

UPSIDE DOWN RELATIONSHIPS

Title: Part 5 – “Nobody Watches a Family”

Date: October 18, 2026

While everyone is saying “Hi” here in the house I want to say “Hi” to everyone joining us online or on our app! We don’t think of you as an audience, we think you are a part of our church family, so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you in any way that we can. You can always reach out through the Care & Prayer tab on our app.

Well, today is part 5 of a collection of messages we have been doing on relationships, and my goal today is to convince you that there are 59 things, that God commands us to do, that you cannot do without other people. All the introverts in the house just checked out on me...

If you have a Bible with you or the Bible app on your phone, join me in **1 Corinthians**

12. The Apostle Paul is writing to a church that is a mess. You say, “Well how messy could they be, wasn’t this shortly after Jesus?” Well, they were suing each other. That’s never good. They were splitting into factions over which preacher they like best. Somethings never change. Communion had turned into a party where the rich ate first and the poor got nothing. AND the church tolerated a severe case of incest, and some members visited temple prostitutes. So, this is not a letter to a church that’s crushing it. But to that church, Paul writes this starting in verse 12:

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated

with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

As I mentioned, for five weeks we've been in a collection of messages called **Upside Down Relationships** all about what to do when you've tried everything else. When you have read every book, tried every hack, taken everyone's advice and your relationships are still rocky then maybe it is time to do them upside down.

In the opening week we laid a foundation by NOT talking about a single relationship. Instead, we talked about the SELF. The part of you that likes to be in charge, call the shots, get offended, and make excuses for anything you do in order to get your way.

We leaned on this interesting observation from a missionary Time Magazine called the greatest missionary evangelist of the 20th century. E. Stanley Jones said:

“I only have one remedy, for I find only one disease—self at the center; self trying to be God.”

Only one disease! So, if our SELF is our greatest problem then what do we do with the self? Do we try to eliminate the self or know and express it? Jesus says neither, you hand it to Him! Surrendering your SELF to Jesus is the only way relationships work. WHY?

Because self-giving love is not something you can produce by trying harder or better communicating yourself through. It is something that overflows out of a surrendered self. Because an unsundered self cannot truly give, it can only trade. Every act of service is always done with a little string attached, something needed back. Appreciation, approval, control, the feeling of being needed, the right to bring it up later in an argument. But that's not a gift. That's a service with an invoice attached!

But a SELF that's been surrendered to God already has what it needs. It's loved, it's known, it's safe, it's held. So, it can give with nothing attached!

AND we have applied that principle to marriage, our kids, our friends and extended family... If you missed any of this, today will feel like walking in on the last 15 minutes of a movie so take some time and get caught up on our app or website, BECAUSE today we apply this to something many people in our country have written off... the Church.

I'm calling today's message:

Nobody Watches a Family

I'll explain that in a minute, but here's the tension. As a Christian sub-culture we don't join a church family anymore, we subscribe to them.

Think about the language we use. "We're church shopping." "We're looking for a church that better meets our needs." "We tried that church; it wasn't for us." Come on, that is Netflix language! Content's good, kids like it, parking's easy, we'll keep the subscription. But the moment the music changes or somebody says something we don't like, or it requires too much of us, we cancel and try the next one.

And I'm not up here mad about it. It's in all of us, me included, because the consumer question is the most natural question a human being can ask, **what am I getting out of this?** BUT here is where this ties into where we have been for 5 weeks. That is not a church problem. It's a SELF problem. It's the unsundered self! It's the unsundered self, expressing its self, about the volume of the music or the size of the youth ministry or whatever else gets in the way of what it wants. It's the consumer question, what am I getting out of this?

BUT that question, what am I getting out of this, as natural as it is, is not one you can ask and obey 1 Corinthians 12 at the same time! Because look at what Paul calls us in verse 27:

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a PART of it.

A part! Not a patron. Not a member where you pay a fee and use the equipment. Not a subscriber. A part! And specifically, a body part. A hand does not consume the body, a hand gives to the body, or the body suffers, and eventually so does the hand.

AND that is the truly upside-down thing about this. Our whole culture says you'll find yourself by curating your experiences—picking the things that fit you best. Your Airbnb app will even do this for you. But Paul says you'll find yourself by being placed in a body and *spending* yourself for it.

