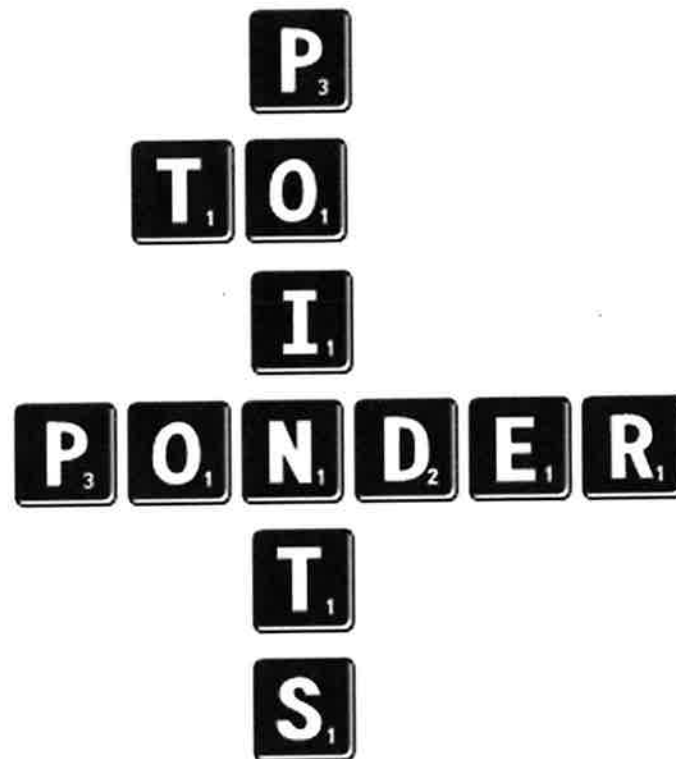




2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: September 21st - 27th

Sermon: September 20th



September 21

Ephesians 1:22-23

Do you remember when you first learned to drive a car? I remember looking right down the front of the hood just a few feet in front of the car; probably to one side or the other. The thought of looking down the road hundreds of feet through the windshield seemed absurd and for a young driver impossible. I think we all learned that as we quit worrying about all the minute mechanics of driving, we were able to focus on the road ahead and the driving just happened. The same could be said for learning to ride a bicycle. After a while, the riding just happens and you aren't even thinking about it anymore.

When we think about belonging to a local church as a member and even getting involved in a small group like Sunday School, we have to be careful that we don't sit around thinking about how to create a sense of community too much. If we just focus on the main things like preaching the Word, strengthening one another, and serving our King, sweet community will happen. Pastor Aaron and I are thrilled and at times blown away by the amazing community that has developed here at Smyrna. We want to always remember that community is not the point, God is the point because He is the substance of what we do.

Our goal has always been, to make much of Jesus Christ. He is the center of the story and the One deserving the praise, honor, and glory. I read a verse the other day that almost startled me. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:23 this: "Which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." I realized for that to make sense I needed to add verse 22 which says, "And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church." Let's think about this for a bit today.

God the Father has put Jesus over all things and has given Him to the church as our Head. He is our Lord, our Savior, our King and He rules the church from the place of headship and the world from His place of authority at the right hand of the Father. The Father gave Him to the church as a gift. With all of that authority and power, God gives Him to us the church. Paul went on to say that the church is the "body" of Christ. He is the head and we are His body – left here on earth to serve Him and to make much of Him. We are to be the visible hands, feet, and voice of our Head in the world today. We are to display His presence in our church and in our lives. We are the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Dear church family, we have been given an incredible privilege to display our Lord to the world; including our community. This is why it is of paramount importance that we live in sweet community established on the preached word of God and lived out in our day to day lives. The fullness with which Christ fills all things is the Body of Christ, the church. We have to get this right dear friends if we are going to display and create an attraction and beauty that reaches the heavens and draws lost people to our Lord.

