

FAMILY TIME
Selected Scriptures
Bob Bonner
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Two weeks ago our pastoral staff met, looking ahead to this Sunday in particular. We sensed a need for specific Biblical teaching concerning a practice that we allowed to get pushed aside for some important immediate reasons, but have planned to reintroduce. It is that part of our worship that we formerly engaged in several times a month called “From the Heart.” For more than two years we have not had “From the Heart” more than once, and we have had several requests for its reintroduction. Some of you may not be familiar with it, and others may think it strange or even out of place.

Earlier this year, we had planned to reintroduce this very special time once a quarter. This morning, we are going to give you an opportunity to join together to glorify God in this unique practice as well as to experience what God can do among us in this form of worship.

But before that, we want to look to God’s Word to establish the basis for why we are doing this, and we will be referring to several passages of Scriptures along the way.

To know what the early church did, the book of the Bible that best clarifies this is the book of **Acts**. For the past couple of years, **Acts** has been the basis of my preaching series, and I will return to it next week. But if you want to understand how the church is to function, the books of the Bible that give us instruction on functionality are the epistles, primarily Paul’s epistles.

For instance, the Apostle Paul illustrates how the church is to function in **I Corinthians 12-14** and **Romans 12**. In those epistles, he uses the illustration of the human body to teach us that the members of the local church are to function as a body. Paul says in those chapters that every Christian has been given at the moment they were saved a spiritual gift package that enables them to uniquely function as a member of the body. Every member of the church plays an important role. Hence, the more people that are involved in the local church using their spiritual gifts, the stronger and healthier the church becomes.

Some people’s spiritual gifts are going to be more obvious and up front than those of others, like the gifts of evangelism, teaching, administration, and leadership. Other giftings may not be as obviously noticeable, but they are still very important,

such as gifts of mercy, faith, service, and so on. Scripture teaches that just as a healthy body has two arms that share the load, so should the church have multiple arms sharing the load. When the human body lacks an arm, or one is injured or weakened, the rest of the body has to work harder in order to make up for the weakness of the missing arm. The human body can never function as intended if only one arm is being used. In the end, the body only functions best when all the members of the body know their gifts and function in those gifts for the benefit of the common good of the body.

There is more in the Bible that explains how the church is to function than just in those two New Testament passages. It is not our purpose this morning to look at all the places that explain spiritual gifts or how the church is to function or be governed. But often times, we can see some examples of how the early church did function as a body in **Acts**.

But, how the church is to function is not the same as how the church is to behave. If you want to know how the church is to behave, how it is to be viewed, and what sense outsiders should experience when they come in contact with the church, you must look at the Pastoral Epistles for a clear understanding. When we read those epistles, **1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon**, it is clear that the church does not function as some service club, political party, or humanitarian organization. When we look at the words used there to describe the relationships of the individuals of the church, we notice the continual use of familial terms such as brother, sister, father, and mother. Hence, the best description of how the church is to behave toward one another is not like soldiers ready for a fight, or mere body parts, but the church is supposed to behave relationally as a family.

A family works together for the benefit of the family and the individuals of the family. When we study churches in the book of **Acts**, we see examples of how individuals within the local church family looked out for each other, met needs that certain individuals could not meet on their own, encouraged each other, and showed deference and honor toward those who deserve honor, in particular, the leaders. Over and over you will find in **Acts** and in some of the epistles incredible examples of tenderness and care being administered to individuals who were hurting, individuals who had made mistakes. You see examples of people who had been wronged forgiving one another and choosing to continue on serving one another within the church family.

So, with that, I'd like for you to open your Bibles to **Ephesians 4**, where we are going to begin seeing how each attender is to function as a family member in this

local church. We are going to zero in on three simple responsibilities of each family member. I'm going to quickly read to you a passage from **Ephesians** and several more passages that highlight for us the responsibilities of every family member and the missional objective of every local church family. In the past, I have spent eight to ten lengthy sermons opening up this six-verse passage in which we will begin our study, to give a clearer understanding and more practical application of how these verses are lived out in everyday church family life. But, we won't be doing that this morning. I simply want to point out a couple of reminders that will help us better understand what we are to be about as individual members of a local church family. So if you will, please follow along in your Bibles as I begin reading at **Ephesians 4:11**. Paul writes, "**And He [Jesus] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.**" Those are uniquely spiritually gifted leaders that have a primary assignment within the church family. **Verse 12** explains the objective of their assignment: "**For the equipping of the saints.**" The leadership is to make sure the other believers in the church are trained and equipped. But for what are they to be equipped or trained? Paul tells us, "**For the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.**"

