

Value 5 - Seeking Unity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2026

Preacher: John Hopkins

[0:00] And something else I just wanted to point out that I really appreciate about Pastor Tim is he's generally the one of the three of us that says, hey, you know what, we need to, this morning we should take a few minutes and have a focused prayer time.

He led us in that a few weeks ago. And then as we were kind of finalizing announcements for this morning and him taking that role this morning, he said, you know what, I want to take some time and focus us in praise.

And Tim does a great job of directing our hearts, our minds to the Lord. That's critically important that we follow his lead in directing our attention to the Lord himself and not always on the horizontal stuff that we're dealing with in life.

Amen. And so I want to tell you a little story that kind of relates to that. When our kids were growing up, I was, as a dad, I had little phrases that I wanted the kids to remember.

And they were kind of the phrases that if they, if the kid learned this phrase, they would learn a principle that I wanted them to follow. At least that was the idea. So for example, I taught my kids, the job's not done until you guys probably heard this from your dads.

[1:10] The job's not done until when? The tools are put away. So one day I was showing off to some other dads and one of my boys was there and I said, watch this.

Hey, Luke, tell me, when is the job done? And Luke, who always wanted to be a stand-up comedian, stopped. They got this look of consternation and finally said, I remember, the job's not done until dad stops yelling.

While that's true, that's not really the idea. But there was another one that my kids grew up with that I want you to keep in mind.

The first one's not bad, but this one's much more important. Your focus determines your reality.

Now, early in my career as a developing leader, developing responsibility in different ministry settings and work settings, I did a lot of reading about developing leadership.

And in the secular market, one of the things that they emphasize a lot is your focus determines your reality. What we pay attention to really deeply impacts our perception of the world.

[2:28] And for a long time, I thought, okay, that's kind of a New Age secular thing, but what's the biblical perspective? Well, the biblical perspective is your focus determines your reality. What we look at really deeply affects us.

Henry Ford once, I think it was Henry Ford, once said that whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right. It's just a matter of what do you focus on. And this morning, we're going to be talking about where is our focus, at least in part.

We're going to be going over the idea of what gets our attention. I'll tell you what really got this going was, Becky, this is the part I was warning you about.

Becky got this, hey, you're the reason for my opening illustration this morning. That's just what you want to hear as a preacher goes up to the stage. Oh, I'm an illustration, great. This is good.

So Becky and I have been talking off and on over the last several weeks about the Sermon on the Mount. And how does it apply to us? What does that look like? And one of the things that came out of that conversation and some reading I've been doing in a broader context about learning.

[3:40] How do we learn? Because if I'm going to teach you effectively, I need to have a better idea of how you learn. So I've been doing a lot of reading on that topic. And what I didn't expect until late last night is

my conversations with Becky, my sermon prep, and my reading about how we learn all came together as I was getting ready to preach the sermon this morning from Ephesians 4.

So how do these things come together? Well, the biggest problem with the Sermon on the Mount and the problem that we're going to face as we go into Ephesians 4 this morning is that we read things like this.

Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the earth. Or I got it wrong. I mixed some of the Beatitudes together. I'm going to just paraphrase to be safer. So you know the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. And then Jesus talked about how we look at other people of the opposite sex.

Is it respectfully or is it with lust in our hearts? And just lust in itself, he elevated to the level of adultery. And if we're angry, we might as well murder the person. And then further on in the Sermon on the Mount, he says that you should have righteousness above that of the Pharisees.

[5:04] And then, wow, that's a heavy burden. And then, as if that wasn't bad enough, you should be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. Well, what that does, if we're not careful, is it tends to put our focus on the wrong place, which is on us.

And that's not a bad thing, but it shouldn't be the first thing. The first thing is we should be looking at the Lord. There's a great verse.

Many of you have sung it in a hymn. You've probably quoted it. You may not know where it is. I'm not as sure myself. It's Isaiah 26 or 28. I can never remember. You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on you, God said.

