

Pic of Ruby Bridges.

Anybody know who this is?

This is Ruby Bridges. She lived in New Orleans with her Dad and Mom in 1960.

That year- segregated all-white schools in New Orleans were mandated by the government to integrate. To allow black students to attend the schools.

But, the folks who didn't want it to happen came up with a plan. We'll give any black child that wants to get into the school a test that's so difficult, it's almost impossible for them to pass- then they could say- we aren't stopping integration- the kids just couldn't pass the entrance exam.

So 165 children took the test.

Only 5 passed.

One of those really smart kids was Ruby...so some folks came and knocked on her door and told her Mom and Dad- you have an opportunity to give your daughter a first class education- even send her to college.

Ruby's dad was hesitant- because he knew how much this would put his daughter in the hateful, racist crossfire happening at the time. But her Mom was determined. She knew that past the extreme difficulty- there was a potential for a life-changing future for Ruby.

So they enrolled Ruby in William Frantz Elementary School.

Pic with Marshalls

In November of 1960, Ruby, surrounded by 4 US Marshalls- as a 6 year old 2nd grader -walked up a sidewalk filled with protestors and into the school- the first black child to attend a formerly all white school in the south.

At that point, fearful and hateful people immediately took their children out of school. (Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference in those two- and they usually show up places together).

So Ruby, was left by herself- almost.

There was one teacher that jumped at the chance to teach Ruby. Barbara Henry. For the entire year Ruby was literally and figuratively...in a class all by herself.

In fact- neither Ruby nor Ms. Henry- missed a single day of school that year.

Talk about people showing up for each other...shew.

How many of those days was it raining? How many of those days were they tired? How many of those days did Ms. Henry have a headache or sore throat— or Ruby's mom need her help with her 4 younger siblings at home?

That doesn't even begin to comment on the external pressure of hateful people- who thought SOMEHOW they were doing the right thing by making threats to preserve their fearful racist way of life.

And yet Ms. Henry and Ruby persevered all the way through.

its actually pretty wild to hear Ruby as an adult tell you what she was thinking. (she is still alive today, btw)

First- she said that after she took that test to get into the school and was told that making this move would help her later to go to college- she actually thought that her test results GOT her into college. She thought she was going from the first grade straight to college!

After she left the first day without doing any school work she thought “Man, college is easy!”

Second, as she made her way through the protesting crowds- she didn't even know they were protestors. They were in New Orleans- so she just thought it was another Mardi Gras parade!

But after that first day- the crowds began to get more angry, more filled with vitriol and violent threats. They were chanting racist epithets... even holding up a black baby doll in a coffin. For an entire year Ruby and her family had to be protected by US Marshalls.

Robert Coles was a psychologist who volunteered to support and counsel Ruby and her family through the school year.

One day Ms Henry noticed that Ruby's mouth was moving as she walked through the crowds with the Marshalls to get into the school. ...she was concerned and asked Dr. Coles to check into it.

Coles: “Who were you talking to, Ruby?”

Ruby: “I was talking to God and praying for the people in the street,”

Coles: “Why were you doing that, Ruby?”

Ruby: "Well, because I wanted to pray for them. Don't you think they need praying for?"

Coles: "Where did you learn that?"

Ruby: "From my mommy and daddy and from the minister at church. I pray every morning [when I come to school] and every afternoon when I go home."

Coles: "But Ruby, those people are so mean to you. You must have some other feelings besides just wanting to pray for them."

Ruby: "No, I just keep praying for them and hope God will be good to them. . . . I always pray the same thing. 'Please, dear God, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing.'

Good Life Series Slide

Spiritual Connection
Deep Relationships
Transcendent Purpose

Not easily separated

Where do Deep Relationships and Transcendent Purpose come together in Spiritual Connection with God?- **The Church.**

Title Slide: "Committed & Connected: How the Church Thinks, Feels, & Acts Together"- Romans 12:3-21

they are definitely coming together in the Ruby Bridges story. Look at all the people involved that had to make hard choices and depend on one another.

Ruby's parents Lucille & Abon Bridges.
her teacher Barbara Henry
US Marshall Charles Burkes and the other Marshals
Ruby herself
Ruby's church & local community that would daily stand outside her house to protect her

Romans 12:3-21

3 For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. 4 Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, 5 in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. 6 According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. 11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But

If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

For in so doing

you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.

21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

1) The church stays connected like a body & commits to one other like family, because we are one.

