



BECAUSE WE ARE, I AM. BECAUSE I AM, WE ARE.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

UMOJA—UNITY

Dr. Darryl T. Canady

Rodman Street Church

2.1.26

BECAUSE WE ARE, I AM!

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EZEKIEL 37:1-3; 10-11; 14

DR. DARRYL T. CANADY

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Title: Because We Are, I Am: Unity Through Faith and Family

Sermon Summary: This powerful message takes us deep into Ezekiel 37, where we encounter a valley filled with dry, scattered bones—a haunting image of disconnection, hopelessness, and death. Yet within this scene of desolation, God poses a profound question: 'Can these bones live?' This isn't just about physical resurrection; it's about the restoration of community, the rebuilding of families, and the revival of a people who have been scattered by oppression and division.

The sermon introduces us to the principle of Umoja—unity—one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, demonstrating how African cultural wisdom aligns beautifully with biblical truth and teachings on faith and family. The pastor uses Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones and emphasizes that unity begins with submission to God's Word, is strengthened through seeking God's will together, and is restored when believers stand in solidarity with God's work. The message challenges the congregation to move beyond individual salvation to collective responsibility, particularly in building community hope through initiatives like the LIFE Male STEAM Academy. The sermon underscores that true unity requires presence, participation, and standing together in the valley where the needs are, not observing from a distance.

We learn that unity doesn't begin with agreement or strategy, but with submission to God's Word. Before bones can connect to bones, before breath can enter lifeless bodies, there must be alignment with divine authority. The African proverb 'Because we are, I am, and because I am, we are' captures this perfectly: our individual identity is inseparable from our collective destiny. This message challenges us to move beyond individualistic faith to embrace communal responsibility. We're reminded that our ancestors survived not because they had power, but because they had principles—principles rooted in faith, family, and solidarity. The call is clear: unity is restored when we submit to God's Word, seek His will together, and stand in solidarity with His work in the valley where the broken bones lie.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction to Kwanzaa and the Seven Principles

We explore how the seven principles of Kwanzaa, particularly Umoja (unity), align with biblical teachings and strengthen faith and family during Black History Month.

Chapter 2: Unity Begins When We Submit to God's Word

We learn from Ezekiel 37 that true unity starts not with human agreement but with collective submission to God's authority and Word as our common ground.

Chapter 3: Unity Is Strengthened When We Seek God's Will Together

We understand that hearing God's Word is not enough; we must stay in dialogue with God through prayer and discernment to move in the same direction together.

Chapter 4: Unity Is Restored When We Stand in Solidarity with God's Work

We see that true unity requires action and solidarity—standing together in the valley where the work is needed, not just observing from a distance.

Key Points:

- Unity begins with submission to God's Word, not human agreement or strategy
- The African proverb "Because we are, I am. Because I am, we are." reflects biblical covenant community
- Kwanzaa principles complement rather than replace Christian faith, representing values our ancestors practiced
- Unity requires dialogue with God, not monologue—listening for God's voice and direction
- Submission answers who is in charge; seeking God's will shows where we are going
- Prayer is navigation and alignment, not just ritual or noise
- Unity without the Spirit (ruach) is structure without life
- Solidarity means presence, proximity, and responsibility—standing in the valley, not observing from the sidelines
- The Community of Hope vision encompasses spiritual, educational, economic, health, social, and physical/recreational hope
- LIFE Male STEAM Academy exemplifies unity in action—standing with young black males the system has overlooked
- Unity is restored when bones connect to bones, when the church becomes a guardian of the community

- God doesn't restore us to sit down quietly but to stand up boldly together

Scripture Reference:

- Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Primary focus on the Valley of Dry Bones)
- Ephesians 4:5-6 (One Lord, one faith, one baptism)
- Joshua 24:15 (As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord)

Stories:

- The creation of Kwanzaa by Dr. Maulana Karenga after the Watts riots in 1966 as a response to community brokenness
- Personal testimony of walking around the Sears building property over 500 times, praying for God's vision while people laughed and criticized
- Reference to the movie "Drumline" and the phrase "one band, one sound" as an illustration of unity
- Story of calling a deacon "pastor" because he was acting like he was running the church
- Illustration of grandparents maintaining discipline and family structure
- Historical context of Rodman Church burning down, challenging the congregation about whether the community would miss them if they disappeared
- The ongoing work of LIFE Male STEAM Academy as practical solidarity with young black males labeled as problems instead of promises

