
Talk – Distress & Hope: Family (Psalm 133 & Rom 12:1-21)

Research

Series Title: Distress and Hope

Talk Topic: Christian Family

Central theme of this talk: the church is family, and as brothers and sisters we support each other in the struggles of mental ill health

Purpose of this talk: I want the listener to know that there is a pastoral role we can all play in caring for each other and supporting each other to access other types of help.

Areas of mental wellbeing to consider and application: making referrals to mental health services wisely, being equipped to care for each other.

Key Bible Passage/s (for the talk):

OT:

Psalm 133 – see below

NT:

Romans 12: 1-21 – see below

1 Cor 12:12-30 – one body – no division in the body, it's parts have equal concern for each other, one part suffers, every part suffers (v25-26)

Ephesians 4:1-16 – the whole body – joined and held together by ever supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work (v16)

1 John 4:7-21 – love because God first loved us – have no fear, in perfect love. – and so love the brothers and sisters

Bible Reading/s:

OT: Psalm 133

NT: Rom 12:1-21

Style

Conversational and interview style

Structure of the talk

Julie's Structure

Teach Psalm 133

Talk – Distress & Hope: Family (Psalm 133 & Rom 12:1-21)

See the beautiful picture of blessing flowing through God's anointed priest/king into his people.

Reflect on the uniqueness of the body image given to us in Romans – that the church is unique in beauty and diversity seen in the volunteers. We meet around a cause. We focus not on ourselves, but others because of Christ. We gather with various capacities, limitations, stages, ages, professions etc. Note that whilst we have individual responsibilities as members of the one body, they is also a collective responsibility – and the value is that no one individual has to carry the full load.

Think briefly about the issue of mental health/ fallenness/ sin – key hear is to recognise the fallenness of humanity (thus mental illness being a feature of the world) yet the distinction that to live with mental illness does not mean that you are sinning – but it is possible to sin in your mental illness. God sits over both sin and mental illness – so point people to the trustworthiness of God.

Romans 12:9-10, Eph 4:2, 15-16, 1Jn 4 - Focus on Love (love marks us as disciples, is a decision not a feeling, and is often costly, so it is hard to love as Christ loved, but God's spirit of love dwells in us so he makes it possible for us to love like Jesus)

We all have different gifts and functions in the body (Romans 12: 3 - 8)

Implication: Mental ill health does not mean we cease to be an important part of the body. We may be limited in our capacity but our value does not change. And it may be that God actually uses our experiences to enable us to serve and encourage others.

Think this into the experiences of men and women (generally speaking when it comes to Mental illness – and perhaps best not to thinking of this as a contrast, but as general features of what mental illness can look like for the gender):

Women – share, adopt the burden of others, take responsibility, will talk (to some degree), yet are fearful (particularly of safety), have more support.

Men – under share, experience shame feeling, isolated, affirmed, shut off from hearing, can be extreme in actions

Application - How as a church family to love people practically

Liv's Structure

Part 1

We are brothers and sisters (Romans 12:1), we belong to each other (12: 5) this is a familial relationship that deserves our time and devotion. Meeting together is a good and beautiful gift from God and to each other (Psalm 133)

Implication

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We should encourage, support and enable each other to meet together, especially when it is hard. This means thinking of and meeting together in ways that acknowledge that we all suffer and have times when we will struggle to meet together

Part 2

We all have different gifts and functions in the body (Romans 12: 3 - 8)

Implication

Mental ill health does not mean we cease to be an important part of the body. We may be limited in our capacity but our value does not change. And it may be that God actually uses our experiences to enable us to serve and encourage others.

Part Three

This is all driven by love (Romans 12: 9-21) . It is right to not only celebrate with each but mourn with each other, and feel the weight of each other's pain (12:15).

Implication

It is appropriate to lament with each other as a way of supporting and encouraging each other, and it may be appropriate that this occurs along side practical support, and professional mental care.

Note: This passage may raise for some people the evil (12: 17-21) that they have experienced that has contributed to their current mental health struggles, we need to be careful how we talk about this.

