



God's Church-Part 5

The Unrivaled Fellowship of His Church

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Well, I was recently at one of my favorite Mexican restaurants and had ordered a bowl of guacamole to go with the chips, as I sometimes do. And when the waiter showed up with that bowl of green, gooey goodness in his right hand, he had waters in his other hand and something happened and he lost control of that guacamole bowl. He was quite a ways from the table. He was up high and that thing fell and hit the table and it was positioned just right to send all ten ounces of that guacamole right into my face (audience groaning). I am not kidding, dead center, right in my face. I had guacamole on my glasses. I had all the guacamole on my shirt. I had it sliding down in greasy green chunks on the side of my hair.

Now, while I'll never write a poem about goo in my hair, at least not a positive one, things were different 3,000 years ago. The ancient near eastern King David sat down and tried to express something in some of the grandest terms he could come up with to describe something that was really great, something he said was fantastic. He analogized it with some greasy goo running down his hair and into his beard. I mean, it was a weird analogy. He talked about the best smelling oil that you could pour on someone's head. He started to think about Aaron's oil, the oil that was given just to the priests to anoint their heads. It was a weird analogy to try and describe something good, but that's what he was trying to do.

His second analogy was better, I suppose, and we can identify with it. He talks about the dew on the mountains of Israel, the tall mountains, and that the dew would collect and it would, you know, kind of, as you can imagine, it would all trickle together and into the creeks and down the hills. It'd be refreshing. It would be great. Well, apparently in the arid climate of the ancient world, they would anoint people's heads, particularly if they were at very fancy places or a rich person's home, they would anoint their head with oil. And then the best smelling oil of all, which you could not reproduce, it was against the rules of the Bible, you had that very special, good-smelling oil they would put on the head of Aaron and it would run down their head.

Now, maybe you remember, if you know your Bible well, the psalm I'm thinking of. It's a very short psalm, it's three verses. It's found in Psalm 133 and it simply goes like this, "How good and how pleasant it is," here's what he's trying to describe, "when the brothers dwell together in unity." He said, "It's like the oil on the head running down on the beard." Then he thinks of that good smelling, the best oil of all, "on the beard of Aaron," for instance, "running down on the collars of his robe! It's like dew on Mount Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded blessing and life."

All of that? I mean, these analogies of something rejuvenating, something refreshing, something good, something that smells good, here was a picture, it's hard to identify with the analogy, but he's trying to get words, he's trying to grasp for analogies that would describe something he said that is just so precious. It's so great. It's so refreshing. It's so good. And what was it? Very simply, "How good and pleasant it is when the brothers dwell together in unity." I'm not talking about



biological brothers here. Obviously, we're talking about the people of God. The people who dwell together. And when they're harmonious and things are working out and their relationships are good, how great is that, he says. I mean, he stretches to find something that would somehow communicate the greatness of that.

We are social beings, obviously, and God has created us for relationship. That's why the world has an endless list of associations and clubs and organizations and guilds and lodges and all the things people do to try and meet that need. Outside their biological family, they need these associations, we grope for it, we need it, we're designed to have that.

If the Old Testament saints could get together with the commonality of loving God and find it to be so awesome that the king of Israel would just, I mean, he would seek and search for some kind of expression, an analogy, a parallel to try and express to the people how good this is. How much better is it than in the New Testament, when that organization isn't just for Israel, but it's for this international group of people, called out from every tongue, tribe and nation, that would come together and they would dwell in what we call fellowship with one another. The New Testament says that's a good thing. That is a great thing. Matter of fact, there's nothing better than that when it comes to what God has made us to experience. Not just in this vertical relationship with God, but in this relational, horizontal connection with other people. You could join a lot of clubs and associations, but there is nothing better, there's no organization that can rival what the Church of Jesus Christ can supply. Before you cross your arms and roll your eyes and go, "Yeah, yeah. He must be new to the church because I've been in the church a long time now and there's a lot of junk out there."

I think you should be very careful about criticizing the Church. You ought to be very careful about that. Before you start dissing on the fiancé of Christ, you ought to think twice. Before you start looking at the warts and the wrinkles... Does the Church have warts and wrinkles? Absolutely. I understand. I got three-plus decades in this work. Do you think I haven't seen it? I bet I can match, I can exceed probably every story you have about the underbelly of the Church. Not to mention that other pastors come and share their terrible stories about what goes on in their church. I know the church can be a rough place. You've been burned, you've been hurt, you got problems. You can complain about it. Great. We can talk about that. Hey, critic, I just want you to put that on hold for an hour. Can you just not think about that for a while?

Let's just think for a second about what God would have us think about. And that is that when the Church started in Acts Chapter 2, Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, stops and says, "Let's just think how good and pleasant it was for that first generation of Christians to dwell together in unity." There's nothing better than that. And so let's stop looking at the dent on the bumper and let's look at the whole thing. You know your neighbor across the street who does not have a church. The person who's out there in the world who doesn't have a regenerate heart, does not seek Christ, and has no fellowship the way that we have it. And they're trying to fill that with their clubs and their associations and whatever it is that they're involved in. It is nothing compared to what the Church of Jesus Christ provides. With all the problems. I know them. I know them probably better than you do. This is still a good thing, and I'm still impressed with it.



I'm still recognizing what a wonderful thing it is that you and I have the privilege of being a part of something that exceeds everything that the world can provide in terms of our relationships, our friendships, our connections, our associations and what the New Testament would call fellowship. The only time Luke in all of his writings uses the word fellowship, maybe you know it. The word "Koinonia" in Scripture, the word "koinos," the root of that are the words "to have things in common." And while he only uses the word koinonia once, that word koinos is used there in the middle of this passage about the fact that the commonality we have. We're not in the Toastmasters talking about speaking. We're not a part of some car club, we're not at a country club and we all like golf. Our thing that binds us together, the theme and subject that is pulling Christians together, that gives us all the benefits of the Church is something so transcendent, so important, so valuable. That's what makes the Church unique.

