

BFF427 Unity #2

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well and finally getting back into a little rhythm. I didn't have as big an adventure as you did helping your daughter get out of North Carolina. But we were in Maine since we've spoken.

Scott: Nice.

Steve: We were on an errand of mercy. My sister-in-law fell and had to call 911. She was in intensive care when we got up there, and now she's in a rehab facility. It's just a lot of stuff we had to do, and yet God met us. I don't know how to tell you. If I told you the specifics, you'd be amazed. We went up there with one mindset, and we came home with a different mindset because of the people that God placed in our path. God met us, and we're very encouraged. Sandy is flying up there again this coming week for three days. It's not a fun drive from southeastern Pennsylvania to New England. I know that we went through seven states, and it's a white-knuckle drive, most of it. It's a lot of traffic and a lot of construction. It's not a put-it-in-cruise control and zip along an interstate.

Scott: My wife took 12 hours to get home from Asheville, North Carolina, where she was with my daughter.

Steve: Which is normally how long?

Scott: About five hours. She was stuck down there for the storm, and I'll spare you all the details, but it was quite a harrowing week. We even lost power in Cincinnati. That was fun, but God took care of us so here we are.

Steve: Amen. Thank you, Father, for taking care of us. Thank you for taking care of our relatives and our family members. We pray for all of those who are still trying to find their footing in North Carolina, and I pray that you will be a very present help in time of trouble.

I pray that you will send angels to minister to those that are hurting, I pray that you'll supernaturally provide water and food and all the needs of people down there. I pray that as people turn to you, they'll find you very near and very helpful, in Jesus' name. Now bless us in our discussion and our study this morning, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: Well, we talked about unity two podcasts ago, and we were quite...I don't know how to describe it. I believe that the best way for us to get close to what Jesus prayed for in John 17 is to draw near to Jesus himself.

When we're around the throne and are focused on Jesus, like the multitudes in Revelation who are not bickering, not writing up different theological statements or treatises. They are simply focused on Jesus, and worshipping the Lamb. I think in the same way, that has to be our focus here.

We need to keep our eyes on Jesus. We need to stay close to the cross. In doing so, we'll find that we're closer to each other. This is like the marriage illustration where as two people get closer to God, they get closer to each other.

Part of the formula for unity is what we did last week in asking God to work deeply in our hearts, circumcise our hearts and circumcise our minds, and do a work that will change us from the inside out.

As I've continued to chew on that, I've been aware that this is more than just a nice thing to do. This is not just a pursuit that is special, this thing called unity. This is on God's heart. This is what Jesus prayed for earnestly, right before He was crucified. When you read John 17 in this context, where He was about to be crucified. In a sense, this was His final address to His disciples. And this is what He was pouring out. He was asking God to help His people be one.

I remember hearing of a man that started an international aid organization. It began because He prayed this prayer, "Father, break my heart with the things that break your heart." His compassion embraced the needs of people and their need for food, clothing, shelter. The amount of poverty in the world is still staggering.

I love the fact that it started with this prayer, "Break my heart with the things that break your heart." Without using those same words, what we need to ask God is to help us to love the things that He loves. What He calls precious needs to be precious to us. What He values, we need to value.

When He returns for His bride, we're going to marry Him. Husbands and wives need to be on the same page on things, and the more they're on the same page, the better their marriage is. Similarly we need to be on the same page with God. If God values unity, then we need to value unity, not just because it's a nice thing and it would prove beneficial, but because it is on God's heart. That's the overriding thought that has been burning in my heart.

Then I began to think about several scriptures that address unity. In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul says, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

There could be a sermon right here that we need to be preaching on a regular basis. This is what we've been called to. If we embraced these characteristics, it would definitely produce more unity, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and giving diligence, giving energy and a focus to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now, of course, this broadcast is Building Faith and Family, and we're talking about the church, but the church starts in the home. The home is the foundation for the church. As parents and children, if we can practice these exhortations or principles and seek to be humble and gentle with each other and patient with each other and love each other and work hard to keep the unity in our home, we will learn skills that we can then apply to the church. I believe that's how God designed our culture.

