I think that is a great prophetic picture of the world. The world lives in a counterfeit unity. The world rallies together against God's wisdom, against God's ways, and against God's word for my good and my glory.

But the kingdom rallies together for God's ways, for God's wisdom, for God's word for the good of others, and the glory of God. You with me on this? The LGBTQ movement. It is a counterfeit unity. It is a rallying together against God's wisdom, God's ways, God's word for my good, and my glory. The abortion movement - it is a rallying together a counterfeit authority against God's ways, against God's word, against God's wisdom for my good and my glory. The persecution of the church is a counterfeit unity of people rallying together against God's ways, against God's word, against God's wisdom for my good and my glory. Kingdom unity is always about rallying together for God's ways, for God's wisdom, for God's word for the good of others and the glory of God.

If I just said something that made something inside of you rise up. Why? Why? See, unity is not you and me agreeing. Unity is not your preference or your opinion or what the world is saying. Unity is not about your or my goodness and glory. Unity is about saying Jesus is Lord, so He gets to define truth, and I need to align my life with that. Don't -- no, just listen. Listen. I heard a story recently. This story is becoming way too commonplace in our world because I've heard it many times over about someone who was arrested and accused of some really significant crime, some really significant sin.

While they're awaiting trial, a bunch of people got together and heard about it, and got online and started to bully, and shame, and slander, and embarrass, and condemn, and criticize, and attack this person, ultimately driving them to end their own life. That's devastating that we're going to counterfeit unity and rally together against to tear people down. I tell you that because I want you to understand there are consequences for this, for what you like and read, and give voice to, and empowerment. You are not supposed to give your everything to the ways of darkness and a counterfeit unity. There's actually a consequence to this. "There will always be temptations to sin, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting? It

would be better to be thrown into a sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to be the one that causes other people to fall. Watch yourselves." This is Jesus.

What in us wants to rally together to shout, "Crucify, crucify." Because with one voice, they already got together and shouted crucify to Jesus, and he was on your behalf and mine. We can let God be the one who deals now with justice and judgement and vengeance and we can just be focused on receiving and releasing grace into the world. Why? Why do you need to tear other people down to build yourself up? Build other people up and in the process you will build yourself up. Here's a question - Is it ever okay? Is it ever okay to gossip, slander, or be divisive? Genuinely, like, think about it. Is it ever okay? Well, if this person or that, is it ever okay?

Who's Lord? Who defines truth? "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are clear. Sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before that anyone living like that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God." Division is a sin and is not a part of the kingdom. It's in the same list as sexual immorality, sorcery, and rage. Is it okay if your spouse commits adultery? Is it okay if your children are engaged in witchcraft? Is it okay if your parents live with rage? So why is it okay for you to engage in division?

Listen to me. There are so many things you can do in our church. So many things you can struggle with. It's okay to not be okay. You can have faith doubts. You can wrestle with what you actually believe. You can work out if Jesus is Lord or not. You can make mistakes. You can fail. You can fall a thousand times and this is a harbor of hope, a safe place of grace. But let me be super clear what you cannot do. You are not ever welcome to engage in division. Never. Gossip, slander, criticism of anyone, of anything. If you're new, or you've been here and you forgot, don't come in here and complain or divide about another church in town. We love them. We pray for them. Don't come in here and gossip about your spouse. We love your spouse and we're trying to help them be free. Don't come in here and try to tear other people down and think it's normal and acceptable. No, no; that is the fastest way you will run into a collision course with us. Because our arrows are going this way, and if you want to come this way, that's okay, but we're still going this way.

I want to be super clear. It's never okay. It's never okay. You say, "Why?" Because the Bible says, "Warn a divisive person once, then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them." Do you know why that first arrow box of religious organization happens? Because we don't lead the church the way Jesus tells us to lead his church. This is what Jesus says. Why? Because it is a direct assault on the character and nature of God. It's not welcome. It's not welcome, you hear me. You're like, "Then, this isn't the church for me." Then, this isn't the church for you. I 100% agree with that. Listen to me, our leadership team has been

together for like almost two decades now. Two decades. I want you to think about this with me for a second.

In two decades, do you know how many times we've done this with each other, offended each other, hurt each other, sinned against each other, said mean things to each other? But you know what else we've done? We've forgiven each other, and honored each other, and loved each other, and served each other. Why? Because we would rather be wronged than be divided. We would rather be unified than be right. Sometimes, just sometimes, this is the back piece of my heart. Sometimes, just sometimes, I wish you would appreciate that. In a world of division, and no one has roots and everyone moves around for the good of themselves, sometimes I wish you would just walk up to Ben and just say, "Man, I just want to say thank you for two decades of pursuing unity." I wish you would go Becca, Jason, Justin and just be like, "Thank you for humbling yourself and always working it out to keep moving forward with God." I wish you would think when you see Chris or Cordell or Dave or Trip or Don or Robert or Rob or Brian, Dawn.

I mean, there's so many names I could list. I wish you would just see it and appreciate it and understand the journey that it took to get there. I wish you would go to their spouse and say, "Thank you for having the scars to pursue unity." Sometimes I wish you'd go to the leaders in our church and the serve team members who have been here faithfully, week after week, year after year pursuing unity with everything, and then just thank them. Because we get it that dishonor disables and division destroys. Do you think I'm passionate about this? Why? Because it's a value in my heart. It becomes a culture of my life. What grieves you? You know what you value. You know what grieves me more than anything in our church? When I watch people get divided - marriages, parents, people in their workplace, with their neighbors, people that are in here. It's a value. We have -- literally, we have the scars that say we love it and we believe in it.

