

Have you ever been in the situation where people assume you will like someone just because you have that one thing in common? Anyone? So, earlier this week, I think it was Tuesday, Alan, we were up in the Bloomington campus, and Alan comes out and he goes, he was meeting with this guy, he said, he said, he's a music guy, you'd like him. And I like to assume that I like everybody, but I had to be honest with him. I said, Alan, Here's the truth.

I've met plenty of music people, none of our people, let's just make that clear. But over the course of my lifetime, I'm going to be 60 this year, I have met people that I share a deep love of music with that I don't really enjoy. Is that— do you think less of me because of that? Yes. So Alan says, I get it.

I like to run, but I find other runners of irritating. Get this, hold on, here's what he said. They're always talking about the runs they've taken or are going to take. And I looked at him and I said, oh really?

I've never met a runner who does that.

Alan does that.

I didn't roll my eyes, but I sort of wanted to in that moment. I think it's tempting, we've all done that, where we'll say, oh, you'd love them, they're an engineer, or you'd love them, they also grow tomatoes, or they're a quilter, you know, they all, all you quilters are weird, so you'll like each other for sure. It's very tempting to think that all people that like music or running or cats or quilting will like each other, but it's just, it's It's just not true. And if you're new to the church, if you've never been part of a congregation before, if this is like the first time you've ever walked in and you see all these people singing together and praying together and laughing about things together, you might be under the impression that just because we all love Jesus, we like each other. Oh yeah, that's the appropriate response.

Yeah, that's the appropriate response. That's not how it's supposed to be. We understand that, but it's a holdover from our old natures. We, we've all got our stuff, and we find our stuff charming and endearing. We find other people's stuff irritating, and you want to throttle them sometimes.

It's a holdover from our old nature. Jesus commanded us, however, to love one another. Loving one another and liking one another are very different things. Today we're going to wrestle with the reality that Jesus called us into a very special and very unique relationship, not just with him, but with his children, his sons and daughters, each other as well. And this new relationship, this new community, he expects us to love and care for each other.

To care about each other even when we don't particularly like each other at any one given point in time. So we're going to open some scriptures up. We don't have one particular one we're going to look at. We're going to be canvassing a lot of different scriptures to work through this idea. But as we go through this series on the church, it's important to know just how we began, but also who we are right now, who Jesus has called us to be in the place that he has put us.

And so we're going to be challenged by it today. Heavenly Father, as we open your word, speak to us, encourage us, remind us of things that are important to you and that will be important to us if we love you and follow you. Each step that we take closer to our relationship with you, may we more closely look and act like you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I've got some teenagers. This morning we stopped at Wawa on the way in. Anyone been to Wawa yet? It's a big stinking deal, and it's a big stinking lot of money to buy breakfast there at Wawa with gas. But we did it.

We probably won't ever do that again on a Sunday morning, but it was fun to go in and go, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh. Anyway, teenagers, they're all in the car for some reason, and I'm like, this is great. You know, the first 5 minutes are just wonderful, and, and you're like, oh, this is like old times. I just love these— all these young men that are in my car with me right now. I just love them.

I would lay down my life for any one of the kids in this, in this car right now. But if you've got teenagers, you know you love them, you would lay down your life for them. But by golly, if you have to pick up another pair of dirty socks in the living room, something's— the police are going to be called. It's going to get bad. The tension is the same in the church.

We, we love each other, but we can find each other pretty annoying. And to remind us how important the church is to us and how important we are to the church, the Bible uses different types of metaphors or pictures that help us understand how to love God and love each other and understand why we're to love each other. The metaphors the church— that the Bible uses to describe this gathering right here is a body. Some of you may be familiar with that. He uses the metaphor of a bride.

He uses the metaphor of a family, of a temple, and even a flock. Now, we did a little English quiz this morning walking into the parking lot, and I asked the boys, what is a metaphor? Do you know what a metaphor is? And they hemmed and hawed, and we got into the door, and no one really answered the question. Does anyone want to offer up a good Orion, what is a metaphor?