September 22

Ephesians 3:10

So, building on what I wrote yesterday, we continue with Ephesians 3:10 today. We learned that the body of Christ, the church, is the fullness of Christ on display in the world (Eph. 1:23). It goes without saying that He is filling all things in other ways too (Eph. 4:10), but we should never sell short the incredible mission of the church. Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:10, "...so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

Friend, do you see that God is making His wisdom known through the church, the body of Christ? That is you and me! Just prior to writing that amazing verse, Paul said that he had been given the responsibility of preaching "the riches of Christ and to reveal the mystery of Christ" (v.9). Through the church, and even to the powers and authorities in the heavenlies, God is making His many-sided wisdom known. Even the demonic will be exposed to His glory. This wisdom is what conceived and planned and brought about the salvation of His people – this is what is called the unfathomable riches of Christ.

The church is the embodiment of Christ. It is God's will to fill the universe with the glory of His Son Jesus, making the church the showcase of His perfections, characteristics, attributes, and lifestyle. We should embrace the idea that God wants to put the church on display so that we can put His Son on display. This is why we must get it right. Think with me dear ones, He wants the world to see how He chose us, His bride, how He has destined her for heaven, how He came for the church, is teaching her, and suffered and died for her. He wants the world to know that He rose from the dead for her and that He reigns now watching over her and cleansing her, and some day will bring His bride to Himself.

We are connected to Jesus just like our body is connected to our head. God the Father did not simply give this mandate to fill the universe to Jesus alone. He gave it to us as well as - His body. Can you imagine God saying to Jesus, "Now my Son, You and those who make up your body, go and fill the universe with your glory?" God wants to display the supernatural reality of what happens to a person and a people when they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He wants to reveal, through us, what His children look like and how they live.

This is why church family it is so important that we establish community through our gatherings and small groups that foster genuine worship of our God and love for one another. Our groups are a means to discipleship, to the teaching of sound doctrine, to help us all learn how to apply biblical theology to our daily lives. Sweet, godly community is the fulfillment of and application of Scripture. We love one another in a Christlike way because we have experienced His life changing love personally. His love empowers our love.

September 23

Ephesians 2:8-9; 14-19

The mistake that I think many churches make when it comes to building community, is attempting to do it from a natural rather than supernatural means. By natural I mean that a church will look for various affinity groups and try to bring people together based on similarities. Please hear me say that I don't think that is all bad. The problem with it is that any social club or gathering of people can assemble people together in groups who have tons of things in common already. The point that I am emphasizing is that there is nothing supernatural about that approach and will likely do nothing to put on display the manifold wisdom of God revealed through Christ and redemption.

The supernatural establishing of godly community is a result of the preaching of God's Word and the transformation that takes place when a person is truly born again. I am reminded of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2. First of all, we are told that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own works (vv. 8-9). He continues to write these incredible, and dare I say supernatural words, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility...that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (Eph. 2:14-15). Consider the nature of the people who have been brought together as one in Christ.

We are talking about the Jews and Gentiles. These people hated each other and considered the other untouchable, nasty, and even less than humans. The world had no answer for how people who formerly did not get along, now did. Only because of the preached gospel of the Lord Jesus did this division get torn down. You see, it was a supernatural work of the Lord that brought unity in the place of division, and sweet community in the place of separation and hatred because of their differences.

My point church family is that the type of community that draws others to it supernaturally is a community that is established not around similarities among affinity groups who have so much in common already. No, this is an unbelievable work of the heart that only God can accomplish in people. It is done by the preaching of His Word not by gimmicks, entertainment, and attractional foolishness that creates a community based not on godly love but something else. The danger is that we leave the supernatural out and as a result, leave God out.

In verse 16 of Ephesians 2 Paul wrote, "...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." Now together, we are "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (v. 19). When this happens in the lives of people, our differences don't keep us apart and our affinities are not the reason we enjoy community together. Jesus changes us and gives us a love for other believers because He loves us first. This puts on display His wisdom like nothing the world can offer.

September 24

John 13:35; 1 John 4:19

Have you ever noticed that as you read through the New Testament, a time period seems to exist in which most of the “miraculous” signs cease. You will find plenty of examples of miracles being performed by Jesus in the four gospels as well as a good number in the book of Acts. Even in Acts I would argue that the miracles decrease as the book unfolds. Here is why I believe this reality takes place.