Talking about Mental Illness (General comments applicable for the whole series)

- My mental health burden is not diagnosed as mental illness and as such I am not speaking as someone who can speak with first hand experience or authority
- This series aims to help us to gather and speak openly about matters which impact the lives of many in our church (and therefore impact us all) – we should create a space where we can speak about these topics without the implicit pressure to put on a false or happy face if that is not what someone is feeling. We want this to be real. And we want this to be equipping so that as individuals and as a collective church family we are better placed to understand and support one another and point one another in appropriate directions when seeking help.
- Often the person who lives with mental illness (of various forms) might feel:
 - Alone or isolated
 - Trapped – the world closing in
 - distrusting (and often with good reason) – therefore need time
 - Fake – especially if they feel they have to put on a ‘happy face’
 - Fearful. Don’t misunderstand the importance of ‘safety’. How to stand with someone so that they feel safe (David feels safe with God in Ps 139)

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- We should recognise that it can be a joy and privilege to walk alongside brother or sister in Christ as they work through matters of a mental health nature (this will be especially important in Talk 4).
- Asking how to help of a person (rather than assuming) can be helpful even if they do not have an answer. Practically help can show itself in numerous ways:
 - Listen
 - Shop
 - Cook (not necessary for them, but with them)
 - Clean (again with them)
 - Exercise
 - Pray
 - Pay
 - Transport – to appointments, to pick up medicine, to church
 - Write – help to fill out online forms etc.
- In caring for someone living with mental illness – look for points of connection. You might not be able to completely relate to what the person is going through, but that does not mean you have not felt some aspect of what they have felt – fear, sadness, helplessness, overwhelmed etc.
- No Bible passage will take away the experience of Mental Health, but might offer hope in the face of distress. Understanding the truth about God and themselves does not erase mental illness but it will provide a beacon of hope within the burden that they might feel.
- So far in this series, I have been a little surprised that some folk have removed themselves from hearing God’s word read and preached as if what is said will hurt them not help them. We need to be conscious of putting ourselves intentionally under God’s word and to expect to be helped, both by challenging and supporting us.

Psalm 133

A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron’s beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Comment on Psalm 133

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This is not a Psalm specifically about Mental illness – although there are aspects of this Psalm that help speak into the scenario of mental illness

Verse 1 – Present longing

The desire of David is that God’s people live together in unity. That has not happened in the history of God’s people – so this is a future hope.

That view and hope is that the unity will be seen and experienced as the harmony of the Church formed by Jesus

Verse 2 – Past desire (anointed intercessory)

Notice the ‘running down’ language (repeated as ‘falling’ in verse 3). Why is it good to have precious oil running down over this Aaron figure. In the light of the OT – it is a picture of anointing (king) and commissioning (High Priest) – it is an expression of a right relationship between God’s people and God, made possible by both King and Priest.

Note: the running down (Lit: falls) emphasises that the blessing comes down from God – his gift. It is not God’s people going up as if achieving that result/blessing. Ironic, given this is a Psalm of Ascents.

Verse 3 – Future Blessing

Two mountains are mentioned Hermon and Zion – the dew on Hermon a picture of the now and the earthly and Mount Zion of the future hope both of Jesus and eternity. And see the result – the Lord bestows his blessing – forevermore.

Romans 12:1-21

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. **4** For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5** so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6** We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; **7** if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; **8** if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

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¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[d] says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^[e]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Footnotes

- a. [Romans 12:6](#) Or *the*
- b. [Romans 12:8](#) Or *to provide for others*
- c. [Romans 12:16](#) Or *willing to do menial work*
- d. [Romans 12:19](#) Deut. 32:35
- e. [Romans 12:20](#) Prov. 25:21,22

Comment on Romans 12:1-21

Key for this Mental health series are Romans 12:9, 10, 12 and 15

There is unity in the body – building love, shaped by the gospel

Context is that what is asked should be shaped by God's merciful act to his people in Christ – calling upon the Christian brother or sister to offer themselves – to put themselves forward humbly as a way of serving. To be aligned not to this world but to the what God has done for you. The orientation here is first to live in such a way that is pleasing to God.

What does that look like? No thinking more highly of oneself, to think of yourself as one of a body playing a role together that allows diversity in gifts and skills – and importantly the using of those gifts and skills.

How should that be expressed? In love, devotion to one another, joyfully, patiently, faithfully, practically, generously (v12)

It is about looking out for the other.

Note – a similar picture of other person centred body – 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4 (see above)

Application

- Help serve
- Be patient

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- **Jesus gives us the people that we need**

As a follower of Jesus we shouldn't run from pain, we follow Jesus steps and entrust ourselves to God in the pain. When we are weak, and afflicted - Jesus sees, he knows, he hears, he cares, he walks alongside, he gives us His Spirit to strengthen and comfort us, and He gives us mercy and grace in our time of need. This is inconceivable to the watching world, and it shows the power of God in weakness, and points to the beauty of a suffering Saviour.

Jesus has not only given us his Spirit, but he also gives us people: -his body /the church, family, medical and mental health professionals -to encourage us, and to help us.

How can we come alongside brothers and sisters who might be suffering affliction?

