

# **life groups' sermon guide**

## **the secret ingredient**

**colossians 1:28-2:5**



LIFE GROUPS

doing life together

*Small groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the  
CORE 4 elements of worship, grow, serve, and share*

## **Unity, Community & Opportunity**

*“Think about the number of souls God has brought about our path  
and we have dropped them!”*

**Oswald Chambers**

*“Love them until they ask us why.”*

**Joseph Aldrich**

## **Unity**

Unity is a bit of a curious thing to me – especially when we’re talking about unity between two things that don’t seem to fit together. Like most couples, when my wife and I got married we observed the traditional lighting of the “unity candle”. If there’s still anyone who is not familiar with this practice, it’s where the bride and groom approach the altar together. They each take a candle already lit, which signifies their individual life and together use those candle to ignite an unlit larger candle. Afterwards they blow out the candles that signified their individual selves, leaving only the new candle of the two of them – the two have become one burning wick, as it were.

It’s a nice enough ceremony and I do appreciate the symbolism. The problem is that I think someone must have secretly replaced our “individual candles” with those trick candles that keep lighting back up when you blow them out. You see, my bride and I are about as opposite and seemingly incompatible a couple as you’ll find. And I’ve found that achieving true unity in our marriage is much, much harder than just blowing out a candle. It is work. It is sometimes a struggle. And I find that I have to be willing to die to what I want for me for the health, greater good, strengthening – and even the survival – of my marriage.

Q: What is unity in a marriage – and what is it NOT?

Q: Why does unity matter in a marriage?

Q: Why is unity in a marriage sometimes difficult?

Q: If we can assume that disagreements are inevitable in a marriage, what then must each person do to achieve unity?

At the end of Colossians chapter 1 and into the first verse of chapter 2, Paul uses some of the same sort of language to describe how intensely he is engaged in his efforts for the Colossian believers. Depending on the translation you look at you’ll see words such as work, labor (“unto weariness” in the Amplified Bible), struggle, severe, striving, etc.

Why all this effort on their behalf – what was Paul trying to achieve for them? Verse 2 tells us that he was wanting for them

to be “encouraged in heart” and “united in love” (NIV). Now Paul was, if nothing else, a gifted writer and communicator. Bringing the encouragement to their hearts, while not without some effort on his part, was not the kind of thing that would cause him to even break a sweat. No, I’d like to propose that the second half of his stated goal is what required all of the draining effort on his part. Unifying these believers looks to have been wearing our good brother Paul completely out!

Q: What is unity in the church – and what is it NOT?

Q: What kinds of things bring DISunity within the church? Think both big and small – significant and petty.

Q: What is the hard work, labor, striving and struggle I need to be doing in the cause of unity?

There are a couple of reasons that this matter of unity can not be emphasized enough. First, in the NIV, the need for unity is more greatly emphasized because rather than a separate goal, it is presented as the key to achieving the ultimate treasure, namely Jesus. Look at verse 2 to see what I’m talking about:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, *so that* they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ (emphasis mine).

Have two little words (“so that”) ever looked so huge? It’s easy to miss, isn’t it? What Paul is saying is that without unity we don’t get the “full riches of complete understanding” – and ultimately we miss Christ Himself. That’s huge!

The other reason can be found in John 17:20b-22

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us *so that* the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (emphasis mine again).

The world – the very same one that Jesus commissioned us to out into with His message – will not believe that message if they do not see us unified. We wonder why so many are hostile toward Christianity, why so many flat-out reject Jesus. Could it be because when they look at the church they see how easily we are divided? Jesus took the matter of our unity so serious that it was laying heavy on heart when he was right within the shadow of the cross. Brothers and sisters we need to take this matter of unity in the church very seriously as well.

## Community

Q: How has the concept of what a community is (or is supposed to be) changed over the past 50 or so years?

Q: The church is often called a “community of believers”. What does that really mean – How should the church look like a community as we think of one outside of a church context?

We know that we are not called to be lone ranger Christians; that we are called to live in community with one another. The problem is that we are often a community of strangers, aren’t we? Outside of involvement in a Life Group how connected are we to those we worship with every weekend? How easy is it for someone who is hurting and broken to come through the doors of a church our size and slip in and out unnoticed. More importantly, how about the people we do see in service with us week after week. Many are hurting and broken as well – and no one ever knows.

