

Community Project

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Date: 15 November 2009

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4 this morning. Ephesians chapter 4. Some of you all here enjoy sports.

I know some of you don't, but we're going to take the illustration and run with it anyway. And some sports, you know, are more individual sports. It's you, the ball, and maybe an opponent like tennis or golf.

And I know that you can have a tennis team and a golf team, but within your match, it's up to you whether you win or lose and you can't blame it on somebody else because you're the one that hit the ball and nobody else can take credit for your win because you're the one out there.

It's an individual thing. Other sports are team sports like football and basketball and soccer. You might fail, but there's a teammate who's there to pick you up.

Or you've done the same for them. Now, team sports can be a little bit messier. Somebody drops a ball at the end of the game and they're the one that gets blamed for the whole team losing.

[1:03] Or they miss the free throw and they forget all the ten free throws that were missed before that and they just remember the one at the end. But one person on a team could possibly let the whole team down.

There might be strife in the team that has to be worked out. There may be a weak link that needs to be brought along by everyone else. Team sports require a chemistry that's not needed in individual sports.

And when the sweet victory comes, the celebration is very different. The tennis player, he falls to his knees, he raises his hands, and he's alone on the court.

And the golfer pumps his fist and maybe high-fives his caddy. But he's alone. But when the baseball team wins, there's a mob, a swarm of players, and they're all jumping up.

And I don't know how that came to be a celebration. Anyway, they swarm together and they jump up and they celebrate together. There's more than just one of them. There's a team of them. And they rejoice together in their victory.

[2:04] Now, I enjoy playing golf and even occasionally tennis. Not very good at it, but I enjoy it. But you give me a mob of players celebrating any day over a lone man all alone on the court celebrating his victory.

And you give me a teammate to back me up when I've missed the play any day over being all alone and having no one to blame but myself.

And, of course, the analogy isn't perfect, but the Christian life should be much more like a team sport than an individual one. We have brothers and sisters to help us, to pick us up when we fall, to rejoice together with us, and to mourn with us.

Can you imagine a baptism service very unlike the one that we saw last week? Quietly, the person being baptized meets with a pastor and is baptized and sent on his way alone.

Instead of the glorious scene that I saw unfolding in the foyer after the service last Sunday night. Of those new converts being embraced and welcomed into the body of Christ.

[3:12] That body that just moments before had committed themselves to serving them, praying for them, and helping watch over their souls for the building up and growth and grace so that Christ will be glorified in his church.

That's what we promised to do for them. They were welcomed into that community of believers.

And they have that now. They're surrounded by a body that's willing to do those very things to serve them and pray for them and help watch over their souls.

They're not alone walking through this path of this life. That's something I want to be a part of. A body. A community. A community. And it should be that way for the rest of their walk.

Those ones that were baptized. Not just the Sunday night after the service when you embrace them and receive them. But for the rest of their days, I hope you all, you committed to doing it. Pray for them. And watch over their souls.

And they'll do the same for us. Which they committed to do. Two are better than one. Because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up.

[4:15] But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Also, if the two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4, 9-12. That's true in life in general. It wasn't meant to be lived alone. Adam needed a helper.

It wasn't good for him to be alone. And it's true in the Christian life in particular. As creatures made in the image of God, part of that image that we reflect is the communion and fellowship and community that God himself enjoys within the Godhead, within the Trinity.

We are to reflect that. And that doesn't all of a sudden change when we get to the need for change and growth and grace and sanctification in our lives.

We don't all of a sudden say, well, I don't want anybody to know about my sin and my struggles.

That would be embarrassing. That would hurt my pride. And so my sanctification, I'm going to have to go it alone. I don't want anybody else to help me because I don't want them to know.

[5:20] And I don't need anybody else. Just me and my Bible and I'll be okay. Well, the whole Christian life, not just parts of it, are designed to be lived together with brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we've been saying that change happens through a person, through Jesus, but Jesus often uses other people in our lives to help accomplish that change. And as we continue our study of Tim Lane and Paul Tripp's book, *How People Change*, we want to consider today the community nature of that change.