Oh, she is as bright as the sun. Well, that is a— that is a simile, I think. That's not a metaphor, but that's very close. Thank you, Orion. Does someone else want to try metaphor?

Ian, can you tell us what a metaphor is? No, Ian, he missed that day at school. Anyone want to try metaphor? Okay, okay, Christy, you're, you're a high school— you're an elementary school principal now. You know what a metaphor is.

So this is sort of what our Ryan said. Yeah, okay, so Ryan, I'm gonna give you 2 points on that one.

Yes, okay, very good. Okay, all— oh, now you're all experts on metaphors and similes. Yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it. But anyway, the metaphors that the Bible uses, they're unique, but each one reveals something essential about our identity and God's design for his church. And together, the— together, all of these metaphors together combine to, to remind us that the church is not just the building that we meet in.

The build— the church is a living community where everyone belongs, everyone matters, And Jesus is at the center. So are we ready for some metaphors? The first one is the body. Most of us are very familiar with this one. One of the most common ways to describe the church is as the body.

And we pull this from 1 Corinthians chapter 12, a couple of verses there where Paul writes this: Just as a body, though one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. So, so the Bible compares us to the individual parts— the hands, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the spleen, the kidneys. You find your part and you claim it, and you are part of the body of Christ, working together with Christ as the head to accomplish what Jesus would do if he was here in, in physical form. Romans 12:4–5 says it this way: For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, function.

So in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. There's this interdependence— the hand and the eyes working together. I'm different than, than Alan, and I'm different than Rod, I'm different than Joby, but, but there's unity even in those differences. Together, each of us, though we're crafted differently, we all work together for the same end with different and individual spiritual gifts. We've got a lot of examples of that.

Bob tells jokes and gives announcements. No one else could do it like Bob does it. No one else could do it like that. He plays bass. He encourages us.

He leads us in worship. Tina uses her administrative gifts to welcome and inform newcomers about what's happening in the church. Steve Wilkinson uses his theological background, his training to mentor young students here on Sunday nights, Wednesday nights. Hands, feet, eyes, noses, toes, all working together to be the body of Christ. What is needed in the place where we are.

If Jesus were here, what would Jesus do? Well, his body does that. But we're not just a body. The scriptures also call us a bride. This was the hardest one when I was a teenager, a young boy.

Being called the Bride of Christ just felt weird. But let me explain why this is a great metaphor for the church. To get it, you sort of have to understand how marriages worked back in Jesus' time. In Bible times, a marriage match would be made between families. A boy and a girl didn't meet at high school and start dating and go down to the Persimmon Festival and ride a ride together and decide they were meant for each other for life.

No, they were, they were young kids, and the families would go, ah, that family would make a great alliance with our family. And so the heads of those families would get together and they would arrange a marriage. And some of us are familiar with how that system worked. Now, the groom's father would then extend some money called a mohar, M-O-H-A-R, a mohar. Now, this is This is not buying the bride.

If you've ever bought a house, you put down earnest money. Do y'all familiar with that concept? This is earnest money that's given to the bride's family that says we are serious about this relationship moving forward and this connection moving forward. Our earnest money indicates that we're not just talking, but we're serious about it and we're not going to back out. If we do you keep the earnest money, you keep the bride price.

So they're not buying a bride. That's not- the bride's not a slave. But, but this is a big commitment. And so this money in- this money acknowledges the, the, the weight that comes alongside marriage. Jesus paid the security deposit.

Jesus paid the earnest money. For us on the cross. He's not going to renege on his promise to us. He's not going to back out of that.

The key operative word though is us. He paid the bride price for us, his church. Now today, if you get married or you're at a wedding, you will see 2 people walk up to the front, a bride and a groom, one and one. The Bible says those 2 become one as well. But when Jesus calls us his bride, he's not saying individually we are each his bride.

Tim is not necessarily the bride of Christ.