Basically, Paul is saying that the responsibility of the church leadership is to make sure that the family members have opportunities to be trained, to be built up or equipped, so that they can use their spiritual gifts to serve the rest of the believers in the church. The church leadership is to make opportunities for people to share their gifts. In other words, it is not the job of the church staff or the elders to do all of the work at church. They are to train and commission all members to function as a family and share in the work of the ministry to the family. Hence, part of the role of one who considers Crossroads their church home is to discover and use their spiritual gifts.

Although evangelism and outreach to the lost is a work of the church explained elsewhere in Scripture, in **Ephesians 4** Paul's focus is not on evangelism, but on equipping the saints in caring for the growth of the local church family members. The reason Paul emphasizes the training up of the church family here is that he knows that it is not best to introduce new believers to an unhealthy church family. Therefore, the local church family must be a safe and healthy place for new believers to be introduced and to grow up and become actively involved with the church family.

Paul continues to tell us how the church family is to be trained and to what end. He says, "¹³**Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the**

Son of God.” The unity of the faith refers to Biblical instruction in doctrine that helps to change people’s lives. It’s not instruction for instruction sake. We know that because Paul continues to tell us so in the rest of the verse. He says that the goal of this instruction is that every believer would become **“A mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”**¹⁴ **As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”**

In other words, we are to teach God’s Word in such a fashion that people would grow up and become spiritually mature, Christ-like, able to know the difference between Biblical truth and deception, and able to know how to serve like Jesus served. Furthermore, the expression **“the knowledge of the Son of God,”** and more specifically the term **“knowledge”** does not just refer to the intellectual understanding or agreement on doctrinal facts, but rather the unity that comes from two or more people who share the real experiential life in Christ as they minister to others. In doing this, believers demonstrate how knowing Jesus makes a practical difference in the way we live and relate to those around us.

Paul continues, adding a description of spiritual maturity which is not measured by what one knows but by how one relates to others. He says, **“¹⁵But speaking the truth in love.”** Boy, is that an often misunderstood and thus misapplied scripture! In the original Greek language, the word **“speaking”** is not there. It literally states, **“truthing in love.”** This may include speaking, but primarily the stress is on the doing of actions that reveal one really cares about the other.

Over the years, I can’t tell you how many times I have been called in to bandage up an emotionally wounded church family member who has been hurt by someone **“speaking to them the truth in love.”** Usually, the wounded person hardly knew the person speaking to them, let alone sensed any genuine concern from the other person toward them. They didn’t feel loved, but attacked!

“Truthing in love” is like the raising of children. A long time ago, I learned as a parent that if I didn’t play a lot with my kids, invest a lot of time on the floor doing things that were important in their world, then any confrontation, any discipline or correction I would bring to them would not be received as coming from one who loved them, but from a mean old woman or man. So it is with correcting others. Be very careful in reproaching others who you barely know, let alone have not demonstrated that you truly do have their best interest at heart. Remember, **“truthing in love”** comes before **“speaking in love.”**

Paul continues with his thought of helping others to mature in the second half of **verse 15**, when he writes, **“We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”**

Hence, a second responsibility of every attender of a local church family is to actively seek to grow in maturity in Christ, as well as to stimulate spiritual growth in the lives of other church members.

Now, this is getting closer to the point of application as it concerns what our goal is in providing you on Sunday mornings with a “From the Heart” time. Notice, it is the individual parts, the individual members or believers in the body of Christ that cause or stir us on to growth for the building up of the body. We don’t have the time to break down all of the very unique Greek terms used in our English translation of **verse 16**, so allow me to summarize what the point is.

If you were to describe how a healthy knee works as a jogger runs down the road, you would have to show how several tendons, ligaments, and muscle groups work together with the joint so that energy can be properly used to move the body in a forward motion. There are bones, tendons, and muscles working behind the scenes around, to the back of, above, and below the knee causing the body to work together to build itself up.