What is the condition of perfect peace? Our mind fixed on the Lord. We look at him. The theme, one of the major themes of the book of Hebrews is consider Jesus.

Look at Jesus. Of course, we've been talking about it for weeks. What was Jesus' invitation? Follow me. Well, you can't follow somebody if you're not looking at him. You've got to be watching him.

[6:19] Our focus determines our reality. And so what we want to do this morning is make sure that we're focused on the right thing. Because when we're focused on the right thing, our ability to execute our mission, we exist to glorify God, walking closely with him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day.

When our eyes are fixed on Jesus, that begins to flow. When we talk about following Jesus, cultivating love for God, cultivating love for others, making disciples, seeking unity, all those should flow out of and originate in our focus on the Lord himself.

That's where we want to look. And that's where we're going to begin today. So what I want you to do is open your Bible. I've noticed this has become a habit for me. Open your Bible to two places. Fortunately, they're close together.

So you're going to turn to Ephesians 4, and that's going to be our main text this morning. And then I want you to just turn a couple of pages over and stick your finger in Philippians chapter 1. So Ephesians 4, Philippians chapter 1.

Let's pray together, and then we'll dig into God's Word. Father, some of the songs we sang this morning talked about the hardships of life and running with endurance and facing hardship.

[7:51] And that you work these things for our good. We know that from Romans 8. But it's hard. But you told us how to do it. You told us to run with endurance the race set before us with our eyes fixed, focused on Jesus.

And I pray that this morning, Lord, as we look at what it means to seek unity, that we would focus first on you. And in focusing on you together, that we would see the unity that literally can change the world grow out of this congregation.

So, Lord, help us to be united people. Help us to understand what that means and help us to go out and be united. Practicing what it means to be followers of Jesus together, linked arm in arm.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So Ephesians chapter 4. Let's read that together. We're just going to read the first six verses, and I'm only going to preach on the first three because of time constraints, as usual.

So, speaking of time constraints, just to put this in perspective of how rich the book of Ephesians is, one of my favorite preachers is a man named David Martin Lloyd-Jones.

[9:07] He was the pastor of a church in London for, I think, 25 or 30 years after World War II. Brilliant man. He did a sermon on Ephesians 4.1, and in his introduction to his sermon, he celebrated with his congregation that they were on their 100th sermon in Ephesians.

Talk about looking at detail, and there is so much there. We're not going to cover it all this morning. So Ephesians 4.1, Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you, or I beg you, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Let's start with that first word, therefore. So I'm sure you've heard somebody say this. I may have said it because it's kind of one of those things that preachers say. In Scripture, whenever you see a therefore, you should ask the question, what is the therefore, therefore?

What is the therefore, therefore? Sometimes it's looking just right to the previous verse. In this case, this therefore, at the beginning of Ephesians 4.1, is a major shift in Paul's flow of thought.

[10:51] In the first three chapters of Ephesians, he's going into the very, very depths, or you could say the height. He's mining the depths of the gospel. He's carrying us up to the heights of heaven to see what we have in Christ.

It's a very doctrinally dense passage of Scripture, those first three chapters of Ephesians. And then in chapter, with this therefore, he's turning the page and looking at what does that mean?

Doctrine is important, but only to the degree that it affects your life. If you are a grand champion at Bible trivia, it just doesn't matter.

I don't care. God doesn't care. As a matter of fact, that knowledge will probably make you arrogant and kind of annoying. But if you put it into practice and you live it out, and what we're going to see in a very brief way is what we have in Christ and what that should mean for us in life.

That make sense? So, what is a therefore, therefore? Here is a very, very quick survey of the first three chapters of Ephesians.

[12:08] Ephesians chapter 1 talks about our wealth in Christ. Did you know that Paul says that you have been seated? You have been seated in the heavenly places with Christ.

Not you will be. You have been. Words matter. You can be absolutely sure if you have put your trust in Christ for all intents and purposes, you're already there.

And all the blessings that are available in Christ are available to you now. Now, some of them won't be unveiled until the future.

