



---

## JESUS UNIFIES HIS CHURCH

---

### Part 4 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Dave Bruskas | July 15, 2012

### JESUS' FAVORITE NUMBER

Hi, Mars Hill Church, my name is Dave Bruskas, I'm an executive elder, and I serve as the Mars Hill Network pastor. If someone were to tell you that the Bible revealed that Jesus had a favorite sport, you would be right to be skeptical. And it would remind me of the very first and the very worst Bible joke I've ever heard, and that is something like this: Jesus' favorite sport is baseball according to the Bible because the Bible begins with the words "in the big inning." Ridiculous, because all one has to do is look outside the Bible and it's very obvious that Jesus' favorite sport is, indeed, football, American style. And his favorite team is the Dallas Cowboys.

If I were to tell you that Jesus had a favorite color according to the Bible, again you would be skeptical. Although there might be a couple of verses we could point to, not a lot of evidence. If I told you Jesus had a favorite season, or even a favorite month, maybe some scant evidence, but nothing we could draw conclusions from.

But if I told you that Jesus had a favorite number, and that favorite number was one, there would be ample biblical evidence to make my case. Jesus talks all the time about the number one. As a matter of fact, as he talks about his relationship to the Father, he loves to say, "I and the Father are one." As we talk today about Christian unity and unity within the church, we are going to see that our unity really has everything to do with the relationship Jesus has with his Father.

I want to invite you, if you have a Bible today, to turn to John 17. We're going to look at a very important prayer of Jesus'. And I want us to get our minds and our hearts around what does unity look like, and what can we do to participate in the unity that Jesus wants us to have.

Now, if you're here today and you don't yet know Jesus, you're not a Christian, you've come at the perfect time because as we look at this prayer of Jesus' from John 17, you're going to see that the unity that Jesus wants his people to have is every bit to prove a point to you. And my hope, my prayer for you today is that you would see Jesus as he really is, communicated through the Bible, that you would meet Jesus, and your life would forever be changed.

Before we do anything else, let's stop and pray.

Father, you are a good, and loving, and kind, and gracious Father. And according to Jesus, you love us with all the love that you have for Jesus. Jesus, thank you that you, being eternally God, you, being without beginning, you humbled yourself, and you entered into human history. You came as a missionary. And you lived the only perfect human life that's ever been lived. And Jesus you went to the cross and there you paid the penalty for our sin. You died the death that we all deserve to die. And you've risen from the grave, and in so doing, Jesus, you conquered sin, and rebellion, and insurrection, you've defeated death, you've destroyed Satan, and you are worthy of our worship. Father and Son, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, we ask you today to move in our hearts. To help us understand at a heart level the unity that Jesus wants for his church. And Holy Spirit I especially pray for those here who don't yet know Jesus. That you would breathe new life into their hearts. That they would be convicted of sin and rebellion and their separation from God. And that they would see Jesus as the only answer, the only remedy to their separation. That they would meet Jesus and they'd be changed into worshipers of Jesus. All this we ask, in Jesus' good name, amen.

### UNITY IS A GIFT WE RECEIVE

Turn if you will, to John 17, all of John 17 is a prayer that Jesus prays right before his death. It's an important prayer, and it's subdivided into three categories. Jesus first prays for himself, that he would bring glory to God the Father. Then Jesus prays for the senior leaders that are going to continue his movement after his ascension into heaven, and the power of the Holy Spirit. And believe it or not, two thousand years before we even came here today, Jesus prays for us.

I really want to begin with dispelling the greatest myth about unity. Unity isn't something that we achieve. Unity isn't something that we work hard to earn. Unity is a gift. Unity is a gift we receive; it's not a status we achieve. And let me prove that to you.

John 17:20, let's begin there, this is Jesus praying to his Father in heaven, "I do not ask for these only," these is a reference to the senior leaders of the movement that Jesus launched, "but also for those who will believe in me through their word." Do you see that? You see what's going on there? Jesus prays for us. Right before his death, and right before the most critical period in his earthly life, he prays for us. We are on his heart. We are the ones who ultimately come to faith as the testimony of his first disciples. Their words, the teachings of Jesus are captured in Scripture, and we came to faith in

Jesus through the proclaiming of his good news, the gospel.