In the preview of Matt’s sermon that I was sent to help prepare this lesson Matt wrote this:

Question to consider: How would your life look different if you were a part of a group of people who truly loved you. Better yet, what if there was a place where people could be authentic with their lives and know they would be accepted, encouraged, and loved. Not for what you can do for them, not because you out-perform others, not because you have a certain financial status, or because you dress a certain way. Simply because they are completely “knit-together” by love. In that kind of place I wouldn’t have to prove I was better than anyone. I wouldn’t have to worry about climbing any social ladders. I wouldn’t have to worry about whether they will love me. The truth is that this is the call for the Church

I believe the real question for us to consider is not how would our life look different if we were a part of a group like that – but, what are we doing to ensure that WE ARE that group Matt describes. I think Kingsway does a great job at most of this. I think this is a loving place where, most of the time at least, people are welcomed and made to feel loved for who they are. But the truth is people do manage to slip in and out unnoticed. We do worship within arm’s reach of hurting people in need of someone to help share a burden. And even beyond that, we must not succumb to the mindset that we are to foster this kind of environment only within the walls of the church. We are “the church” even when – *especially when* – we are not *in* church. The “call for the church” that Matt related is the call for us – in our everyday, rat race, Monday through Friday world.

Q: Look back again at the picture of the church Matt painted. It is a picture of not just unconditional love, but of a level of acceptance that cannot be found anywhere else in our culture. What roadblocks to accepting others with this kind of abandon do we sometimes come up against?

Q: Are there people that might come to church that should not be accepted at this level? Why or why not?

I believe two primary things are needed to become an embodiment and extension of this high calling – the type of people that live in a community where they are both blessed and are being a blessing, exhibiting the kind of unity that causes the world to stand up and take notice.

#### 1) Proactive Transparency

We simply must learn to drop our masks and be real with one another. Honestly, how can we minister or be a blessing to someone who takes their brokenness, their trouble, their hurt, their true need – and keeps it hidden from everyone else? Seriously. When we were talking about this issue, my wife said “but some people are like onions, you get to them one layer at a time.” My reflexive reaction to that was something like “Well then they need to stop it.” Don’t misunderstand me, I’m not at all trying to sound callous, but truth is that with some folks that are like onions, you keep peeling layers and NEVER manage to get to the core. I know there are hurts and betrayals in our past that have hurt us so deeply that we’ve vowed never to let anyone else in. But that voice in our heads that tells us “Don’t trust anyone. Just keep all your junk and baggage to yourself” – whose voice do you really think that is? That doesn’t sound to me like something God would be saying.

I am not a fan of what I call the “Christian catchphrase”. Things like “Let go and let God”. They sound all deep and theologically sound, but leave me with no greater insights into how to pull off what it’s saying I should do. It makes a good refrigerator magnet, but I don’t need another refrigerator magnet. One little saying I do like however is that if you don’t ask for help when you need it, then you are “robbing someone of an opportunity to be a blessing.” True, it’s kind of catchphrasey, but it’s rich with truth that is not hard to figure out what to do with.

I know this is a lot more complex than we have time to fully address, but the truth is that if we never open up we cannot move past being a community of strangers.

#### 2) Preemptive Grace

This is absolutely necessary if people are going to risk opening up. I heard of this term in a passage quoted from Michael Sytsma’s book *Marriage Partnership* (though the concept is applicable to others besides our spouse). He writes:

“...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God carried a strong preemptive grace and forgiveness toward us. Should we not offer the same...”

What I find convicting is that he also says this involves “letting go of her humanness and what isn’t developed or matured yet.” Wham! That is a powerful challenge. In my mission as an extension of the refuge that the church is called to be for hurting people, am I able to let go of the humanness and the things which are not developed or mature in others? Or, as Howard Brammer, former Senior Pastor at Traders Point Christian Church has said, do I look down my nose at someone because they sin differently than I do?

We must be willing to meet people at their point of need, or their point of brokenness with the love of Christ. We must make the church – and ourselves as the body of Christ – a place of trust, a place of grace, a place where we stand ready to share one another’s burdens – not in some “refrigerator magnet” kind of way, but in real sacrificial service to one another.

Q: Again, this has to be oversimplified given the medium, but what ELSE can we do to become a community that strives to achieve the oneness that Christ prayed we would have and maintain?

## Opportunity

I believe we have to cultivate a lifestyle of readiness so that when the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Christ, we don’t miss the chance. This means I need to be both intentional and strategic. For example, I am aware that almost all of my time spent socially is with other Christians – my “holy huddle”. It’s not by design, but I just don’t really have any non-Christian friends right now. So my greatest opportunity to witness and minister to others will likely come with strangers. And I also need to be aware that God may call me to minister to someone outside of anyone’s notice, or my comfort zone. Ruth Harms Calkin puts it this way in her verse titled “I Wonder”:

You know, Lord, how I serve You with great emotional fervor in the limelight  
You know how eagerly I speak for You at a women’s club.  
You know how I shine when I promote a fellowship group.  
You know my genuine enthusiasm at a Bible study.

But how would I react, I wonder,  
If You pointed to a basin of water  
And asked me to wash the calloused feet  
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman,  
Day after day,  
Month after month,  
In a room where nobody saw  
And nobody knew.

Whenever and however the LORD brings someone across my path, He must not find me unready.

Q: How *might* God have you minister to someone – and what things could you do (with intentionality) to be ready? Give specific examples if you can.