Spiritual Connection & Deep Relationships are necessary for long term joy. Crucial to the Good Life.

At the very core of who you are, introvert or extrovert, your soul longs to be bonded together with God and with other people. The Church is the family of God. Take a look.

v 4-5

Paul writes to the church in Rome

“You are a body- where you are all individual parts...but working together to one end- to make a big deal out of Jesus.”

v 3-

Grace- Whatever you are called to be in the world and in the church-
Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.

What does Grace have to do with that?-

Grace is God's undeserved favor.

On one hand- it lifts you up- he thought of me- to call me up! To give me purpose. To give me a desire and a calling!

Now- if I don't think that through- I start looking down on other parts of the body that don't have my calling.

BUT- GRACE also humbles me. I didn't deserve this. I didn't earn my spot. I'm not more righteous than the person next to me.

I'm humbled.

when I realize that the church isn't just to supposed to be an arm or a leg- ...and (Paul addresses this in his letters to the Corinthian church)- everybody has role to play.

God has literally distributed a measure of faith/ of belief and loyalty to each one.

In the age of Expressive Individualism- we live in a “I'M THIS KIND OF BODY PART AND BECAUSE I CARE ABOUT WHAT I CARE ABOUT AND YOU DON'T CARE ENOUGH YOU DON'T HAVE THE LOYALTY AND FAITH I HAVE”

You take the right kind of action! You've been given grace to be connected to God and also a measure of trust and loyalty-

EXAMPLE

“Coat Drive”- You lead the coat drive!

“I don't have time”

So its not that you want a coat drive- its you want to be a part of a church that does coat drives.

v 5-

When you lead- remember we belong to each other.

v8-

Leading- With Diligence- Zeal (Hopefulness, determination, commitment
Acts of Mercy- with Cheerfulness (It's not just doing the right thing- It's about doing it with Joy- which goes back to being connected to God while you do it. Knowing it's by grace...a calling-

Think about the curiosity you have for other members callings. and what that does to the church's unity.

Romans 12:10

tells us to love one another like brothers and sisters. so we aren't just a body- we are a family.

want you to pay attention to the verb that starts this verse. It's the word philostorgos (Fee LO- STOR gos).

You might have a translation that says "be devoted." That's what philostorgos is. It's a devotion. A commitment. A kind of love you have for someone that is, well, just because of their relationship to you. Just because they are who they are.

Why do new parents look at their baby and immediately fall in love? Why don't they first evaluate whether the child will be athletic, or good-looking? Why don't they have their genes tested to see if they will be smart enough to make a lot of money? I'll tell you why.

Philostorgos. I love my sons, because they are my sons. Why do brothers who rarely get along defend each other in public? Philostorgos.

See, philostorgos says "I have a commitment, a responsibility, a devotion to you and regardless of what you do or don't do, I love you, because you are my family." It's probably the least romantic idea of love you have ever heard of, but you've never seen anything so beautiful.

Ever watched a mom or dad hold their newborn baby? Ever seen the first time adoptive parents embrace their child? There is no performance necessary. It's not a trial period to see if mom and baby like each other.

v9

Did you see verse 9? Let love be genuine. Let love be without hypocrisy. Let it be without pretense, without a mask on. Let your sacrificial, lay down your life love be so pure. There isn't even really a reason for it. It's just love. That's philostorgos. That's authentic love. Sounds great right?

Until you think a little deeper about family. With family, you don't only lose the ability to be selective about who you love, you also lose your right to privacy. When you are a part of a family, you have very few private moments. In fact, parents in the room, do

you ever go to the bathroom not because nature is calling, but because you just need a private moment? That's what it's like to live in a family. Everybody is in your business, because when you're family, your business is their business. Let me put it to you like this.

A family is different than a club. Say you're a part of a dance club. And every Tuesday night you go to your dance club and you Rumba, and you Salsa, and you Cha-Cha. All evening long you are talking about moving, grooving, dipping and ducking. Then one of your fellow dancers looks over and you and says, "Do you really think you should be sleeping with your girlfriend?" "I don't know if it's such a good idea to spend 20% of your paycheck on a Powerball ticket." You'd say, "What is this? 'Dancing with the Stars', cuz I'm feeling judged right about now. Stay outta my business. You do you, and I'll do me."

See you don't have philostorgos in a dance club, a stamp collecting club, a rock-climbing club, or a sports team. In all of those places you are bound to people because of their abilities or hobbies. But in a family, you are devoted to one another because you share the same family identity. The same Spiritual Connection to God.