So Jesus prays for us at an important, critical stage in his earthly life. We should pay attention, then, to what he asks for. This is it, verse 21, "That they may all be," what? "One." There's that number. "Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

So much depth. Three short verses but we could spend months full of Sundays just unpacking the deep, profound truth included in these three verses. But I want to focus on two main points as it pertains to the unity that Jesus wants us to have in the church.

First thing I want you to see is that Jesus models unity in his relationship with the Father. The very unity that Jesus wants us to have as his followers is ultimately modeled in the relationship that Jesus has with his Father. The Bible teaches this about God: God is a triune God. One God, three distinct persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; one God. This means that the Father's not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, but one essence. By that it means that the Father's in the Son, the Son is in the Father, the Son is in the Spirit, the Spirit is in the Son, the Spirit is in the Father.

And what Jesus is saying here is that he wants us as his followers to live in the very same type of unity that he experiences with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Perfect unity, uninterrupted relationship. A relationship that's defined by love, care, and respect, and worship. That we would have that type of relationship with him together.

But not only does Jesus model for us the type of unity that he wants us, his church, to live in, he also makes that unity a reality, because he accomplishes it, according to this prayer, by being in us. Jesus in us brings about the unity that he desires. Jesus in us achieves the answer to this prayer. The Bible teaches that all those who turn from sin and trust in Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 makes it very clear that those who belong to Jesus are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. So Jesus lives in us. And the very unity that Jesus is praying for us to have, he achieves by indwelling us.

It means basically this: the most foundational definition of a Christian is one who is united or one who is one with Jesus. And if we are one with Jesus, Jesus lives in us through the Holy Spirit. And if Jesus lives in us in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is the basis of the unity that Jesus wants us to have. That if we're united with Jesus, we're united together. We are one.

You see, unity is a gift we receive; it's not a status we achieve. It's not so much about our activity, but it's our identity in Christ. Jesus has done all the work. And a way we respond to Jesus' grace, Jesus' work, Jesus' presence isn't through religious effort, it isn't by trying harder and doing more; it's always biblically through repentance. And repentance is turning away from sin to Jesus, and faith, trusting in Jesus.

Let me see if I can explain it to you this way: If the Apostle Paul could say that he is the chief of all sinners, I think I can easily say that when it comes to all of Mars Hill Church, I am the most technologically challenged person that's ever been a part of Mars Hill Church. It's just who I am, I don't get technology at all, much to the chagrin of my effective and faithful executive assistant, Nate Finn. There have been times where he has to come into my office and literally turn on my Mac. Just the way it is.

And so because others convinced me that to grow in my relationship with Jesus I had to have an iPhone, I purchased one a couple of years ago. You'll get there someday, trust me, we'll be patient in your growth. And here I was with an iPhone, the guy who's the most technologically challenged guy who's ever lived.

Now, fortunately for me, my wife, Kara, and I, we have four daughters, and my youngest, Jillian, is just tech savvy. You have kids like that in your home? They just come out of the womb ready to get involved in technology. Whether it's the television, or the computer, anything at all, they just get it. That's Jillian.

As a matter of fact, she, from the time she was a little girl, would give us proposals when she had an idea, and they would be multimedia-type proposals. I remember one specifically where she decided we should take a vacation on the beach instead of in the mountains, and I remember the audio, and the visual, and the PowerPoint, and everything she put together. No joke.

I even remember the most persuasive proposal that Jillian ever wrote was so that we would buy her a hamster. And we went through this amazing slideshow with video, and music, and scientific stats, and the last PowerPoint slide was the closer. It basically read that scientists have determined that kids that have a hamster are likely to be better-adjusted adults.

So I have an iPhone and Jillian is going to be my technological guide to make sure I enjoy the iPhone to the fullest. And two days into this experiment, she can tell by the look on my face—I'm not a good poker player, I don't hide my emotion well—that I'm deeply disappointed in my iPhone. She said, "Dad, what's the problem with the iPhone?"

And I said, "Well, Jillian it's really rather simple, I want to be like those cool people who come to Mars Hill Church and they can read the Bible on their iPhone." And she said, "Okay, well, what's the problem?" I said, "Honey, I don't have the time to take the Bible off the Internet, to pay whatever it costs to get the Bible off the Internet, download it onto my computer, then transfer it into my iPhone." She took the iPhone out of my hand and she said, "Dad, watch." She went to the app store, there she found the Crossway Free ESV Bible, she pushed two buttons, and voila, the Bible on my iPhone.

