

# **‘Poplar trees by flowing streams’**

The work of the Holy Spirit in His church

*“I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground: I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams”*

[Isaiah 44.3f]

This short series of studies looks at some significant aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ’s church, as He brings into being and nurtures a new community of faith which anticipates the glory of the age to come.

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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# 1. Psalm 133 [w/b Sunday 20th May 2018]

*“There the Lord bestows His blessing”*

Having reached the ‘half-way’ point in Luke’s gospel, we’re taking a break from that book of the Bible to think through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (and in our life) as the people of God. Given that Luke gives some considerable prominence to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, this short series provides a relevant ‘side-bar’ to our studies in Luke.

Psalm 133 is a helpful starting point for us, giving expression as it does to the key concern of the Holy Spirit in the outworking of God’s purpose - namely that of bringing all things together under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Eph.1.10 and Col.1.20). We see just that on the day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit begins to ‘reverse’ the damage occasioned by sin, as epitomized by the tower of Babel (Gen.11.1-9)

*[There may not be time for all the questions to be addressed in your Community Group - but try and ensure that in this study you cover questions 2, 5 and 7. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer - and let the passage inform your praying together!]*

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1. **Read Psalm 133.** Read the whole psalm. It’s described as a psalm ‘of David’, under whose rule, at least initially, the tribes of Israel were strikingly united and experienced much blessing.

How would you express the basic message of the psalm?

What lessons do you think we can learn from the psalm?

**2. Read Psalm 133.** The psalm is simple: it comprises a basic statement (v.1), a couple of illustrations (vv.2-3a) and an explanation (v.3b).

What unites God's people?

Why do you think God's people often find it so hard to 'live together in unity'?

How do the two illustrations reinforce the message?

What's meant by the phrase "*even life for evermore*"?

**3. Read John 17.1-25.** This is sometimes called the 'high priestly' prayer of Jesus: it's clear from vv.20-23 that the burden of His prayer for us is that we dwell together in unity.

Why is this unity among His people so important to Jesus?

What clues does Jesus give here as to how such unity is cultivated among God's people?

**4. Read Genesis 11.1-9.** Pentecost was the start of the Lord's 'undoing' the tangled mess occasioned by our sin, exemplified so strikingly in what happened at the tower of 'Babel'.

In vv.3 & 4 how does sin manifest itself?

Why is this such an affront to God?

How does God's judgment at Babel find expression today?

**5. Read Acts 2.42-47.** These verses paint a graphic picture of "God's people (living) together in unity" in the life of the early church in the immediate aftermath of the outpouring of the Spirit.

What are the main characteristics of the early church's living together in unity as described here by Luke?

What might this look like in our own church context today?

How did they experience the bestowal of God's blessing?

**6. Read Eph.1.3-14.** In these verses Paul sets out the purpose of God in Jesus Christ in expansive terms, painting it on the canvas of eternity and encompassing the whole cosmos.

In ways and by what means, according to Paul, does Jesus effect a 'unity' in us as individuals?

What does Paul say is the culmination of God's purpose in and through Jesus?

What is the significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit in connection with the purpose of God?

**7. Read Eph.4.1-17.** As Paul starts here to draw out the practical implications of the gospel, he begins with this exhortation to us to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit'.

What comprises that unity of the Spirit according to what Paul says in vv.4-7?

What practical steps does Paul encourage us to take with a view to our keeping that unity?

How does the ministry of the Word serve to cultivate that unity among God's people? Can you illustrate that from your own experience?