

Date: August 9, 2020

Series: *Faith for Tough Times*

Title: *Getting Along With Others*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: 1st Peter 3:8-12

Take your Bibles and turn to 1st Peter 3:8-12.

8 - Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9 - Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 - For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

11 - They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

12 - For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

As the news constantly reminds us, with its non-stop updates, we are STILL in the midst of a pandemic. I remember thinking this Covid-19 deal couldn't possibly last until Easter. But it did. It's been raging for five months now and it looks like it may continue to do so for at least five more months.

Now, this is my FIRST global pandemic, so I'm not an expert, but I have to say, I don't think the damage the virus can do to our PHYSICAL bodies is something we should worry about. No, the thing that I think should concern us is the damage it could do to our CHURCH body. You see, I fear the harm Covid-19 can do to our sweet, sweet Spirit. I mean, without seeing each other a few times a week in worship and at ministry activities, without opportunities to physically fellowship---well, the love that binds us together as a church family can begin to weaken.

Without regular gatherings to PRACTICE community; without things like hospital visits, and serving together in RBC Camp, and sharing a meal on Wednesday evenings, and sitting next to each other in choir practice; without opportunities to PRACTICE community, we begin to lose it.

Think about it, how many times have you picked up the new directory and began to leaf through its pages and seen pictures of fellow Redlanders and thought, "*Oh yeah! I remember them. I wonder how they are doing?*" Sadly, several of those families pictured in that directory have moved away during this quarantine and we're used to that in this high-turnover area, but not without the opportunity for us to say good-bye. And if we don't work creatively to keep our fellowship strong, when we come out of this pandemic, Redland we might find that several other families have moved away; not physically, but relationally.

This is another reason I'm thankful for God's providential guidance to lead us to study 1st Peter, because in today's text the Big Fisherman reminds us of some things we can do to as a body to keep our fellowship strong even in tough times, things we can do to keep our relationships close even when we are forced apart by quarantine. In essence, Peter speaks to us and says, "**Whichever CHURCH body would love life and see good days must...**" And then he addresses certain parts of our individual bodies that we need to pay close attention to in order to strengthen our relationships.

(1) First, he refers to our MOUTHS.

Look at verse 10 where he says, we, "**must keep our tongues from evil and our lips from deceitful speech.**"

Now, do you realize how much of your life is spent talking and communicating? The average person puts out about twenty-five thousand words per day, either verbally or electronically. That would be about fifty pages in print, which means that every week you speak or share on social media the equivalent of a John Grisham novel. If all your words were put on paper, each year you would compile a personal library of more than fifty such novels. The act of speaking, communicating, takes up about one-fifth of our lives.

So, we really do need to pay careful attention to our words. You see, most human conflict begins in the way we communicate. And all of us “fight” in that way. All of us use our mouths to HURT others. As James 3:2 says, “**...we all stumble in many ways...[and] none of us are without fault when it comes to what we SAY...**”

One reason we all fall short in this VERBAL area is because it is so easy to do so. As that old saying goes, “*The tongue is a wet place...be careful lest it slips*” The same is true when it comes to our fingers on a keypad, they slip too. Before you know it you have hit the “enter” key and your hurtful words are out there, wreaking havoc! It IS easy to SLIP up and use our words to damage community and this is especially true in these days when tempers are frayed by this quarantine. The sad truth is we have all communicated with the intent of hurting others. As Proverbs 12:18 puts it we have all spoken, “**rashly like the thrusts of the sword...**”

In fact, let’s stop right now for a time of honest confession. If you have ever used your tongue to THRUST some hurtful words toward another person—if you’ve ever used your words to hurt would you raise your hands? Thanks for your honesty.

Of course, we must ALWAYS keep our “swords” sheathed, we must always be careful with what we say, but especially now, for with our mouths, our words, we can do potentially irreparable damage to our fellowship. You see, face-to-face conversation makes for less misunderstandings, but online conversations almost breed them. Social media can spread painful messages like wildfire. Even “Zoom” does this because it is impossible to look each other in the eye! This is a time when we MUST keep our tongues, our words, from evil.

And one of the best ways to STOP the damage our words can cause is to stop using them so much. In verse 9 Peter says, “**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.**” Solomon said, “**When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise**” (Prov. 10:19). We limit the damage of hurtful words when hold our tongues---when we don’t respond in kind.

And keeping silent is following Jesus’ example. Remember what Peter said about our Lord back in chapter 2? “**He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When He was abused He did not return abuse; when He suffered He did not threaten; but He entrusted Himself to the One Who judges justly**” (1 Pet. 2:22–24 NASV). Jesus set an example for how to respond to mistreatment and the example is seen primarily in what He didn’t say. No deceit, no insults, no threats.