It was there. I didn't need to do anything other than to activate it. I didn't have to work for it. I didn't have to pay for it. That's the essence of the unity that Jesus wants us to live in and enjoy. Unity is a gift we receive; it's already been achieved by Jesus. All that's left for us to do is to believe that we are united, to live out the reality that Jesus has already provided for us.

Jesus loves his church. And because Jesus loves his church, Jesus gifts his church with oneness, with unity. That we might together, in some way that's difficult to define, experience the same type of unity that Jesus enjoys with God the Father and God the Spirit.

### THREE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF UNITY

Now, as we look at the relationship that Jesus has with his Father, I see at least three different dimensions of unity, and what unity can look like. And I want us to work through those. I want to refer you, though, to chapter 6 in *Vintage Church*. Pastor Mark has written a great book titled *Vintage Church*. In chapter 6, Pastor Mark identifies five different dimensions of unity.

In light of time today, let's just cover three. But let's look at the relationship that Jesus has with his Father. And I want to talk about three categories, three dimensions, if you will, of unity that I want us to experience and enjoy together as members of Mars Hill Church. And if we're not living in the gift, in the reality of unity that Jesus has made possible, then let's turn from sin, let's trust in Jesus, and let's move into the unity that he's achieved for us.

#### 1. DOCTRINAL UNITY

Let me show you the first example. It has to do with what we refer to as doctrinal unity. John 17:3, same prayer, early part of the prayer where Jesus is praying for himself, same context. Jesus says this as he prays to his Father, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Do you hear that? Do you understand that? Do you see how profound that is?

When you and I tend to think of eternal life, we tend to think in terms of quantity, right? It's a life without end. And although that's true, when Jesus thinks in terms of eternal life, he defines it as a quality of life. And that life is defined by knowing God, the only true God through Jesus Christ, the one he sent. That's amazing. That's exciting.

The word "know" doesn't simply mean intellectual knowledge, knowing facts about God. It means a deep, personal, experiential knowledge of God. God, the only true God, he's a personal God. He knows us and he wants to make himself known to us, that we might know him. And we know him through Jesus.

But the fact that he's the only true God means there are propositional truths that surround his reality that we need to understand. Look at verse 6, John 17, Jesus says this, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." Think about that for a minute. What an amazing statement of your worth and my worth in the eyes of God.

Do you see what just transpired there? Jesus, as he's praying, acknowledges that those who come to him in faith were a gift to him by God the Father. So you and I are a gift from God the Father to God the Son. That's amazing. That's encouraging. The next time someone stops you and says, "Do you think you're God's gift to the world?" Say, "No, not exactly, more technically I'm God's gift to God because God the Father gave me to the Son." And then walk away and see what they think of you after that.

Follow the thinking here. John 17:7, "Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." See the relationship there? See the relationship between God the Father and God the Son? Jesus, in essence, is saying, "My teaching really isn't my own words, they come to me from the Father. And my role in the world is to make him known."

So we have complete doctrinal unity in truth between Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. No disagreement, no dissension, no difference of opinion, complete and perfect unity. So when Jesus says that he wants us to live in unity, and he prays for our unity, and he compares the unity that he wants us to live in with the relationship that he has with the Father, doctrinal unity is critically important and foundational.

I think one of the huge misconceptions we have in Christianity is that somehow doctrine and unity are polar opposites, that they're antithetical. Not true. When I was pastoring in Albuquerque I had an opportunity to meet a woman who would come to the church that we had planted just to be refreshed. She went to another church primarily, and she also had a ministry where she would go into prisons and she would work with illiterate prisoners to teach them how to read. And one of the things that was really important to me as I was planting the church was to get to know as many pastors in the city as I could, and come alongside them, and love them, and pray for them, and serve them.

And so she began to figure out, as she was making her rounds, working with different churches, serving the prisons, that other pastors knew me and they felt encouraged by me. So I remember the night she came forward and she handed me a card with a big smile on her face, and said, "I just wanted to thank you. This is for you. You can read it later in your study." And I made my way back to my study, and I opened the letter, and I opened it up. Now, her intent was so good, and it's really the thought that counts, but it was one of these Christian Hallmark cards, and it said simply this, and then she added some kind words that made it all better, but this is what it said, the card basically said, "Thank you Pastor, for putting aside doctrine in order to pursue unity."