He doesn't have 8 gazillion brides. He has one bride, and that one bride is the church, the collected body of Christ, which changes how we think about each other. I think Jesus loves Diane desperately. He loves her. Jesus loves Donna desperately.

He loves He loves David.

He loves Darla desperately.

But it's only together that we become the bride of Christ. We collectively are his betrothed. We are promised to him, and he will not take back his proposal. He has said, I will I will marry my church. They are my intended.

They are my betrothed. And someday we will enjoy that marriage and that marriage feast. I, I love that. Revelation 19:7 says this: Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Who is his bride?

The church is his bride. Together we grow in our love and devotion. Together we prepare for the day when Jesus returns for his bride, us collectively. So separating yourself into a little individual pod and say, I'm the bride of Christ, well, that's not exactly how the bride of Christ is defined. We're the bride of Christ together.

We're also a family. The church is a family. Growing up, the church I was with called everyone brother, sister, brother, sister, brother, brother, Brother Bill and Sister Angie. And, and it got real weird when couples called each other brother, sister. Yeah, Sister Shawna and Brother Kamal.

And it's like, that, that's just odd. That's odd. We don't do that. We don't use that language here, but it— but just because we don't use the language doesn't mean there's not truth in it. We are brothers and sisters.

Ephesians says this in Ephesians chapter 2. It says, consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you're fellow citizens with God's people, and you are members of his household. That members of his household is a standing that we receive when we say yes to Jesus. We become part of his family. I love my biological family and I love my church family, and so does Jesus.

Galatians says because you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, so you're no longer a slave but you're God's child. Remember that song? I'm no longer a slave, I am a child of God. You are God's child, and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. We are to receive what God has promised to us.

At some point because we are members of his family. God is our Father and we are his adopted sons and daughters, and that makes us brothers and sisters in God's household. And I love this metaphor for the church. One, because I, I understand I've had a great family, and so I understand at a, at a very basic level how amazing families can be—deeply committed to each other, unconditionally loving each other. For better or for worse, those relational bonds that, that we have with our family are not easily broken.

Even, even in the worst, relational bonds with family are not easily broken. In healthy families, that commitment and unconditional love is the foundation your future life is built on. You are setting the stage, if you're a parent, for your child's future health by being strongly knitted to each other. When every other support fails— we talked about this yesterday on the porch— when every other support fails in the world, because the world is tough, family is where you run back to, where you're loved and patted on and said you're amazing. No matter what the world says, you are loved and amazing right there within the bonds of your family.

Now, there are obviously families that fail this test. They fail commitment, they fail love, they fail bonding. That's why I think God uses the term, I adopt you, because no matter what that family is like, when you come into God's family, he, he brings you into his family. And even if you all squabble amongst yourself, God our Father never changes. His love and commitment to us are unfailing and unchanging.

He loves us with everlasting love, and he draws us to himself. The Old Testament says with cords of loving kindness we are bonded to him, we are leashed to him, not with chains and not with ropes, but with, with cords of loving kindness that draw us tighter and tighter and tighter to him. And as we learn how much God loves us as our adopted Father, then I, I believe this, that we, we will truly and deeply learn how to love one another every day better and better as his true children. We're a family. We're also a temple.

This is a very cool metaphor. You remember last week when I talked about that ziggurat at Babel? I found a picture, so Bode has a picture for us. So, um, is that it? Yeah.

So look, you all know what I'm talking about now. See that little, that little building up at the top? The tippity-tippity top, that's that room at the top that I mentioned where space was made inside for the god to come from wherever the realm he was in. And he would— the god would go in there and he would, he would stay in that space. And they would even put like a bed and a table and, and bring daily food offerings to him so he'd have something to eat.

And the idea is that, that God would make his home there and he would

be there among the people that claimed him, and he would protect them and bless them and provide and, and keep them safe from their enemies and make sure that they prospered. This was going— this was called the habitation of the God. The temple at Babel had one of those.

God doesn't dismiss that imagery. In fact, he said, you know what, there's some truth to that metaphor for that picture. And the church is sort of a metaphor for that. Here's what he says in Ephesians chapter 2. He says, consequently, you're no longer foreigners and strangers— we've read this before— fellow citizens with God's people, members of his household.