How it requires a body of Christ, not just a lone believer, to be growing in grace. In some ways, this chapter just fleshes out what we've committed to as members of Grace Fellowship Church.

Go back and read through those membership commitments. Or if you've been in the membership class recently, you know some of the things that we emphasize. But let me read you one of the commitments we make. To do together as a body of Christ.

Every member agrees to be willing to serve the local body of Christ. According to his natural talents, spiritual gifts, and God-given responsibilities. The members must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another.

[6:28] So that they may be better able to pray for one another. Love, comfort, and encourage one another. And help one another materially as necessity may require. That's from our Constitution.

If you're a member here, you made that commitment. You agreed to do that. To cultivate acquaintance with one another. And to be a blessing to one another.

In our memory verses this time, what are they about? One anothering. If there's not another to one another, then you can't one another. And so you need a body of Christ to be able to do that.

To do these things together. And these verses assume that the Christian life is not to be lived alone. And it won't be easy on your handout there. You see that there's attention, there's challenge, and there's blessing.

There's risk and reward. It's clear that God wants us to live together as Christians. Why instituted the church? And the blessings that come from that body of Christ.

[7:30] And from walking the path to glory together. Those blessings are undeniable. But it's also true that with great blessings, such an arrangement will bring some trouble along the way. As long as sinners are involved.

As long as sinners are walking closely together and rubbing up against each other on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. Having close relationships with people and encouraging one another along the way.

That's going to bring some bumps in the road. Because we're going to sin against one another. We're going to hurt one another in those relationships. And so it will bring great trouble. And this quote is on your handout.

At one level we want friendships. At another level we don't want them. In creation we were made to live in community. But because of the fall we tend to run from the very friendships we need.

Quite often our longing for them is tainted by sin. We pursue them only as long as they satisfy our own desires and needs. We have a love-hate relationship with relationships.

[8:28] And so it's going to take great effort. I'm just going to go right ahead to that next quote on your handout there. Meaningful relationships are often avoided. They require work. Sacrifice.

Humility. And selflessness. While the idea of loving another person taps into something inherently human. It also exposes our sinful self-centeredness. And you know how this works.

You've had a really long day. Kids have challenged you. You're behind on your housework. You're very tired. And the phone rings. And it's a friend. Someone who needs your help at that moment. Someone that you have a relationship with. And they are in need. And they need someone to listen to them. And encourage them. And point them to Christ. Not to indulge their whining. Not to gossip with them. But they genuinely need help.

And encouragement. And that would be fine some other day. But today? You simply don't have time for it today. I don't have the encouragement. I need you to encourage me.

[9:27] I don't have any to give today. And it gets messy. And it gets difficult. And why was it that you signed up to deliver a meal to that family in need? Today. Of all days.

You don't have time for it. And you come to church looking forward to being fed and nourished. You just want a break after your long week. And you are. You're fed and you're nourished. And you're just soaking it up.

And you're walking towards the back of the sanctuary. And you see that person coming. Someone that you have a relationship with. And you think. Oh. I just can't do it today.

Everything they say is going to be bad. It's going to be negative. And I just found my encouragement and my comfort that we. I just. I can't. And you run. The other way. Because relationships are messy.

And growing together in grace with one another is messy sometimes. And you're thankful for the relationship with that person. But you just wish that you didn't have to deal with it today.

[10:22] And then there's the friendship that you've poured time and energy into again and again. Only to be sinned against badly. And hurt badly in that relationship. And you say.

Is it really worth it? Wouldn't it be easier to go through this life alone? Without all of the problems that these relationships are going to bring me. And these same authors.

Tim Lane and Paul Tripp have a book called Relationships. A Mess Worth Making. And I would recommend it to you. If you've read it. It's profitable. He takes some of these principles and applies it specifically to relationships.

But they are worth making. It's how God has designed us. It's how he's made us to function together. And on the other hand. While there's challenge. There's also great blessing. Our hope for change is not a purely individual matter.