I want us to spend a little time this morning in Acts Chapter 2, as we finish out these last few verses, this last section of Acts, to stop and say, wait a minute, let's just think about the good side of what it is to be a part of a church. Put your history on hold, put your past on hold, your criticisms, the problems you might have with the Church. Let's just stop thinking about those for just a little while and let's focus on how good it is to be a part of the fellowship of the redeemed. Open your Bibles and turn there. You know that this was a challenge for people who went from 120 people, they'd been through a lot together, many of them for three years, and now it had gone from, we remember in verse 41, from 120 people to now over 3,000 people are involved in this.

Talk about, you know, you used to be able to find a nice parking place for my camel before the Church grew so much. I mean, now it's like this is crowded, I don't get the donut I want, the coffee. You know, I just... All the things they could complain about, and Luke stops and says this, which, by the way, after Chapter 4, he does the same thing. It's like every now and then he steps out and goes, "Man, this is so great what they're doing." Are there problems? Yeah. By Chapter 5, we're seeing the internal problems in the Church. And he knows it's there, but he has to stop, take a snapshot and say, "This is a good thing." You ought to think about that this morning. It's a good thing to be part of the Church.

Now there are benefits and there are responsibilities built in here. Maybe you need to focus on the benefits this morning or maybe you sit back and think, "Well, I'm a Sunday Christian. I just come, you know, hear the sermon, get out, try to get to the parking lot, through the parking lot to my car before anyone stops me." Maybe then you need to feel the conviction of responsibility. Either way, to confront or to comfort, to heal of the wound, this sermon is, I hope, going to be helpful for you to celebrate the good things that God provides in the local church.

Let's start in verse 42. I'm going to read it for you in the English Standard Version. Follow along as I read these six verses when it speaks about the early Church being devoted to the apostles' teaching. Look at this. "And they devoted themselves to," four things here, "the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship," there's our word koinonia, the only time Luke uses it, "to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believe," verse 44, "were together and had all things in common." There's the root word for koinonia. "And they were all selling their



possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." Verse 46, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

That's a great summation of an imperfect Church where he's standing back highlighting what you and I should come to appreciate this morning in a fresh and new way. It does start with some responsibilities here. The benefits of what the Church provides for us, just in terms of how we're made ontologically, our need for relationship, for connection, for association, for fellowship, for community. I mean, all that's built into the Church.

But what makes it good is the object of our focus. The thing that ties us together. It's broken down into four pieces here in verse 42. Let's look at those real quick. "They devoted themselves." They have to do that. They have to be committed to that. We ran into that word in Chapter 1, same word over there in Colossians 4:2 about being devoted to prayer, or "continuing steadfastly in prayer" as it's translated.

They had to continue in, they had to focus on, they had to devote themselves, resolve themselves. Here were the unifying factors: "to the apostles' teaching." Which, by the way, you could circle that and draw a line down to verse 43, because the reason they sat there in subjection to the apostles' teaching wasn't because they had a New Testament they were quoting from. "Well, it says right here in Romans Chapter 4..." They didn't have a New Testament. The apostles and the prophets were speaking authoritatively and everyone was submitting their lives to it. They were conforming and applying themselves to what was taught. They found unity in that teaching because they knew it was authoritative. They sat there in response to the apostles with awe. Why? Because "many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles." And we looked at that earlier in the chapter. We know it's an authenticated, certified message. I mean, there's a two-factor authentication here. Clearly, this is what God wants us to know. It's what we need to align our minds and our hearts with because God is verifying it in the first-century.

And thankfully, they all codified that. It's all been inscripturated now. And so verse 42 can take place. God doesn't have to do magic tricks in every generation to try and prove that we should all be committed to and devoted to, first of all, the New Testament teaching, the apostles' teaching, and secondly, to the fellowship. Now, sometimes we use that as an active word, like we're going to go fellowship with some people at church. We use it as a verb. But in reality here we're talking about it just as the descriptive of the whole group. This group in which we have commonality. It doesn't even give us the object of our commonality. We know it in context. We're all committed to being devoted to Christ. But he's saying they were committed to it. They're committed to not just leaving and being on their own and taking their personal private relationship back to their homes. They were committed to the group. They were committed to the fellowship.

Thirdly, they were committed to "the breaking of bread." Now, maybe your study Bible or your commentators like to talk about the Lord's Supper here. I don't think that's what's in view. Did they break the bread at the Lord's Supper? Of course they did. But look around in the New Testament. They broke the bread every time they had a meal, because that's what you did. You



took the loaf and you broke it. You didn't pull out your knife and cut it. You broke the bread. It was actually one of the idioms to describe the way in which we come together and interfaced with one another because we're eating from the same loaf of bread. The idea here is that they had that connection that I think is expanded on in verse 46. They were breaking bread in their homes. It's not like the Lord's Supper, where it says in First Corinthians, we gathered together, we assemble together to practice the Lord's Supper. Here they were going to "their homes, breaking bread, receiving their food with glad and generous hearts."

So we have this commitment to one another outside the Temple Mount, where they were having all this teaching by Peter, the senior preacher there in the Church of Jerusalem. They were in there connecting. They were, as I often say, having their chairs go from side-to-side to face-to-face, interfacing in people's homes. And then they were committed to the prayers. All of those kinds of things are the things that drive us together. They pull us together and give us a certain kind of strength.