- Personal conversations with children about having lived twice their age and understanding life experiences they haven't encountered yet

Scripture References from the Sermon

Directly Referenced or Read:

1. **Ezekiel 37:1-3** - The valley of dry bones vision
2. **Ezekiel 37:10** - The bones standing as a vast multitude
3. **Ezekiel 37:14** - God's promise to put His spirit within them
4. **Ephesians 4:5-6** - One Lord, one faith, one baptism
5. **Joshua 24:15** - "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"

Alluded to or Thematically Referenced:

6. **Romans 10:9** - Believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth (mentioned at closing)
7. **Psalm 119:133** - "Order my steps in your word" (referenced through the song lyrics)
8. **Matthew 7:24-27** - Building on solid foundation (implied in discussion of God's Word as foundation)
9. **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** - Body of Christ unity (thematic connection to bones connecting)
10. **Acts 2:1-4** - The breath/Spirit (Ruach) bringing life (thematic parallel)
11. **Proverbs 29:18** - "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (implied in discussion of shared vision)
12. **James 2:14-26** - Faith without works is dead (implied in "faith has to have feet")

13. **Hebrews 10:25** - Not forsaking the assembling together (unity theme)
14. **Philippians 2:2** - Being of one mind and spirit (unity emphasis)

Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

For Unity/Umoja:

- **Psalm 133:1** - "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity"
- **1 Corinthians 1:10** - Unity in mind and thought

For Community Responsibility:

- **Galatians 6:2** - "Bear one another's burdens"
- **Acts 4:32** - Early church unity and shared resources

For Obedience and Submission:

- **James 4:7** - "Submit yourselves to God"
- **John 14:15** - "If you love me, keep my commands"

QUOTES:

Unity does not begin with each other. Unity begins with God. You can have all the money in the world, all the fame in the world, but if you ain't got God, you ain't got nothing.

Unity is not built by human confidence. It is birthed by holy surrender. Unity emerges when God's Word becomes the common ground.

Hearing God's Word is not the same as following God's will. Submission is what aligns our hearts with God's will.

Unity is not maintained by proximity. It is maintained by prayer. You can be in here and still be far away from God.

Real unity is not proven by what you say in your prayer. It is revealed by what you do in your obedience.

God does not restore us so we'll just sit down quietly. He restores us so that we will stand up boldly together.

Unity is not restored by distance. Unity is restored by presence, by participating, by taking a stand.

When we stand together, no system can stop us. When we stand together, no injustice can defeat us. When we stand together, no valley can hold us down.

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5-Day Devotional: Unity in Faith and Family

Day 1: Submission - The Starting Point of Unity

Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-6

Devotional: Ezekiel's response to God's question reveals the foundation of all unity: "O Lord God, you know." Before bones could connect, before breath could enter, there had to be submission to God's authority. Unity in our families, churches, and communities doesn't begin with our strategies

or agreements—it begins when we bow our hearts to God's Word. Today, examine areas where you've been trusting your own conclusions instead of surrendering to God's wisdom. True unity emerges when God's Word becomes our common ground, when we stop competing to be heard and start listening to the One who speaks life. Ask yourself: Is God's Word the foundation of my decisions, or am I relying on my own understanding?

Day 2: Direction - Seeking God's Will Together

Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5-8

Devotional: Notice how God kept Ezekiel in constant dialogue: "Then he said to me... then he said to me." Unity requires more than submission—it demands ongoing conversation with God. Hearing God's Word isn't the same as following God's will. Strong families and churches don't just agree on authority; they move in the same direction through prayer and discernment. Prayer isn't noise—it's navigation. When we seek God's will together, He removes confusion and clarifies purpose. Today, commit to waiting for God's instruction rather than rushing ahead with your own plans. Whether facing family decisions or ministry opportunities, pause and ask: "Lord, what do You want us to do?" Unity deepens when we stop assuming we know and start seeking God together.