This all sounds familiar so far, doesn't it? Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. Now catch this: in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become— what? To become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him you too are being built— how? Together. Together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. The church is that dwelling place, that habitation of God. 2 Corinthians chapter 6 says it this way: We are the temple of the living God.

As God has said, I will live among them, I will walk among them, I will be their God, and they will be my people. This is what the picture is. That upper room last week when the Holy Spirit fell, well, we are now the upper room of the habitation of God. When we speak about our individual beings, our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit, how many of you guys heard that when your mom said, well, you don't need to be smoking, drinking, cussing, chewing, or running around with girls who do? Because, Tim, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Anyone grow up with that? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Don't be doing stupid stuff with it. But here's the truth: a fuller understanding of us being the habitation of the Holy Spirit is that together we are being formed into a temple where God dwells among us.

So that should awaken us with an awareness of how God moves and operates within the collective body of Christ. Together we are a temple being built as a habitation of the Lord. And then this last metaphor that we're going to talk about this morning is the church as a flock. This is one of the oldest metaphors that the Bible uses. In fact, if you, if you've got any familiarity— familiarity, is that how you say it?

Familiarity with the Old Testament, you'll have come across this term a lot. It's the one of the oldest ways that describes how God works in and among and through his people, and it's a very tender, tender

visual, a sweet visual, one of the most precious pictures of how God works among his people. Think about this: a flock of sheep depend entirely on the shepherd for direction, for safety, for security, for guidance, for to get to where they need to, for protection at night from danger. As far back as, as, as Genesis, Jacob blesses Joseph. If you don't know those characters, read through Genesis.

Join us on the porch on Saturday morning at 8 o'clock. It's getting chilly, wear a coat, but we're going through Genesis and we're going to get to where Jacob blesses his, his, his grand- his, uh, his son Joseph, and he says, in the name of the God who has been my shepherd, my guide, my protector, my defender, my nourisher all my life long. Many of us are very familiar with how David spoke of the Lord. He says, the Lord is my shepherd. He is my shepherd.

And now Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. He's the gate through which they're saved and protected. He comes and searches for the lost lamb, and his disciples, he calls them, are his little flock. In Luke chapter 12, he says this to his disciples. He says, do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Even, even though he dies, the shepherd dies, that's not the end of the story, because he takes up his life again and he calls his sheep from inside and outside the Israel, and he, he sends his, his, his apostles, his disciples, to go out and find the sheep that need to be drawn in to make one new flock. He says in John 10, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. They become his people, his flock. We are the flock of God. And when we see ourselves as flock, as sheep led by a Good Shepherd, it reminds us that no matter what the world throws at us.

There are a lot of things out there that if you do not have an understanding about the Good Shepherd and the God who is protecting and keeping and sustaining his church so that the gates of hell will not overpower it or overthrow it, you can get very fearful of stuff. Anyone wrestle with that? You don't even have to raise your hand. You just might go, mm. Yeah, I'm sorry, I can get a little scary.

Understanding that we have a Good Shepherd who is leading his flock and who will take care of his flock and he will not lose anyone the Father gives him changes the way we think about the church. We are part of the flock of God. Don't leave the flock. Stick with the flock. Don't abandon the flock.

Stay with the flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus will shepherd his church, his flock, through whatever comes. I believe that with all my heart. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Anyone else agree with me? Amen. I've been part of the

church for most of my life, and I've seen firsthand how the church works like a body.

Everyone stepping up and into a role so that the entire church benefits and the community around us is blessed because the body of Christ is working the way it should work. I've known it as a bride, and a very imperfect one. Anyone been part of imperfect churches? I have big, big, big, big hand up in the air with that right there. Imperfect churches filled with imperfect people, but one that Jesus never rejected.

He never turned his back, never forsook his bride. I've experienced as a family when hard things happen, the church gathered as family, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and prayed and supported. We prayed last week for a young man who was in desperate straits. I just heard this morning he's back home. He's doing good.