How about be quick to hear and slow to speak. I was a part of a church once where we went through a big discussion which required us to meet on Sunday nights for several weeks trying to figure out the direction of our Christian school and the responsibilities of the parents in raising their children.

It wasn't long before our discussions got heated. If we had been quick to speak and slow to hear the discussions would have been more productive. But I was young and I was right, of course.

The Bible also says, bear one another's burdens. I'm bearing the burdens of the people of North Carolina. I feel it. I am bearing the burdens of my family members that we were with in Maine. This is a good thing because this is what God tells us to do to fulfill the law of Christ.

Pray for one another. It's hard to get upset with people when you pray for them. I finally discovered I had a few enemies several years ago. I thought I've never had an enemy before, so now I'm going to have someone to pray for. You know what? When you start praying for people and you start bearing their burdens, you'll find that your heart is drawn to them. There might still be some animosity, but it goes a long way to being together again.

The first principle I thought of when I was putting down my notes for things that we can do was Philippians 2:1-7 "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."

Now, that's a mouthful. It means be of the same mind, have the same love, be in full accord and of one mind. Not only was this on God's heart, not only was it on Jesus' heart, not only is it on the Spirit's heart, it is on Paul's heart and I think it should be on our heart. If we're going to love what God loves and be in the same Spirit of God, we need to apply this diligently.

Paul goes on to say, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit." Conceit is you think you're better than other people. The older we get, we learn to cloak it, but it's there. We have ambitions, and with most ambitions, we're thinking about ourselves and not others. Then Paul says here's the antidote for this condition, "In humility, count others more significant than yourselves."

Now, I've studied these words in different translations. One says, "Esteem one another more highly than ourselves," and I've thought of that when I'm communicating with people. Instead of sitting there thinking, I've read my Bible a million times, blah, blah, blah, if I can look at who's ever communicating and esteem them more highly than myself, and I can count them more significant than myself, it changes the way I communicate.

One of the ways that I do that is remember we were created in the image of God. God created them in His image. God gave them a gift. They have something to offer the Body of Christ that nobody else does. I think of this when I'm looking at my son, John. I can say, well, obviously, I'm better than John. I'm smarter. Really? That boy has something to communicate to the Body of Christ. He has something to offer. He has a

gift to build up the Body of Christ. As I look at Johnny, I want to listen when he's talking. I want to count him more significant than myself. I want to esteem him highly. Same thing with my wife. I said this before. I don't even like to say it. There was a time when we were getting very vulnerable and open and she said, sometimes I make her feel like a second class citizen. Well, that is certainly not esteeming her more highly than myself. I made her feel that way, and sadly it's probably because I thought it. It starts in our own hearts. Since out of the abundance of our hearts our mouths speak.

I need to recognize and remember that Sandy has been created in God's image. She's a joint heir of the Grace of God. She has gifts and talents that supply the Body of Christ. And knowing these truths helps me to count her more significant than myself. Back to Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but to the interests of others." This morning I'm out walking my dog and I see a lady down the street and I know she's a coach for her daughter's track team. Instead of telling her the latest news about myself, I inquired, "Hey, how's the coaching going? How's your dog?" Simple questions, yet I've had to learn this skill that some people possess a lot better than me, and I'm working at it.

When someone asks me how I'm doing, I tell them, and then I say, and how are you doing? I want to look to the interests of others. Philippians 2:5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant."

I don't know about you, but I never had that on my list of what I wanted to be when I grew up. I didn't plan on being a servant or washing people's feet. However now I am developing an appetite to want to esteem people more highly than myself. These are not the kind of things that are natural for us, but that's what Paul is saying. You need to have this mind in you, which is yours, for it is ours in Christ Jesus.

Think like He thought, and treat other people like He treated people. In this way, we are connecting with God, we're loving what God loves, we're appreciating His heart, and we're giving diligence. These are specific things that we have been given to do that produce unity.

