Ordered: God's Design for Church Life

Order in Community

Pursue, Partake, Pray

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14–27

Where We Are

Good evening. We are in our series called *Ordered: God's Design for Church Life*, and here is the premise: God has a design for the way we function when we gather together for what is often called church. In the first sermon we talked about worship and the purpose of singing to one another. Then we talked through polity, where we showed that the New Testament is clear that the church should be led by a group of elders and served by deacons, not the top down, CEO style lead pastor model many of us are familiar with.

Last week we talked through order in giving. We spent a great deal of time showing how the Old Testament commanded Israel to give, and we looked at what the New Testament instructed regarding giving. What we saw was that the ten percent tithe that many churches preach is not really the whole picture. If you were an Israelite, it was expected that you give closer to twenty or twenty five percent of your income, your first fruits and the rest, to the Lord by way of the local synagogue or temple. So if we were going to say that the Old Testament standard of giving applies to us today, saying that you need to give ten percent would be intellectually dishonest. What we see in the New Testament is not that believers brought a tithe, but that they gave generously, sacrificially, regularly, and within their means. They lived in the reality that they needed to steward one hundred percent of their resources, not merely give ten percent. All of it is the Lord's, and we are managers or stewards of it.

I left you with a challenge: make sure that your heart is not disconnected from your giving, that you are not just checking a box or giving under compulsion but giving out of devotion and gratitude to the Lord. And the other challenge I presented was that you give within your means, not above them and not below them, because if everyone does that, the Kingdom across the world would have no problem being funded.

Today is the easiest message in this series. This is the one where we take a break from the things that feel intense, though it is really important. Today's message is order in community.

God's Design for a Room Full of People

God has a design for the way that we are to function as a community, and as we have been saying in this series, God's way is better than our way. He is the Lord of our lives and of our gatherings, and we would be foolish to do church our own way.

The truth is that this sermon, if done properly, could be a ten week series in and of itself. How do we function together as a community? How do we treat each other? So much of the New Testament is written to explain this. I could likely give thirty or so bits of instruction to this very end. In a couple of weeks we are starting a new series in the book of James, and so much of what he says falls into this category. So for the sake of this sermon, I want to focus on three aspects of our community that I believe are most often overlooked, and that if I am honest are potentially the most overlooked even here at Legacy, and we want to change that.

There are three elements of our gathering as it relates to our community that are non-negotiable. The first is simple in concept and difficult in practice.

The Text

> [14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?
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> [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”
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> [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. [27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
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> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14–27 · ESV

Three Non-Negotiables

i.

A Community That Pursues

This is where you say, pursues what? One another. We have got to be a community that goes out of our way to pursue building relationships with one another. This is crucial for the life of the church and for the soul of the people. Five times Paul tells the churches to greet one another with a holy kiss. Now, we are not going to do that, but the principle is real: we are to warmly welcome each other.

We have multiple instances of Peter, Paul, and the author of Hebrews imploring us to be hospitable toward one another.

> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ROMANS 12:13
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> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. HEBREWS 13:2
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> Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 PETER 4:9
>
> ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION

Elders must be hospitable according to 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8, which is a qualification rather than a universal command, but it assumes that hospitality is a Christian virtue. And there are many more of these: love one another, welcome one another, honor one another, care for one another, stir up one another, seek the good of one another, be devoted to one another. We have about sixty of those one anothers in the New Testament. We have to be a community that pursues one another.

What can happen, though, is that we come to church and we go to our one anothers, our crew, our friends, our people, and we forget that there are others in the room who do not have that. This is going to be a particular challenge for many of us in the room, because the nature of our plant was that many people already had longstanding relationships with each other, so it does not come naturally to get outside your box and think about the person walking in who does not know anyone.

As soon as a person walks through these doors, we need to include them as a one another. When someone walks through those doors, they should immediately be a recipient of all the one anothers. They are welcomed, shown hospitality, loved, honored, and cared for.

And I think it is normal to assume that someone else should be doing that.

Let me help you. It is your job.

We just did our year one survey, and you know what one of the common threads was? People do not feel as relationally connected as they want to be. That is not a rebuke, that is an excuse for courage. If you are sitting here thinking, man, I wish I felt more connected to these people, I wish someone would invite me to coffee or to hang out, chances are that other people are thinking the same thing. So get over your fear of rejection, get out there, and start pursuing relationships with people. We all want that.

Now let me give you two practical things if we are going to be a community that pursues. First, start by introducing yourself to someone you have never met at church and striking up a conversation. That is the whole greet one another, receive one another, welcome one another component. It can be so hard to walk through the doors of a church where you do not know people. Social anxiety is real.