You see how wrong that is? You see how misinformed that is? You see how confused that is? How opposite it is? That would be like your physician, after getting a good, clean bill of health, saying to you, "Patient, thank you so much for choosing to put aside good nutrition so that you could have good health," all right? Doesn't make sense, one leads to the other. And if you and I are going to experience the unity in a way that's good for us, and gives us joy, and brings Jesus honor and glory, unity that Jesus achieved, then we have to live in doctrinal unity.

Doctrinal unity is found in the pages of the Bible. Because according to Jesus, the words that he speaks are from the Father, and there's no disagreement

there. Two categories of religious folks, at least in the time that Jesus walked the earth, that threatened doctrinal unity. Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 15 to beware of the leaven, or the teaching of two groups, the Pharisees and Sadducees. And I think, in many ways, these two groups are still among us in different formats, in different categories, in different personalities today.

### ***The Sadducees***

The first group, the Sadducees, their problem was they were "Bible minus" types of people. They were Bible light; they were less than the Bible. They denied the whole Bible, at least as Jesus saw it, and as Jesus taught it. And they held to really the first five books of the Bible, the Torah. They denied a lot of the supernatural things that happened within the Bible. They specifically didn't believe that the dead could be resurrected, so this life was all you had. And they were very politically involved and influential. And when they pose a question to Jesus, Jesus just flat out confronts them. He says to them, "You don't know the Scriptures and you don't know the power of God." Some of us need to repent. Some of us are threatening the unity that Jesus wants us to have together by stopping short of the Bible, by denying the basic truths of the Bible, by not embracing and understanding the Bible in its fullness.

I'll give you an example. A kind woman who attends one of our Mars Hill churches approached me just recently, and she was troubled by some of the things that she read on the Internet. I don't have to tell you that everything on the Internet isn't true, right? We know that's the case, so we look at the Internet with some skepticism. Right? You with me? And as we look at the Internet, she saw a problem, specifically, and begins to be concerned about the concept of church discipline at Mars Hill.

And very specifically, I said, "What bothers you most? What is it that's concerning you? What doesn't feel right?" She says, "I don't know if it's ever right for church leaders to tell church members to disassociate from each other. I don't get that. Seems like overstepping some boundary." And I said to her, I said, "You know what, if it was just church leaders telling church members to not associate with each other that would be a big problem. If the authority just resided in the leaders of the church."

But I said, "The issue is the Bible tells us to do that. Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 makes it very clear that if anyone is living as a believer, as a follower of Jesus, in sexual immorality, and that person isn't repentant, doesn't want to change, and isn't open to the grace of Jesus to change his or her life, that we are not to associate, we're not even to sit down for a meal." And she looked at me and said, "Oh, okay, good, I get it now. I'm for it." You can see the potential disunity that would happen in the body if we don't agree upon the objective truth of the Bible.

And we live in a world in which many people who claim to be Christians, they deny, much like the Sadducees, much of the Bible. They stop short of the full meaning of the Bible. They are "Bible minus" people. They are Bible light people.

### ***The Pharisees***

But it's interesting that Jesus' greatest conflict really wasn't with the Sadducees, it was with the Pharisees. And the Pharisees didn't stop short of the Bible; they actually went way beyond the Bible. They accepted the Bible that Jesus accepted as truth, but they had their own traditions, and they had created their own regulations, and they added rules to the Bible.

Jesus referred to them as hypocrites. "You hypocrites," Jesus said, "You teach as doctrine the traditions of men. You take your own teachings, your own traditions, and you make them on par with the Bible. And you create rules and regulations that go way beyond the Bible." And if we do the same today then we challenge the very unity that Jesus wants us to have, and wants us to live in.

There are people, maybe some of you here today, who have your own inner Pharisee. Your tendency is to go beyond the Bible, and in so doing you create rules and standards. And then you separate yourself, you're segregated from those who don't keep your rules and your regulations that go beyond the Bible. And disunity follows. And disunity is a tragic result.