And I think they'll be continually unveiled for all time and into eternity. But they're yours now. Imagine a Christmas tree.

I'm sure you all did this. I did this. As the presents start appearing under the tree, what do we do? We're looking at the tags. Is the big box mine or the little box? Oh, the little box is mine. That's too bad.

[13:18] What is for me? What's for you? You shake it. You try to figure out what's in there. Somebody in our household may have unwrapped a present and gotten caught. She rewrapped it.

So I got to tell you the story because you'll think less of me as a dad. And I will pay you your \$5 for using Use an Illustration. I have a deal with my kids. If they're a sermon illustration, they get \$5. But so Kayla unwrapped a small box of ballet slippers and we figured it out. So between that crime and Christmas, I also unwrapped the present, took the ballet slippers out, and put a bag of candy coal in their place.

So Kayla opened the present and I felt terrible because she cried. And so that backfired. But it became a family tradition.

And that bag of candy coal reappeared for several years in different boxes and ha-ha and then that kid got to pass it on. By the way, I'm sure it was nasty when it was first purchased, but by year four

or five when we finally ate it, it was disgusting.

[14:27] Don't do that. But we look at these presents under the tree with anticipation, but they're already ours. Even with the example of my tormenting my poor daughter, those ballet slippers were hers.

She just hadn't been physically given them yet. She didn't get to put them on. That's what we have in Christ. That's the wealth that we have in Christ. So that's chapter one.

Then in chapter two, he talks about our peace with Christ. You look at Ephesians two, one through 10. It is a beautiful summary of the gospel.

That we no longer walk in the futility of our minds, but we have a new way of walking. That we were dead in Christ, but we were dead in transgressions and sins, but now we're made alive again in Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. Paul says that twice in 10 verses. He has prepared good works for us to do. And he is the peace where humanity was divided all the way back at the Tower of Babel, particularly between Jews and Gentiles.

[15:37] Jesus is the bridge bringing us back together again into one united family under him. Jesus is our peace. Not just peace, absence of conflict, but peace as in shalom, the rich word that the Jews use.

It's wholeness. It's security. It's harmony. That's what we have in Christ. So we're rich in Christ. We have peace in Christ.

That's chapter two. And then chapter three is there's this mystery. This mystery that's woven through the Old Testament.

It's subtle. You see it in Genesis 3.15 when God told Adam, told Adam and Eve actually, that the serpent's head would be crushed by the seed of the woman and that the serpent would bite his ankle.

That was a foretaste of redemption. It was a foretaste of restoration with God. And it was all inclusive of those who believe. And then you move forward.

[16:51] You see the covenant that God made with Abraham. It's all about Abraham and his offspring. But then the very last phrase is, and all through your offspring, all of the world will be blessed.

You see it in David's, the covenant with David, that he'll be given an eternal throne. And the eternal throne isn't just over the Jews. It's over all of humanity. And then in chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul says the mystery has been unveiled.

That we Gentiles also have access to God through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. That's what we have in Christ.

And then that magnificent, rich exposition of doctrine. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 ends with this profound statement.

If you're still in Ephesians chapter 4, move your eyes up a couple of verses to verse 20 of chapter 3. This is Paul praising God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.

[18:05] According to the power that works within us, which by the way, in chapter 1, is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. That's power. To him, to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. To him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. The best thing you can imagine. Nothing.

God says, that all you got? Come on. I need a challenge. And so you think bigger. And God says, wow, you're kind of a small, you must have a little brain. Get bigger than that. And God says, I'm going to exceed your wildest expectations for now and for eternity.

That's the offer. So we have riches in Christ. We have peace because of Christ. We are the beneficiaries of this mystery revealed in Christ that the Gentiles have new life.

And God is showering us with generosity. And I've only scratched the surface of what those chapters contain. I'm fighting the temptation to keep going.