In his book *Sabbath Time*, Tilden Edwards tells about a family with teenage children who decided, as part of their Sabbath commitments, that they would not criticize each other on Sundays. As the months went on and they kept this commitment, they realized more and more of their children’s friends were coming over on Sundays just to hang around. No one in the family had talked about this commitment, but somehow other teenagers knew this home was a good place to be. We want our church HOME to be a good place to be, don’t we?! We want people to WANT to be with us, don’t we?! Of course, we do, so let’s be careful with how we use our mouths, our words. This is a time to obey Ephesians 4:29. If we can’t use words to BUILD UP, we should SHUT UP.

The next body parts Peter says we must use in ways to keep our fellowship strong...

(2) Are our HANDS and our FEET.

In verse 11 Peter says, ***“We must turn from evil and DO GOOD; we must seek peace and pursue it.”*** This is a time when we must intentionally get off the couch and DO things to strengthen our relationships in this church. Perhaps Calvin Coolidge was thinking of this verse when he said: *“Little progress can be made by merely attempting to repress what is evil; our great hope lies in developing what is good.”* And this perspective on life, you know, DOING, is an area where, as Christians, we need help because we so often evaluate ourselves on what we DON'T do. And as I said a couple weeks back, there is much we must NOT do in this fallen world. Through the prophet Isaiah God said as much. ***“Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil”*** (Isa.1:16). But God didn't stop there. He went on to say, ***“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow.”*** (Isa.1:17).

This is a time to use our hands and feet to do good for each other.

- If you know of a family that loves peaches and you see them on sale, buy a couple pounds and leave them at their door.
- If you know of someone who is moving, put on a mask and help load the truck or send them a *Cracker Barrel* gift card for a meal on the road.
- If you see the flower beds at the church that need weeding or the mulch in the playground or the islands in the parking lot, go weed them. You will make Clint Jones and Andy Johnson VERY happy. Plus you'll give lots of people a great first impression of our church family.
- If you know of a lonely widow or shut-in, give them a call or drop off some cookies at their door.

This is a time to strengthen our fellowship by DOING GOOD to each other.

Speaking of good, Peggy and her Children's workers have been delivering little bags full of goodies to all our children; bags that help them do the Sunday School lessons along with their teachers online. Peggy was telling us at staff meeting this week how much fun it feels to do that, how GOOD it feels to do GOOD in that way. We should all follow her example.

I mean, there is no reason for this quarantine to stop us from DOING GOOD for each other. We just have to be more creative and we can! After all, Ephesians 2:10 says, ***“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to DO good works.”***

And this doesn't just apply to our church body.

Look around your neighborhood, there is a good chance that you will see some GOOD that needs doing. St. Augustine talked about this. He said, *“Since you cannot do good to all, you are able to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstances, are brought into closer connection with you.”* I would disagree with part of St. Augustine's statement though, I don't think those are accidents. I believe God put YOU where you are to do the good you see that needs doing! By the way, a GREAT way to do good to our neighborhood is to help keep our food pantry stocked. When you're at the grocery store pick up a couple extra cans of tuna or beans and drop them off.

This week I read about some good that was done for Blair Walsh who is the kicker for the Minnesota Vikings. Back in 2016 Blair had successfully scored a field goal 33 times out of 34 attempts within the 30 yard line. So, when the Vikings were down 10-9 in the play-offs with 22 seconds left and Walsh lined up for a 27-yard field goal attempt, it looked the Vikings would win. But Walsh's kick sailed wide and the Vikings season came to a

crashing halt. Of course, Walsh was deluged with criticism, everybody and his brother was angry at him for the miss.

But a group of first graders in Minnesota took another road. They decided to encourage the broken-hearted kicker. First grader Allie Edwards said, *“Blair was really sad, and we wanted to make him feel better.”* One of her classmates, wrote, *“Dear Blair Walsh, I think you shood keep trying. Don’t give up! We still love you! Git better by practicing.”* Tyler Doffin filled a whole page for Walsh: *“Dear Blair: I fell bad for you. Don’t give up. You’re still #1. Practis more so that you can get better at cicing. You’re so good at cicing. So don’t give up! Keep trying! We still love you.”* Isn’t it cool how a child’s bad spelling makes their encouraging words MORE encouraging!

Well, the kids’ act of kindness got Walsh’s attention. He was so touched to hear from children who didn’t know him that he pushed his flight home back a day to visit the classroom. After the visit he said, *“It was very touching to me. A lot of [the cards] were very pretty and creative. I will cherish them forever.”* Here’s a pic of him helping one of his first-grade fans learn to kick.