Second, look forwards, not backwards. God is doing something amazing here at Legacy. He has a future for us that I believe wholeheartedly echoes Paul's words to the church in Ephesus, that it will be better than we can ask or think or imagine. He has people that He is going to send our way who are going to come to know Jesus for all eternity, who are going to be discipled and stand the test of time. He has new lifelong friendships for many of us that will serve to anchor us to the truths of the gospel. He has new things in store for us.

But we will never see any of that if we are stuck staring at the past or trying to recreate the past. Many of you are here because you were at a church together for years that did not pan out the way you hoped. You are not alone, but we have got to start moving on from the pain, the disappointment, and the disillusionment, because people will feel that when they walk in. It is easy for someone new to walk in and spot very quickly that they do not share the same history that many others do, and the enemy can use that to make them feel as if they do not belong. No one in this room wants that. We want to be a community that pursues each other and develops lasting, fruitful relationships.

ii.

A Community That Plays Our Part

When you are partaking in something, it means you are taking part in something. You are invested. You are not just showing up, you are getting involved. And biblically there is clear and beautiful language to describe this. It is using your gifts for the benefit of and the building up of the church. It is giving your portion to the body of Christ.

Paul's language is particularly clear in 1 Corinthians 12. He says that God has equipped the church with a variety of gifts, but all of them given from the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He is clear that not everyone has the same gift, and that not one gift is more honorable than the other. He uses this really good analogy to describe the sentiment. He says that together we are like a body, and each one is a different member, or part, of the body. Some are hands, some eyes, some legs, some arms.

The only way the body works well is when you have all the parts working together, bringing their proper portion. The body will not work properly if you have hands trying to be feet or arms trying to be legs. There is no competition, no envy, just a beautiful design and each part functioning as the Lord created it. That is you and me. We have to be content with how the Lord wired us, content with the gifts the Lord gave us, and we have to bring those gifts to help build up the community.

And He lists some examples of these giftings: words of wisdom, knowledge, miracles, tongues, prophecy, healing, discernment, helping, administration, teaching. Let me just point this out, these are examples, not an exhaustive doctrinal list. He does this on at least three occasions where he gives examples, and each list is a little different, and I can assure you that he is not banking on us compiling all of his letters and making a list of twenty four gifts and only twenty four gifts. His point in each of those instances is the same as it is in 1

Corinthians 12: we all have a part to play, and it is wrong to withhold your part.

Some of you are really gifted at music. Use it for the glory of God and the building up of the church. Some of you are really gifted at making money. Some of you are really gifted at administration. Use it for the glory of God and the building up of the church. Some of you are really gifted thinkers and communicators. Use it for the glory of God and the building up of the church.

This is one of the reasons we are moving to establish deacons, because we want to do our part as an organization to make sure that those who need it have a clear path to utilize your giftings. So let me ask you, what are you gifted at? Is there something you feel the Spirit has enabled you to do, and how can that serve the body of Christ?

iii.

A Community That Prays

Lastly, we need to be a community that prays. I mentioned in this series a couple of times that there are clear elements that we are supposed to have present when we gather: the reading of scripture, the teaching of scripture, communion, fellowship, and prayer. We should be a people that prays. That is both individually and collectively. And what can happen in churches sometimes is that prayer is mostly relegated to individual prayer, or to the weird charismatic people in the side room on the off night, speaking in tongues for three hours.

Let me just tell you, you need to be praying without ceasing. You need to constantly be in communication with the Lord. And so often when we hear that you need to pray more, we think about the people who rubbed their knees raw praying in their closet. That is not what I am talking about, as great as that may be. I mean turning the inner dialogue in your head into an upward dialogue. I mean fixing your eyes on Jesus all throughout your day.

I heard it said once that if you want to learn how to pray, do not watch the guy who rubs divots in the floor with his knees, but watch a child talk to his dad who he knows loves him. Can you imagine how much of your life would change if you were constantly praying, eyes locked above? It would change the way you speak, act, think, spend, and steward.

You should be praying individually. But we should also pray together. The New Testament church is often found praying together, and it gives us great detail into what those prayers were like. Broadly speaking, they can be fit into three categories.