- We can be present with them [SLIDE], we don't need to speak necessarily, or require them to speak to us, but just sit with them, or invite them to spend time together doing an activity. Let them know they are not alone, and remind them that the Lord is also present with them even when they feel far away, unworthy or abandoned.
- We can pray for them and with them [SLIDE]. They may not feel as though they can pray themselves, but we can assure them that we are bringing them before the throne of grace. (And we can assure them that Jesus is doing this too)
- We can remind them of the truths of God [SLIDE]. Read the Bible with them, or if they are in a space where concentration or focus is difficult -maybe share one encouraging verse that they can hold on to.
- We can lead them in thanksgiving [SLIDE] for the certainty of the unchanging truths of God, even if they may not feel them in the moment.
- We can make sure they eat, and rest and get appropriate professional help.[SLIDE]

Psalm 139 points us to the powerful presence of God in all circumstances and for all our lives. David shows us a posture and orientation toward God, looking to Him and thinking His thoughts -even in affliction. When our thoughts are anxious, we can know that God sees and knows our troubles. God's power, knowledge and presence provide us with security, value, honour and purpose.

More than that, we know that he sent his Son to lead us in the way everlasting by becoming the source of our eternal salvation. Hebrews shows us that Jesus empathises with our weakness and he deals gently and lovingly with us. He provides an example to us of

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dependence on the power and sovereignty of God, and he leads us and enables us as we follow him. When we are afflicted, we can come to the Lord as we are, we can bring our anxious thoughts to him in our weakness knowing that He is strong and in control. We can acknowledge our feelings knowing that they change, but we can put our trust in the One who never changes.

We can have full confidence in his promises to be with us, and that the struggles of this life have an end point, and we can walk forward together as his church in hope.

Argument of the talk/discussion

Psalm 133 points to a unity in faith

Romans 12/Eph 4/1 Cor 12 points to a unity in faith lived out for the benefit of the other (especially the church family member)

Why – because we have all been made right with Christ (our King and High Priest)

That calls Christians to live in a way that is different to the world – God first then the other (before self)

In regards to Mental Health – the starting point is not the person or the problem, it is what God has first done (as promised) and given in Christ – which provides the principle and pattern for how to live.

The application is to live that out in the Christian family

Bible talks to follow are:

5 Hope: ultimately found in Jesus

Feedback on this talk

Talk – Distress & Hope: Family (Psalm 133 & Rom 12:1-21)

Outline

The Goodness of being family

Unity is blessing that comes down from God – Psalm 133

The Christian family belongs to one another – Romans 12

Supporting one another in mental health struggles

Practical application: What kind of Church should we try to be?

Be _____

Be _____

Be _____

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TALK [SLIDE – Series Slide]

CHECK TIME

Opening Prayer (KDN)

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that in Jesus and in a church family, you have made us brothers and sisters. As we hear your word today, help us to see the goodness of your church family, and teach us to love one another with patience, wisdom and hope. Please comfort those who are burdened, and shape us to care well for one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Opening: The Goodness of being family [SLIDE]

- I have heard someone describe the difference between having friends and having family like this: 'friends might visit when they are invited, but family are the people who know where the spare key is'.
- They are the people who can come in when life is messy. When the dishes are still in the sink. When you have not replied to messages. When you are embarrassed by how long it has been since you were "fine." They are not shocked that things are hard. They do not need the house to be perfect before they love you.
- And for those struggling with mental health, a hard reality is the feeling that the door needs to be locked. That they need to tidy themselves up before they can venture out, before they speak honestly, before they ask for help.
- And Christian people are not immune to this reality – people stay away, remove themselves from interactions or engagements, distance themselves from their church family.
- Psalm 133 gives us a different picture. It says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." Not when God's people all have it together. Not when everyone is cheerful. But when God's people live together as brothers and sisters.
- This is not a denial of distress. In this series we have seen that distress and hope are both real parts of the Christian life. Psalm 133 gives us a picture of hope in the middle of distress: God gives his people one another.

Unity is blessing that comes down from God – Psalm 133 [SLIDE]

- I am going to quickly lead us through this Psalm, and then Julie and I are going to have a bit of a discussion and see if we can draw out some practical implications for how we care for one another in our Christian family.