Thank you, church, for praying for that young man. Amen. I've known it as a temple where I've experienced God moving in incredible, amazing, miraculous ways in us and through us and among us. I've known it as a flock when times were scary and the future was uncertain, and seeing how Jesus tended and guided and comforted and protected the church through those moments kept us intact and unharmed, together and safe. And through it all, I've seen how Jesus has been the head of his body, laying down his life again and again for his bride and his flock.

As we— as he says, nope, nope, I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to take care of you. As we submit to his leadership, we experience his love and protection. Are we lovable all the time? No, we are not.

Do we leave our socks laying around for other people to pick up and it just drives them crazy? Yes, yes we do. Yes we do. Do we talk too much at times? Yes, yes we do.

We don't know when to shut up. Not Ron. Ron never talks too much. Can we be stubborn and opinionated? No one here at this church, I'll just tell you right now, no one is stubborn, opinionated.

Does God love us despite all that? Yes, yes he does. Jesus loves his church. And he's building us into something that even the gates of hell pull back at and are fearful of. And he's inviting you into it.

And it's not complicated. He does not make this hard. If you've never fully trusted Jesus with your soul, that entirety of who you are, I invite you to do that today. Allow Jesus to be Lord of your life, accept him and be baptized into the body of Christ. Be baptized into his family.

This is not just a little, a little extra. This is the point. This is the point. You are baptized into the body of Christ. That's the deal.

That's the big deal. Do it. Then make a commitment. Step into that. Step into the body of Christ.

Say, I'm here. I'm going to be a sheep. I'm going to be a body. I'm going to be a body part. I'm going to be part of the temple.

I'm going to be a living stone. I'm going to— I'm here to serve. I'm here to give. I'm I'm here to pray. I'm here to show up.

I'm here to help and encourage. I'm here. I'm part of the body of Christ. Being part of the body of Christ is where you experience firsthand what it means to belong to Jesus. I'm telling you, out there on your own, you are not going to get the full experience.

Inside the church, that's where you— it's like watching a movie, an IMAX movie on your phone versus going to the real deal. This is the real deal. Show up for it. Be part of it. If you desire to be baptized, or if you want to make Sherwood Oaks your, your church home, we're going to share in a time of communion here in a moment.

I encourage you, do that. Share in the time of communion. Then the band's going to come up and they're going to lead us in a moment of worship. And while they're worshiping, this front row here— we don't know why it's here, but I think this morning it's here because if you need prayer, if you want to be baptized, if you want to commit to this body of Christ here at Sherwood Oaks Bedford. Come up.

I'm gonna be standing right there. Alan's gonna be there. He didn't know he was gonna do this either. It's been a rough morning on you, buddy, but we're— you're up for it, aren't you? Just whatever the body of Christ needs, you're gonna do it.

I love that. I love Alan. We're gonna be here. We're gonna pray with you. We're gonna get you set up for your next step of faith in Jesus.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for gathering us here in this place. Around this table at this moment as one people, as one body, as one, one bride, one temple, one family in Christ. So as we take the bread and this cup, remind us of how much you love us, that you gave us your body, you laid down your life, you shed your blood, not, not just to save us individually, but to bring us into the church. The church, not an extra, but the point.

Through your sacrifice, you've joined us together under one head. You've brought us together as one bride, loved eternally, loved with, with eternal commitment.

One family, welcome into your household, adopted into you, into your, into, into your fatherliness, where we get to experience what? What you intended family to be— one flock led by a good, good, good shepherd.

We resist one another at times. We overlook one another. We forget how deeply we belong to one another. But forgive us and teach us to love as you have loved us, by laying down our lives, by serving, by forgiving, by encouraging. Help us to bear with one another in love as we remember the cross.

Build us up Into this, this beautiful temple that is a habitation of you through your Holy Spirit. We receive the bread and the cup with, with gratitude and thanksgiving. Meet us in this moment. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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