There are entire churches that do this. There was one in Albuquerque, and I would drive by it every day on my way to work. And they would engage in church marquee wars. Have you ever seen those? Where one church will war against another church by putting a message up on their marquee. If you haven't seen it yet, it's really, it's funny but it's also shameful.

And as I drove by this church I was always amazed at what they would put out on their marquee. So for a month it was they were against anything that was contemporary, musically, in worship. Kind of like, "You can have your new, filthy streams of water; we go back to the deep pools of old hymns." It was that kind of a thing. Okay.

They were very much against any sort of casual attire in the church coming together. And they made a point, much more creatively than I'm communicating it, but they made a point about it in their marquee. They had one translation that they felt was authoritative, and every other English translation wasn't, and they championed that cause.

And I got to tell you, I began to anticipate every week, "Okay, what are they going to do this week? What rules do they have that go way beyond the Bible that are going to segregate them, and alienate them, from the rest of Christianity?" As a matter of fact, I was so intrigued by this, I went online to Google them. Guess what? They don't have a website, right, because the computer is evil, the computer is wrong.

It's what some of us are doing. Some of us live by rules and regulations that go way beyond the Bible. And we're judgmental towards others who don't have our same convictions, and we're separate, and we're divisive.

Listen to me, Mars Hill Church, we love the Bible here. We want you to love the Bible. We want you to study the Bible. We've got amazing

opportunities for you to study the Bible. In just a few months we're hosting our first ever National Resurgence Conference, in October, in a wonderful place, Irvine, California. And the simple theme is because Jesus lives, we live for Jesus.

We want to train you in the Bible. We want you to know the Bible. And this is applicable to you whether you're a pastor at a Mars Hill church, or you are a stay-at-home mom. We want you to come and we want you to be trained. We're going to be rolling out in the next few months, Mars Hill training days. We want to teach you the Bible. We want you to be hungry for the Bible.

We don't ever want to stop short of the Bible like the Sadducees. And we don't ever want to go beyond the Bible like the Pharisees. Because we want to live in the doctrinal unity that Jesus has with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. We need to be Bible people.

## 2. MISSIONAL UNITY

Let me show you another dimension of the relationship that they shared that's critically important for us if we're going to live in the unity that Jesus has given us. It's what I refer to as missional unity. Back to John 17:15, Jesus praying for his immediate disciples, for those that would lead his mission all over the world, he says this to the Father, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world," when Jesus speaks of the world this way it's the systems that are influenced by Satan against God and all the world. "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them," that means set them apart, make them holy, make them set apart for good. "Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth."

Look at verse 18. "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Jesus is a missionary God. He goes out of his way, especially in the Gospel of John, to say over and over, "I've been sent by the Father. I've been sent by the Father. I've been sent by the Father." Jesus enters into human history as a missionary. He takes on human form. He's human in every way, except one significant way, he's without sin. He walks our soil. He breathes our air. He speaks our language. He lives in our cultural context. He hangs out and pursues relationships with people who are far away from God. All for the purpose, according to Jesus, to seek and save those who are lost.

And then Jesus makes it very clear as he prays this prayer, and he may even say it more definitively a couple chapters over in John 20:21, he says, "Just as the Father has sent me into the world, I send you into the world." The church is about one mission, and it's a mission that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit live out in unity. It's a rescue mission. It's a mission where Jesus is coming to pursue people who are alienated from God, to save them, and to transform them, and to convert them into people in rebellion against God, to people who worship God, through Jesus.

I have some pressure points as a pastor. And one of them is, if you want to frustrate me—and I ask that you not, that's not really good for me, I'm trying to grow in that a little bit, and it's certainly not good for you—but if you did, hypothetically, I have a pastor who's a friend, if you really wanted to make him angry, put these two words together: the word "my" and the word "ministry". Talk a lot about "my ministry." Because I don't see it in the Bible.

There's one mission, there's just one mission, and it's the mission that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are on. To redeem a lost world. To save sinners. To transform sinners into saints, those are set apart for God, those who worship God. You and I may have different roles to play, but it's his mission; not our mission. The mission belongs to him. There's one mission at Mars Hill Church.

Jesus says this most clearly to his disciples in Matthew 28. He says, "As you go into the world, go into the world, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything that I've taught you."