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- Psalm 133 is a short song of ascents.
- God’s people in the Old Testament travelled *up* to Jerusalem, and the Psalmist here expressed his praise *up* to the Lord, yet the repeated picture in the Psalm of blessings running *down*: oil running down Aaron’s head and onto his beard and robe, dew falling down as if Hermon’s dew were falling on Mount Zion.
- The picture is of provision – that the unity enjoyed among God’s people is good and pleasant not because Israel could manufacture it by effort alone. Israel’s history shows that unity among God’s people was never automatic; it had to be received as God’s gift.
- The pouring of oil points to the anointing – as it would be for a King (like David) and the oil running onto Aaron (who was the High Priest) points to priestly mediation.
- If blessing comes through God’s anointed priest-king, then Christians should hear Psalm 133 with Jesus in view. He is the one who brings us to God, and therefore brings us to one another.
- Christians are not united because of natural similarities, or emotional strength, or common interests, or because of equal capabilities. Christians are united because Christ has brought us to God and made us brothers and sisters.
- The dew (of verse 3) speaks of refreshment and life – as if the start of a new day or a new season. And in this case one that comes with the Lord’s blessings which will go on forevermore.

- How different that is to what mental ill health can feel like - dry, lonely and exhausting.
- The people of God *then*, the church family *now*, today because of Christ - are called to be people who live together and refresh one another by ordinary good and pleasant - presence, patience, prayers and practical love.
- If Psalm 133 can show the beauty of family unity – the New Testament picks up this same vision in several places — one body in 1 Corinthians 12, a body built up in love in Ephesians 4, brothers and sisters loved by God in 1 John 4.
- But let’s land in Romans 12, because it shows us what this family life looks like in practice.
- Turn with me to Romans 12.

PAUSE

The Christian family belongs to one another – Romans 12 [SLIDE]

- Romans 12 begins “*in view of God’s mercy.*”
- The practical life of the church starts with what God has done in Christ.

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- Christians offer themselves to God, and then learn to think of themselves rightly - not too highly, not as isolated individuals, but as members of one body. *“Each member belongs to all the others.”* (verse 5).
- One of the features of Romans 12 is that it speaks both of what we do with our *bodies* (verse 1) as well as our *minds* (verse 2). Throughout the chapter, acting and thinking are upheld and work together to see this Christian family work together well.
- They serve God in *“true and proper worship”* — that is, lives of grateful obedience — and they humbly serve one another with the gifts, capacities and opportunities God has given.
- Now, again, this passage is not written as a treatment for mental health – but it raises matters which are helpful when thinking about mental health.
- Mental ill health does not make someone less valuable, less spiritual, or less part of the body.
- Capacity may change. Belonging does not.
- A person may need to receive more than they give for a season, but they remain a brother or sister, gifted by grace, loved by Christ, and needed in the body.
- Romans 12:9-21 offers a picture of the Christian family culture: sincere love, devotion, honour, patience in affliction, faithful prayer, generosity, hospitality, rejoicing and mourning together, peace where possible, and overcoming evil with good.
- This is not sentimental love. It is costly, embodied, patient family love.

Question and answer discussion

- At this point, let me invite Julie up here.
- I want us to move from principle to practice. Not because every Christian becomes a counsellor, but because every Christian is called to be a brother or sister.

PAUSE

Supporting one another in mental health struggles [SLIDE]

[KDN > JH] Q1. Why does church family matter when someone is struggling with mental health?

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A. Because isolation often deepens distress, and God has not designed his people to suffer alone.

- Psalm 133 says it is good and pleasant when brothers and sisters dwell together.
- Romans 12 says we belong to one another.
- Christian family cannot replace professional care, but it can provide presence, dignity, prayer, patience, practical help, and the reminder that the person is still loved and still belongs.

[KDN > JH] Q2. In the way that we care for one another, are there things that we should avoid saying or assuming?

A. Avoid assuming that mental illness is simply personal sin, weak faith, laziness, or unwillingness to trust God.

- We live in a fallen world, so mental illness can be part of human frailty and suffering.
- It is possible to sin in the midst of mental illness, as it is possible to sin in any suffering, but the presence of mental illness is not itself a demonstration of sin.
- Avoid quick fixes, clichés, forced cheerfulness, or using Bible verses as a way to shut down lament.

[KDN > JH] Q3. What does love look like first?

A. Love often looks like presence before words.

- The best part of what Job’s friends did was that they sat with him!
- We can do the same. Sit with someone. Check in again.
- Ask, “Would it help if I came with you?” or “What would make today easier?”
- We don’t need to require the person to explain everything.
- Safety, trust and time matter.
- Romans 12 calls us to be devoted to one another, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, and willing to mourn with those who mourn.

[KDN > JH] Q4. Most of us, Ministry Team included, are not trained counsellors - How do we help without trying to be the counsellor?

A. We remember our role. We are brothers and sisters, not saviours. We are family members, not professionals. And there are limits to what we should do. In part, this is about expectations.