Day 3: Solidarity - Standing Where the Bones Are

Reading: Ezekiel 37:7-10; Galatians 6:2

Devotional: God didn't revive isolated bones—He raised a community. The vision shows bones connecting to bones, standing together as "a vast multitude." Unity becomes real when we take responsibility for one another, moving from belief to action. Solidarity means presence, proximity, and responsibility. You cannot rebuild a community from comfort or restore hope without showing up. God's work requires God's people to stand where the bones are—in the valleys of struggle, injustice,

and need. Today, ask yourself: Am I observing problems from a distance or standing in solidarity with those who hurt? Faith with feet means your neighbor's child becomes your concern, their struggle becomes your responsibility. Because we are, I am. Because I am, we are. Where is God calling you to stand today?

Day 4: The Breath of God - Unity Filled With Spirit

Reading: Ezekiel 37:11-14; Acts 2:1-4

Devotional: The bones came together, but they remained lifeless until God's breath—His ruach—entered them. Unity without the Spirit is structure without life, organization without power. The same Spirit that raised the valley of dry bones is available to breathe life into your family, your church, your community. God's breath transforms connection into community and structure into strength. Today, recognize that your efforts alone cannot produce lasting unity. Invite the Holy Spirit to breathe fresh life into your relationships, your ministry, your purpose. Where there is division, ask God to restore. Where there is discouragement, ask God to revive. The Spirit of God turns scattered bones into a standing army. Are you relying on human effort or divine power? Open yourself to God's transforming breath today.

Day 5: Standing Together - The Power of Umoja

Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6; Joshua 24:14-15

Devotional: When God's breath entered the bones, they didn't crawl—they stood. Together. As a vast multitude. As an army. This is the power of Umoja—unity that stands in the face of opposition. God never intended salvation to stop at the individual level. He saved you to help restore families, revive communities, and raise people together. One Lord, one faith, one baptism—one band, one sound. When the people of God stand together, submitted to His Word, seeking His will, and filled with His

Spirit, no system can stop us, no injustice can defeat us, no valley can hold us down. Today, declare over your life and family: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Unity is power. Unity is survival. Unity is God's design. Stand together, and watch God do what only He can do.

***Prayer Focus:** Ask God to reveal where you need greater unity in your life—in your family relationships, church involvement, or community engagement. Commit to being a bridge-builder rather than a divider, always pointing back to Christ as the source of true unity.*

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Small Group Guide: "Because We Are, I Am"

Unity and the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa (Week 1: Umoja)

Opening Prayer

Begin with prayer, asking God to guide your discussion and help you apply His Word to your lives individually and collectively.

Sermon Overview

Pastor Canady explored the first principle of Kwanzaa—Umoja (Unity)—through the lens of Ezekiel 37 (the Valley of Dry Bones). The message emphasized that unity begins with submission to God's Word, is strengthened when we seek God's will together, and is restored when we stand in solidarity with God's work.

Key Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Main Theme: Unity is not just about agreement; it's about alignment with God and action in community.

Icebreaker Question

Choose one to start your discussion:

1. What does the word "unity" mean to you personally?
2. Share a time when you experienced genuine community or solidarity with others.

Discussion Questions

Part 1: Unity Begins When We Submit to God's Word

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 37:1-6

1. **Ezekiel's Response:** When God asked, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel responded, "O Lord God, you know." What does this response teach us about submission versus our own understanding?
2. **Authority in the Home:** The sermon stated, "In strong families, somebody got to set the spiritual tone." How can families establish

God's Word as the foundation without being authoritarian or legalistic?

3. **Church Unity:** How does submission to God's Word prevent division in the church? What happens when personal preferences outrank biblical principles?
4. **Personal Reflection:** In what areas of your life are you trying to be your own source of truth instead of submitting to God's authority?

Part 2: Unity Is Strengthened When We Seek God's Will Together

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 37:4-6, 9

1. **Prayer vs. Complaining:** Pastor Canady said, "If you complain more than you pray, you're in trouble." How can we shift from a culture of complaining to a culture of prayer in our families and church?
2. **Dialogue with God:** The sermon emphasized that Ezekiel stayed in "dialogue" (not monologue) with God. What practices help you maintain two-way communication with God?
3. **Discernment Together:** How can small groups, families, or church ministries better seek God's will together rather than following individual agendas?
4. **The Breath (Ruach) of God:** What's the difference between structural unity and Spirit-filled unity? How do we invite God's breath into our connections?