The Apostle Paul is telling us here that Jesus has chosen to join together several parts/people that make up a joint. And all these parts, or the people in the local church family, are meant to work harmoniously together to accomplish a task.

God has given you certain spiritual gifts, abilities, and experiences that together with others’ gifts, abilities, and experiences can be used to build each other up, help you know Jesus better and grow more in love with Him. We are to encourage the growth of more Christ likeness in one another’s lives and thus glorify God. All of you are chosen parts and are absolutely essential to getting the job done for Christ here in Grants Pass, through Calvary Crossroads. Jesus is the one who is responsible for putting us together. We in this body of believers are not here by accident. God has us here for a reason. We are to use our gifts to build into each other’s lives and thereby strengthen us to live for Christ and to introduce others to

Him. But the glue that Jesus uses to hold us together is His love being expressed in and through each other.

Allow me to go one step further to show you how this encouragement for growth takes place in love. God's Word demonstrates that each of us, no matter how long we have known Jesus, is to encourage growth in one another's life. If you were to look up all of the commands directed at Christians listed in the New Testament that have the words "**one another**" in them, you would see the basic responsibilities we each must fulfill for each other if we expect or desire to grow.

Here is a brief list of the "**one another**" commands in scripture that demonstrate how we are to build into each other's lives to stimulate growth of Christ likeness in the other person.

"So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another," Romans 12:5. In other words, if you are living as a maverick as if you need no one else, living as an isolationist, and not taking responsibility to serve or care for another member, then you are not living as "**members of one another.**" In the end, if you have not joined a class, a group, or a ministry team, you are not living as a healthy part of this local body of Christ. You need to be involved in some way in others' lives. As leadership, we know this, and it is why you see on the back of the Contact Card that is placed in your bulletin the encouragement to join one of those three things. Simply being an attender is not in the best interest of your spiritual health.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love," Romans 12:10. Devotion to another requires time and contact with others in this fellowship. With whom are you investing your heart?

"Honor one another above yourselves," Romans 12:10. When was the last time you honored a nursery worker, an usher, a greeter, an elder, an office worker, a Sunday School teacher, or a member of the worship team who leads us in singing every Sunday?

"Be of the same mind with one another," Romans 15:5. When was the last time you agreed to disagree about the minor details and humbly submitted yourself and joined another to get a project done?

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you," Romans 15:7. Can you learn to accept others that dress differently, speak differently, worship

differently, or pray differently just as Jesus accepted you, even though in comparison to His perfectly heavenly cultural standards, I would suggest each of us is rather weird!

“Admonish one another,” Romans 15:14. This has to do with the positive and timely deliverance of correction. We all need correction. Granted, it doesn’t often feel good, but in the end it produces maturity in our lives when it is truly received as delivered in love, as though you were a cherished person.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss,” Romans 15:16. Obviously, there is nothing sensual about this command. It is a cultural instruction by which you show another person that you value them. It is a form of blessing. How do you greet others from the church family? Do you demonstrate to them that you are truly glad to see them? When you see them, what do you say? Do you immediately start talking about yourself, or do you inquire how they are doing? In the genuinely Biblical sense of this term, I’m so grateful for the lovers of Christ who greet me, not just on Sundays but during the week. I can say this because he won’t turn red in front of you because he is not here, but I’m blessed when Victor greets me at the beginning of a new day. He doesn’t physically kiss me (thank goodness!), but he does the New Testament cultural equivalent with his words.

“Serve one another in love,” Galatians 5:13. That doesn’t need any explanation, just examination. Whom are you serving in this church family, other than those in your own family who attend here?

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” Ephesians 5:21. Watch out gentlemen! Notice that this command comes just before the command of wives be submissive to your husbands! There are times when, in the way you serve, cherish, nourish, and honor your wife, you need to submit your plans, wishes, and desires for her.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love,” Ephesians 4:2. You know, some of us really have trouble with this one. Different generations find it difficult at times to bear with the differences of other generations. We become arrogant rather than humble, as though our generation has it all right and another generation has it all wrong. In different parts of the country, if you hold hands in church or show any display of affection toward your spouse while you worship together in unity, know that somebody will get bent out of shape. But what better way to demonstrate to your kids that God loves affection, especially the proper affection between a man and a wife!

“Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up,” 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

“Bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ,” Galatians 6:2.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed,” James 5:16.