And though that sometimes may seem better to us for the reasons that we've said. Just me and my Bible. And nobody needs to know about my struggles. That's not how God has designed it.

[11:20] He uses other people to be a channel of blessing. And of his grace flowing to us through them. We need them. And you remember when we finished. No, that's not how it is.

I don't need other people. You remember when we finished up this study on 2 Timothy. Go back and read the last chapter. The last part of it. And Paul is writing. He's talking about different people. And how they've helped him. And been a blessing. And how he needs others to come and help him now. And we saw that Paul had a need for companionship. And he had a need for people to help him in the ministry. And he had physical needs.

And he talks about how people met those needs. And how other people failed to meet those needs. But Paul. The great apostle Paul. Didn't live in isolation. He said, I'm Paul. I don't need all you people. He needed them.

He walked with them. And they were a great help and blessing to them. But he was burned too. He was hurt by some people that he had had a close relationship with. But great blessing came to him.

[12:17] And so maybe you need help killing some particular sin. You need to love Jesus more and you're sinless. You need to see what God's word says about your sin. But you also need the grace of God to point you to those things.

And to his grace. And that grace comes through God's people often. Change is something God intends his people to experience together.

It's a corporate goal. What God does in individuals is part of a larger story of redemption that involves all of God's people through the ages. That is the context in which personal change takes place.

We need each other to grow in grace. To change. So there's challenge and there's blessing. But let's talk for a moment about God himself and what he's done for us so that that can be possible. God lives, we mentioned, in communion with himself. Perfectly so. The Father, Son, and Spirit enjoying that communion together. But we aren't perfect.

[13:15] Because of sin, we long to find all of our hope for relationship in other human beings. If we don't get what we want out of those relationships, we often do hurtful, sinful things.

Our approach to relationships is often self-centered. And that's going to require, if we are always looking for what's in it for us, or we're considering it from our own pride and we don't want other people to know about our struggles, then that's going to require a radical change.

Something's got to happen with our selfish, self-centered heart before we can rightly relate to other people. And that's a work that only the Holy Spirit can do. We call it regeneration. He gives us a new heart.

A heart that isn't focused on self, but focused on worshiping God and loving men. The two greatest commandments that are given to us. And so notice with me, we're here in Ephesians 4, the first six verses.

And see if you can see a call to unity, a call to walk together, and the foundation for that unity. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

[14:19] Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. You see how we're told to pursue unity in the Spirit with humility and gentleness and patience and bearing with one another in love. And that acknowledges the challenge that we talked about.

It's not going to be easy. It's going to require patience. It's going to require gentleness. It's going to require putting up with each other in love. It assumes that we're going to sin against each other.

It assumes that it will be hard work. But then it lays the foundation for that unity. There's one body. That's the church. There's one Spirit. That's the Holy Spirit. One hope of your calling.

[15:16] There's one Lord. That's Jesus. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all. You see the triune God there is the foundation for our unity together. He communes together with Himself and we are able to with one another when He changes us.

And so what does God do for us so that we can live like Him? So that we can enjoy that community? If we hadn't fallen into sin, we could do it perfectly. And it wouldn't be a problem.

And we wouldn't need to bear with one another because we wouldn't sin against one another. But the fact is we are sinners. And so what has God done for us sinners to enable us to enjoy communion with Him and with one another?

Well, so that we might enjoy that, God disrupted His own perfect communion with His Son, Christ, at the cross. Interrupting what until then had been perfect love and unity and fellowship.

And so Jesus cries out at the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because that communion had been broken.

[16:23] We should have been punished for our sins, but God turned His back on His Son and punished Him in our place. Notice the quote there on your handout, under number two. We were the ones who failed.

Yet the triune God was torn asunder so that we might be united to Him and to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The perfect love, unity, and joy that existed between the Father, Son, and Spirit were demolished for a time for our sake.

