

SERIES: “Together
Week 4: Together We Can Change the World – Ephesians 4:25-5:2

For the past month, we’ve been exploring the theme *Together*, as we draw lessons from the book of Ephesians. Through the past three weeks, we’ve explored the themes Together We Find Peace, Experience Love, We Grow Stronger. Today we’re going to discuss the idea that Together We Can Change the World.

That said, who’s your favorite superhero? You didn’t see that coming, did you? But let’s talk about superheroes. I mean, you could say we’re living in the golden era of superheroes. Our biggest movies are multi-million dollar blockbuster superhero movies. There’s Spider-Man and Batman. There’s Captain America and Captain Marvel. Black Panther. Thor. Wonder Woman. **(Show Avengers pic)** There are the Avengers, the Justice League, the Guardians of the Galaxy, and the Incredibles. Even Ant-Man and Aquaman and Shazam have their own movies.

It seems like everybody loves superheroes. And I get it. They’re fun. They’re the embodiment of our imaginations. Who wouldn’t like some kind of super power to take out and zap every once in a while? They fight for good. They defeat evil. They restore justice. They save the world.

Those are all good things. But I’m going to say that the world doesn’t need any more superheroes. What the world needs more of than superheroes is more Mr. Rogers. **(show pic)**

So in true superhero style, let’s do a Superheroes vs. Mr. Rogers showdown. Ready? Raw strength and rugged good looks? Superheroes take that one, hands down. I’ll give you that one.

But when it comes to saving the world, for superheroes, it’s all make-believe. Mr. Rogers used make-believe to open kids’ imaginations, but he made a difference in the real world. Fake vs. real. Point to Mr. Rogers.

Superhero pride and arrogance vs. Mr. Rogers’ quiet, humble attitude? I’m going with Mr. Rogers. Every day, in his own soft-spoken, friendly way, Mr. Rogers told kids they were special. “I like you just the way you are,” he’d say. In fact, he got into TV because he didn’t like the way that TV and the culture were treating kids.

Let’s do one more. Superhero independence or Mr. Rogers’ cooperation? Okay, so many superheroes have a sidekick, and lots of them have learned they have to team up with other superheroes to beat the bad guys. But Mr. Rogers built his entire career out of making others feel welcome and included. He didn’t put others down; he always lifted them up. Mr. Rogers takes this category too.

Does the world need more superheroes? I’d say right now we’ve got plenty of those. What the world needs more of is Mr. Rogers. And it’s no coincidence that Fred Rogers was an ordained pastor. The principles he built his show on and the characteristics he lived out were Christlike. The world needs more Mr. Rogers because the world needs more Jesus Christ.

And we as a church can learn a lot from Mr. Rogers about creating space that welcomes people in—all people—to encourage them, to dream with them, to listen to them, and to walk with them. By those simple acts, Mr. Rogers changed the world. In similar ways, we as a church fulfill our purpose as God’s people here on earth when we experience and share peace, unity, encouragement, kindness, and grace—or to summarize it even more, we fulfill our purpose when we experience and live out God’s love together and share it with the world around us. When we do that, we too can change the world. Changing the world doesn’t require superheroes or even superhuman powers; it requires consistent choices to follow Christ daily and to walk together on the journey as He leads us.

We're going to explore some ways we can do that, so let's turn back to the book of Ephesians. In the first half of the book, Paul primarily deals with God's redemptive plan throughout history. It is God bringing humans together with Himself. The second half of Ephesians turns the gospel story directly toward our lives and explores how the truth of the gospel should impact how we live our life stories—personally, in our families, neighborhoods, and communities. The second half of Ephesians is much more instructional and practical.

Our key passage today is Ephesians 4:32–5:2: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Dream Big, Act Small - I think Mr. Rogers must have been familiar with these verses. Be kind to each other. Be tenderhearted. Forgive each other.

Often, when we think about making an impact in the world, changing the world, we get hung up on thinking about big acts, superhero kinds of things. Or at least the kinds of things done by pioneers like Thomas Edison or Albert Einstein or Nelson Mandela or Steve Jobs. But listen to that list again: be kind, be tenderhearted, forgive each other. Those are fairly simple acts. They may not always be easy, but they can be easy. Sometimes as easy as a smile or a hug or time to listen. Even those kinds of efforts, when multiplied by many people, consistently over time, build into a powerful force.