[19:16] But I was joking about going for an hour and a half, so I'm not going to do that to you. You've got to read it. You've got to think about what you have in Christ. Therefore, because these things are true, I, the

prisoner of the Lord, Paul said, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

Paul was in prison. Obviously, he said that. I, the prisoner of the Lord. But he was not just talking metaphorically that he's God's prisoner. He was actually in jail in Rome. You see that at the end of Acts.

And while he was in prison, he wrote Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Those four books have a lot of common themes. That's why I had you turn to Philippians 1 as well.

And so he wove those together. He's in prison. And what he is modeling to the Ephesian church and what he said overtly to the Philippian church is, what I am pursuing in Jesus is so great.

And the opportunity that I have to fulfill my calling to go out to share the gospel with the Gentiles in particular is so great that prison is nothing.

[20:35] It's just not that big of a deal. To live is Christ, to die is gain. Paul said in Philippians chapter 1. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

He was telling the Ephesians, follow my example. What I'm about to share with you is way better. And if you go to jail for it, well, you go to jail. Look at the bright side. You get three square meals. You know, it's not all bad. But I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you, he's begging them, walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

Now remember what I said about focus determines reality. Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called. The temptation is to say, is, am I walking worthy? Am I stepping where I need to step?

Am I going where I need to go? That's the second thing you need to do. Let's pause for a second and think about what is our calling? What is our calling?

[21:37] is the exact same calling that Jesus gave to the disciples in Matthew chapter 4. Remember, they're at the Sea of Galilee. Jesus turned to Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip was in there.

Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Later, he said that to Matthew. Step out of your tax booth and follow me. He later said it to the rich young ruler.

Follow me. So long that you've got, follow me. That guy said no. Don't make that mistake. But that's our calling is to follow Jesus.

Remember, that's our first value. To determine to follow Jesus, to walk in his footsteps, to live like he lived, to be the type of person that Jesus was. So let's talk for a minute.

Let's go back. I want to constantly bring our focus back to the Lord Jesus himself. That's what we have to be focused on.

[22:48] I have been struggling for years, my entire Christian life, trying to understand the balance between submitting to God's work in our lives, for example, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc., but it's the fruit of the Spirit.

Well, okay, God is producing this fruit in me, but what's my responsibility? And I would be like a pendulum. Sometimes I'm just going to let go and let God do it. Make me more loving. Make me more joyful.

Make me more peaceful. Make me more self-controlled. And other times, I would obsess with, oh, I've got to keep a list. Ben Franklin used to have a notebook where he had all these character traits that he wanted to do, and each day he would look at one and say, how did I do with this?

And so I did that. I wrote down. I had this little notebook. Love, joy, peace, patience, etc. Was I loving today? No, I gave my daughter coal in her stocking. Clearly I failed.

And I'd look at these and I'd think, oh, I'm not good enough. I'm failing. I'm missing the point. And so I'd be on this back and forth. What if it's not an either or?

[23:52] What if it's a both and? Walk worthy of the calling with which you've been called. Run with endurance until you're still running.

You're running the race with your eyes fixed on Jesus. You know, I got to thinking about how we learn. When I taught my kids how to ride a bike, I didn't give them a manual.

I took them out on a bike and I held the back or they had training wheels and then they started to get better and better and better and eventually we let them go. How did my kids learn to catch and throw a ball?

I didn't give them a book on how to throw and catch a ball. I threw things at them until they figured it out. They stopped dodging and started catching. No, that's not true. I did that, do that once at Emmaus.

I had a friend who was really bad at racquetball. He was afraid of the ball so my solution was I stood and I said, do you trust me? I stood him at the end of the court and I stood at the other end and I threw balls at him as hard as I could.

[24:58] The amazing thing is he let me do it. He learned that the balls don't hurt as bad as you think and he got better at racquetball. But we learn in doing is my point.

We learn by doing. That's true in every field of endeavor. We learn by doing. So if we're focused on Jesus if we're looking at how he lived and following and living out this great, these great riches that we have in the gospel, then, then and only then do we start to think about, well, what does that look like in my life?