This is the ground on which we build all relationships. Every time you're tempted to shun another believer, remember that the Father, Son, and Spirit were torn asunder so that you might be united. When you sin or are sinned against, you are to move toward your sibling in Christ, aware that Father, Son, and Spirit were torn asunder so that you might be reconciled.

If we approach relationships in the body of Christ with that in view, it would transform our friendships. So instead of holding grudges, that person sinned against me, I'm not going to talk to them.

We remember that Jesus suffered to do away with that kind of division and fighting and arguing. And He died that we might be united to Him and to one another. And so as image bearers of God, we're to live in community as He does.

[17 : 36] And we can only do that because of what He's done for us, transforming us, giving us a new heart. And so let's talk for a few moments then about God's family, the privilege of being part of the family of God, being brothers and sisters in Christ, a child of God.

There's a sense of belonging there because we've been adopted into His family. When God justifies us by His grace through faith in Christ, He doesn't leave us in the courtroom. He brings us, as it were, into the living room.

He makes us His children. He makes us His sons and daughters. And a lot of times I know that I'm tempted to think about that in an individualistic sort of way. I'm a son of God.

I have a place in His house. I have the Holy Spirit that guarantees I'm going to share in the inheritance as a son. I'm His child. And I enjoy the benefits of a father and son relationship with my God.

And I think of it in terms of me. And maybe you do too, but are you the only child that God has adopted? Well, of course not. And you know what that means?

[18 : 41] It means that you have brothers and sisters in your family. Brothers and sisters that live in the same house as you. And you know that if you've had siblings that that brings challenge and blessing, doesn't it?

There's challenges as you rub up against each other. And as you fight over time in the bathroom and toys and whatever else. And the parents' attention. But you know that there's great blessing that comes from it too.

There's an older sibling to watch over you and protect you on your first day of school. There's a sibling there to be a friend. To enjoy time with. To play with. When no one else is around.

There's challenges and blessings that come from having siblings in our families. And so it is in the family of God. Our salvation connects us to God and His people.

This is on your handout. Our salvation connects us to God and His people. It is not an either or but a both and arrangement. It is not just in heaven that we will be united around the throne of God.

[19 : 44] Our personal relationship with Christ unites us to believers now. And so we're walking this road together as children of God.

As brothers and sisters. And we're to help one another along the way. You're familiar with Romans 12, 1 and 2. I'm used to thinking about that in individualistic terms. But listen to it for a moment.

Therefore, I urge you. And that's plural. You. You all. Brothers. That's plural. And view of God's mercy. To offer your bodies. That's plural.

As living sacrifices. That sounds plural but it's not. The NIV makes it a plural but it's a singular. I urge you all. To present your bodies.

You brothers. To present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Many different ones of you. But working together to present a singular sacrifice to God.

[20 : 38] This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform. That's plural. You all do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. But be transformed. That's plural. By the renewing of your mind.

Then you all. Plural. Will be able to test and improve what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will. And we think. Boy I need to. I need to. Transform my. My mind. I need to renew my thinking.

And not be conformed to the world. And we think about it individualistically. Don't we? But this says. You all. Do it together. So that you can offer one sacrifice to God. We're to be helping one another in that process.

We go through it together. All sorts of hindrances to that. Things are going to come up. Things are going to challenge us on that. And make us want to back away from that. But we must do it together. What excuses do you make?

Oh. I know that I'm supposed to have these relationships. But I don't want to. What excuses?

There's the busyness of life. Just keeps relationships distant and casual.

[21 : 34] I don't have time to invest that kind of energy. I just don't have time. Too busy. You ever use that? To avoid those messy relationships that can be so profitable. Or. Sort of the opposite.

A total immersion in friendships that are activity and happiness based. You just do it for what you get out of it. You want to have a good time together. You don't really want to grow in grace. You don't want to be challenged or to challenge other people.

You just want to have fun. So you're investing time in the wrong sorts of relationships. Or. Your conscious avoidance of close relationships is too scary or too messy. You've been burned before. And you don't want to be burned again. And so you just isolate yourself. You back away. And withdraw. Too scary. Too messy. So you avoid it. Is that your excuse? One way ministry driven friendships.

