*This document is an AI transcription of an audio recording and may contain errors; refer to the audio recording for accuracy.*

Good morning. Children may be dismissed to Children's Church. And let's start with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you, we praise you. For what you want us to become, we thank you, God, that. You have created us to be a perfect family, united together in love. I pray God that you help us to achieve that. Please deliver your message to this church through me today. Help them to hear what it is that you're saying. Please help my words not to get in the way of that. Pray these things in Jesus name, Amen. Well, first, happy Mother's Day. This week I've been pondering kind of this recurring theme that it's something that I've seen all throughout my life. I've seen it in businesses, I've seen it in churches, I've seen it in non-Christian places and in Christian places. And even though it's something that doesn't sit well with me, it's also something that I'm guilty of. And so I've been thinking about it and this theme is when people realize something is wrong and they say, we need change, we need to fix it, we need to do whatever it takes to fix this problem, to do what's right. And whoa, unto any who stand in my way. And it's just, I'm going to fix it, I'm going to do what's right, and I don't care about anybody else. I'm going to get this done. And since we are in a time of transition and growth and finding a new fresh vision from God about what he wants from this church, there's even been times when I've heard people say things that kind of have this attitude to it, like, this is what needs to be done and if people don't like it, then they can just deal with it. And as I think about that, I think, well, that's not really the way that Jesus would go about doing that. He did have a mission, but he didn't trample anyone in the process of pursuing his mission. We find evidence of this in Matthew, chapter 12, verses 19 and 20. In this part of the book of Matthew, they're actually quoting Isaiah who's prophesying about Jesus in the future. And so this is, this is a description of Jesus written before Jesus. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break. A smoking flax he will not quench till he sends forth justice to victory. A bruised reed he will not break. A smoking flax he will not quench. He knew there was this job to do. He knew there was something he had to get done. He knew there was a lot of problems with the religious people of the day. But he also knew that there were these hurt, broken people out in the world. And he knew that his ministry could not plow and trample over them as he was trying to accomplish the mission that God gave him. There was a job, but there was also a right and a wrong way to do that job. And Jesus and the apostles never pursued their agenda at the expense of anyone. And this is a good message. Don't pursue your agenda at the expense of anyone. Don't trample anyone in the process. And so I was thinking, I was like, all right, well that ought to be the message that I preach on. But as I prayed about it, as I thought about it, something wasn't sitting right. Like it is a good message, but it just wasn't sitting right in me. Something was wrong in my spirit. So I kept praying and kept thinking. And I try and think at it from different angles. And so one of the angles that I thought at it from was, all right, let's try and find some examples in the Bible. Let's find some verses where Jesus or the disciples were pursuing their agenda and didn't trample their brothers and sisters in the process. And when I put it in those terms, that's when it kind of clicked. And I realized the problem with that message is, the message is not don't crush your brothers while fulfilling your mission. The real message is your brothers and sisters here are your mission. We don't find examples of Jesus and the apostles caring for the church while they pursued their mission because the church was their mission. Growth is good. Programs are good. And Jesus has called us to save the lost and to make disciples. Absolutely. But the key to that, the way that we will get all of those things done, or any Christian mission is through loving this church, loving these people right here. Being perfect in love and unity in this family is the key to reaching people out there, reaching people around the world. It all starts right here, pursuing that perfect love and unity in this group. You want to reach the lost? It starts with loving these people. Make disciples start by loving these people. Want to see growth? Start by loving these people. Jesus didn't die to get a bunch of brides. He died to get a bride. The church collective. And he's more concerned about the whole than the parts, which is why when comparing the church to a tree, we read in Romans. 11 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, referring to the Jews who were cut off, he may not spare you either. Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God on those who fell severity, but toward you goodness if you continue in his goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. You see, Jesus is creating a church, this metaphorical tree, this family. That's what he's trying to build. And he wants branches that fit in and grow together in unity with the rest of the tree. God is so concerned about the tree that he's willing to cut off a bad branch. He wants a healthy tree. He wants a pure and spotless bride. If you look at people around here and you see barriers to your vision for this church, then either your vision is wrong or your strategy for pursuing that vision is wrong. Because these people aren't barriers, these people are the mission, they are the mission. If you are planning what you're gonna do and you say, oh, let's not invite those people 'cause we always butt heads. Or if you look at a group of people here and you say, well, they're not gonna like it, but they're just gonna have to deal with it 'cause this is how it's gonna be, then that's wrong. That is when you've taken your eyes off what is most important for this church, which is the health of this church in pursuit of a vision. Loving these people is the right way to accomplish whatever it is we're supposed to be doing. John 13, 35, by this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Our perfect love and unity here is the evidence that we are disciples of Jesus. If we don't have that love and that unity, then we are missing the thing that makes us the evidence that we are Christ's disciples. Acts 2, 46, and 47. This is a description of the early church. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. You see, when the church, when that early church was operating perfectly in love towards one another as Jesus commanded, then the Lord added to their number. When they focused on their love and their unity, God took over their outreach program. Last week we talked about, I gave a little tongue in cheek example about the wrong way to adopt. And I said that if you take a room of your house and you put in a baby's bed and clothes and toys and stuff, you can't just then sit there and wait for orphans to come along and make their home. That's the wrong way. But I don't know if any of you have actually ever adopted or been a foster parent, but here's how it actually works. An adoption counselor comes to your house. He evaluates you, your family, your home environment. And if he approves, then he or she places those kids waiting to be adopted into your house, your family. You get evaluated and judged and then people are added to your family. God is our adoption counselor. And he is judging to see what kind of environment this is for a child, metaphorically. He cares about, there's a lot of really hurt, broken people out there and they need a stable, loving environment to come into, not an environment that's divided into camps, not people talking about those people, like they're part of a different group. There's only we, there's only us. There was only our brothers and sisters and family. By this, all will know that you are my children, you are my disciples if you have love for one another. So much of the Bible deals with how the church is supposed to treat each other. Have you noticed that? If you've read through the New Testament, so much is about us and how we treat us. And so little of it is on outreach programs. Because our health in here is paramount. And all the other stuff will grow out of our health in here. If we get it right in here, then just like that verse in Acts says, we will have quote, favor with all the people. And then God will quote, add to our number. You don't add blood to a bleeding body. First you fix the body and then you can add to it. And I'm not saying that any of the plans or the visions or anything we have are bad or wrong. I'm not, I think it's amazing all of the work that we've been talking about, all the things we talk about with Keith, all the plans we've been making, I'm excited. I cannot wait to start implementing that stuff. But if any of those plans require us to steamroll over a group of people in this church, if any of those plans, well, they're not gonna like it, but that's tough 'cause this is the way we're going, then those plans need to be tweaked or thrown out or something. God would rather us be in love and unity with no plan than to have lots of irons in the fire and discord in this house. Anyone who dreams about the future of this church, when you think about us growing and what we're gonna be doing and how we're gonna reach out, do you have to mentally exclude people from those plans? That shouldn't be the way. If even one person gets shoved out from your plans or if one person gets exasperated and frustrated and walks, then it's time to go back to the drawing board. And I realized that you can't please everyone all the time, but you must strive for that unity first. And I know it kind of sounds like the people I'm talking about are like the movers and the shakers, the people who are hungry for the growth and the change and all that, but the truth is is that anyone who has a dream for this future, even if that dream is we need to go back to the way we were or we shouldn't change. If that's your dream for this church, okay, hang on to that dream, pray about it. But if also, if your dream about not changing, not growing or whatever, even if that is going to trample or offend the other people in this church, then again, that's not a dream that comes from the spirit of love and unity that's in God's heart. And sometimes those people, the ones who don't want change, those are the hardest to convince because people who really love what we were in the past, they say, "That's who we are, that's our identity." We can't change our identity. If people don't like us, then they can just leave. But what if God doesn't like us? Are we gonna ask him to leave? We need to be willing to do whatever God tells us to do. And I'm not saying that we need to be one way or the other, we just need to be careful 'cause when you draw a line in the sand, you've just given God the test that he's going to use to test how much you love him. That's why you gotta be real careful about drawing lines in the sand. When I was in college, we had a professor who let us make our own tests and we would sit there and shout out, "Here's all the things we've learned this semester." And he would write them down and that would become our midterm or our final and kids would still fail. When you draw a line in the sand with God, then God says, "Perfect, now you can show me how much you love me." So who in this room are you not in one accord with? I'm not gonna do this. I know sometimes I like to throw some wrenches, but I'm not gonna do this. But let's just say hypothetically, if I had a bowl of names, a name of everyone in this room and I said, "You need to spend the rest of this day with whose ever name I drew out." Is there someone who you'd be going, "Oh please God, not