

JUNE 25, 2023

“Better Together”

Psalm 133:1

**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!**

SPECIAL MUSIC:

“Two or Three”

The Collingsworth Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Fx40F3iEuc>



THE CORDS OF TRUTH

The harvest is rich
And the workers few
As we look around
With much to do,
And while a single cord
Can accomplish wonders
Braided cords are more difficult
To tear asunder.

Two hands are better than one
Four hands even more
Eight hands are better still
To accomplish heavy chores
But each must work in tandem
There is no need to ask
If any hand goes on their own
They will not complete the task.

Jesus does not call us
To do it all alone
Even he called twelve
To make his message known
We cannot allow our pride
To keep us from our goal
We are all better together
And that's what keeps us bold

**As we bring the cross of Jesus
To a world in need of hope
Together we can make our stand
And help the people cope.
For tomorrow is not a given
In a world so full of hate
But together we can make our stand
And take our place before the gate.**

**As God's united messengers
And light against the dark
And if those around us begin to fall
We will carry them to the ark.
We are each a single strand,
But together we are strong.
God give us strength to change the world
And stand against all wrongs.**

**God lifts us high on eagle's wings
And guides us in our way.
And as others come to join us
Together we will praise.
As the cord grows ever stronger
And puts even steel to shame,
We know the cord will never break
As we come together in Jesus' name.**

There was a point in my life that I worked for a photocopy company as a technician, repairing copiers. Our offices were in an industrial park with many other businesses, warehouses, and distribution networks. It wasn't unusual for us to see forklifts on the street and in the parking lots around us. As a matter of fact, it was sometimes so busy with machines moving freight and supplies around that I hardly took notice.

There was a company across the street from us with a freight dock with many raised warehouse doors. On one of these giant doors, the company has installed a concrete ramp so that forklifts could get from the warehouse floor down the four feet to the parking lot. Again, it was not unusual to see a forklift either bringing a load down to the parking lot or taking a load up.

One day, I had parked my truck at our own loading door because my boss needed me to make a copy paper delivery. There were several of us loading cases of paper into the bed of my truck. Suddenly we heard someone yell from across the street and we looked over in time to see a heavily loaded forklift miss the edge of the ramp and fall to the ground below. It was a large forklift and had to weigh at least a couple of tons, not to mention the load it was carrying. The horrible thing about this accident was that the driver was pinned beneath the forklift.

I've heard stories about those times when emergencies arise that the adrenaline in our bodies gives us unheard of strength and stamina, but this was the first time I had experienced it. The people in the warehouse and those of us loading my truck rushed over the forklift and all of us working together lifted that

forklift off of the driver so he could be pulled free. The ambulance quickly arrived, and the injured man was taken to the hospital where he eventually recovered with a tale that he would be able to tell his children. As soon as the ambulance left, we all just went back to doing our jobs, not really thinking about the miracle that we had just been a part of. It was truly a God moment, but most of us took a long time to process what had happened. We didn't think about the fact that we should never have been able to do what we did, that we had been a part of a truly extraordinary experience. That was over thirty years ago, and I still don't think I have ever completely processed the scenario and the way God worked a miracle through this group of workers even though we didn't really know each other. When I do think about it, it's more like remembering a dream, like I don't want to remember the details. The eight of us, as strong as we were, should not have been able to lift that forklift. But, by the grace of God, we did.

There were no stand-out heroes here. We were all just a part of a bigger event doing something that none of us could do on our own. Maybe that is why it is still hard to process. Knowing that it was impossible and that we were still able to accomplish it makes me not want to believe it. But that doesn't make it any less true.

When I was a Boy Scout, we learned about making rope. I guess that went along with learning how to tie knots. We built rudimentary rope twisting devices and made our own ropes. We learned that to make the best quality ropes we first had to twist or braid small twine together to make bigger strands. We would use those cords to make even bigger strands. Then we would then use those bigger

cords to twist into our rope. It wasn't an easy process and took a great deal of patience. It would have been so much easier to cut corners, but to do so would have made the ropes weaker.

It is commonly held that the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, Son of David. We hear his wisdom regarding this matter of Better Together in Ecclesiastes 4:12:

**An enemy might defeat one person,
but two people together can defend themselves.
A rope that has three parts wrapped together
is hard to break.**

Even the ancients knew the principles of ropemaking and that the wisdom found in the process of ropemaking could be applied to relationships.

We are Better Together. Separating ourselves only makes us weaker. Adding more to our number makes us stronger. It is always good to know that someone has our back, that God has placed people in our lives to hold us accountable, able to stand with us in our trouble, able to sit with us in our grief, able to speak into us when we are confused, and able to keep us focused on our common goal, delivering the message of Jesus Christ to all people. Together we are made brave. Together we are made strong. Together we become part of a greater whole. Together, in Christ, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish in his name.