In which you always minister to others. But never allow others to minister to you. You're always serving, serving, serving. But you're too proud to let anybody help you. Or the opposite.

[22 : 32] Relationships where you're always receiving. And you like it. Because people do good things for you. And you just absorb it. But you never do anything for anyone else. You absorbed in the wrong kind.

Or the wrong emphases in your relationships. All of one thing and none of another. Or maybe it's that private, independent, just me and God approach to the Christian life. I don't need anyone else. I've got God.

We saw Paul needed others. And so do you. All sorts of excuses we can make. And it will take work. We will have to make time for these kinds of friendships to emerge and grow.

We will have to be realistic too. Close relationships make it more likely that you will sin against someone. Or that someone will sin against you. There will need to be times of confession and forgiveness. There will be times when you will need to serve someone.

Even though you feel your lack of resources. There will also be times when you will be served. That may not sound like a challenge. But if you're proud. It's the last thing you want. These are the very reasons why community is such a big part of God's plan to transform us into the image of Christ.

[23 : 38] And then this is on your handout. Partway through 3A there. Living in community pushes us to die to ourselves. There will be times when loving others and allowing others to serve and love us will feel like death.

But this is the pathway to real life in Christ. It takes a work of God's grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in redemptive relationships shows us our need for change and helps bring it about.

You need church. You need the family of God. You've been adopted into it. And enjoy its benefits. It's not just a negative thing of work. You receive great blessing through these things.

You're part of the family of God. So there's adoption. There's a sense of belonging in this family. There's love. You receive the love of God through other people.

There's those who have experienced God's love. We saw this last Sunday morning. Those who have experienced that love were to show it to others. 1 John 4.11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[24 : 48] And just before our passage we read in Ephesians, exhorting us to unity, Paul has prayed that we would have power to know the unknowable, vast love of Christ.

And the greater awareness we have of that love God has shown to us in Christ, the better equipped and ready we will be to show love to one another. I need love.

And you need love. And one of the ways God gives us that love is through the people that you're sitting next to this morning. And we can be thankful for that.

And so in a church family like this one, someone's going through deep waters. The decline of their health. Employment trouble.

The loss of a loved one. But they don't have to endure that trouble alone as part of this wonderful, glorious body of Christ. They're surrounded by brothers and sisters who have been loved of God and should be.

[25 : 49] And I see it in you all are eager to love one another. Maybe some who have gone through similar trials of their own and have come out on the other side take the comfort with which they have been comforted and comfort that person who's struggling.

And that is a demonstration of God's love. They stand ready to comfort. And so we mourn with those who mourn. And then later on that person is able to show that same love to someone else in the body who is going through a similar struggle.

If you isolate yourself from the body of Christ, you say, church, I'll come and hear the preaching. I really don't want all of this relationship. You're missing out on God's love being shown to you through these people.

This is on your handout again. When we are in meaningful relationships with one another, we each bring a unique perspective and experience to our knowledge of Christ's love. Together, our understanding and experience of God's infinite love becomes fuller, stronger, and deeper. Not only are we strengthened in our individual growth and grace, but the entire body is built up by a fuller sense of the power and hope of God's grace. You need to be loved.

[27:00] And I'm not going back and throwing away everything that we said at the beginning. My only problem is people don't love me enough and people just love me before all my problems will go away. You still need change. You still need work. But part of that is love.

And you need it. And you receive it in the church. And then, here's where it begins to rub against us and against our pride. We need one another for purification and growth and grace.

For change. To pursue holiness. To pursue the growth that God wants to see in our lives. We need each other in that process. You know Titus 2.11.

Think of it, again, not just in individualistic terms, but in corporate terms. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness.

And I think when I read that, I need to say no to ungodliness. Me. You notice it teaches us to say no to ungodliness. And worldly passions. And to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

[28:00] While we wait for the blessed hope. The glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness. And to purify for himself a people.