I want you to catch the gravity of it. Are you with me? The reason it's so significant to me, stay with me like three more verses, is because division destroys destinies. You remember when the God -- they sent in the spies to go check out the promised land. But when the men, the ten spies -- this is only ten guys come back, "They said, 'We cannot attack those people.'" We can't go into the Promised Land. "'They're stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report." Division, gossip, slander, in rebellion to what God had already said, which was, "Take the land and I will give you the victory." "That night, all the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said, 'If only we had died in Egypt or this desert!' And they said to each other, we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'" Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!

We've been slaves for 400 years and God brings us to the brink of the promised land. Only ten guys have the spirit of division and it destroys the destiny of 2 million people because for 40 years they had to wander the desert. All the Israelites, the whole assembly, you're telling me out of 2 million people, no one could have stood up and said, "No. Shut it down. We follow

God. This marriage will not be destroyed. My children will not be lost in darkness. This business will not fail. This school will serve our children. This city will glorify God." You're telling me, no one? Listen to me. The listening ear is as guilty as the speaking tongue. The reading eyes are as guilty as the typing fingers. The apathetic heart is as guilty as the grumbling spirit.

You're like, "But they didn't get it." Ten Guys, and no one had a heart to say, "No." Catch it. That shows you what level of propensity we all have for it. This is why we fight. Why? Because one person's selfishness can destroy the destiny of an entire family. One person's selfishness can destroy the destiny of an entire business. One person's selfishness can destroy the destiny of an entire church. We refuse to allow that. Come on. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God." Jesus says how good and pleasant, happy, blessed, joyful are peacemakers; they're sons of God. We spent a whole lot of time around here talking about living as beloved sons and daughters, right. How do you actually know if you're living as a beloved son or daughter?

You become a peacemaker. It's the ultimate proof that you're living as a beloved son or daughter - not peacekeeper. A peacekeeper is someone who is afraid of man, who's a people pleaser, who just wants it all to be okay. No, no. A peacemaker, they're not afraid of conflict. They'll jump right into the middle of it, and they will shut it down. They will start it up. They will apologize. They will forgive. They will give up their offenses, whatever it is. There's a blessing in that. So put this verse in reverse. Cursed are the dividers for they're the sons of the devil. Why? Because you carry the image and likeness of your father. Whether you want to or not. If you want to know who your dad is, look at what's coming out of your life.

God is the ultimate reconciler, sending Jesus to reconcile us unto Himself with everything He had. We were made in that image, in that likeness. Peacemaking should become the heartbeat of who we are. But if division is part of the heartbeat of who we are, then we have to ask ourselves the question, am I really a son of God, or am I living with that same old orphan spirit that has been around since the beginning, in the darkness? Last verse. This is Jesus at the end of his life, "My prayer is not for them alone" - the disciples - "I pray also for those who will believe in me." This verse is a prayer for you. "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 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. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You have sent me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. "

Jesus literally prays that you would pursue unity with everything that you have. Because when you do, the world sees Jesus. Every time you pursue unity in your marriage, your kids see the glory of God. Every time your family pursues unity, your neighbors experience the glory of God coming out of your home. Every time you pursue unity with that boss, who is difficult and has some really bad ideas, but you do it anyways, you just showed your co-workers, the glory of

God. Every time our church pursues unity and gets over itself in the process, we just showed the city the glory of God, and that God loves them the same way he loves Jesus.

The reason we're so passionate about unity is because unity is the heartbeat of the mission of God. Because it reflects and reveals His character and His nature. Every time... every time... say it with me, every time you pursue unity, you just released God's glory into the atmosphere and God's kingdom just came and His will was just done. That is, "If my people who are called by my name," that is being a person of God, walking in the ways of God, and carrying the name of God, and following the commands of God. When unity becomes a value in your heart, the culture of the kingdom will become the culture of your life. Close your eyes with me. Come on. What's God want to say to you today? What's God want to whisper into your heart and into your mind?

Maybe it's about your marriage. Maybe it's about the way you treat your parents. Maybe it's your work, your team. Maybe it's something right here in our church. What's the Holy Spirit saying to you? That's where the grace of God wants to come and meet you. Satan wants to bring division into your life to steal, kill, and destroy. But the Trinity wants to release unity into your life, that you might experience the good and pleasant ways of God.

If you find yourself frustrated today, offended, worked up in your spirit, even as we've been spending these few moments together, maybe that's even God interrupting your life, disrupting something. Don't just discount it. Don't double down on your opinion or your preference or your perspective. Maybe, just maybe, this is God reaching out His hand to rescue you and show you something different. Process that with the Lord and ask Him to speak to your heart.

Jesus may we be a people that answer the prayer, Your last words, Your last will and testament, if we will, as You were going to the cross. May we be one as You and the Father are one. May Your glory be released as we die to ourselves and pick up our cross and follow You. Humble us, Lord; humble us, Lord; humble us, Lord. That we might see Your ways as more important than our opinions and perspectives and flesh and emotion and desires. Because the world will believe that You are when we pursue unity with everything we have. Thank You for the values of the kingdom. May they be the culture of our lives in this church. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!