

BETTER TOGETHER – WEEK 2 -- WHAT IS UNITY?

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? Do you prefer ice cream with one flavor (vanilla) or a combination of flavors (chocolate covered cherry with pecans)? Why so?

What flavors of ice cream ALWAYS go well together? What flavors can NEVER go together?

Engage your imagination: If New Heights were ice cream, what flavor(s) would it be? Do these flavors and textures go well together?

Are we really like ice cream? Check out *Psalm 34:8* – “T_____ and see that the Lord is _____.”

What is the base that unifies flavors and textures of ice cream and makes them work well together?

Michael introduced this “BETTER TOGETHER” series last time we met. His focus was *John 17:20-21*. Jesus was on his way to the cross. At that moment of great suffering Jesus was praying for you and me! What was his main prayer? _____

John 17:21 -- I ask “that all of them may be _____, 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.”

What does Jesus mean when he prays that Christians can be “one”?

Why is it important for the people of New Heights – all of us, English and Spanish, men and women, young and old -- to be ONE? Look again at *John 17:21* – What happens when all of his followers achieve this oneness that Jesus prays for? _____

This is a message he repeated. See also *John 13:34-35* – “A new _____ I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this _____ will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Let’s explore a little deeper. As a group, write up your own definition of unity before going any further: Unity is _____

Discuss these questions...

Is unity simply a matter of **being together in the same place**? Have there been times when you were with a big group of people and still felt lonely?

Is unity simply a matter of **doing the same things** “together”? When we come together to worship and take communion, do some people feel like outsider or “off key”?

Is unity **a matter of uniformity**? Do we have to be the same flavor of ice cream to be unified?

After discussing these questions look again at *John 13:34-35*. What is the “base” that unifies all the different flavors and textures of people in God’s church? _____

Love is a vague word in English. Is Jesus talking about the kind of love that we have for ice cream ... or something much stronger than that?

What kind of love truly binds God's people together in a sense unity and oneness where everyone is loved, everyone is valued, everyone has a purpose and everyone belongs?

In the Sunday message we discussed three hard truths about true unity:

- 1) **True UNITY is NOT COMMON.** In fact, it is very *unusual*. How much unity do you see in our nation today? Jesus knows that true Christian unity is so *uncommon* that it shines like a bright light in the night. He says: "By this all men will KNOW that you are my disciples" (John 13:35) and by this unity "the world will BELIEVE ..." (John 17:21).

*Identify a time in your life where you experienced true unity and oneness within a group of people. What was the effect on your health and attitude? Was that unity apparent to your family and friends? What were you able to achieve together that would have been difficult or even impossible without unity?

- 2) **True UNITY is NOT NATURAL.** In fact, it is *unnatural*. That is the teaching of Darwinism – survival of the fittest and the law of tooth and claw.

*Briefly identify some division and brokenness seen in the natural, social and political worlds. Why is unity so hard to achieve, even in a people who profess to be "we the people... and One nation, under God ..."?

*God offers a better way. From the beginning he intended that "two will become one"; and in the church "there is neither Spanish nor English, rich or poor, male or female, for you are all ONE in Christ Jesus." *Galatians 3:28*.

What kind of unity is this passage really talking about? Is Jesus telling us we all must become "vanilla" or is there something much more tasty and textured at work?

- 3) **True UNITY is NOT EASY.** Divorce is common because true oneness in marriage takes hard work. Divisiveness in politics is the norm because it is easier to tear others down than to work together to solve problems. Keeping true unity in the Church is also hard work. That is why Jesus gives a new COMMAND that we love one another (*John 13:34*). This love that truly unites us in Christ takes hard work and commitment.

Before closing, take a few moments to name and confess some sinful attitudes and actions that make keeping unity in OUR OWN church quite difficult. What are some specific things we can do together to show the world that we really are ONE in Christ, and we REALLY do LOVE one another? How can we do a better job of building understanding and unity between younger and older generations? Who should take the first step toward this unity and how so? Same question about building understanding and unity between English and Spanish speakers?

Close by reading together and out loud the words of Paul in I Corinthians 12:31 through 13:13.

This passage is the tasty center of a long recipe for unity in the church. Commit to memorizing 13:4-8a (or post it where you see it) and start each day with a commitment to be ... patient and kind, not jealous, proud or selfish; to be slow to anger and quick to forgive and forget; remembering that love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and never gives up!"