Not a person. A people. To purify. To make holy. To make clean for himself. A people. A group of people. A body of believers. That are his very own.

Eager to do what is good. The ultimate goal of God's grace is an active, healthy, unified body of believers. A full-fledged family. Freed from sin and its slavery.

Not just a holy person over here. And one over here. And one over here. But a body. It's pursuing holiness together. Well, how do we do that? We've got these brothers and sisters around us.

Well, they come to us, don't they, sometimes? And they do it in humility. And they do it in love. And they do it with gentleness. But they point out sin in our lives. And what a blessing it is to be committed to a body of believers that's agreed together to do that very thing.

[29:08] Again, go back and take a look at those expectations of members that you committed to when you joined this church. And you'll see that part of it is coming to one another. When you've sinned against one another.

When you've sinned against them or you think someone has sinned against you. You go to that person. The two parties should meet in the middle to make it right. Or maybe somebody's going on blindly in their sin.

And that's part of the beauty of the body of Christ. We have blind spots sometimes, don't we?

Things that we don't see or don't want to see in our lives. And somebody comes alongside us and says, Aaron, you know, I really think you're struggling with this.

And they're not coming with a log, a beam, and they're taking that out of their eye. And they're working on the log that's in my eye. And they do it in gentleness. Brothers, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in gentleness when they're caught in sin.

And what a blessing to be part of a body that's committed to do that. I need you to grow in grace and holiness. And you need all of us to be growing in grace and holiness.

[30:12] And so we have those things in our church constitution for a reason. To commit together. To help one another grow in holiness and grace.

We've got the responsibility and privilege of confessing our sins to one another, as we heard from the book of James. Being transparent and willing to be challenged and encouraged by our brothers and sisters as we share our struggles together.

You don't get that when you're walking this road alone. We have the privilege of exercising the various gifts that God has given us for the good of the brethren. Serving one another in love.

That's why we're a body and we need each other. The eye can't say to the foot, I don't need you.

Lop off the foot. Well, then you can't walk. You can't look around and say, I don't need that person

in the body of Christ.

No, we're a body. Each part is needed. You have something to contribute and you need the contributions of others. We're members of one body. Living stones build up into a spiritual house. [31:12] And if a member of the body or a stone is missing, then the body or the house isn't whole. It's not complete. We need one another. It's how God designed it and it's for our good.

We're here in Ephesians 4. Look at verse 7. After he exhorts them to unity together and he gives them the foundation of it. He says, but to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Each one has received a measure of grace as Christ has measured it out to us. And then look at verses 11-13. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attending to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

And then look at verse 16. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

And that word it is measured. Christ apportioned. He measured. Gave us a measure of grace. And we each do our measured, our apportioned work in accordance with the grace that Christ has given us.

[32:26] I need you to serve me and you need me to serve you and everyone else around you. Change is a community project.

That's why we have a body. And so just the fact that we're gathered together here today is a testament that you all are doing this.

That you're serving one another. That you're growing in grace. That you're loving one another. When you walked in this morning, this room was clean.

And somebody did that. Somebody came in and picked up your Sunday school papers and your dirty Kleenex and your candy wrappers and vacuumed. And so when you come in, you're not distracted by those things this morning.

And someone came in and they made these chairs into perfectly straight rows. Or almost perfectly straight rows. So that we're not bumping into them as we're going to find our seat.

[33:30] And there was water waiting for me here this morning. And I'm thankful for that. And that just appears there every Sunday.

Somebody does that. And I'll get to how this is helping us grow in grace in a minute. But there's lights on this morning. Because somebody paid the bills. And we have heat this morning. Because somebody in the body paid the bills. And we're going to worship together in a few minutes. And we're going to sing. And somebody prepared to lead worship.

And somebody prepared a message to preach. And people here have prayed that God would bless this day. And without those prayers, the day wouldn't be a blessing to you.