You can see in verse 9 that we are hating evil together. It's plural. We are holding on to what is good together. Plural. See, as a part of the family of God, my business, to a degree, is your business. Because we are pursuing good and forsaking evil together. That means accountability. Because I care about you as a family member.

Back to 1)

Lets talk about Finding the Good Life.

From Jack Kerouac "On the Road"- Disconnect from people. Get up and leave to find yourself. Bring random people into your life that you meet. Unrooted. Uncommitted.

That blossomed in "Eat. Pray. Love."- Elizabeth Gilbert.
To connect spiritually- disconnect relationally. Cut off all those who have been holding you back. Leave and go find yourself. Go experience things alone.

But understanding who God is and who you are doesn't put you center stage. It actually comes through loving and serving. It comes from being an important part of a body- a real part of a family.

You don't discover who you are by removing yourself from other people. You find out who you are in the context of family relationships, not in the absence of them. You learn good and evil in the context of family love- philostorgos.

That's why you'll find somewhere between 60-100 "one another" commands in the New Testament, because it matters how we treat each other. It matters that we outdo

one another in showing honor. It matters that we forgive one another and push one another to good while we discourage one another from evil.

See, a Christian that is disconnected from the church is like a baby disconnected from his mother? Is it possible? Yes. Is it healthy? No. It's deadly. Babies need mommas and christians need the church.

I need to warn you, though. This is not easy. This "being a family thing." As you can see, it can feel terribly intrusive. But so does open heart surgery. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't have it.

2) When the church thinks, feels and acts together, we show the world what God thinks and feels and how he acts.

Something that is so beautiful about the Ruby Bridges story is watching everyone play their part.

Ruby, her parents, US MARSHALL Charles Burkes-

There were some people who acted just to do the right thing.

Ruby's mom & Dad weren't thinking about the big picture- as much as others were.

They wanted something good for their daughter. A better future.

Charles Burkes said- He knew he was called to protect Ruby.

In fact- Ruby says she didn't even realize she played such a big historic role in Civil rights movement until she was 17 and saw this picture.

PIC- NORMAN ROCKWELL

"The Problem We All Live With"

But Norman Rockwell saw it. Was moved by it- and used his calling as an artist...and the influence he had in the Saturday Evening Post to paint this for wide release at great risk to his own career and well-being.

Spiritual Connection and Deep relationships- AND ALSO- you need Transcendent purpose.

To live the good life- deeply happy- you have to know that what you do matters. That's what Norman Rockwell did for Ruby Bridges. He painted a picture that showed her all along she hadn't just gone to school for her own good- but God was doing something with her life that transcended her own personal good.

Back to 2)

The church is called to be a kind of Norman Rockwell painting “The Problem we All live with”

We are the body of Christ- ambassadors- giving people a taste of what Jesus thinks and feels and how he acts.

And this is why its so important that when you realize you are called to follow Jesus- that you know he is the one who controls how we respond to our feelings...the way we think...and how we act.

There are a lot of feelings in these verses.

v 9

Detest what is evil.

v 10-

love deeply

V11-12 &15

Don't be lazy in eagerness. Be excited about serving the Lord.

That word zeal gives a word picture of being so hyped up about serving the LORD that your heart is boiling.

Verse 12 & 15 tell us to rejoice and weep with each other.

Being the church is not some stoic, robotic obedience devoid of feeling. These are deep emotions. How can you rejoice and weep and boil over with excitement without emotion? You can't.

AND- Christianity is also about thinking. It's about recognizing the truth and thinking it through.

v 3

Think sensibly.- be reasonable- Sober-minded- even keeled.

v 17

You see in verse 17 where we are told to “give careful thought” to do what is honorable in the sight of all. That word means to plan, to think ahead of time about how you are going to act in a given situation, so that your feelings don't dictate what you do in the moment, but the truth does. And look where this command to think is given, right in the middle of some of the deepest feels you have.

Do you see that? Don't repay evil for evil, instead think ahead of time about what is honorable, in the sight of everyone. In other words, make sure you are expressing the

truth about who God is, not necessarily how you feel. Let love be genuine, not show everyone who you are.

See, there is no easier time to let your emotions guide you than when someone wrongs you or wrongs someone you love. You want to stick it to em. You want to get 'em back. And you feel totally justified.