So at Mars Hill Church we have one mission, it's quite honestly the same mission that every church that follows Jesus has. And that is to make disciples, so we want to make disciples because that's what Jesus told us to do. And we want to start new communities of disciples that we call churches. So we want to make disciples and plant churches.

And you have no ministry, nor do I, apart from the mission of Jesus. If we are going to live out the unity that Jesus wants us to have, then all of us, all of us, all of us without exception are missionaries on mission with Jesus. And there's one mission.

At Mars Hill Albuquerque we had a couple come and they came through the door, and their first Sunday went really well. They were appreciative, and communicative, and said, "We'll be back." And they came back again. But as they came back, there began a pattern of every time they came, whatever they came to, I would get an e-mail of constructive criticism.

Now, constructive criticism is helpful. We always want to be open to the things that we can do better. But this couple would come to a worship service and there would be constructive criticism pertaining to how we could adjust sound volumes, how we could do seating better, how announcements could flow better. I mean, just every little detail.

Then as they began to get involved in a Community Group I would receive, "Here's all the things that are wrong with our Community Group. Here's what you need to do in the realm of Community Group ministry to make it better. And here's what's really wrong with our Community Group leader." "Okay."

Then they began to pray about being involved in the Redemption ministry, and they went to an informational session, and they began to tell us everything that was wrong in our Redemption concepts. What we were doing that was too much, and what we were doing that was too little.

So about that time—I'm slow, I realize that—I began to notice a pattern, a trend. So I asked to meet with this couple. I said, "Come on, let's talk about this. It seems like you're just not real happy here. Let's talk about how things are going. You're welcome to be constructive, you're welcome to offer

criticism as long as you're deeply invested and you're willing to be an answer to the problem."

And the husband looked me in the eye and he said, "You don't understand my ministry." And I thought, "Uh-oh, here we go." Blood begins to boil. "Really, tell me about your ministry." I didn't say it like that. He said, "Jesus has called me and my wife to go to all the different churches here in our city, to be in different aspects of their ministry, and to help them figure out the things they're doing wrong so that they might correct them."

"Wow. Really? Because when I look at my Bible I don't see any sort of church quality control ministry there as a gift. And as I look through the pages of Scripture I don't see anywhere where there's Spirit-filled secret shoppers that go and they try the products." And I invited them to stop that, to consider that it's not from Jesus, and I could assure them that that wasn't from Jesus. And as to be expected they left a week later.

Some of you today are missing out on the gift of unity that Jesus wants us to enjoy together because you're not on mission. You're pursuing your own individual agenda. You're about your ministry and your ministry has nothing to do, ultimately, with the mission of Jesus. It's his mission, and it's our mission collectively. And I want you to turn from that sin because that's exactly what it is. It's a selfish sin.

I want you to turn from that sin, and I want you to come, and I want you to be involved. Be a member. Commit to being a member of Mars Hill Church if you know Jesus and you're in a Community Group, commit to being a member of Mars Hill Church. Because you know what, you know who members are at Mars Hill Church? They're missionaries. And when you look at community, and community is important in the Bible, the purpose of community is mission. And as we look at mission as a strategy, we do mission in community.

So get involved, you can jump right in. There are opportunities regularly for you to become a member. Talk to anybody you want to today. I don't want you just to feel guilty. I want you to turn from that, but Jesus has forgiven your sin, but turn to Jesus and be involved. Become a member of Mars Hill Church because our members are missionaries, and we're experiencing together the most incredible adventure anyone can ever experience.

Jesus is showing up in a big way, and we are afforded a front row seat to see lives transformed in our homes, in our work places, in our weekly gatherings. Jesus is changing lives and he invites you to join in. And we want you to join in as well because there's great joy, there's great excitement about being on mission together with Jesus.

Jesus had a perfect relationship with the Father, there was missional unity, Jesus was aligned with the Father, who is aligned with the Holy Spirit, and they still are today. And they invite you in to their unity, to be on mission with Jesus. Will you? Jesus loves his church. And Jesus gifts his church with unity and we experience unity on a doctrinal basis. We experience unity as Jesus would have us do so, on a missional basis.