SO, let's talk about how to stop subscribing and start belonging. If you're taking notes, write this down:

1. Find your part and play it.

You don't fix a consumer problem by consuming better, right? You fix it by finding out what you actually are in this thing and playing it. And Paul tells us, not by giving us a step-by-step plan, but by giving us an anatomy lesson. Look at verse 14:

¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. [and then Paul does something kind of hilarious, he starts giving body parts feelings, v.15] ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

Paul puts self-pity in the mouth of a foot because he's heard it in the church. The unsundered self often shows up in two ways **self-pity** and **pride**.

SO, the foot says, "I'm not important enough to matter here... Nobody noticed me... Nobody asked me... I'm not up front... I'm not gifted like them... I'll just come late and leave early and stay a spectator." And church, I want to say this gently but clearly, that is not humility. That's self-pity, and self-pity is just pride in reverse. Both of them are the SELF standing in front of a mirror measuring and comparing.

Paul then shows us this in verse 21:

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

That's the opposite problem. "I'm the important one here... I'm talented... I've been here longest... I give the most... I was in leadership at another church, so I know how things ought to be done..." It's the self expressed as pride.

BUT Paul says in verse 18:

¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

And watch how far Paul goes with this metaphor. He lets a foot talk. He lets an ear talk. He lets the eye talk and the head talk. But not one time does Paul entertain a body part claiming to **BE** the head.

Why? Because that position is already filled. Paul tells the Ephesians that God ***“appointed him to be head over everything for the church,”*** and he tells the Colossians that Christ ***“is the head of the body, the church.”*** Meaning the church already has a head and His name is Jesus! Amen?

Which means every power grab, every “Well, in my opinion this church ought to...” Every underground campaign to get your way is an attempted coup. It might be a well-intentioned coup, but it's week one all over again—the self trying to be God!

BUT come on, a surrendered self doesn't need to be the eye. It doesn't need to be a mouth or a head. It doesn't even need to be seen at all. It just needs to be **USED!** Look at verse 22 again:

²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor... But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Paul is talking about your liver! Think about your liver for a second. It filters your blood, it makes the stuff that lets you digest a cheeseburger, it stores what you need and dumps what'll kill you. And you have never once thanked it. You've never posted about it! If your liver quit you'd be dead in days, and it has never asked for a single thing.

Paul is saying there are livers in this room! There are people in this body who have been quietly keeping this thing alive for years, and nobody's clapping, BUT heaven is keeping a very different set of books than our world does! Verse 24 says God gives “greater honor to the parts that lacked it.” God Himself goes out of His way to honor the unhonored! If you've been faithful in the dark, you are not overlooked—you are noticed by the only One whose notice lasts forever!

So, find your part, whatever it might be, visible or invisible, loud or quiet, find your part and be used to make the body whole, not in self-pity or pride, but all in service of the head who is Jesus. Because our church is not complete without you!

Number 2:

2. Stop watching and start belonging.

There's a little Greek word that runs throughout the New Testament. It is the word {all-LAY-lone} allēlōn. It is actually the root of the English word parallel, but it usually gets translated as “one another” in the Bible and it shows up around a hundred times. Of

those hundred uses, roughly 59 of them are direct commands about how we're supposed to treat each other. 59 out of 100!

Things like: Love one another. Serve one another. Forgive one another. Bear with one another. Encourage one another. Confess your sins to one another. Carry each other's burdens. Be patient with one another. Live in harmony with one another. Greet one another. Pray for one another. Spur one another on. Submit to one another. Honor one another above yourselves. Do not grumble against one another. Do not judge one another. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling...

Now here's the part I teased at the opening of the message. Of those 59 New Testament commands **you cannot obey a single one of them by yourself!** Not a single one of them!

There is no private version of “bear with one another.” You cannot “forgive one another” alone in your car listening to a podcast. You can't “confess your sins to one another” if you are not in community. Every one of those 59 commands requires a second human being who knows your name and is close enough to annoy you.

Which means God wrote the Christian life in a way that is impossible to live out alone. Meaning He didn't make community a nice bonus for extroverts. He made it the only way the commands work!

