

God

WE NEED YOU

Unity and Community

Message Reflection Guide

Seeing three large predatory animals cuddle and play together is extremely unusual. Yet this is precisely what happens daily in an animal sanctuary in Georgia. In 2001, after months of neglect and abuse, a lion, a Bengal tiger, and a black bear were rescued by Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary. "We could have separated them," said the assistant director. "But since they came as a kind of family, we decided to keep them together." The trio had found comfort in each other during their time of mistreatment, and, despite their differences, they live peacefully together.

Unity is a beautiful thing. But the unity Paul wrote about in his letter to the believers in Ephesus is unique. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to live up to their calling as members of one body in Christ (Eph. 4:4-5). By the power of the Holy Spirit they would be able to live in unity as they developed humility, gentleness, and patience. These attitudes also allow us to lovingly bear "with one another in love" through the common ground we have in Christ Jesus (4:2).

Despite our differences, as members of the family of God we have been reconciled to Him through the death of our Savior and reconciled to each other through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. - Marvin Williams

CONVERSATION STARTER

When was the last time you did something with a team? How well did the team work together?

GETTING INTO THE SCRIPTURES

Read Philippians 4:1-21
On Sunday Pastor Jason said "Our passion for unity and community in the church must be shaped by biblical principles not personal preference." Why is unity and community important in a local church?

Read Colossians 3:11-16 Describe some of the characteristics of a unified church versus a divided church? What are some proactive steps members can take to bolster church unity? How can you contribute to the unity of the church?

On the one hand, unity is given by the Spirit, but on the other hand, unity is something that we must diligently work to maintain. What are some personal practices or group disciplines that would serve to preserve unity in the church?

Read John 13:31-35 The attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience are required for unity in the church. Which do you struggle with most? What passages of scripture are important to you in your pursuit of a Christ-honoring attitude?

In Ephesians 4 there are seven statements that describe how Christians are one, and yet some still **don't feel like they belong**. What are some things that could help people feel more connected to the body of Christ?

How would someone know if they were using their gifts for personal enjoyment or promotion, instead of serving the body of Christ and leveraging them for the upbuilding of the body? What would misusing our gifts look like? What gifts do you think God has given you, and how could you potentially use them for the building up of the church?

CHALLENGE

Do you value biblical unity over your personal preferences? Have you found yourself complaining, criticizing, comparing, leaving conflict unresolved, gossiping, rather than forgiving and forbearing? In what ways do you need the help of the Holy Spirit to be a person who contributes to the unity of the church? Is there anything you need to repent of?

PRAYER TIME

Pray for biblical unity and community at Iron Mill. Use the following points as a guide for your prayer.

Unity and Community...

...is a gift from God.

...takes work.

...is threatened by pride and personal preference.

...requires a doctrinal and biblical center – the Gospel.

...does not mean uniformity.

...flows out of forbearance and forgiveness.

...glorifies God and attracts unbelievers.