Part 3: Unity Is Restored When We Stand in Solidarity with God's Work

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 37:10, 14

- 1. From the Closet to the Valley:** Pastor Canady challenged us to get out of the prayer closet and walk into the valley. What does this look like practically in your life right now?
- 2. Community of Hope:** How does Rodman's Community of Hope vision (spiritual, physical & recreational educational, social, economic & employment, health & wellness) reflect biblical unity in action?
- 3. LIFE Male STEAM Academy:** The sermon highlighted standing with "bones that the system had written off." Who are the "dry bones" in your community that need the church to stand with them?
- 4. Personal Accountability:** The sermon asked, "If your church burned down today, would the community notice?" How would you answer that question about your personal impact on your community?

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Unity begins with submission to God's Word – not personal opinions or preferences
- ✓ Unity is strengthened through corporate prayer and discernment – seeking God's will together
- ✓ Unity is demonstrated through solidarity – standing with others in the valley, not observing from the sidelines

- ✓ "Because we are, I am. Because I am, we are." – Our identity and strength are found in community
- ✓ Umoja (Unity) is power – When God's people stand together, no system can stop us

Practical Applications

This Week, I/We Will:

Individual:

- [] Identify one area where I need to submit to God's Word instead of my own understanding
- [] Commit to praying more than complaining about a specific situation
- [] Ask God to show me someone in my community who needs solidarity/support

Family:

- [] Establish or recommit to a family devotion time centered on God's Word
- [] Have a conversation about our family's spiritual direction and vision
- [] Identify one way our family can serve "dry bones" in our community

Small Group/Church:

- [] Pray together about a specific direction or decision facing our group/church

- [] Discuss how we can better support ministries like LIFE Male STEAM Academy
- [] Plan one concrete action to demonstrate solidarity with those who are marginalized

Reflection Exercise

Personal Journaling Prompts:

1. Where am I scattered like dry bones right now? (spiritually, emotionally, relationally)
2. What would it look like for God to breathe life into that area?
3. Who has God placed in my life that I need to "connect with" (bone to bone) for mutual strength?
4. What is one step of obedience God is asking me to take this week?

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 37:14 "I will put my spirit within you and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

Closing Prayer Points

- Pray for unity in your church, family, and community
- Pray for submission to God's Word in all areas of life
- Pray for discernment to know God's will together

- Pray for courage to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized
- Pray for LIFE Male STEAM Academy and other community ministries

Looking Ahead

Next week, we'll explore the second principle of Kwanzaa in light of Scripture. Come prepared to discuss how faith and family intersect with responsibility and purpose.

Closing Thought: "Unity is not restored by distance. Unity is restored by presence. Unity is not restored by good intentions. Unity is restored when you take a stand."

One band, one sound. Umoja!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the concept of Umoja (unity) challenge us to move beyond individualism and recognize that our survival and thriving are interconnected with our community?
2. In what ways might we be guilty of 'hearing God's Word' without actually 'following God's will,' and how can we bridge that gap in our daily lives?
3. The sermon emphasizes that unity begins with submission to God's Word rather than human agreement. What areas of your

life require deeper submission to God's authority rather than your own understanding?

4. How does Ezekiel's response 'O Lord God, you know' demonstrate the kind of holy surrender necessary for true unity, and where do you need to shift from self-reliance to God-dependence?
5. What does it mean practically for families and churches to 'seek God's will together' rather than simply moving forward with individual plans and preferences?
6. The pastor states that 'a millionaire without God is still broke.' How does this challenge our culture's definitions of success, wealth, and fulfillment?
7. How can we distinguish between being physically present in church or community and truly standing in solidarity with those in the valley where the dry bones are?
8. What would it look like for your church or community if prayer replaced complaining and discernment replaced personal preference in decision-making?
9. The sermon connects the seven principles of Kwanzaa with biblical values. How can cultural frameworks enhance rather than compete with our Christian faith and practice?
10. If your church building burned down today, would the surrounding community miss it based on the tangible impact and solidarity you've demonstrated with those in need?