But why? Right? It all goes back to the self. Watching is safe. Watching lets you keep control. When you watch, you decide how much, how close, how long, and you can leave anytime without a conversation. BUT come on, belonging costs you exactly what week one asked you for—control of your SELF. Because in community you get known, you get needed, you get inconvenienced, you get asked for things at bad times.

Thus, the title of today's message, nobody watches a family. You can watch a church service, but you cannot watch the body of Christ, you have to experience it!

You can be a fan of a team. You can be a follower of an account. You can be a subscriber to a channel. But there is no such thing as a fan of a family. There's no spectator section at Thanksgiving. You're either at the table passing the potatoes and getting into it with your uncle... or you're NOT in the family. There is no third option.

SO, if you've been coming here for years and nobody in this room knows what's actually going on in your life—hear me in love—you haven't been part of a family. You've been a really loyal viewer! AND the thing God wants for you is not viewership, He wants ownership, a family bond, to be known and loved, to be inconvenienced and vulnerable and used for the body... to belong!

Say, “Stop watching and start belonging.” Stop watching and start belonging!

One more thing before we move on. Our church is not huge by some standards. And every so often somebody treats that like a disclaimer. But after 20 years of planting and leading this church, let me tell you what I've come to believe. 59 one-another commands cannot be obeyed in a crowd of 10,000 strangers. Not saying there are not ways around that, but the truth is these commands can only be obeyed in a room where people know your name! Which means this church, OUR church, is the perfect size room for the commands God gave us!

But only if we do this, number 3:

3. Love like family, not a brand.

There are two ways to belong to something, you can belong to a brand, or you can belong to a family. And they kind of look identical right up until it costs you something. Meaning, belonging isn't the full issue, it's HOW you belong, and the Apostle Paul has a word for it. This time writing to the church in Rome he says: (Romans 12)

¹⁰ **BE DEVOTED to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

"Be devoted" is the compound of two words {fil-OSS} philos—that's friend-love, the brotherly kind, think Philadelphia. And {stor-gos} storgē—which is the Greek word for the natural, instinctive affection of blood family. It's the ache a mother feels for a newborn or the loyalty between siblings. **BUT** are you ready for this? This compounded word only appears one time in the entire Bible! Paul reached for the warmest word the Greek language had, and he didn't use it talking about husbands and wives or father's and kids, no he used it to address a room full of unrelated strangers in a Roman church who had nothing in common but Jesus!

He's saying God's plan is for the church to out-family your family!

Now that's a tall command, right? I have a hard enough time loving my own family... BUT fast forward 200 years from when Paul wrote this and a plague tore through the Roman Empire. A bishop named Dionysius of Alexandria wrote down what he watched. He said of his pagan neighbors that *"they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads."* In other words, the panic was so bad that people abandoned their own families in the street. But then he described the Christians. And I want you to catch the exact words he used:

"Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another." (Dionysius of Alexandria)

Dionysius is saying 59 commands walked out of a 200-year-old letter and into a plague, and the people who ran toward the dying were the ones who had surrendered their SELVES to God and trusted Him with total abandonment!

In fact, a sociologist named Rodney Stark argues that this—how Christians handled the plagues of this time—is one of the big reasons the church kept growing while the empire was dying. So much so that the Empire that killed Jesus became a Christian nation 300 years later! It was the church family out-familying the family!

I wrote in my notes: **Love that doesn't need anything back is the only kind that lasts!** Amen?

SO, locate yourself in the body, commit to it, change the category you've filed it under and one more:

4. Get close enough to feel it.

Write that down. Get close enough to feel it. That's what Paul tells us in verse 26, why don't we all read this out loud:

²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Did you know that when you get an infection in your little toe—just your toe, the smallest, farthest, least important part of you—do you know what your whole body does? It runs a fever, your core temperature rises, your heart rate climbs and you ache in places that have nothing to do with your foot. Your entire body gets sick “on behalf of” your toe. Meaning your body cannot quarantine the suffering of one of its parts.

Paul is using biology to teach the church a lesson. We are to be so connected that when one part suffers, we all carry that ache with them. BUT you can't do that from a distance, amen? You have to get close enough to feel it.

And that is true for the flip side, which honestly I think is the harder one. ***“If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it!”***

That's harder! Suffering together is hard, but we're sort of built for it—somebody suffers a loss and the church shows up. But rejoicing when somebody else gets honored? When they get the thing you've been praying for? When their business takes off and yours is struggling, when they get the baby and you're still waiting? Come on, that is way harder, but Paul says if you are operating as one body then that is the sign!