If you go to premarital counseling or even marital counseling, if you're having problems, one of the things you should be taught by a good marital counselor is the more we as Christians, if you have a Christian husband and a Christian wife, we drive toward our relationship with Christ, the more we get conformed to Christ, the more we think like Christ, the more we learn what Christ has to say about how we should live, those things are going to pull us closer to him and guess what? Much like two lines on a triangle, it's going to pull us closer together. And that's what happens in the Church. Not just in our homes does that work. That happens in the Church. We become strong, people from all different backgrounds, all different strata of economy. We get together closer and closer. We pull together. We get woven together as people because we're all committed to these four things.

These four things, starting with the most important one of all and that is the teaching of Christ in the New Testament, what the apostles have articulated to us about New Testament truths. It makes us strong. It makes us strong as individuals. I can face whatever comes on my newsfeed this week for one reason because I'm associated with Christ. But I know that that association with Christ finds its manifestation in my relationship with my church, that we together think the same about history, about the future, about eschatology, about understanding God's teaching for how we should live in the midst of this crooked generation. I realized that I can't have that with everyone in my neighborhood. I can't share that with everyone in a secular workplace. But I can share that at the church. I have a strength to stand strong and courageous and bold, much like a lion. It says, "The wicked they flee when no one pursues them, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." One reason is because we run in packs, we're together.

Number one, let's put it down this way. Those four things, if I'm just going to tie them all together under one heading, there's something strengthening about the unity that we find in those things. And I want to put it that way. You need to acquire strength. You need to see that is the product of us as a church pulling together, we "Acquire Strength Through Spiritual Unity." We're connected on the four aspects that are listed for us in verse 42. As we draw together, that makes us strong.



I remember announcing our Alaska cruise that we're going to take for Focal Point, our teaching cruise and it made me think about the time, and I shared it not long ago, I was on that cruise and usually I'm teaching on those cruises, but I had a chance to go on one and just enjoy it. I remember seeing things and thinking of things that I don't normally think about. Looking out as the big gigantic ship, it moors up to the dock and they tie it to the dock. I look down there and it just looks like these big ropes coming off the side of the ship and they tie them on to the, you know, the ties there, these big gigantic ties on the dock. And then you get off the ship, you disembark from the ship, and you get a good look at those and they're gigantic cables. They're like huge ropes. Matter of fact, they cost anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for one of these ropes.

I was so fascinated by these ropes because as I looked closely at them, wow, that's weird. It just looks like a lot of little ropes tied together. So I went on the Internet and I learned how they make these big ropes. Right? How weird is your pastor? But anyway, I thought this is a weird thing and I want to see how they do it. And sure enough, you go through the process of watching how they make these super strong, expensive ropes, they're just a bunch of little ropes. I mean, that's really what it is. They take all that, and I know it's special material and all that, but they start with this little tiny twine, they put it together, they make ropes, they braid it, they put it tightly. And then they take those and they put them together. They braid them tightly. Then they take those and they put them together, until you have finally this huge thing, and it's super strong, some the strongest rope on the planet.

But what it is, is all those little ropes put together. The braiding together of our lives as Ecclesiastes 4 says, "A cord of three strands is not easily broken." When we pull together as people and we start to say, I'm not going to live this alone, I'm going to live this in community, I'm going to live out my faith and my resolve to follow Christ in a community of believers, which is your requirement. God asks us all to do that. We have a strength, an inner strength and a corporate strength. And it starts with you and I being committed to the teaching that you hear from this place as it is accurately reflecting the apostles' teaching. That's what makes us strong.

Keep your finger here in Acts Chapter 2 and turn with me real quickly to Ephesians Chapter 4. Ephesians Chapter 4. I want to get your eyeballs on this passage. It is so helpful for us to see that the strength of the Church so often comes down to how you respond to what's going on right now in this building at this very moment, the teaching of the Word of God. Verse by verse, chapter by chapter. As you respond to that, as you take that seriously, as we go deep in the Scripture and understand what it says and how it is to be applied to our lives, that makes the Church strong. Passage about bodybuilding here.

Two offices are foundational. We learn that in Ephesians 2:20, the apostles and prophets are the foundation. They're speaking the Word of God with authority from heaven without a New Testament in their hands. They do that and authenticate it by signs and wonders. Well that there is settled as Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4 says. And once they inscripturate those truths, now we build on top of it. We have two offices built on top of the apostles and prophets, and that is the evangelists, they're called here. In modern parlance, we might say missionary or church planter, and then we have the ones that sit there and feed the flock every week, the



pastor-teachers or, as it says, in our English Standard Version, shepherds and teachers. "Poimen" is the Greek word. Same thing. Pastor, shepherd, that's all... When you say "pastor" you're using an agrarian term for someone here in front of the sheep and what does the shepherd do? He feeds them. He leads them into green pastures to feed them.

And so the pastors of the church should spend all that time in the Word, finding the green pastures and taking people to it and they're taking in the truth. For what? I'm just paraphrasing. Let's get to quoting it. Verse 12, "to equip the saints," the people of God, "for the work of ministry." Look at this: body building. "For the building up of the body of Christ." The body of Christ, the Church gets strong, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature manhood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." You want to talk about strength? Wow. That's it. Christ, in this world, corporately, the body of Christ in this world. We're not little puny, you know, pencil-armed pre-adolescent boys. "No, we're no longer children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine," every teaching, which a lot of it is false teaching by false teachers, "by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful scheming."