I'm saving the big one, the New Commandment. I talk about this all the time because I don't hear anybody else talking about it, that we are called to love one another just as God has loved us. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Ultimately, when we learn to really love each other, everybody is going to be impacted. This world is going to know that we are His because we're acting like Him. We're loving each other. We're serving each other and laying our lives down for each other.

When you talk to people outside the church and ask, how come you don't come to church? They will say, because of the hypocrisy in the church. They see that we're not practicing what we preach. When we do practice what we preach, then they're going to

not have that excuse, and they're going to say, I want to come in there, because I can tell that you guys really love each other, and that you're serving each other and there's a unity there that is very attractive. There you go. What do you think?

Scott: I think it's very easy to screw all this up. Even in trying to do these things, it's so easy. I don't know if Satan's just so good at getting us to be prideful or what, but it's so easy to...Even when I'm trying to do it right, I can feel pretty proud of myself for doing it.

I find that just praying for God to fill me with His Spirit, and let Him have His way is probably the most practical thing I can do to help actually achieve some of it. I'm not sure how much of this I've actually achieved though. I don't have a lot to say on this. I don't have much wisdom in this regard.

Steve: Well, I'm just realizing this is on God's heart, and this is not an afterthought. I don't know that it's been on my front burner, but it's becoming more and more my front burner. Because any time you have people, you have stuff. And you're going to have to work through things.

Just think about these principles that I mentioned right here because I could think of specifics where I've applied them, but bearing each other's burdens. I'm finding out now that sometimes we don't have to fix people.

We just need to bear their burden and pray for them and let them know that we're thinking about them. It might just be a text. A little comment or a quick phone call and say, "Hey, praying for your brother. How are things going?"

When I was a young pastor, I thought that when someone shared their problems with me I would have to counsel and help them get their ducks in a row. I have to balance their check books, however more and more I just need to love people. I need to esteem them highly. I need to listen and bear their burdens.

We know when somebody is looking down their nose at us and when they are esteeming you highly. We know when we're valued. My son with Down syndrome knows when he's being esteemed highly and when he's being patronized.

How about practicing to confess our sins to one another, and pray for one another. Whew, that takes some humility.

We had men's group last night and it's a safe place. Once somebody goes and opens up, the next person will follow suit and open up. We have really deep communion and fellowship. And you know what? We're a team now. We see each other in church and we know each other.

There's something about confessing your sins that endears us to each other. Men feel free to bring up their dark things as well as their other successes, and it's nice to air it out and be heard and still be loved and accepted. Putting on patience and humility and a spirit of service and quick to hear and slow to speak, boy, that's when you can apply that one, almost all of us can.

Maybe it's not thinking about how to build a big church. Maybe it's not to create a big ministry. Maybe it's just to learn how to love each other and be of the same mind and the same love and be in full accord. Maybe that's where God wants to focus our

energies, because when that happens, we're going to be a tremendous witness and testimony to the world.

Steve: In my own family, I want to be quick to hear, slow to speak, treat others better than myself, serve them, pray for them, bear their burdens. Most of these I'm doing, but I want to do them well.

Scott: All of those things are the antithesis of envy. Like, it's kind of a formula for how to kill envy in your own heart, and that is so...Envy kills everything that Jesus wants us to stand for, and comparison to others.

Like, when you're bearing each other's burdens, when you're weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice, it's hard to be envious and to compare yourself to them when you're doing that genuinely. And again, that takes the Holy Spirit.

Steve: Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these truths that you've pulled together and directed to our attention to consider this morning. And we're talking them out not only for those that are listening, but primarily for our own sphere of influence.

Help us to have the mind of Christ. Help us to have a heart that beats with the heart of Christ. Help us to value what you value. And you prayed your heart out that we would be one. And then you've given us lots of things that we can do that will lead to that. And so, help us to not only love you, but to love your heart and value what you value.

Help us to be diligent in keeping the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Help us to love each other well, bear each other's burdens well, pray for each other well, and esteem one another more highly well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scott: Amen. And that's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.