Somebody has prayed that the Word would be good for you today. That it would be profitable for you. And God will take that Word and He'll bless it. Because somebody's prayed for that. And we'll sing together when we worship.

[34:25] And there's a pianist here today who's practiced. So that we'll be able to sing together well. So that our singing won't be a distraction. But we'll be able to offer it up as a sacrifice of praise.

Without distraction. And we'll fellowship together over lunch. And people have worked to make that food. And that lemonade that we drink.

That doesn't just make itself. Somebody has to make that. That happens. And somebody had to set up all those tables and chairs down there. And then we could say the same thing for the afternoon service. And then it's going to all happen again next week.

And it doesn't even have to be a spiritual gift that we're talking about. But when it serves the body of Christ. So that we can come and worship. And benefit from hearing the Word as it's preached. And when we can do the very thing over lunch that we're talking about today.

Showing love to one another. And bearing one another's burdens. And challenging one another. Where we see sin in one another's lives. Then it is a gift that God has given you. That you're able to serve the church in that way.

[35:23] Even if it's shoveling the sidewalks. When we have a snowy day. That enables people to come and worship together. And to receive the grace of God. You need each other.

I need you. We need each other. And if we go it alone. We won't have those blessings. You say well I've been struggling with sin for a long time. And discouragement. Nobody's helped me. I'm going to give up on the body.

Have you gotten close enough to anyone in the body. That they can see that you're struggling.

Have you told anyone. And asked for help. We don't always see what we should see.

But we're a community. So let's live like it. And then just briefly. One other last note. Of something that we do together as God's family.

And that is partake of the sacraments. We do it individually. But we do it as a community. Baptism is an ordinance for the individual who's trusted in Christ. But the baptism takes place in the presence of the people of God.

[36 : 22] And at the time when that person is baptized. They're joined to the body. When 3,000 were saved and were baptized on the day of Pentecost. They were added to their number. Acts 2.41 And we could see something similar from 1 Corinthians 12.13.

We're all baptized by one spirit into one body. Again glad that I wasn't baptized into a life of solitude as a Christian. We saw that clearly last week. And then those believers thus joined together.

Partake together of the Lord's Supper. We call it communion. Because we commune with God. And with one another. And you can look at those passages. We don't have time this morning. But 1 Corinthians 11.28-29.

About a man examining himself. And that's something you have to do. Prepare yourself to come to the Lord's table. But also. Because there is one loaf. We who are many are one body. For we all partake of one loaf.

These things are means of grace. Grace. And I need God's grace if I'm going to grow in grace. I need the means of grace if I'm going to become holy. And these sacraments.

[37 : 25] What a blessed thing they are. They're not something that are just for us as individuals. We do them together. We partake corporately. We grow in grace together. And so if we're going to succeed in this business of change.

We need each other. And this is on your handout. God's work of change has relationships at the core. They are a necessary means. And a wonderful goal. When we pursue individual spiritual growth through redemptive relationships.

We have a powerful combination that beautifies the bride of Christ as she prepares to meet her bridegroom. So don't try to walk this road alone. You need each other.

I need you. Thank you for the way that you do love and serve one another. For the way that you challenge one another. If you want to be challenged. Do review those expectations of church members.

And remember what you've committed to do together as a body of Christ. And next week we're going to really dive in then to the nitty gritty of how people change.

[38 : 23] It's going to give us a paradigm for how to look at life. And we're going to see that there's heat. There's trials that come in our life. And then there's thorns. The bad fruit that those trials produce.

But then there's the cross that corrects our perspective on those difficult trials. And then there's good fruit that comes when we view those trials through the cross. So there's heat. Thorns. Cross. And fruit. And really the rest of the book is going to be spent fleshing out sort of that paradigm. That will give us a way to look at life. And that by God's grace he'll use to help us to change.

To become more like his son Jesus. As we walk this road to glory together. As the body of Christ.

So may God help us to do that. I'll try to leave time for questions and discussion next week.

I have a bunch to cram in today. But hopefully next week we'll have more of that. So may God bless us and we're dismissed.