But that's exactly where the truth has to take over.

v 19-21

Look at Paul right here do the family thing in verse 19-21. He gets in your business, because he loves you. He says, Beloved, people I love friends, don't avenge yourselves. If you do that, you aren't thinking through the truth. See God has said he is going to right every wrong. Remember the truth. You are not God. He is. Your job is not to execute justice, rather, it's to love in the way he has loved you. When you love your enemy the way God loved you when you were his enemy, you'll wake your enemy up to begin feeling the right way about Good and Evil.

That's essentially what it means to heap burning coals on his head. It's like a person is sleep walking and then you wake them up by dumping cold water on their head

Think about it. You ever treated somebody terribly only to have them do something kind for you? It wakes you up from your evil, doesn't it? You stop justifying the evil you did to them, and you get serious about owning it, confessing it, and asking them for forgiveness.

See, when you think about the truth you know, so much so that in the middle of situation where your feelings try to jump in the driver's seat, you start telling your feelings what to do, and when you do that, you'll have your enemies beginning to feel in such a way that they think actually begin to think about the truth.

And when we are doing that together, loving our enemies, doing good to those outside the church, living according to the truth of God's word and not our individual feelings in the moment, that's when verse 16 happens.

v 16

Verse 16 starts out as a very 'feely' verse doesn't it? I mean "live in harmony" It sounds like that 70s Coke commercial. "I'd like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony"

But that's not what this is. That phrase "live in harmony" you know what it means? It literally means "think together" It means "think the same thing." This flies in the face of expressive individualism that says "let your freak flag fly". Tell everyone what your individual thoughts are.

That's why the rest of this verse says, don't be haughty. Don't think you are better than other people.

If you live your life in the body of Christ like you are an individual that sets your own agenda and determines your own meaning of good and evil, with no input from the Word of God or the church, you cannot possibly live in harmony, and you will never associate with people you think are “doing it wrong” or trying to change you.

See, the apostle Paul is saying right here, the church is a family that thinks together about how they are going to feel together and about how they are going to treat each other, and act in the world.

And that means that you have to be together behind a vision. You cannot obey Scripture with just you and Jesus. You cannot get behind a vision that the church agrees on without a church.

It's very popular today to talk about our personal relationship with Jesus and how you just don't like being a part of a church because there are so many hypocrites, and they aren't doing things your way. And people are in your business, and they don't know you.

But that is exactly what Paul says you can't do here. He says that's your family and you don't up and leave your family. Instead, you consider others more important than you. You set a vision together that is informed by truth and you get excited about it and then “together” you serve the LORD. You can't do that by yourself. You can't do that if you just get together with friends every few weeks and have dinner. You can't do that by just talking theology in a coffee shop or a cigar parlor. You can only do it among a people who are committed, devoted to each other, and submitting together to the truth.

And BOY- are we not gonna like each other some time.

Can you name a time where you didn't like your mom or dad. Where you didn't like your kids. Where you were at odds- but the PHILOSTOGOS- the deeper devoted love brought you back together to reconcile?

John 17:23

I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me

Do you see it? When we are one, when we love with philostorgos and feel with brotherly affection and a zeal to serve the Lord and other people, when we define ourselves by being in Christ, rather than black, white, rich, poor, extrovert, introvert Republican, Democrat, or any other way, we don't express our individual selves to the world...we show Jesus' love.

That's why the church is called the body of Christ. When you see me walking up to you in here, you don't think, “Here comes Trevor's legs, arms, elbows, and spleen.” You just think, “Here comes Trevor. I better hide!”

We are a family. We are the body of Christ. That doesn't mean that we all look the same or play the same roles anymore than my legs and spleen do the same thing, but it does mean we define ourselves by being in Christ, not individuals.

Back to 2)

Groups- Community Groups

Here's how we practically work this out at City Church. We don't just gather in here on Sunday's. We gather weekly in homes, in community groups. And our hope is that, over time, we begin to know one another. To know each others needs so that we can obey the command to take care of each others needs and open our homes up to strangers, in hopes they won't be strangers for very long. In these groups, we serve together. And we also encourage people with the truth.

We talk about how we feel, but we also challenge each other with what the truth is. So we actually get where we need to go, instead careen over a cliff. And none of that's easy. None of it really feels good at first.

v 12

That's why verse 12 tells us to be patient and to constantly pray, because if I don't, I'm going to want to give up. Verse 12 tells me to rejoice in hope. Hope means that in the moment, I don't have what I want, but I know it's coming.