The miraculous signs were a temporary means of confirming the truth of the gospel at the outset. Consider this strong possibility – once local churches were established, the reports of most miraculous signs stop and the focus of the epistles becomes preaching God’s Word (the gospel) and strengthening the churches. The point I want to make today is that God intentionally moved from the temporary means of confirming the truth of the gospel by miraculous signs to the permanent miraculous means of confirmation by and through the local church.

When the gospel first entered a region, the Spirit enabled miraculous signs. Once the gospel took root, the Spirit enabled miraculous community. This is what we see after Pentecost in the book of Acts chapters 2 and 4. Keep in mind that it is through the church that God makes His manifold wisdom known (Eph. 3:10). It is not through signs and wonders except for the signs and wonders of converted lives and godly community in the midst of diverse people.

This is one of the reasons it is vitally important that we represent Christ, our Head, well here on earth. Remember that we are called to be ambassadors for Christ and it is through our lives that God is making an appeal to others to trust and follow Him (2 Cor. 5:20). Jesus told His disciples in the upper room the night of what we call “The Last Supper”, that others will know they are His disciples if they have and demonstrate love for one another (John 13:35). The question that we need to consider is this: Is our community based on godly love for one another or something else? You see, if it is godly love, it will be sacrificial and sanctifying love, and this will be a love that looks supernatural to onlookers because only God could produce that kind of love in the hearts of people who otherwise would not spend time together.

Where does this come from? John wrote in his first epistle (1 John) these words, “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). This matters dear church because genuine, godly love is vital for our evangelism effectiveness as well as discipleship. We are to love one another “as He has loved us” (John 13:34). This type of love is beautiful and attractive. It is a costly, God-honoring love and God-exalting love that appears as it is – supernatural. This is why once local churches existed, the reports of miraculous signs stopped. The local church became the miracle and the proof.

September 25

1 Timothy 3:14-15

I wonder if you know what I mean when I say the church is supposed to present a counterculture to the secular culture in which we live. Most people in our world think there is only one way to live, and it is the way the world has conformed our society and convinced us that “everybody is doing it.” The church has the responsibility and privilege of showing the world and our communities that there is another way to live – a better way.

The way we live and conduct ourselves amongst ourselves is meant to present to others a plausible way to exercise and live by faith. What I mean is that our Christian examples should be an apologetic against all the ungodly accusations against Christianity. The world is full of people who believe or act like our faith is idealistic and not practical in the real world. Our lives are intended to make biblical faith plausible. That is just another word for reasonable or possible. This is why darkness hates the light.

Have you ever been around people who seem to hate the fact that you are a Christian who is actually living a life in step with the Bible and experiencing God’s favor? It is as if your life exposes the failures of their own and the easiest thing for them to do is to try to get you to stumble so that they can say that nobody lives up to that biblical stuff. Your light makes their darkness unbearable and thus something they oppose and hate.

Paul wrote to Timothy in his first letter to him these words, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Isn’t that an incredible verse? Paul has written this entire letter to Timothy and to us to tell us and instruct us as to how we are to live as disciples of Christ. As children of God, there is a way we are to conduct ourselves and live our lives. He says that he wrote this letter so Timothy would know how to live as a member of the church, the body of Christ. What I find so important is that he says the church is a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Do you see dear one that as a member of the church, our lives should display God’s truth to the world around us? We are to be support of His truth. This screams of the church’s foundational role in displaying the truth and wisdom of God’s word. We are to present to the world the truth of the gospel which would include the sinful nature and fallen condition of man, as well as man’s need for repentance, forgiveness, and redemption by the finished work of Christ. This is one of the main reasons the author of Hebrews said, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” (Heb. 10:23-24). Representing our King properly for His glory and to make His wisdom known requires that we live circumspect lives encouraged and held accountable by each other. Strong community matters so much.