No. "Rather," going back to those teaching gifts up there, the Church planters and the shepherds and teachers, "we're speaking the truth in love." And as that happens, as people receive that truth, as they go line by line through Scripture and they learn the apostles' teaching, they grow up, the Church grows up. "We grow up in every way into him, who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that," here's our bodybuilding idiom, "so that it builds itself up in love," speaking the truth in love.

And even though the sermons may sting, even though the truth may not be in keeping with the culture, even though the things that we say and affirm clearly because the Bible clearly teaches it, it may be out of step with what the polls say and what people want the Bible to say. We speak it. We speak it clearly. We speak it truthfully. We speak it in love and the Church gets strong. And you can go to a place that you call your church and you can say here is a place where we are all being consistently conformed in our thinking and therefore in our lives to the "truth that God has once for all delivered to the saints." You get strong in a church because you've taken its teaching. As a good Berean, line by line you read it and you search the Scriptures to make sure what's said from the front is so. We get stronger as an organization, we get stronger as individuals and you acquire strength being part of the most important association in the entire world, the Church of Christ.

The next thing I said, you can look back at it, it's printed on your worksheet, verse 42. The second thing was the fellowship, the group. He uses the word *koinonia* to describe the whole group. They are committed to this thing in which they have commonality, the Church. I mean, I know it's kind of weird. We pass out bumper stickers. You put it on the back of your car and, you know, what's with all that? All the gear, all the swag. What is that? Well, listen, we are important in our economy. That is God has made us his children, the saints. We have a job to do in this world and we take pride in the fact that we are a church, that we are together in this. We're committed and devoted to it.



I mean, I meet a lot of people who think that they're super spiritual and don't need the Church. The more spiritual you are, the more you see you're an integral part of the Church. We don't grow out of the Church and you certainly don't put your nose in the air, "So I found a few warts and wrinkles on the bride of Christ. So I don't need this anymore." I mean, you're not spiritual because you say, "Well, you know, any Christian I meet, we're having fellowship and that's it." No. The fellowship that you need to be committed to in this case is the Church in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount. You've got a church here. I hope this is your church if you're seeing me here in person. This is your church, this is our fellowship and you ought to be devoted to it, starting with a commitment to be here. Right?

This is not sitting around on a Saturday night going, "I wonder if I'll go to church in the morning." This is a commitment. We make it a commitment and a priority. It's the thing that strengthens our resolve, as it says over there in Hebrews Chapter 10, that assurance that we have about our faith and our resolve, it is strengthened by us "spurring one other on to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some." And they think they've got it going on because they don't need the Church. But in reality, we all need the Church, and we've got to be a part of the Church. It's not based on need. It's based on God's design. And it says you ought to be doing that "all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Think about the importance of the Church and you saying I'm committed to it. You cannot be an effective member of more than one family. And if this is your church family, this needs to be your priority. And if it's not this one, great. Whatever it is, get involved in a Bible-teaching church, commit yourself to it and say I am committed and devoted to this. It's not an end in itself, I understand that. We're all about Christ, we're all about the head, but we're going to grow up and be bodybuilders, if you will. We're going to have the Church be strong, committed to its teaching, and I'm devoted to that congregation.

Thirdly, "the breaking of bread." I've already tried to make the quick apologetic that what I think is going on here is them now disseminating outside of the Temple Mount and they're teaching there on the Temple Mount and going into their "homes and taking their meals together with glad and generous hearts." Did the Church include the practice of the Lord's Supper? Of course it did. And he's going to deal with that elsewhere, and we're going to see that. But right here, I think we're dealing with them just taking their meals together. And how important is that?

A UCLA professor up the road, who has written on ancient near eastern meals and the meaning of them in the first century. I just need to quote it. It's such a powerful quotation. He says this: "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of fellowship around the table for the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first-century era." He says, "Mealtimes were far more than occasions for individuals to consume their nourishment. Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating food with another person had become the ceremony that is richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and unity. The social intercourse of relationships took place over the meals."

I should've put this book on the back of the worksheet, but Tim Chester wrote a book called "A Meal With Jesus," and I love what he does there. He just goes through the gospel of Luke and he



looks at the times when the meals are described. How important the meal was for Jesus and his apostles and what an important thing it became through the book of Acts, people taking their meals together. And that means the commitment really goes beyond the programs or the meeting or this is my church. But, it's the people and I get enmeshed in the lives of the people and I get my chairs face-to-face, as we often say, and I spend time over food. I mean, it's such a revealing and vulnerable part of our lives. It's a thing that happens that tears down the walls. It makes sure that I'm integrating my life into the lives of other people.

The life-on-life that takes place in the Church. It's a commitment they made. It's easier to eat on your own. I get it. Easier for you to cook for just yourself. I get that. But they were taking their meals together and they were committed to the thing that all of us should be committed to in private, but they were doing it together. They were committed to the prayers, the prayers. Jesus prayed a lot on his own. I get that. But even in the midst of some of his most difficult times, THE most difficult time in the Garden of Gethsemane, he puts his finger in Peter's, James' and John's chest and he says, "You come with me. Come and pray with me. Watch and pray with me."

Do you know this? If you don't have in your schedule times where you're praying with other Christians, I mean, I just think there's a problem. I know this is descriptive. Right? This is a description of what was happening. But elsewhere in the Scripture, you can find the call for us to be praying and praying together is the thing we see expressed so often in the Bible as how we live out our prayer lives. Is there a time to shut the door in the inner room and pray to your Father in secret? Absolutely. You ought to be doing that every day. But you ought to have in your schedule, there ought to be a part of your habit that you are pouring your heart out to God with other people in your church. There's got to be that.