### **3. RELATIONAL UNITY**

I want to show you one more dimension here. There's a relational aspect to the unity that Jesus enjoys with the Father. John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me," circle this phrase, or highlight it if you got your funky iPhone Bible, "may be with me where I am." Let me say that again. "May be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father," verse 25, "even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know you that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Wow. Do you get what Jesus is saying there? I'm not sure you do. I don't know that you could still be sitting in your seats if you really understood what Jesus was saying there. What Jesus is saying is, "Father, there's never been a time when you haven't loved me. You've loved me forever, and ever, and ever. And Father, the love that we share with each other, I want that to be in my followers. As I indwell them through the Holy Spirit, I want them to experience that same kind of love. I want the love that the Father has for me to flow through the Holy Spirit like a conduit into the lives of my followers. And I want them to love each other."

Namely, what Jesus is praying there is that you and I and everyone who loves Jesus, who belongs to Jesus, would be with him forever. And as we're with him, the ultimate experience we would have together is seeing the glory of Jesus manifested. Jesus has had a perfect relationship throughout all eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. They love each other. They enjoy each other. They serve each other. They respect each other. And Jesus wants the same for us.

And when you and I come together and there's something very important about us getting together weekly, because what we're really doing is we're previewing, and we're partially fulfilling the answer to the prayer that Jesus just prayed. Do you see that? When we all come together, and we're together, and we proclaim Jesus, what we're really saying is, "We are previewing the kingdom of God in all its fullness." There will come a day when this prayer will be answered. When we're all together with Jesus, in perfect relationship with Jesus. And Jesus' glory is made known, and we will worship him.

And there's a relational unity that exists between the Father and the Son. And the only time it was ever interrupted was briefly, on the cross, when Jesus cries out these words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When Jesus took the sin of the world upon himself, that's what sin does. It separates us from God, and it separates us from each other. But Jesus on that same cross said, "It is finished." The work is done and we belong to Jesus. We are reconciled with God, and we are reconciled with each other.

And there is great value in us coming together and experiencing the love that Jesus has for God the Father and God the Spirit. And very few of you would ever walk into a local church and say, "You know what, I'm going to be as divisive as I possibly can. I'm just going to wreak havoc here. I'm going to get in and I'm going to tear up relationships, I'm going to twist doctrine." Very few people, an infinitesimal number of people do that.

But here's what a lot of us do, we don't actively and aggressively create disunity, we do it passively. And we don't do it when we're present; we do it by our absence. We experience the relationship that Jesus has with his Father when we're together. When we're together in worship. We see it in the early church. Acts 2 tells us they met daily in the temple courts. They were taught, and they worshiped Jesus, and they would disperse to their homes, and they would take meals together. And some of you unknowingly and passively are bringing disunity to Mars Hill Church by not regularly participating in worship. By not being together at our services, not being in a Community Group.

I have an opportunity to coach a lot of church planters. And the first three years of church planting are really difficult and defining. And I spoke with one of our planters the other day who's had a rough year. He's just now coming on his third year. I said, "Tell me about your year." He said, "It's been tough." I said, "What's tough about it?" He said, "We can't get momentum." So I asked him, I said, "Are people resisting what you're teaching, and preaching, and who Jesus is?" He says, "Not so much." He said, "They're just not consistent in coming together." He said, "There are people who will come a couple weeks, then they'll disappear for five weeks, then they'll come back. Some of the more consistent people, consistent means they show up every other week."

Now hear me out Mars Hill, I'm not being legalistic. I understand there are things like vacation, and sickness, and other things that keep you from being here. But what I'm saying is some of you, some of you are being disunifying because you're not joining in, you're not together with us, you're not physically present, your heart is not in it.

And we invite you to activate the gift of unity that Jesus has already given you by repenting. Repent from your selfishness, turn to Jesus, come be a part of what's going on. It's amazing. It's a preview of what heaven will be like. Not perfectly yet, but we're progressing towards that. But that's the essence of what Jesus prayed for. And you, in the power of the Holy Spirit, have an opportunity to fulfill the prayer of Jesus. How cool is that?

## WHY UNITY IS SO IMPORTANT TO JESUS

Now, non-Christians, this message is really for you today. Some of you are looking at it and saying, "You know, there's a lot of messiness in the Christian church." You're right, but there's purpose and unity, and Jesus alludes to it. Let me show you something from the first verses that we looked at today. Always pay attention to small words when you study the Bible. And whenever you see these two words together, the word "so" combined with the word "that," that gives you an indication of purpose.