September 26

Genesis 2:18-24

Have you ever noticed that men and women are very different; Of course you have. I am really being facetious. God created male and female in His image but as two very different beings. We look different, think differently, process differently, and prioritize differently. This is one of the reasons that marriage can be so challenging. The old book Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus, is certainly incorrect in one sense but absolutely correct in that it can feel like we are talking to someone from another planet at times. So, why am I talking about this today?

As I considered what God said in Genesis 2:18-24, I realized there is a connection to building community in the local church. In that text it is written, "I will make him a helper fit for him.... And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said...Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." I find it interesting that God used the words "hold fast" to describe the relationship between a husband and wife. For our purposes today, I am thinking about how hard it is to "hold fast" at times in light of the differences we experience between us. As a man holds fast to his wife, the supernatural process of oneness and unity take place by the Spirit of God at work in them.

I hope that you are tracking with me today. As we consider building community in our church, please understand that we will bring many differences and preferences to these relationships we have in the church. The only way that we are going to experience supernatural unity beyond and even in spite of our differences is by holding fast to one another and our calling as a church. To hold fast will not always be easy. There will be times when we want to walk away, to give up on each other, and to say ugly things about others. Think about your marriage. There are times when it isn't going well or times when you are so frustrated that you can barely stand it, but still you are called to hold fast. As you do, unity and oneness are the reward.

Friends, commitment in the local church transcends the benefits we receive from it and points to something much deeper. Commitment is fundamental to community in our church. Similarly to how we are committed to our spouses in marriage, we should be committed to one another in the body of Christ. I have heard people at times say that they don't really need people. I get that sentiment, but the truth is that you do; we all do. The other truth that I want to highlight here is that your commitment to the body of Christ should go beyond what you get out of it and more to what you give to it. If you feel that you don't need people, consider the fact that people need you. The Bible says, "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). We need each other and I implore you today to be fiercely committed to one another so that as we hold fast, we will experience sweet unity and oneness.

September 27

Psalm 42:1-4

I hate the fact that sometimes I take the church for granted. What I really mean is that I take church attendance for granted. I tend to just believe that the opportunity to gather will always be there and that if I miss today, it's no big deal because I can go next week. That "take it or leave it" *laissez faire* attitude is detrimental to commitment and easily diminishes a heart of gratitude and love. I am afraid that far too many people suffer from this tendency.

In his book Life Together, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer he writes, "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone." I wish so much that you and I could remember that the privilege we have to be able to go to church and to publicly worship with our brothers and sisters is a grace of God that should not be taken for granted or made insignificant in our lives. Imagine life if we were not able to gather with each other regularly.

The sons of Korah penned Psalm 42, and it would behoove us to realize the context in which it was written because it could happen to us. We need to take advantage of opportunities to worship together and truly enjoy coming to church. The first verse of this Psalm is likely very familiar. It says, "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for You." This is meant to create a picture of a deer running through the woods, most likely being chased by dogs, and longing for and needing a drink of cool water. The Psalmist is in a situation where he too longs for and needs to be in the presence of God with God's people (v.2). He is longing for and missing what he used to experience in the presence of the Lord. They continue by expressing the reality of their circumstance and the tears they are shedding because of it.

You see dear ones, they are exiled from the church and are longing to be able to go back to the house of God where they once worshipped and rejoiced together as His people. In verse 4 it says, "These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival." These people are sad and crying because they are no longer able to go to church and to worship God together. This is hard for us to imagine but we must try. Friend, recognize the gift the church is to us today, and especially Smyrna. What sweet fellowship we enjoy as we serve and worship God together.

In 2 Tim. 1:4 Paul writes that he longs to see Timothy as he finds himself in prison in Rome once again. He says the same thing to the believers in Thessalonica as he longs to literally be with them (1 Thess. 3:10) and again in 2 John 12. My point is simply that the day could come when we wake up and realize how precious and special our time together truly is or was. The community that we have developed and that we share in our freedom to worship is grace. Let's soak it all in while we can and celebrate together for as long as God allows. Jesus is a gift to us, and we are a gift from Him to each other.