that person." (audience laughing) That's the person that you need to work with. That's the relationship that needs repairing. And it's not just for your sake or their sake, it's for the sake of this whole church. It really is. That person that you can't see eye to eye with, you need to work on that for the health of this church, for the future of this church. And our enemy is pride. And we all hate fighting pride. I know I hate fighting pride. Fighting pride feels like death. You can accomplish a vision for this church with pride, but you can't do it correctly. Because ultimately pride leads to destruction. Proverbs 16, 18, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." That means pride is the enemy of this church and everything we want to accomplish. That means pride is the opposite, pride is the enemy of continuing daily with one accord, breaking bread from house to house, eating their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. Pride is the enemy of all of that. And transitively, that also means that pride is the enemy of and the Lord added to their church. I know it's not the easy way, but it's the right way. (laughs) So pray about what part you need to play in order to be in one accord with your brothers and sisters here. Maybe it means tweaking your plans or your beliefs. Maybe it means throwing some of those out. Maybe it means sitting down and sharing a meal with someone who you have trouble seeing eye to eye with. And if someone from this church unexpectedly invites you out to coffee or lunch this week, just be humble and say yes. Maybe you're aware of the tension between you or maybe it's just all in their heart, but just be humble, brother and sister, and say they're working through some stuff, God's working in their heart, and I want to be on board with what God is doing. So just say yes and go along with that. And even if you can find nothing else in common with that person, then just celebrate your shared faith in Jesus. As Paul said in Ephesians 4, "There is one body and one spirit, just as you were all called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." We all have that in common, every single one of us. And it is the biggest best thing to have in common with someone. Jesus died for you, Jesus died for me too. You used to be dead in your sins, I used to be dead in my sins. You have life now and joy and hope and peace, I have life and joy and hope and peace in Christ as well. Paul said all of that stuff about one Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father of all, he said that immediately after beseeching us to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. You want to pursue the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, then remember those things that you have in common with your brothers and sisters, the most important things. So if you end up meeting with someone this week, then just pray for one another. If they admit they have some difficulty with you, don't be argumentative about it, just acknowledge it. Maybe you need to apologize, but definitely pray with that person and rely on the Holy Spirit to put you in their shoes. 'Cause I'm still struggling with the problem of being a young person with not enough wisdom. And there's so many times when I walk into a situation and I see someone acting foolish and I just immediately want to say, "Well, they're acting foolish, I'm right, they're wrong," and just plow ahead with me and what I'm doing. And I really have to stop and step back and say, okay, they have come from a whole lifetime of experiences and challenges and difficulties and they have been going through stuff and they are going through stuff and I just need to stop and be patient and remember how patient God has been with me and how forgiving he's been with me and how he's taken me from what I was to what I am and I need to respect that God is doing the same thing for that person. And it is in that moment of humbling yourself and putting yourself in their shoes that you will finally have the door to love and unity with all the people here. So is there someone here that you need to apologize to? Or is there a strained relationship that needs some repairing? God is waiting for us to kill our pride, to walk in love and unity, and he's going to knock our socks off when he takes over our outreach program. So now as we have our time of open worship, pray for love and unity right here. And be willing to let God convict you. And if he does, remember that he's not trying to make you feel bad, he's trying to repair us and so obediently, humbly obey anything that he leads you to do. A little seed must experience death. A seed must experience being separated from the tree where it was born, from the source of its life. It falls to the ground and dies and is buried. But out of that death comes the life of a new tree. And dealing with our pride feels like death. It feels like dying to everything you ever lived for before. And it's so difficult, but it is the place where new life will grow. If you walk through that death of your pride, new life will grow there. And then when a tree looks back at that seed and just looks at how small and weak and insignificant that seed is compared to what it is now, it can't believe it ever questioned whether it would go through that death process. I promise you as you deal with your pride, as you go through that death, the new life will make you wonder why you ever waited so long to deal with it. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for the beautiful tree that you are growing us into. But we know that there is something inside us that rejects that, that rebels against it and does not want to experience the death of joining in to unity and love with these people here, God. But we need it. We need that death in order to experience your new life. So please show us where it needs to happen and how it needs to happen. Give us the strength to face that death so that we can be filled with your new life. In Jesus' name, amen.