- What we can do is - listen, pray, encourage, help with practical burdens, and support someone to access appropriate care.
- In Australia, a GP can be an important step for mental health support, and crisis services are available when someone is at risk.

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- If someone is in immediate danger, call 000. If someone is at risk of suicide or self-harm, do not carry that alone; contact appropriate crisis support and involve trusted pastoral or professional help.
- In the Yellow folders in our Foyers – there are contact details for emergency and support services and details for mental health professionals.

[KDN >JH] Q5. What can practical Christian family care look like?

A. Ask rather than assume, and offer concrete help.

- ‘Can I drive you to the appointment?’ is often better than ‘Let me know if you need anything.’
- Help may include meals, shopping, transport, cleaning alongside someone, exercise or walking together, help with forms, help arranging appointments, sitting together in church, arranging to meet before and outside church so that you can walk in together, praying with or for them, or helping them reconnect gently when gathering feels hard.
- Key is walking alongside – for example, providing a meal can be wonderful, but making the meal together might be much more helpful. Shopping for someone is great, but taking them shopping could be wonderful.
- We don’t want to take away agency – yet we don’t have to force anything.

[KDN >JH] Q6. What if someone’s suffering has been caused or worsened by evil done to them?

A. Romans 12:17-21 must be handled carefully. “Do not repay evil for evil” is not a command to minimise harm, silence victims, avoid justice, or remain unsafe.

- Wisdom, wisdom, wisdom – each circumstance could be different.
- Sometimes mental distress is connected with relational conflict, trauma, abuse, or harm. That means we need care, wisdom, and safety — not simplistic conclusions.
- Christian love does not require pretending evil did not happen.
- Where there is abuse, danger, coercion, self-harm risk, or threat to others - safety and appropriate reporting or professional help matter.
- The church family supports the person by taking harm seriously, seeking safety, and entrusting justice to God.
- Be careful not to become the go-between who carries messages, takes sides too quickly, or acts on assumptions (that is called triangulation)
- Stick with facts not assumptions – and recognise that in disagreement and conflict no side has all the facts and so it is easy for assumptions to be made (and worse acted upon)

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Practical application: What kind of Church should we try to be? [SLIDE] – Julie to take over asking Questions

- Let's me ask you (KDN) a question. When it comes to supporting one another in the Mental Health space what would you like this church to do?

[KDN to answer...]

Be Present [SLIDE]

- **Notice.** Look for the brother or sister who has withdrawn, stopped serving, stopped gathering, or seems unusually burdened.
- **Be willing the Ask (gently).** Try, “How are you really travelling?” or “Would you like company, prayer, or practical help?”
- **Listen slowly.** Do not rush to correct, diagnose, explain, or compare stories.
- **Stay connected.** One conversation is rarely enough. Put a reminder in your diary to check in again.

Be Practical [SLIDE]

- **Make gathering possible.** Offer transport, sit with them, meet outside the service first, or help them leave quietly if needed.
- **Offer Concrete help.** Julie has already talked about this.
- **Share the load.** No one person should carry all the care. Involve trusted pastoral leaders where appropriate. Bear in mind, that one of the beautiful things about being different gifts is that a variety of people can work together to help.
- **Encourage professional help.** Support wise referrals to a GP, counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or crisis service when needed.

Be Wise [SLIDE]

- **Pray appropriately.** Ask whether they would like prayer now, later, silently, or by message.
- **Speak truth gently.** Remind them of God's presence, Christ's mercy, and their belonging, without demanding that they feel those truths immediately.
- **Protect safety.** If someone may harm themselves or someone else, do not keep that secret; seek urgent help.
- **Remember you are not the Saviour.** Always keep in mind, the person already has a saviour – it is Jesus. You don't need to be their saviour, you are called to be their brother or sister.

CHECK TIME

** If time – perhaps open to the floor to ask questions.*

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Close [JH]

- Psalm 133: the blessing of unity comes down from God.
- In Christ, God has given us more than an idea of family; he has given us actual brothers and sisters.
- We will not do this perfectly. We will need patience, wisdom, boundaries, professional help, and forgiveness.
- Yet in a distressed world, the church family can be a foretaste of hope: people who belong to Christ, belong to one another, and walk together toward life forevermore.
- **[SLIDE]** In distress, Jesus gives us himself.
And because he gives us himself, he also gives us his people —
a family who can sit, pray, weep, help, refer, protect, and hope together.

Closing Prayer [JH]

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that in Christ you have made us your family. Help us to recognise one another as gifts from you, to notice those who are burdened, and to love with patience, wisdom and courage. Teach us to sit, pray, weep, help and hope together, trusting Jesus, our Saviour. In his name, Amen.