

SMALL GROUPS

LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER

Stand Alone Week 1:

“How to Be Arm in Arm When We Don’t See Eye to Eye”

ICEBREAKER |

What do you think: does pineapple belong on pizza?

INTRODUCTION |

There are so many things to be divided over in the world today. Whether it’s politics, faith, or even sports. We can be divided about wearing masks or taking the vaccine. We can be divided over whether pineapple on pizza is a great idea or not so much. Even in the church, there are divisions. It’s very easy to draw a line and choose sides. But we also know we’ve been called to unity. In our time together, let’s look at four ways to live arm-in-arm even if we don’t see eye-to-eye.

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Pastor Dave talked about a vacation he went on as a kid when two of his sisters got into a disagreement. His mother had a very timely word of wisdom that works for us today as well. She told them, *“In life, you’re going to disagree about things, but it doesn’t mean you have to pull away from each other. You can allow your differences to separate you, or you can learn how to get along despite your differences.”*

That sums up the way the world looks at differences today. If someone votes differently than you do, just pull away. If someone doesn’t like your church, then forget about them. If someone has a different taste in music, who needs them?

But real unity means we see our differences not as divisions but as opportunities to learn more about the world, about each other, and even about ourselves.

Think of someone you’ve had a disagreement with in the past. How is your life better for knowing them? How can you help their lives be better for knowing you?

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This week, we looked at four ways to make sure we are living in harmony with each other. The first is to **“Choose to Really Love EVERYONE.”** Read this short passage together:

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.
Romans 12:9 (NLT)

The foundation of unity is love. Jesus told His disciples that the whole world will know they were followers of His if they love each other (*John 13:35*). There is no other characteristic that is more central to the act of harmony than love.

In the New Testament, there is a special word for “love” that Jesus uses: Agape. It’s a Greek word that goes far beyond just the simple, romantic love that you feel towards your sweetie. It’s more than just the love you have for your favorite sports team. It’s even bigger and better than the love you have for your favorite dessert! Agape love is not about feelings, it’s about choice. It’s not self-serving but instead self-sacrificing. It always asks, “*What can I do for you?*” When we start with this type of love in mind, then the road toward unity will be a lot less bumpy.

What are some differences between a godly “Agape” love and a worldly self-serving love? (Ex., worldly love will pressure a partner to fulfill their own desires while “Agape” love will seek to serve before being served.)

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The next step is to “**Recognize You Have BLIND SPOTS.**” Blind spots are things in your life that you don’t see but others can. Just like when you’re driving down the road, there are areas around your car that you aren’t aware of. If you don’t check it, you could wreck it!

Again, read this short passage together:

Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!

Romans 12:16 (NLT)

Often, we don’t see eye-to-eye because we refuse to see something from another perspective. We think we know it all, so why even ask? We can sometimes have the mindset of, “I don’t need to know your opinion because I already know it stinks!”

But Jesus told us that when we try to remove a speck from our brother or sister's eye without checking our own first, we're going to end up poking their eye out! Instead, we need to check our own vision first (*Matthew 7:3-5*).

What is a blind spot you've had to correct in the past? In other words, what is something you thought was true, or an opinion you held dearly, that you have since changed because it wasn't helpful?

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The next step to unity and harmony is **“Don't Fight to be Right, Fight for HARMONY.”** It's natural and normal to want to win an argument or disagreement. No one likes admitting when they are wrong. But the truth is, you may not always know best.

In *Romans 12:18 (NLT)*, Paul asked us to *“Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone”*. That means admitting when you're wrong and the other person is right. Whenever you feel like fighting back, ask yourself, “What's the point?” “What can be won by continuing this fight, disagreement, or argument?” You may win the debate but lose a friend.

Have you ever lost a friend over an argument or disagreement? How could you have avoided it? What role did you play in ending the friendship?

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The last step is this: **“See Others as Your Brother or Sister.”** It’s easy to choose sides in any disagreement. In fact, there is an entire field of study on this phenomenon. We treat those who are like us better than those who are different. It’s all about the “In-Group” versus the “Out-Group.” An us and them battle.

We’ve been reading excerpts from Romans 12 this entire time. Let’s look at how Paul starts this chapter:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.

Romans 12:1 (NLT)

Notice that Paul addresses them as “brothers and sisters.” Before he goes into the details about how to live out a life of sacrificial worship, he wants to make sure they see each other as family. Sure, families fight. They disagree. They get into arguments. But at the end of the day, they love and help each other. There is something about the bond of family that is simply inseparable.

God sees us as we truly are, as a family. Each of us has a special place in His heart. When we see each other the way God does, we will start to live in harmony. Share with the group something amazing you see in someone else in the group.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

We can’t solve the problem of disunity overnight, but we can start as early as tomorrow. By following these simple steps, we will get much closer:

- 1) Choose to Really Love Everyone**
- 2) Recognize You have Blind Spots**
- 3) Don’t Fight to be Right, Fight for Harmony**
- 4) See Others as Your Brother or Sister**

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS (Optional):

- Do at least one (1) SOAP Devotions this week
- Share with your group one of your SOAP Devotions from this past week

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, help us to live in harmony and unity. That was Your Son's prayer for us from the very beginning. We don't always get it right, but we all want to. Give us hearts that love and eyes that see just like You do. And point out the things that bring us together instead of the things that separate us. Draw our hearts back to You because it's only through You that we are able to love everyone else. Help us to recognize our blind spots. Help us to fight for harmony and to see others as my brother and/or sister. In Jesus' name I humbly pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: *My dear friends, as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to get along with each other. Don't take sides. Always try to agree in what you think.*
1 Corinthians 1:10 (CEV)

Day 2: *Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*
2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

Day 3: *Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.*
Philippians 2:2-3 (NLT)

Day 4: *"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, My Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as My followers, I am there among them."*
Matthew 18:19-20 (NLT)

Day 5: *Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*
Colossians 3:13-14 (NLT)