Think about those people who did change history, for better or worse: Mozart, Martin Luther, Adolf Hitler, Martin Luther King Jr, Mother Teresa, Walt Disney, The Beatles. Who else comes to mind?

Now that we have a list going in our minds, ask yourself two questions about these people: 1) He or she may be best known for one big impact, but what were the steps along the way? 2) Did they do it alone?

In every case where the change was for good, we see small steps, and people who didn't act alone. Even if some of their work was individual, they didn't live in isolation. Other people influenced them, partnered with them, and played a role in their accomplishments.

I think we get too hung up on viewing changing the world as a giant mission. We think for it to be real and meaningful, it has to be big and impressive change. Too often we fall into negative comparisons of our everyday life activities to someone else's single, grand accomplishment.

The reality is that the most powerful change is slow and steady. It comes through consistency over time—like the water flow that carves canyons or the winds that sculpt desert arches in places like Utah. Be Kind. Forgive. Love. Sacrifice. Together—over time.

In the later chapters of Ephesians, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus about what it takes to impact the world around them. He doesn't describe earth-shattering events. Instead he describes households, parents and children, families. Change in the world happens one person, one relationship at a time, so our choices to be kind, to show compassion, to choose understanding over judgment, to give grace instead of anger, to choose service over position—those are world- changing actions. Those are representations of Jesus in our world. They follow His example, just like Paul directs: “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering & sacrifice to God.”

Recognize Eternal - True togetherness means a shared purpose. Being united in purpose keeps us working together and moving forward rather than getting caught up in the disagreements that cause us to work against each other. Paul warns the church in Ephesus that they must be prepared to fight for their community.

In the same way, we must be united against evil and ready to fight against division. In Ephesians 6 Paul instructs the believers to put on the full armor of God, not to fight each other, or even to fight against outsiders, but to stand against evil and to become one in the battle for the hearts and souls of the world.

When we know that the real battle is a spiritual one, it helps put the rest in perspective. Is what we disagree about really worth fighting over? How can we keep our focus on the eternal and maintain unity? Because the battle is not about what's temporary or finite. Even when we can't see it or understand it, we know the real battle is about the eternal.

Stay Connected - Even when we recognize the eternal, changing our world together takes effort—and it requires connection. Looking at another Bible letter to a different group of believers, Hebrews 10 says, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

An important part of life for us as the church is getting together. That can mean physically gathering for worship or study or fellowship. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that can interfere with that. Schedules, commitments, disagreements—the list goes on. It can be easy to let our time at church together get squeezed out.

Being together, staying connected, is vital for us as we seek to impact our world. Even Jesus surrounded Himself with a group of people. He invested in relationships and took time to be together with others. Jesus' closest disciples and followers provided community and fellowship. They lived daily life together, and they shared a common purpose.

We chose this series *Together* because church is where we commit to that kind of togetherness. We invest in the relationships among believers, and we are challenged and supported to pursue togetherness in other ways in our relationships outside the church—with family, neighbors, coworkers, friends, teachers, students, etc.

Our culture offers us many counterfeit ways of staying connected, like the yearly Christmas card or scrolling through endless posts on social media. While those aren't intrinsically bad, they do not provide the real, relational connection we need. We come back to church and pursue being together because we all need more than a Facebook group. We need real connection and authentic relationships. We need support and a place of belonging. We need encouragement and reminders of who we are and what we're called to.

This is the kind of connection we need and the kind of connection we can have together. Why does this matter? Because community matters. Connection matters. Unity matters. Living as a part of God's family matters. When we pursue these things together, we find that we find peace, we experience Love, we grow stronger, and together we can change the world.

As we close out our series, let me offer this ongoing invitation to all of us: Let's continue pursuing togetherness in God's love. Let's lean into the concept of *Together* to deepen relationships. Maybe that means taking the next step, from joining us regularly for worship to joining a small group or a service opportunity here at Mount Olive. Maybe it's just greeting someone around you who you don't know. Or going to lunch with a casual acquaintance. There is a place in this community for every single one of us—together.

I think it's only fitting to close with Paul's final words to the Ephesians as a benediction: “Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Ephesians 6:23-24). Amen.