What am I doing? Am I, in light of these things that I have in Christ, in light of this example I have in Jesus Christ, am I walking worthy?

And all of a sudden we have a better understanding of what that means. Well, Paul focuses our attention in particular on one word. And I think this is critically important.

Obviously, Tim and John and I agree on this because it's our fifth value. We need to seek unity. To walk worthy for us as a body, arms linked, to walk worthy of the gospel, to walk worthy the calling that we've received is to walk in unity, to walk together.

[26:19] So what does that mean? So first, let's look at verse 3 of Ephesians 4. Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

First thing, this unity is the work of God. It's God working in us. As each one of us, each one of you and I, learn to be more loving.

Learn to engage and carry through with us peace as we exhibit joy, as we're kind, as we're good, as we're self-controlled, as we're gentle, as we're faithful.

That work of the Spirit in us produces unity, but it's the work of God in us. We don't have to work it up. Oh, I'm going to be united. I don't care what it takes.

No, it's the work of the Spirit. Words are very important. Paul didn't say, be diligent to preserve the Spirit of unity. That's a very different thing.

[27:25] The Spirit of unity centers on us. What am I doing? The unity of the Spirit is what Paul said. It's something that originates from our relationship with God.

So that's the first thing about unity, which is the highest expression of our walking worthy of our calling. Okay? So first, it's the work of the Spirit, but we still have work to do.

We're being diligent to preserve it, to keep it going, to make sure that we have healthy relationships with one another. And the second one, now turn over to Philippians chapter 1.

In verse 27, Paul says, only conduct yourselves. This is it. Only. This is it. Nice and simple. Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Sound familiar? So that whether I come and see you or remain absent, because Paul wasn't sure if he was going to get out of prison or not and go back to Philippi, he died before that happened.

[28:32] Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you, the Philippian church, that you are standing firm.

How? In one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. Unity.

It's unity. And let's go on to the next couple verses, in no way alarmed by your opponents, which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you.

And that too from God. It's God's work. Our unity and our endurance through persecution is a testimony to the people around us that what we have claimed is true is actually true.

our unity says to the world, God's love is real. Because look at this diverse body. We can come across areas of gender, race, culture, language, political views, dare I say, and find unity in Christ.

[29:49] That can only be a work of God. And our endurance as we endure together says to the world, the gospel is real. It's valid.

It's true. You can depend on it. So what we learn here, though, the key piece that I want to focus on at the end of chapter, or verse 27, is Paul wanted to hear of the Philippians and of us that we're standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

What we're, this unity that we have is rooted in truth, the faith of the gospel, the truth of the gospel, that we were dead in trespasses and sins.

We were enemies of God. We were choosing separation from God. But God intervened in our behalf.

At the right time, he died for us. He demonstrated his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. Those are historically validated.

[30:54] We know that Jesus lived. We know Jesus died. We know Jesus raised from the dead. We know doctrine. We know how to relate to God. God, these things, this unity is rooted in truth.

Isn't it interesting, what did Jesus say about himself in John 14? I am the way, the truth, and the life? Our unity is rooted in truth, biblical truth.

It's not something we have to manufacture. We have a basis for it. So our unity is the work of the Spirit. It's rooted in truth. And now turn over to, you're actually don't even turn there and just read the slides.

In John chapter 17, John 17 is the end of what's called the upper room discourse. The upper room discourse was when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.

He washed the disciples' feet. It was the final conversation he had with them before going to Gethsemane and then going to trial and being crucified. The upper room discourse ends with Jesus praying and the disciples getting to listen in.

[32:04] This isn't him teaching how to pray. This is them listening in on him having an intimate conversation with his Father. And look at what he prays at the end of that prayer, which, by the way, includes you and I.

We're going to start in verse 18. Jesus says, As you, Father, sent me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. Jesus said, at the beginning of Matthew, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, he said what? All authority in heaven has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples. We go as Jesus was sent.

As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world. For their sakes, I sanctify myself or I set myself apart for your service, Lord, that they themselves, that's us, also may be sanctified in the truth.