Jesus pulled his disciples around him and brought them into a community that was more reflective of a brotherhood than a misaligned group of disparate individuals. It was within this community he began to build the foundations of the church. But it was not an easy process. Just like making rope is not an easy process. He took the time and patience to do it right and make sure the bond was firm. Each was so very much an individual, but together, they were the twelve. So, when one of those strands broke, it was a blow to all the others.

But Jesus knew this. Through Judas, he taught the others about how important it was for them to stay together and stay strong. Because separately, they would never be able to accomplish the task before them of establishing his church. Judas chose to work outside the group, and everyone paid a high price for his betrayal.

19 “Also, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about something, then you can pray for it. And the thing you ask for will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

20 This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them.”

Matthew 18:19-20

Why do you think Jesus says this? I mean, doesn't he tell us that he is always with us, and we should always depend on him for our strength and fortitude? With him in our lives, we have the courage and ability to face any danger and stand against any foe? Doesn't Paul tell us in Philippians 4:13, **“I can**

do all things through Christ because he gives me strength.” Why do we need to spend time building earthly relationships when we have Christ in our lives?

I want to remind you that Paul always took a companion with him on his journeys. We need to draw on our relationships. Christ brings us into unity and community with one another to make us stronger, so that we can encourage and pray for one another, just like Paul. It isn't about being weak. It's about staying nourished and lifted in the most difficult of circumstances, having someone around to help catch us if we start to fall or hold us accountable if we start to head down a wrong path.

This understanding of Better Together goes beyond our family and friends. Even Moses understood this when he wrote in Leviticus 19:33-34

33 'Do not mistreat foreigners living in your country.

34 Treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were foreigners one time. That was in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'

God never meant for us to live lives of exclusion, but to be inclusive. Why? Because, we are Better Together. The very fact that America is a melting pot of races and cultures from all over the world, actually makes us better. But we are often too blinded by our own prejudices to see that. We often fall into a vat of preconceptions and hold each other at sword's length in distrust. Being a blended society is much more difficult than being a country with a single ethnicity and belief system. But being able to find the strength, courage, and love

to do so is what makes us better able to appreciate each other and stand together in our diversity.

17 Iron can sharpen iron.

In the same way, people can help each other. Proverbs 27:17

We need each other to stay strong. But we also need to allow ourselves to be sharpened by each other. We need to drop our pride and do our best to wash each other's feet, even those that we have tried so hard to push away. We need to be patient with each other as we learn about each other. And each step closer to another removes more of the distrust of difference and brings the light and grace of acceptance into the relationship.

**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!**

In a world that seems determined to follow a path of self-destruction, Christians can provide the catalyst for change. As followers of Christ, we can broker peace among nations and cultures. But we will be unable to do that if we can't find a way of unifying our own nation and heal the rifts that divide us.

Forgive me for saying so and I don't mean for it to sound so political, but I can't see anyone among our political leaders who is willing to stand up and say:

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If our leaders cannot do that, if they cannot find a way to curb their tongues and speak decently to one another, then I am afraid that it is left up to us. If our leaders insist on pushing intolerance, then it is us who must reach out and bridge the gap and bring peace and acceptance proving that it is okay for us to be different, to believe different things. Our differences should never keep us from joining Jesus at the table in fellowship and communion.

Jesus was a rebel. Literally. He preached against the religious and political leaders of his day and fought against injustice and intolerance which made him an enemy of those who felt it was okay to build walls and separate people from the blessings of God. If we want to be like Jesus, and people try to keep us from embracing one another, then maybe it is time that we flip a few tables to let people know just how bad an idea that is, how contrary it is to God's will for us.

It all begins with us as individuals before we can unite. In that same chapter in proverbs, chapter 27, verse 19 says this:

**19 As water shows you your face,
so your mind shows you what kind of person you are.**

Let us be sure our motives are pure and our relationship with God is strong before we entwine ourselves with each other. When making a rope, it is important that the individual strands are strong before twining them together to make a bigger rope. The final rope needs to be comprised of strong strands willing to join into a bigger purpose. Ropes that are made to tie great ships to the dock are

so heavy and strong. They are made carefully and with great patience. That is the kind of bond that Christ expects of us as we challenge the world and its self-serving values.

So, this week, I ask us to look in the water, the mirror, and see our reflection. Let us gaze at our beauty and our warts, knowing that God loves each of us just as we are, sinners that we are. By doing so, we can see where God needs us to work on our own souls and then determine how we fit into the greater whole. It is such a joy knowing that God knows us and still finds a way for us to work together to change the world.

**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!**

God bless you all!

AMEN

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