One of the great tragedies in the history of Christianity is the fracturing of the church. Today, there are an estimated 45,000 different Christian denominations worldwide. Reunifying the church is a complex task, with no clear answer. While on the surface Christians agree on key basic concepts such as who Jesus is, the Trinity, etc. there are many things, even the most basic things, that Christians have a wide range of different beliefs and interpretations of. For example, among the various denominations you will find different teachings on salvation, baptism, the Eucharist, and the Bible. We can’t even agree who fits under the title of Christian, as different traditions have different beliefs on what makes one a Christian. All of this is to say that when we’re looking at how to reunify Christianity, we have a lot to unpack.

To start, we need to define what we’re hoping to achieve. Are we hoping for an end to denominations, and instead finding Christianity united into one Church of Christ? This would be ideal, but would be quite a daunting task, one that many have tried, and failed to achieve. Or perhaps we mean an end to conflict between Christian denominations. Why we certainly aren’t fighting wars with each other anymore, there are still many debates and arguments between Christians with different beliefs, both in person and online. The different doctrinal teachings of each denomination presents several problems, but perhaps one of the most consequential is the confusion it brings for believers and nonbelievers trying to enter into Christianity. This solution is flawed for a few reasons. The first is that it promotes a false unity. If all the Christians in the world simply decided “we’re not going to fight anymore.” we haven’t actually unified the church, we’ve just ignored the fact that it’s divided. The second issue is that it does not solve the problem of confusion. If you’re a Christian trying to get to the truth of Jesus Christ, these different teachings can bring confusion and even mistrust towards different teachers. Why should I trust one interpretation of the bible over another? For the unbeliever, who lacks the background that one born into the church has, this problem is even worse. The third is that it is actually more impossible than the first option. We cannot expect there to be no discussion between opposing beliefs. As long as there is division there will be conflict. So our only option left is the first.

So how do we go about reunifying all denominations into one church? Well there is no easy answer. I wish I could give you a detailed, step by step plan that ends in Christianity reunifying forever but I cannot. What I can give is suggestions that will push us into the right direction. There is an idea that these divisions are all at the institutional level and we just have to wait for all the Christian clergy in the world to sit down and work it out and eventually they’ll figure out something and that will be how the church reunites. The truth is that Christian clergy have been trying to do just that for over 1000 years now, since the Great Schism at least and even then the conflicts that lead to the Great Schism began hundreds of years before. The reality is that if we want Christian unity it is up to us to pursue it. Meetings like this are a great start, where Christians from different denominations all come to worship together. Interdenominational Bible Studies are also fantastic as they give people who disagree a chance to come and read the bible together and just point out what they see. These are great starts, but I think there are three steps that each Christian should take to help strive towards Christian unity.

Step one: Self reflecting. Dig deep and find out what you believe. I don’t just mean basic Christian doctrines, but truly explore who Christ is to you. What does the bible say? What is the nature of God? Do you believe in the 5 Solas of the Reformation? When should people be baptized? What is the Eucharist? What books should and should not be included in the Bible? Study the history of your church and denomination and see if the doctrine it teaches truly makes sense to you. Psalms 119:15 says “I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.” 2 Corinthians 13:5 says “Examine yourselves to see whether you are living the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? – Unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!” From these scriptures it is clear that we should be testing ourselves and constantly meditating and reflecting on God’s word. I make this point because I think it is very important to make sure you know where you stand. A lot of people grow up never challenging the beliefs they have. That is, in my opinion, the wrong way to go about it.

The second point is probably the hardest. That is to be humble. A lot of denominations and churches contradict each other on doctrine. It is a simple truth that all of these different denominations can’t be right. In fact, it is safe to assume that everyone, including me, is wrong about something. There is some message or understanding of God’s truth that we are missing. It is hard for those who are sincere in their beliefs. Sometimes it is easy to be so sure of our own interpretation and understanding of God, but we must remember that the Christians who disagree with us are also incredibly sure in their own interpretation as well. That is why humility is important. We must open our ears and our hearts to different points of view so that we may all learn something from each other, for as Proverbs 27:17 says, “iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.”

The final point is to be civil. This isn’t really something that I’m worried about with this group, but I do think this is worth mentioning. There are a few instances I can think of where Christians have been really hostile towards each other, which is obviously counterintuitive for our goal of unity. There was a video that went viral where someone who disagreed with the Catholic Church’s veneration of saints interrupted Mass. Obviously very bad. There’s one Christian youtuber I watch sometimes who has done a fantastic job with this project of reunification. Basically what he does is he goes to different denominations and interviews a member of the clergy from that denomination just to figure out what they believe. In one of his videos, however, he mentioned how he received a lot of hate and backlash from the members of one particular denomination, just for simply interviewing one of their pastors. As someone who spends way too much time online, I have seen the best and worst Christian behavior from people online interacting with other Christians. I managed to get into this small online Christian group that originally was very diverse in belief, but over time became dominated by one denomination. I ended up having to leave because the members of that one denomination ruthlessly bullied the few people in the chat who disagreed with them still. Then of course it is not hard to find a Christian post where the comment section doesn’t have someone accusing the poster of being a heretic, idol worshiper, or even in some cases a child or follower of Satan. It’s as if social media provides this magic filter where the people you talk to on the other side stop being one with you in Christ. Of course bullying exists in all online circles and sadly, Christian circles are not exempt. If we want to heal the divisions in Christianity then we cannot behave like that. We should not be afraid to have rational, civil conversations about our disagreements. This is the only way forward, if we go forward together recognizing ourselves first as one body of followers in Christ, and secondly as members of our individual denominations.

In our scripture today we read part of Jesus’ prayer before he would be arrested and taken to the cross. So important is this point of unity that it was a great concern for Jesus as he prepared to go to the cross to die for our sins. So far, Christianity has not done a great job staying united, but I believe that through grace, humility, and love for one another, we can move forward as one community, one faith, one body in Christ Jesus.