To be sanctified is to be made pure, to be set apart. This is a cool part because Jesus is praying for us. Verse 20, I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word.

[33:15] So there's this chain. I don't have the smarts to figure it out, but maybe in heaven we'll get to find out. The uninterrupted chain from late January 1980 all the way back, the apostle Paul or one of the other disciples.

That uninterrupted chain that led to me coming to Christ. That led to you coming to Christ.

We'll get to see that chain. But Jesus was praying for us. But for those also who believe in me through their word, here it is, that they all may be one.

And what's the measure of our oneness? Even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me.

unity, this unity, we see it in the Trinity. As God the Father and God the Son and the Holy Spirit, the only word that really fits their relationship is a dance.

[34:29] As they dance together, as they delight in one another, as they serve each other, as they serve together, one God in three persons, and created everything that exists and said that it was good and created us and said that we are very good.

That unity that resulted in everything that we see, everything that we are, is the model for what we should have together. That's the love that we should have for one another, brothers and sisters, is the same love that God has for himself.

that is perfectly appropriate because God is above all most to be honored and loved and glorified. That's how we should be looking at each other.

That's the unity that's worthy of the calling that we have received. And that unity, do not forget, that unity is the ultimate expression of what it means to walk with Jesus.

That we're united as a body and we come together. So how does that play out? Go back to Ephesians 4. We're going to look at verse 2.

[35:52] Paul said, verse 1, I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.

this is what we have to do. This is our part of the equation of preserving unity. Quick note, I used to use this passage to brief our teams that would come down to the Dominican Republic to work with us at the orphanage where we lived.

And I would tell them, okay, there's one thing here. We all read this because the way Paul wrote it is, I am being patient with all of you. I am being tolerant of you.

And so what's implicit is there's something about you that I need to work on. You know, I need to be patient with you because there's something wrong out there. But there's another piece of this puzzle that we cannot forget.

You look at me and say, oh, back at you, buddy. You're kind of an irritating guy and I need to work on patience with you. I need to be tolerant of you.

[36:56] And what I mean by that is look in the mirror first. When Paul says that people need to be treated with gentleness, with patience, with tolerance, recognize that's true of me.

I've got to be careful to do that. Does that make sense? I need to be, I need people to be patient with me. But these are the means that God uses to bring about unity.

And I'm going to give you a very specific example. And I got permission before I brought up this. John and Tim and I talked this over. So almost a year ago, all of us entered into an arranged marriage.

But in particular, John and Tim and I did. That arranged marriage was me being hired to serve as one of the pastors here at Tri-State Community Church.

Now, y'all vetted me. I vetted the church. I watched videos. I listened. I watched. I asked questions. I talked to shepherd staff.

[38:02] But, we did not know each other to the degree that Kara and I knew each other when we got married. We agreed to get married. And so we entered into an arranged marriage. And just like in a marriage, we discovered things about each other that weren't really great.

I'm a pretty blunt guy. And if I think that there's a goal, I have a hard time understanding that other people have feelings.

We have a goal. Put your feelings aside. Man up. Let's go get that goal. Well, that didn't say it went really well. I had to adjust.

And John and Tim brought things to the table that were hard for me to put up with. that in all of us, we're in a silo figuring out, trying to figure out how do we get along.

And I'm not, I'm not going to lie, folks. It was a rough, rough, almost year. I think I've shared with you I broke out in psoriasis about eight weeks ago.

[39:11] You know what the primary cause of psoriasis is? Stress. Trying to figure this out. And I'm sure John and Tim, I'm not saying that they were causing me stress.

We were causing each other stress. I was as big a pain in the butt as they were to me. But there are some things that are true of John and Tim and I that I think are exemplary.

Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. And I would submit to you that this is one of those moments to follow John and Tim and I as we follow Christ.

Because we had determined before we ever met that we were men who wanted to follow God. We wanted to work worthy of our calling. We recognized that for better or worse, our calling involved sitting around a table together to lead a church that God entrusted to us.

we realized that we had to figure things out. And I'm here to tell you we did.