So we wait, we pray and we keep reminding one another of what God has promised, perfect peace, all things new. We don't tell each other, "This is how I feel, now stay out of my life." We tell each other, "This is how I feel, I want to quit. I want to leave. So come in and tell me truth"

And in our community groups, we feel together too. When someone is rejoicing, we all rejoice. And when someone weeps, we all weep with them. This is what helps to cement community.

Being with people when they weep is a part of being the body of Christ. I gotta tell you, rejoicing with people when they rejoice might be harder than weeping with people, because it means I might have to celebrate with someone when I really don't feel like it.

It's hard to rejoice when someone in your community group gets pregnant, when you've been trying for years. Or when you are single, and someone else gets married. It's hard to rejoice with others when you are jealous for what they have. But, when you see them as family, not as disconnected individuals, but a part of your body, you tell that jealousy where to go. Back to hell where it was born.

Listen, this doesn't happen the moment you walk in the door. You know what is going to happen the first time you go to a community group? You are going to leave saying "that was weird". Those people are awkward. You are going to want to retreat back to

your house where you can close the garage and lock the door and keep people out of your business.

For God's sake, don't do it. It's suicide. You won't find yourself. You'll just find yourself alone.

You need family and by God's grace, he's giving you one in the church. Don't neglect that grace. The church, this church, is by no means perfect. I've failed you in ways that you don't even know about. But if we come together, letting our love be genuine, hating evil, loving good, and seeing one another as family, we will overcome evil with good and this city won't see us as a bunch of individuals but as the Body of Christ. And lest you think we do this by sheer effort, let me remind you where the strength of this family comes from, and it is most definitely not from within us.

3) When our family blood lets us down, Jesus' blood raises us up.

I know that when I talk about the way a family is supposed to love, for some of you that rings pretty hollow.

Your spouse left you.

Your Dad abused you.

Your Mom was emotionally distant. You aren't talking to your sister.

For many of us, the church family has let us down. We've never really experienced anything like Paul is talking about here. And so, it's hard for you to believe the Bible when it says, "It's good to trust people, and treat them as your family." It's hard to abandon the idea of being your own individual person. It feels safer.

In a way, it is safer. After all, if you don't love, you don't have to be worried about being hurt. But I want you to know today, that God loved you so much, that he hurt and died so you could be his family. See, the Bible is actually about the failure of family. The way your blood let you down.

The Bible is the story of family that failed to give us the unconditional love we long for. It's the story of people who were supposed to love each other, but instead, lived for themselves.

From the very beginning, Adam turns on his wife and blames Eve for his sin as they hide from God. Trying to keep him out of their business. They close the garage door. Then they have kids. Brothers. But they don't have philostogos. Instead, Cain follows his heart and kills his brother Abel out of jealousy. Lot prostitutes his daughters. Ishmael struggles with Isaac, brother & brother. Rachel competes with Leah, sister & sister. Jacob cheats his brother Esau, and Esau tries to hunt him down to kill him. Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers.

Where's the philostorgos? Where's the love? And that's just Genesis.

David is driven into the wilderness by his son Absalom. Amnon rapes his sister Tamar. Abimelech kills his brothers so he can be king

Don't you see? Your family cannot give you the unconditional love your heart is created to receive. In all the ways your blood has let you down, Jesus' blood redeems it all.

When Abel was killed by Cain, God said, "Abel's blood cries out to me from the ground for condemnation" And Cain's punishment was to walk the earth alone. He was driven away from his family. Exiled. Free to express himself as an individual, if you call that freedom.

Hebrews 12:24

Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

But in the New Testament, it says that Jesus' blood speaks a better word than Abel's blood.

Abels blood cried out for Cain's condemnation.

But jesus said "Father forgive them- they don't know what they are doing"

His blood doesn't cry out for you to get what you deserve, but to get what he deserves. The unconditional love a heavenly Father. Grace.

You get spiritual connection- reconciled to God our Father
Deep Relationships- Philostorgos love in the church
Transcendant purpose- Sent out in his name

Good was not overcome by evil, but through Jesus' blood, Evil had been overcome with good.

That happens through ordinary people not expressing themselves as individuals and letting their feelings drive them- but submitting everything we have to Jesus. As he laid his life down for the church and the world- so do we.

And everywhere family has let you down and cast you out, by his blood, the Lord is taking you in.