That's why coming into church, sitting in a chair, listen to your pastor yack for an hour on a passage of Scripture is not church. It's not the full totality of church. It certainly involves your commitment to the people outside of the walls of this church who are a part of this church and then pouring your hearts out to God in that time of prayer together. That needs to be a part of what you do. And what do you do when these things take place? Committed to the teaching together, sitting under the same exposition of the Word, committed to the organization, the fellowship, the church, sharing meals together, putting the walls down, life-on-life within the church and praying together. Well, it makes us super strong. It makes us super strong. If you commit yourself to those things, you will feel stronger because you'll be a part of a strong church and the whole world, really, can go to hell in a handbasket in so many different ways. Your health can collapse, a million things can go wrong, and you will say, you know what? We're standing strong. The strength that you derive and acquire from a unified, a spiritually unified church, is amazing. Shallow churches don't provide that. Non-Christian clubs and organizations cannot give you that. The Church is unique and unrivaled in that regard.

Verses 44 and 45, Acts Chapter 2. It's print on your worksheet. It says, "And all who believe were together and had all things in common." Of course we've just described what that was. "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." So I guess we all need to be communists, at least socialists. I guess I'm voting for the wrong



people. I need to rethink my politics here, because what you see in this passage, which has been the basis and rationale for many people saying, "Well, this is what we need."

There's a big difference between what you see in the political spectrum of socialism or communism and what you're seeing here in Scripture. Matter of fact, the next time we see this described in Acts Chapter 4, Acts Chapter 5 makes very clear with that really sad story of Ananias and Sapphira that all of this was 100% voluntary. This was not conscripted by the leaders of the Church. This was not legislated by the government. This is not something they're saying you need to do this. This is a reaction to, look at the last few words in verse 45, "as any had need." And what happens? The Bible says really converted people, when they love God, the automatic thing that flows from that is a love for the brothers. That's what the whole book of First John really is about, the theme woven throughout it. How in the world can you say you love God if you don't have love for your brothers? How can you keep closing your heart toward your brother if you have the world's goods and he needs that and you don't open your heart to them? You're going to be meeting needs in tangible ways to love them, not just in word, but in deed. I mean, that's really what happens when the Church starts to have a mutual concern for one another. It flows from God's love in our hearts. And you know what that does? It provides an amazing amount of security.

Oh, by the way, what is the law about how much of my income I have to spend on my children? I forget what that is. Is that 38%? I forget what the law says about that. I mean, what does the legislation say? It's California so maybe it's 75% of my income needs to be spent on my kids (audience laughter). What? I don't know what the law is. And you're going to say, "Even the California Assembly hasn't gotten to that crazy place of legislating that. Right? Why? Because no one has to legislate that. Why? Because parents, they love their children and therefore they give to their children. You don't have to legislate that."

And so it is in the Church. This is not a verse to justify socialism or communism. And it's not your verse to try and start a commune and force people to give their stuff to people. It's about the recognition, a descriptive recognition, that people when they love God, just like a parent loves a child, they meet needs, they meet it in extravagant ways. They engage in labor and work and sacrifice, even if I have to give up something that I like, a possession or a belonging, and I give it away so that I can meet a need.

That's big. That's a big thing that flows from a heart of love. And it's the thing that if you have it in a church because people there are really converted and love God, it brings you a great sense of security. And I just don't have that in any other earthly organization. It's not like me going into the Toastmasters and saying, hey, can I borrow a pen? Oh, yeah, you borrow a pen. If my house burns down in the middle of this sermon and me and my family need a place to stay tonight, I'm guessing I've got a place to stay and you're probably not even going to charge me rent. Am I right? I didn't get the response I was hoping for with that question (audience laughing) but I'm assuming you're just not the expressive group of people that I have preached to in other places.

If my car won't start, really, if I go out to my car, it does not start. Do I need to call Lyft or Uber? Really? No. I bet I got a car. I bet even if you have a nice car, you're willing to risk the pastor



driving that nice car. Why? Because if you're a real Christian, what happens when you see your brother in need and you have the means to meet that need? Because you're a Christian, you do it. Do you know what that does for me? And not just because I'm the preacher. Anyone in your small group that needs a car. I'll bet you would do what it takes to meet their need if there's any way that you can do that. Why? Because if you're a Christian, that's what happens. Do you know what that does? It brings security. I am really not afraid of whatever might happen in this world. Really, I know the Church is going to step up because we're a part of an organization that I can't count on that at the country club, I can't count on that with the associations, the groups, the guilds, the lodge. I can count on that here.

You ought to celebrate that. You ought to find and revel, number two, in security that comes through the mutual concern of the Church that I know people will sacrifice to meet needs when I have them. And I want to see that both as a benefit and a responsibility. I want to make sure that in my heart, I'm loving people enough to say I will go, as I often say, the extra mile, I will stay the extra hour, I will spend the extra dollar. And you know why? Because I know this: God is so good to respond to those who are willing to do what he did. He laid down his life for his friends. He proved that love was defined by sacrifice. And then he calls us to love one another and lay down our lives for one another. Here's what Paul said when Paul said to the Ephesians pastors, you know how much I sacrificed for you. And he said this: because I remembered and you should "remember the words of our Lord Jesus. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" You know that's the truth that we can test every time we're moved in our heart to give to those around us that have a need.

I got a real problem with buyer's remorse. I will admit that. Do you have that problem? I have a hard time going to Best Buy and buying something that I think, "Ahh, this is good." Even if I do the price comparison and all that. I get it and I look at it and I get to the car and I unwrap it carefully so I can rewrap it if I have to. And I think, "Oh, man, I don't know. Should I have gotten this?" Buyer's remorse. Don't psychoanalyze me, but I do have a problem of buyer's remorse.