[40:35] It was tough. It was exhausting. I know all three of us lost sleep. But we came to the table with humility.

Humility is putting other people's needs first. Humility is recognizing two things. Where we're strong and where we're weak.

And accepting the offer of the other person's strength and our weakness. That ain't easy. And having the vulnerability to do that, we learned to do that.

We learned to be humble together. And we learned to let each other live out of our strengths and go into our strengths and step into those things. And in doing that, we became stronger.

Clarity emerged as we were humble with each other. We were gentle with each other. Gentleness isn't caving to the other person's whim.

[41:50] Gentleness literally means in the New Testament strength under control. We learned how to speak strongly with each other. To be honest, Tom and Jim needed, Tim and John needed to learn how to hit me upside the head because I'm a bull in a china shop.

And it was hard for them. but they learned to say, okay, John, stop talking. Okay. I had to learn to soften my tone because I'm a bull in a china shop.

But we learned to be gentle with one another. We have to do that together. Paul says in Ephesians 4 that we speak the truth and love to one another. That's hard, but we have to do it.

We have to be vulnerable and open with each other to speak the truth and love. We have to be patient. God is at work in our lives. We have to allow that work to come to fruit.

We have to allow people time to process what we're going through. We have to give people the grace to come to our way of thinking or for us to change our mind and come to their way of thinking.

[43:03] Most often it's a meeting in the middle. But we need to be patient with one another and we have to show tolerance. I'm a sinful man. So is Tim.

So is John. There is some sin in our lives that needs to be confronted. There are some things in each other's lives that need to be tolerated. There are weaknesses that we have that aren't necessarily sinful.

But we have to be tolerant of these things. You know, I learned many years ago that we tend to judge one another out of our area of strength. So I'm really critical.

If I watch somebody else preach, I have to fight this because I'm good at it. And so I'm tempted to judge them on that and kind of dismiss the fact that there's others they're not very good at.

I'm not real strong in compassion. Well, I don't focus on that. I don't care about that. I want to focus on what I'm good at. And we judge each other by our strengths. No, no.

[44:05] We shouldn't do that. Especially if we're judging, if we're condemning. That make sense? We have to tolerate where the thing that I'm strong in my brother is weak in.

That doesn't come a place of judgment. Why can't you do what I do? No, it becomes a place of, can I come alongside of you? Can I help you? And it's accepting of that help at the same time.

Because one of the things I've learned from working with these men is we have very different gifts. But our gifts go together like the teeth of gears.

We need each other. And the only thing that keeps those gears from grinding is tolerance. So we come to each other with humility, with gentleness, with patience.

We're showing tolerance for one another. And what's it rooted in? In love. In love. Your homework for this week is to spend time in, from Philippians 1.27 to Philippians 2.8.

[45:16] Because the example of what it looks like to love is, of course, Jesus. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant.

And being founded, fast as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death. That's the measure of love that we have for each other, sacrificing for each other. 1 John 3.16, by this we know what love is.

Christ died for us. Therefore, we should die for one another, we should serve one another. We should serve one another, not just in word, but also in deed.

That's what it looks like. And when we do that, when we do that, what arises is unity. Not unity like a good football team or a hockey team or a volleyball team, but unity that is the work of the Spirit in our midst that says to the world around us, there is something weird in this place among this group of people.

This is something supernatural, and that supernatural thing is the presence of God himself. It's the Holy Spirit working through us. And we participate in his work as we walk worthy of our calling, as we seek unity, by being humble, by being gentle, by being patient, by being tolerant, in love.

[47:05] Think about this. Think about how you can do that with the people around you, to be proactive, to take initiative, to preserve peace between us.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that this work is your work in our lives and not up to us. It's too hard. But God, you are the one at work. We were commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it's you who are at work within us and help us, Lord, to rest in that fact, that you are working in us.

Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Help us to never take our eyes off of you, but to run determined to look at you no matter what happens.

God, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.