First, we pray for God's Kingdom, which is the advance of the gospel, God's glory, His mission, boldness, and His will. Jesus teaches us to pray that God's kingdom would come and His will be done in Matthew 6:9–10. The church prays for boldness to continue proclaiming Christ, not for safety, in Acts 4:23–31. The church fasts and prays as they send Barnabas and Saul on mission in Acts 13:1–3. Paul asks the church to pray that God would open a door for the gospel in Colossians 4:2–4, and that the word of the Lord would speed ahead and be honored in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. Jesus tells us to pray that the Lord would send laborers into His harvest in Matthew 9:37–38, and Paul asks for prayer that he would proclaim the gospel with boldness in Ephesians 6:18–20.

Second, we pray for God's people, which covers spiritual growth, perseverance, healing, unity, confession, and encouragement. Paul prays that believers would know God more deeply in Ephesians 1:15–23, and for strength, love, and fullness in Christ in Ephesians 3:14–21. He prays that love would abound with knowledge and discernment in Philippians 1:9–11, and for spiritual wisdom, worthy living, endurance, and thankfulness in Colossians 1:9–14. He prays that believers would abound in love and holiness in 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13, and that God would fulfill every good purpose in His people in 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12. James tells us to pray for the sick, confess sins, and pray for one another in James 5:14–16, and Paul tells us to pray for all people and governing authorities in 1 Timothy 2:1–2.

Third, we pray for God's wisdom, seeking His direction, guidance, provision, and our own dependence. The disciples pray before selecting Matthias in Acts 1:24–26. The apostles pray as they appoint the Seven in Acts 6:6. Prayer and fasting come before the sending of missionaries in Acts 13:2–3, and accompany the appointment of elders in Acts 14:23.

James tells us that if any of us lacks wisdom, we should ask God, in James 1:5. Paul tells us to bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving in Philippians 4:6–7. And in Matthew 26:36–46, Jesus prays that not His will but the Father's will be done, modeling dependence on the Father's wisdom.

We find the church praying together about sixteen times in the book of Acts alone.

Now, some of us have been on a bit of a palate cleanse from corporate prayer this last year. Just resetting. But starting next week, we are going to begin incorporating prayer into our service. We are not going to be the church that relegates prayer to the side room on the off night, or to the people who merely feel called to pray.

> *If you are called to Christ, you are called to pray.*

We are not going to be the church that only emphasizes your personal prayer time. We are going to be a church that values prayer, and as a church, our main gathering says a lot about us. It sets the tone for the kind of Christians we want to be and it tells newcomers what is important to us. When you come to our service, it will be clear what we value the most, and prayer has to be on that list.

So here is what this means. We are going to switch up the way we do our service flow a bit starting next week. We are going to sing together like normal, but following that, one or two of our elders are going to come up and lead us in a time of prayer on the mic for three to five minutes. They will lead the room. There will be music in the background, and we are going to ask everyone to pray out loud, not in tongues but audibly. We will have a topic out that fits one of the categories I mentioned, and we are going to pray together. Sometimes it will be about world events, sometimes the health of our community, and sometimes we are going to open up the Bible and pray through it to prepare our hearts for the sermon.

There are moments when it is going to be us inviting you to pray with your friends and family, to pray for the person sitting next to you. It is not going to be the same thing every time. There is going to be some awkward moments, times of reflection, times that are quiet.

A Pastoral Word

Some of you are going to be super uncomfortable, because you have never seen anything like this and it feels weird. Stick it out with us for a few months. This is supposed to be like breathing for the Christian. It is just what we do to survive.

Some of you are going to be uncomfortable because it reminds you of your time at the house of prayer. We are going to try not to make it feel the same. But just know, not everything about the house of prayer was bad, and give the Lord a chance to redeem corporate prayer.

Some of you will feel extremely comfortable because of your time at the house of prayer. Do not default to the same buzzwords, or the same style. Let us come at corporate prayer with fresh eyes and a fresh heart.

This is not going to be a time of charismania. This is not a time for prophetic ministry but a time for prayer. Do not speak in tongues unless it is under your breath and not heard. Paul said he spoke in tongues more than anyone, but that in the gathering he would rather speak five words that could be understood than ten thousand words in a tongue.

This is just normal prayers by a people saved by grace.

FOR REFLECTION

Answer These With a Name

Do not answer in the abstract. The abstract is where we hide.

Who walked through our doors this year that you quietly decided was someone else's responsibility? What has the Spirit enabled you to do that you have been withholding from the body because you assumed your part was small? And when was the last time the dialogue running inside your head turned upward?

Answer the first with a name. Answer the second with a gift. Answer the third with a time. Then do something about all three before you leave this room.

God's design for our community is that we would pursue one another, play our part, and pray together.

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Soli Deo Gloria