I want you to see why unity is so important to Jesus. He says it a couple times. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that—" Purpose statement. Here's why. Here's the purpose according to Jesus' heart. "The world may believe that you have sent me."

Let me show you another example. Let's go on to the next slide. "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that," it's the purpose, here's the motive, "the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

Non-Christian, listen to me. My hope is when you look at the church, and it's far from perfect, but my hope is that you would at least see present the unity that Jesus has gifted his church with. And that you would draw the conclusion that Jesus wants you to when you look upon his church. You would look at this thing called church, and you would say, "I don't know entirely what to make of it, but this much I know, there's a missionary God and his name is Jesus. He was sent into the world on a rescue mission and he has rescued some people. And those people that he rescued, he loves them really well. Because I've watched the way they interact, and as they do so, they communicate in word and in deed that Jesus has come into the world."

Saw a great example of it just this past week. Earlier this summer we had our first ever church-wide Mars Hill Youth Camp in Malibu, Canada. And a lot of our churches sent their students on the trip, particularly those in the Puget Sound area here in the Northwest. A great week of camp. I believe over 240 kids attended. And out of those 243, about 83 or 84 met Jesus. So one out of three of the youth that went on this trip had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. It's exciting, isn't it? *[Applauding]*

And every good camp has to have a really killer reunion service, right? Everybody gets together, it's been a week since they've seen each other, everybody brings family and friends, and people all come together. Well, that's exactly what happened this past week. And I'll never forget the feeling as I walked in the room, I came in a little bit late, and I saw what was going on. It was the most diverse gathering of youth I've ever seen in my life.

You had kids from very urban context; you had kids from very suburban, almost rural context. There were kids of all different races, all different ethnic backgrounds, even different languages I heard being spoken. Kids from different socioeconomic statuses, very wealthy kids, and prosperous kids; and very poor kids. Kids that came here with intact families, kids that came here without any family at all.

And what was amazing was watching the evening transpire, because two things were going on. One, they were loving and worshiping Jesus. They were praising Jesus. They were singing songs loud, they were clapping hard, they were raising their hands high. They were worshiping Jesus. And these kids that in any other context would never come together, young women and young men, who wouldn't cross paths in any other context, were loving, and caring, and serving people. It was an absolutely sociological myth buster. It was that type of night.

And as I watched that transpire with this text in the back of my mind, I thought, "This is what Jesus prayed for. Jesus, your prayer is answered. This is what's happening." And I began to pray that in through the doors would walk the most hardened person against Jesus, or the most indifferent person towards Jesus, and that they would look at this room of people that don't really belong together in any way whatsoever, that they don't come together in any other context in all society, would come together and they would make the observation that Jesus would have them make. Namely, that Jesus has

come into the world to save sinners. And he loves those he saves very well.

Non-Christian, do you see that? Not perfect, I get it. But do you see present the unity that Jesus gifted the church with? If you do, then you have a decision to make. Either you're going to receive Jesus, and receive the forgiveness that he offers you for free. You'll receive the forgiveness that's yours. That Jesus has done all the work, and you'll turn from your rebellion, and you'll turn from your independence, and you'll trust entirely in Jesus, that he's willing and he's able to forgive you and free you, that you might become a worshiper of Jesus. Would you do that now? Would you do that now?

Church, do you see how important our unity is? Do you see the amazing gift that it is? Do you see the purpose in it? That when we experience the unity that Jesus gives his church, we make a statement to the world that's looking on. You see, Jesus loves his church. Jesus unifies his church. Church, how are we going to respond? Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you that you've come into the world to seek and save those who are lost. Thank you that you've come into the world to make God known to us. Jesus, I pray that we would turn from the sin that keeps us from enjoying the unity that you've gifted us with. And we would trust in you to not only forgive us of that sin, but to free us to live in unity. I pray that people wouldn't leave here today with false guilt, but instead that they would experience the forgiveness and they would boldly step actively into the church that you love and be members. Holy Spirit, I pray that you would work on the hearts that don't yet know Jesus. That they would see in the pages of Scripture, and that they would see in the lives of those around them, that Jesus indeed is a missionary God who's come into the world to save sinners, and he loves those sinners deeply. All this we pray in Jesus' good name, amen.

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*