So, to protect and build up our church body we must use our mouths, our words. We must use our hands and feet to do good, and finally, Peter says to strengthen our relationships as a church body we need to use,

(3) Our MINDS.

In verse 8 Peter says, ***“be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”*** Peter is saying we must be like Jesus, Who, ***“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** This is a time to seek to use our minds to try and understand how others are feeling, to empathize with the hurting, to be compassionate to the lonely.

Webster’s Dictionary defines empathy as, *“the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of someone else.”* I share this definition because one of the worst side effects of this virus-induced quarantine is fear, and fear always causes us to look within. Instead of empathizing with others, it makes us focus on OUR feelings, OUR terrors, OUR struggles. Fear makes us selfish, which is why for the first couple months of Covid-19, toilet paper was almost impossible to get. This virus makes people close their doors and forget about their neighbors. It breeds the *“every man for himself”* mentality.

Douglas LaBier, director and founder of the Center for Adult Development in Washington, DC, says many people are being *“catastrophically unempathetic.”* He says we suffer from what he calls EDD, Empathy Deficit Disorder. And there have been a couple examples of EDD in the news lately. It was EDD that led a couple hundred people to crowd onto a party boat on the Hudson River with ZERO social distancing and few if any face masks. It was EDD that sparked a RAVE under a bridge in Manhattan. All those party goers weren’t thinking of others, they had no empathy for the pain their party could cause, as Covid-19 spread. No, all they cared about was fun. They were CATASTROPHICALLY UNEMPATHTIC.

I wonder, have you caught this “mental virus?” Have you suffered from EDD? A church body cannot be healthy if its members do. We are to empathize with the pain of others, especially those in our church family. A healthy empathy, Christ-like compassion, STRENGTHENS our fellowship. We draw especially close to others when, with God’s help we seek to feel what they feel.

If the Lord wills, nine couples from Redland are going to The Cove in November to hear Joseph Stowell. His study is entitled, *“Living Well in a World Gone Wrong.”* Sounds timely doesn’t it?! This week I read something

Stowell shared about a time a few years back when he was walking through the wintery streets of Chicago with a newspaper under his arm.

He writes, *"It was a bitterly cold January morning, and I'd already stopped by Starbucks and paid more than a buck for a measly cup of coffee. I passed by a homeless woman and feeling noble, I struggled to find my wallet, reached in, and took out a dollar. The woman asked, 'Do you really want that newspaper, or can I have it to sell to someone else?' 'You can have the paper,' I replied. Then I added, 'How are you today?' 'I'm so cold,' she said. As I turned to go, I told her, 'I hope the sun comes out, it warms up, and you have a good day,' I continued on, with the cup of coffee warming my hand. About half a block later, the conversation finally registered. I wrestled for a moment with what I should do, but I was late, so I kept walking. Ever since, I've regretted not giving her a cup of hot coffee in Christ's name."*

I know we've all done things like that, failed to feel the needs of others. Well this is a time to fix that flaw, it's a time to be sensitive to the Spirit of God and learn to empathize with people.

Look at the prayer list, as you read the names and their needs ask God to help you feel compassion for those people.

- If you do, you'll see that Gladys McClain's daughter had a major stroke about a week ago, but thank God she is fully recovered. How do you think Gladys feels right now? HAPPY! THANKFUL! Well, call her or drop her a note to say that you praise God for His goodness in taking care of her daughter. That EMPATHETIC call or card will strengthen the bond between you and Gladys.
- The prayer list says that Diane Gordon has been having a rough time lately. Her dad has endured a couple serious health issues. Diane also has a friend who is in alcohol rehab and another friend whose daughter died of an aneurism. She also has two nephews in need of prayer. How do you think Diane feels right now? OVERWHELMED. BURDENED. Call her and tell her you feel for her. Pray with her. If you do, I promise the BOND between you and Diane will STRENGTHEN.
- Jacqui Galik is on the prayer list. She has been for a while as she fights breast cancer. She's about to start yet another round of chemo. How do you think Jacqui and Peter and their kids feel right now? Try to empathize with their situation, ask God what you can do to let them know you feel some of what they feel. God may prompt you to call Jacqui and pray with her, or to take a meal, but if you do something like that, the BOND between you and the Galiks will grow.

I could go on, but you get the idea. Nothing builds the body of Christ---nothing strengthens relationships---more than sincere empathy and compassion. And using your mind in this way will strengthen your relationship with Jesus as well. In verse 12 Peter says, ***"The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers"***

Let's pray.