You know one thing I don't have? Giver's remorse. I don't have that. I don't really have giver's remorse. I don't stop at the hospital on the way home from a long day at the office and say, "You know what? I should really stop here and pray with this gal going into surgery. I really should stop here with this guy who is recovering from that surgery, and I'm going to go in and pray with him and I'm going to hold his hand. I'm going to talk about the Lord and I'm going to read Scripture to him and then I'm going to get home late and have my dinner at 9:00." I don't get home and say, "Man, I wish I would have stayed at home and watch TV tonight." I never feel that. I never sit back and go, "I could have played a video game or something." Instead I was out trying to serve the people of God tonight.

I never give something away to someone and say, here, I want to meet this need and say, "Man, you know what? I really have giver's remorse." And you know why? Because God is faithful to do exactly what he said. Bring blessing to you. It's better, it's more blessed to give than receive. It's blessed to receive. I get that. It's more blessed to give. Hebrews 6 says God is not unjust. We think of God's justice usually in terms of his retribution on sin. He is a just God and he will retribute sin. Thankfully for us, we're under the shadow of the cross that's absorbed our sin penalty, and then



he flips that justice around and he says, "And God is not so unjust to forget the love that you've shown and continue to show to his people." He is a just God to reward you for that. Matter of fact, he says you can't give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he's my disciple and not have a reward. You're never going to lose your reward for that.

I need to believe the fact that God will always be a God who brings that kind of security, not only being on the receiving end, but such a great security and joy and satisfaction and a real sense of strength as a community, just because I know I'm ready to meet needs. I'm ready to put my love into action beyond my words. And when you get a church that's filled with people like that, that's a good place to be. You might say, I don't feel as much of that as I should. Well, then I've got a challenge for you.

Epaphras in Colossians Chapter 4 was one that Paul held up and he said Epaphras is from Colossae, he's one of yours he comes from your town. I can testify to this, he's about to end with this. Here's the line he ends with, "That I can testify to you that he's working hard." He works hard for you. Well, in between that is this, and I love this about Epaphras, here's the descriptive, "He greets you" and I can tell you he is "always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you can stand fully mature and assured in the will of God. I can bear witness," I can testify, "that he's worked hard for you."

The labor of love for me to work hard, sacrifice, extra hour, extra dollar, extra mile for the people of the Church, which creates an incredibly secure environment for people to fellowship in. For you to do that, for me to do that, for all of us to do that in mutually webbed relationships in the Church, that makes an incredible experience for people. It meets that social need in a way that no other organization can meet. If I want to see more of that in my heart, I know this, I better put those people on my prayer list. Everyone should be in a small group at some level in the church. Chairs got to go side-by-side for teaching and face-to-face in meeting the needs in a small group.

Now here's what I'm going to say. If I'm not loving those people in a sacrificial way, it starts with me having them on my prayer list, I got to make sure that I'm struggling in my prayers for them. And there's the descriptive. I just want to say, has that been true of your prayers this week for anyone outside of your biological family? There's a challenge. Put those people on your list and every day get up and struggle in prayer for the good of what God wants to do in their life. Then when there's a need, they need a car, they need a house, they need a place, they need something, they need anything, you watch yourself go the extra mile, stay the extra hour and spend the extra dollar.

Paul said he did that naturally because of God's love in his life. It's natural for a convert. In First Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 7 he says, you know, "We were among you like a mother caring for her own children. We were affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel, we weren't there just as the Bible Answer Man, and we were not just there as the missionary, "but we were also willing to share our lives as well, because you've become very dear to us. You remember, brothers, our labor and our toil and how we worked night and day."



In the early Church, they were staying late to deal with one another for their good. They were lingering together in their times and meeting needs. They would even sacrifice their possessions and sell them and liquidate them if they had to meet needs because they had everything in common as it rallied around things like their church, the teaching, their relationships in homes and praying together. This is a natural extension of a good, healthy fellowship. All of it, according to this passage, reminds us that brings us not only strength, but security.

Verse 46, "Day by day, they were attending the temple together." Now, remember, this is not Old Testament worship bringing in their sacrifices. Christ was the sacrificial lamb. The Passover lamb had been slain. The temple had been torn, the veil of the temple. This was not about them getting back to Old Testament worship patterns. It's about them meeting together on the temple as Peter would stand up and preach. We'll see that throughout the book of Acts. But they were coming over and over and day by day. Now, this is a commitment to being actively involved that went not just to the preaching on the Temple Mount, but also, as it says in the middle of verse 46, having their meals, "breaking their bread in their homes, receiving their food with glad and generous hearts and praising God and having favor with the people. And God kept growing the Church."

That kind of active participation, it's one of the values at our church. We call it "highly committed participants." We're participating heavily. So much so that people could look and say, wow, those people at that church, they're really involved there.

As I said about the blessing of giving, you can say that about the blessing of active participation. Those are the most joyful people among us, the people who are really connected, really involved. I'll put it this way. There's so much to this. But let me write it down this way for you. The joy, you need to "Discover the Joy of Active Participation." It's the casual church attender who never gets to this level of profound fulfillment, who doesn't feel the happiness of that great principle of giving of themselves, of connecting with other Christians, they don't get that. Because they come in, sit in the back row, head to their car when it's over. That's not church. That's one small aspect of church.

It's important that you recognize that kind of active participation, that heavy committed participation, that hopefully the people in those buildings around the perimeter of this business park, they can say this. They can say, "You know what, those people day by day are meeting in those buildings over there." I mean, I know they're sometimes hassled by our traffic, but they realize this. There's something going on at that church every single day. And you know what? Praise God for that. That's exactly how it ought to be when highly committed participants engage in one another's lives.