So there you have a very quick snapshot of the how the church is to behave as a church family. A church family is made up of individuals who are committed to fulfill at least three responsibilities: 1.) Discover and use your spiritual gifts. 2.) Actively seek to grow in maturity in Christ, and stimulate spiritual growth in the lives of other church members as well. 3.) Make time to obey the **“one another”** commands.

Now you might be thinking at this point, “This sounds great, Bob. But when am I supposed to do all of these things?” Great question! I’m glad you folks brought it to my attention! Well, let’s just think about that for a moment. Can we expect every week to use all of our spiritual gifts on a Sunday morning during a 1 ½ hour worship service? No. Can we expect every week to model every one of these **“one anothers”** during a standard worship service? No. The gifts are to be available all during the week, but used only when called for. When it comes to the **“one anothers,”** they are to be practiced all during the week, most often in a smaller context than in a large group.

However, every week during the worship service some of the spiritual gifts should be on display. In addition, every week some of the familiness of the **“one anothers”** should be on display. And at certain times, we need to make room during worship times for others who may be new to Christ and new to how the family of Christ relates. They need to observe genuine displays of at least the last three or four from the list above.

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And that is where “From the Heart” comes in. We are a family. Our “From the Heart” time is a fifteen-minute segment in our service when we can glorify God as a family. It is a time when we share together how the Lord is at work in our lives. There is a moderator who encourages individuals when they take a microphone to first give us at least your first name. There are three general guidelines for sharing: 1.) It should be appropriate to our setting. This is not a time to make announcements or political statements. It is not the time to express a complaint. They should be appropriate comments for worship. 2.) Brevity is important. It is not a time for mini sermons. If you want to read a portion of scripture that has touched your heart this past week, simply begin reading it by stating something like, “God’s Word says in __ and then read it. If you have a personal specific need you would like to make known, then do so. If it is a prayer request for someone else, then please hold that for the prayer cards. 3.) Christ should always be exalted!

Let me give you several past examples that meet the three general guidelines. A single mom, recently divorced, was down to literally her last dollar from which she was to feed her family for the week. She stood up and said, “I just wanted to tell you how the Lord met a need in my life this past week.” She went on to explain how unsolicited food had come her way. Her family had eaten plenty and she simply wanted to enthusiastically share her thanksgiving with the church family.

Another young girl asked the church family to pray for her. She had a brother who was strung out on drugs, and it was killing her to watch it. Nothing they had tried thus far could get him to stop. So the moderator pointed to another person and said, “Please, go over there and stand next to her and lead us all in prayer for this need. You used to be entangled in drugs. You know how it feels.” So he got up, went over, and prayed for this sister. He prayed for her courage as well as for her brother to find Jesus so that he could discover His way out of the slavery of sin.

In another situation, a middle-aged new believer stood up and excitedly said, “I just want to read to you something the Lord showed me from his Word last week! I never knew this before.”

Another man stood up and shared that he needed to buy a car cheaply so he wouldn’t have to depend on hitch-hiking to get to his college classes on time at night. When another in the audience, who was asked to pray for his brother, finished praying, a middle-aged house wife stood up and said, “I don’t know how this happened, but just this week the Lord gave me a car I don’t need. If this man wants it, here are the keys!” The rest of the congregation spontaneously applauded as the man joyously ran over to get the keys.

I’ll never forget when a clean-cut college kid stood up and confessed his struggle with sexual purity. He said, “I know that Jesus wants me to live differently in this area of my life. Would you please pray for me?” In that situation, one elder went over and put his

arm over the young man's shoulder and prayed for him. There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

There needs to be a time in which we are genuine and real with one another. We can pray for one another, encourage one another, and share failures and successes that in the end bring glory to Jesus, our Savior. This is a time when we bear one another's burdens. Some of you are facing important decisions about jobs, purchasing of a home, school choices, and decisions concerning important people in your lives. These are things that we as a family need to support one another in. Simply make your request or statement appropriate, brief, and Christ honoring.

This morning, I'd like to begin with a couple of different questions to prime the pump: What has Jesus done for you in the past week, for which you are thankful? Where are you hurting right now, that you would like prayer for? What decision are you looking to make, for which you need wisdom? We have individuals with microphones ready to hand to you. Just raise your hand, and we will pass one to you.