But both halves cost the surrender of the SELF. Suffering with somebody costs you your time, your comfort, your hours, laying your SELF down at 11 pm on a weeknight. And rejoicing with somebody costs you the spotlight, the praise, the credit, which for a lot of us is more expensive because you can only clap for somebody passing you if you're not the one holding your own worth.

My point is, you cannot obey verse 26 with an unsundered self. It is literally not possible. A self at the center compares and comparison turns someone else's suffering into an inconvenience and someone else's honor into a threat. But a surrendered self is free! Free to weep without being drained and free to celebrate without being diminished, because its identity was settled a long time ago on the cross.

God sent me today to sound the alarm that we desperately need this kind of close community in our world today. Because someone in here right now is running a fever, but you're trying to hide it. Somebody came in and smiled at the door, but you are falling apart inside. Listen to me, the only way this body ever finds out is if we get close enough to feel it!

SO guys, I don't want to pastor a giant arena! I want to be part of a body that aches when one of us aches and throws a party when one of us wins! That's not a program or ministry we can launch, that's what naturally happens when a room full of surrendered people finally stop protecting themselves! That's what I want to be a part of! That's what Jesus gave His life for!

So, let's land this plane. What do we do with all of this? A few thoughts:

The first is to name your part. What has God actually built you to do in the body? If you don't know, ask somebody who knows you. And if you're the foot who's decided you don't matter here, God placed you in this body "just as he wanted." So, stop auditing yourself and start offering yourself.

Two, pick a "one another" and do it. One command, one person, and this week. Encourage one another, bear with one another, serve one another, offer hospitality to one another... there are 59 to choose from, ask Gemini or Chat, but aim to do one of them with one person from this church.

Then I'm asking you to move one seat in. Everybody here is sitting somewhere on a line between watching and belonging. I'm not asking you to jump to the end of it, but move one seat. For some of you that's moving from watching online to joining us in the House. For some of you that's getting here a few minutes early and sticking around a few minutes late talking with someone in the lobby. For other's that's getting in a men's, women's or student group, going to Practicing the Way all four weeks.

For some it's serving, eventually it means everyone serving to truly be the body. For some it's just letting one person in this room actually know you. But move one seat!

Finally, show up for somebody's fever or somebody's party. Whichever one is harder for you is probably the one God's assigning. Amen? But show up for somebody's fever or somebody's party, get close enough to feel it.

We've called this whole collection "Upside Down Relationships." And I told you in week one that I stole that title from the book of Acts, where the enemies of the church accused the first Christians of turning the world upside down. But I need to confess something else to you today.

The title's wrong. Jesus' way of surrender isn't upside down. Ours is!

We're the ones who have been holding the ledger upside down our whole lives, wondering why the math never works! We've tried to win marriages by keeping score. We've tried to hold our kids by gripping them. We've tried to make friends without sacrificing anything for them. We've tried to belong to a church without being known by it.

And we called all of that normal. And we called Jesus' way radical. NO! Jesus isn't turning your relationships upside down. He's turning them right-side up for the first time in your life!

One surrender. Four overflows. It is one dead self and a God who hands it back alive.

And the reason you can trust Him with it—the reason you can put your whole self in those hands—is what we said in week one:

"God takes His own medicine, obeys His own law of losing His life and finding it by losing it. He goes from a cross to a throne, from a grave to a resurrection... The God of the scars becomes the God of the stars."

He went first! Before you kept score, He gave! Before you opened your hands, His were already open! Before you ever belonged to anything, He called you His own body!

When Jesus wanted to tell the world who belongs to Him, He didn't say, "they'll know you by your doctrine." He didn't say, "they'll know you by your building, your attendance, your podcast." He said this, John 13:35:

³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love ONE
ANOTHER.

Nobody watches a family from the outside for very long before they want a seat at the table! If we will be a body of surrendered people who pour ourselves out FOR each other, this community will not be able to explain us!

SO, for one final time, would you stand with me, open your hands out in front of you... but today, don't just put yourself in them. Look around this room first. Today, we say, "God, I give You everyone and everything, starting with... one another."

Let's pray.