And I don't apologize for it, even though I get complaints about it. I get complaints from people who don't even go to the church. I get complaints from non-Christians. I actually had a letter from a lady who complained about the church having so much activity here, blames it on me, the pastor, and said, "Oh, they're out all the time. These families are abusing kids on Thursday nights. I see those kids over there. They get to bed late. And what about school on Friday morning?" (audience laughing and cheering) I love those letters. I didn't respond, but had I responded, I would have simply put it this way. "You ain't seen nothing yet," Right? Because here's what the



Bible has to say about that. It says that "There are some who forsake the assembling themselves together, but that's not the way that we should be. We should be stirring one other onto loving good deeds and all the more as you see the day approaching." I need to recognize this. I'm not going to apologize for another night out of the week. I'm just not. I'm sorry. There is nothing better than to give of our lives, to not just give the spiritual things, but to give of ourselves to spend and be expended for the souls of people around us.

Now, I know you're not going to be a part of everything, every single night at our church. But I am saying this: church has got to be more than once a week for you. It's going to be more than just a night a week. I mean, I think our involvement in the body of Christ, if we're going to experience the kind of strength and security and joy that God intended, it's going to be an active participation. And they were proving that just by way of descriptive here, day by day, they were attending those meetings on the temple and then they were breaking into the homes. They were having those meals in their house.

I don't know what you're trying to save your house for. Right? I don't get that. People come into my house and sometimes they'll say, "Should I take my shoes off?" I'm like, no, I bought carpets so you could actually walk on the carpet. You don't have to take your shoes off. I mean, the whole point of having that home is for us to have it, not only be a place where we can raise our family, but the point is to be, as the Bible commands us, to be hospitable to people. I know a family in our church and just because I connected with them throughout the week, they probably had people in their house four nights this week. And I think to myself, wow, that's a lot of people from the church in your house. And yet I never heard them complain.

Not only did I not hear them complain, I can attest to this. They're probably a lot happier than the average person in our church. And I think that's the whole point. Jesus shows that it's better to give than to receive, to wear out your carpet, to have your pantry empty at the end of the week, to have had people sit on your couch and spill stuff on your couch. You know at the end of the week, your couch may not be cleaner, but their hearts are fuller because of the time and investment in relationships of the people who share the same teaching from this church, who are committed to the same fellowship of this church, who are engaged together in taking meals and praying together. I mean, that's just where it's at. That's good. Yeah, I guess you could get better at Candy Crush or something. I mean, you could do things and catch up and binge watch something on Netflix. But how much better is it for you to invest in these people?

This is where those of you who were tempted to cross your arms and roll your eyes at the beginning of the message go, "Well, this guy's got his nose up in the sky and it's pie in the sky and he's just, you know, an idealist. Let me talk to you for a second. STOP. Right? I mean, that's the short version. That was really a comma, not a period, but I'd like you to stop your reflection and mirroring of the kind of thing that you've created in your virtual world, which is not real. I mean, where you have tried to avoid the realistic stuff that happens in relationships because you know, people irritate you, because you know, people let you down, because you know, sometimes people stab you in the back. I mean, someone you invite in your house is eventually going to be a Judas and you don't want any of that.



So you can live in your virtual world, as we all like to, and think we have friends because they're all tallied for us on the top of our social media page. But when I don't want that friend, I mean, how convenient, I can just click and unfriend people. I mean, that's the world we live in. And not only that, if I'm getting irritated with you, but I don't want to unfriend you, I got this great thing now I can mute you for a week. Right? I don't even have to watch what you're saying anymore. And if I go to a real small group, there are people there I can't mute. Right? I'd like to mute them. And you know what? In real life, as opposed to my virtual life... I mean, I'm the average guy, I spend a lot of time, you know, getting information off of YouTube. If someone gets on YouTube and they talk too slow, I got a plug-in for that on Chrome. I can speed them up. And when I sit around with you guys, if you talk too slow, I might start clicking in my pocket to speed you up. I can't speed you up because you are who you are and you want to slow me down. I know it works both ways. But the reality is this: you need to understand that kind of crazy world that we live in, this self-tailored, reclusive, in my own mind kind of world, that isolation is not helping us.

I put two works on the back and I do it from time to time. They're secular references, they're not about Christianity, but they both highlight the problem. And I made sure in the parentheses to say these are just academic, sociological references or whatever I called them. Our retreat into our private world, that is just not what God is like. It will actually, at the end, it will completely disappoint you. It will disillusion you. Better for you to deal with real people who are really going to spill stuff on your real sofa and are going to mess up things in your real life and are going to eventually stab you in the back every now and then, and engage in real life with real people.

Do it, as it says in verse 47, for God. And I say that, you say, "Well, it's worship, praising God." It is worship. I get that. That's the word. But it's not the common word for praise. Praising God. You see it there. It's like this is what they were doing as they did that. It's a word that is translated sometimes "to celebrate." It's not the word "to worship" or "give thanks." It's not the standard word for directing praise to God. It's the word that they were doing it celebrating God. I mean, they were having meals and taking their food with gladness and they were doing this without complaining and they were doing it in celebration of God. God was in view here.

Can you choose, as it says in this passage, "glad and generous hearts?" Can you choose to do this with a smile on your face? Can you, as it says in First Peter, "Practice hospitality without grumbling?" Can you say I'm going to go beyond what I normally do in giving of myself, of staying, of lingering, of staying out later, of keeping my kids up past their bedtime, so we can engage with the people around us. I'm going to do that and I'm going to do it with gladness, I'm going to do it with generosity, and I'm going to do it in celebration of God. I mean, that is really what's going on here. Of course, they are directly praising God, but I don't think that's really the concept fully here. It's the idea of this was all a part of their lifestyle in honor of God, living before the face of God and doing it for God.

That was something even the non-Christian world recognized. Now, don't misunderstand this phrase, middle verse 47, "and having favor with all the people." Most people think that's the people outside of the body of Christ, and that's probably true. And yet they were about to get into major persecution. The Romans didn't like what was happening with the burgeoning Church and certainly people were about to unleash their disapproval of what the Church was doing. Just like



they're going to not like that we're talking about a God who is just and a God who must punish sin and a need to repent. They're not going to like our message either.

But there's one thing they should recognize, even as they drive around the perimeter of this place, as it's active every single day, and people's lives are life-on-life, intertwined, people's needs are being met. They ought to stand back and be able to say, "Well, there's something there that we don't have here." I heard that even this morning from someone watching us up close. Something brought them onto this campus and they said, "There's something there with those people. They really care about each other." I mean, that was really the essence of the report I just got this morning. I thought, well, that's how it's always been.

Jesus promised this, "By this all men will know you're my disciples, if you have love for one another." The early Roman historian looking at the Church said, "See how they love each other." No needs among us that aren't met. No issue faced alone. Even if you had your arms and your legs cut off because of a bacteria in your life, an infection, you'd not only have, I hope, a caring family come around you, you'd have the Church come around you. You'd have an entire army of people from which you can derive strength, you can find security and you'd experience joy. That's an unrivaled kind of protection and security and meaning and significance that you're not going to get in the world.

"And the Lord added to their number day by day such as should be saved." That's the great thing about a church that God finds doing what it ought to do. He loves to direct his infant Christians into those places. When my kids were little and we needed to find babysitters. Because we were active in church ministry, you had to have a lot of babysitters and I don't apologize for that. A lot of babysitters for our kids.

Of course, it was good to have an intelligent babysitter, it was good to have an organized babysitter, it was good to have a babysitter who had time and could be attentive to our kids. All that was great, but there was one thing that trumped it all. There's one thing that if I know this babysitter had this, everything else was going to work out. You know it was? That that babysitter loved our kids. If I thought this babysitter really loves our kids, I know, it may not be the smartest girl, it may not be the most organized kid. But you know what? That babysitter, I know she's the right one for us.

We may not have everything going for us that we ought to have as an outpost of the Church of Christ. We'd be lacking if you think we may be sitting here in a rented warehouse trying to do church. I get all that. But there's a harvest in South Orange County that Christ, I'm sure, needs to place those converts somewhere. He needs to use some church that's sitting around talking about being evangelical in this county this week. Where are the new converts going to be led? Where is Christ going to place them? He's going to try and find a place where the people love each other. He's going to find a place where they're committed to one another, where it's more than just sitting around and having people share their knowledge. It's about sharing their lives together. May God find us to be that kind of church. May he look at us and say that's the place. And if you're sitting here saying, that's just not where I'm at, I'm not sure I want to... Listen, I'm telling you, this



has to be a resolve. It all started with these words, "They devoted themselves to it." So can you make a decision today?

And by the way, if you look at all this and go, oh, yeah, I'm going to apply all that and you think about how you're going to apply it and it's just the circle you always apply it in. "OK, I'll stay, I'll linger a little bit out there at the Velcro donut table and I'll stick around for an extra 20 minutes." And you envision just talking to the same people you talk to every week. Can you look over their shoulder and say, I'm going to reach beyond the circle that I'm in? You know, I would normally invite this person over and normally go have breakfast or lunch with this person. Can you go and reach outside? Start a new layer of involvement because there are people in this church, I'm sure, they're just not the outgoing type. They're waiting for someone to say, "Hey, look, you know, hey, let's swap numbers. Maybe your kids could come play with our kids." Reach beyond your circle and start putting this stuff to work. Spiritual unity, mutual concern, active participation. Watch what God does when that takes place. I'm sure he would love to see that kind of church grow. Are there pains, growing pains? Sure. Are there going to be problems, warts and wrinkles? I get it. Let's focus on what a privilege it is to be a part of the unrivaled fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. God, as we've watched this morning, a very dramatic video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIE27SkMIUM&feature=youtu.be&rel=0) it reminds us of how important the Church is, how gracious you are to us in the midst of our trials, even if our biological family isn't what it needs to be, that if we're part of a good church, you can do great things to meet our needs, to strengthen us, to give us that kind of optimism that we can do it. Let this church be that kind of church.

God, I want to preach this message like Paul wrote the Thessalonians, not to chide them, not to say you're not doing this and you need to do it. Just like Paul said to them, you are loving each other, there's a lot of labor of love going on in this church, but he's still put a comma after that and said, but I just want you to excel still more. God, I'm so proud of this church, not just Mike and Vicki on that video that can attest to this church stepping up. There are so many others, and they hit me this week and after seeing that video, they've had their own trials and this church has stepped up. But I just want this church to excel still more.

So God, motivate us. Give us that resolve by your Spirit to say we want to be that kind of place. And we know that starts with the practical decisions we're going to make even this afternoon, decisions we're going to make about our schedules this week. The investment that we need to make in other people around us. God, help us to be less protective of our little circle, our privacy, our time, being misers about our resources. God, let us do all the things that we see in this passage with glad and generous hearts. Do that for us, God. Let us do it in celebration of you and all that you've done for us.

In Jesus name. Amen