

Be The Church - Part Four
It's Love
Lester Zimmerman

This morning is part four of a series we are doing called **"Be The Church"**.

So far in this series we talked about the fact that when the bible refers to the church it is referring to God's people and not buildings.

This morning the church is gathered in this building. And in another 40 minutes the church will leave this building and be the church in action throughout the week in many different places.

We talked about the mission of the church. Being the church means we are carrying on the work of Jesus wherever we go. **"We are followers of Jesus who help others follow Jesus."**

We talked about the habits of the church such as gathering together weekly to worship and grow in our faith.

This week we want to focus on how God calls us to love. The hallmark of Jesus was how he loved people. He cared the same for both the rich and the poor, the educated and uneducated, the Jew and gentile. He was no respecter of persons.

Jesus knew when to be compassionate and he knew when tough love was needed. But it was all done out of a motivation of love to help the person.

This is how God wants us to be known. We reflect Jesus to the people around us. We are his image bearers. In Galatians 6 we are told to reflect his goodness.

- He begins by telling us to do good by helping restore people caught in sin
- We are to get involved in each other's lives and carry each other's burdens

READ **Galatians 6:9-10** (Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.)

This verse is saying we should care for all people. Whenever we have the opportunity to do good for someone we should.

But the Apostle Paul reminds us that in the midst of our outreach to the unchurched we must give special attention to caring for each other in our church family.

We do a lot in our community to reach the unchurched and that is good. But this morning I want to talk about the last part of this verse. How do we love and care for each other in the Petra family?

In the New Testament the word family is used over and over to describe the church. We are family. We are brothers and sisters. We belong to each other. We look out for each other. We care for each other because we are family.

One of the purposes of church membership is to know who is committed to this family and our mission together. Family is only as strong as each person's commitment and contribution to making the family work.

So how do we love each other? What does this look like? In the New Testament there are about 60 verses that are called the "One Another" verses. They tell us how to love one another.

- Be devoted to one another
- Honor one another
- Accept one another
- Agree with one another
- Fellowship with one another
- Encourage one another
- Pray for one another, etc.

One third of these 60 "One Another" verses deal with the unity of the church.

1. Getting along together is a mark of authentic Christianity.

The fact that we are able to genuinely get along and love each other is a testimony of a people whose hearts and minds are being transformed by Jesus from a culture of self-centeredness to a culture of love and honor.

We are such a mixture here at Petra. We come from atheist, unchurched, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Amish, Nazarene, Mennonite, Assembly of God, Presbyterian, Muslim, and many other faith traditions. Each carries its own ideas of how to be the church and how to do church.

We come from various ethnic backgrounds, Philippine, Colombian, Puerto Rican, European, American, Mexican, Guatemalan, African, Costa Rican, Chinese, Iraqi, Congolese, Ukrainian and others. Each has its own culture mindset and values.

We are men and women, young and old. We have different personalities. We hold to differing political views, have different interests, different perspectives on a whole host of things including how to do church life together.

We have differing tastes on music and worship. We like different translations of the Bible. We have different ideas on priorities for our church finances. Different ideas on what the pastors should teach on. We even have different ideas on when Jesus will return.

The fact that we are here this morning worshipping together and finding ways to do life together in community is amazing. Only God can do such a thing.

How we care and treat each other as members of Petra has a great impact on our testimony to people who are looking for something real and authentic. In other words, the way we love each other validates our message.

Here is one of Jesus "One Another" commands to us. Jesus said: ...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The world is looking for the real deal. For something that can change their lives.

When they see a diverse group of people, like us, genuinely loving each other they will be convinced concerning Jesus and his love for them too.

Where people walk in unity, God releases a special blessing and favor.

Psalm 133

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Unity is precious. We need to guard it and do what we can to preserve it.

Your most powerful witnessing tool is how you love other people. Not your theology or expertise in apologetics.

The truth is - people are more convinced by authentic love than our words.

2. Getting along and loving each other is hard work sometimes.

It's easy to say we love each other. But walking this out in our marriages, church and other relationships requires a lot of dying to self. The test of our love comes when we disagree. When we don't meet each other's expectations. Or when one of us says something insensitive. It's much easier to run at these times and find someone that agrees with us.

Here is a “One Another” challenge for us.

Eph 4:32 ... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Jesus put a lot of emphasis on kindness and compassion. Another word he used to describe himself was gentleness.

Sometimes we are so focused on convincing other people that we are right, and they are wrong that we become overbearing, defensive and not very kind. We can win the argument but lose the relationship.

Gentleness has a lot to do with how we talk to each other. Discovering the kind way of saying something.

Recently God has been speaking to me about this. To help me I have made **Psalm 19:14** a regular prayer. **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.**

We also need to forgive those who hurt us with their words.

Story: I remember as a young man I confided with someone I looked up to about a dream in my heart for my future. Instead of really listening he said something off the cuff that made light of it and it really hurt me. Sometimes the people closest to us hurt us the most because we value what they say more than others.

These things happen in the best of relationships. They happen in marriages. They happen in church. I had a choice to make. I could ditch him as a friend. Tell others how he hurt me, Dwell on my hurt feelings, or I could forgive him.

- I chose to forgive him, and we are still friends today

3. We learn how to love and be the church in smaller group settings.

It is hard for me to practice these “One Anothers” unless I learn to know you.

In **Galatians 6:2** we are told to **Bear one another’s burdens.**

James 5:16 tells us to **Pray for one another.**

But I can’t help bear your burden unless I know what it is. I can’t pray for you very well unless I know what you are struggling with.

Andy Stanley: When everyone is sitting in rows...you can’t do any “one others”.

I really want to encourage you to get into some type of smaller group outside of Sunday morning where you can share your heart and life with others. We can't really be the church and live out these "One Anothers" on our own.

I challenge you to make it a priority. Every week or every other week is good. Even monthly is better than not at all. Find something that works for your stage of life. Mornings, evenings, lunches, breakfasts, as a couple or with other friends. A support group, men's' or women's group, youth group

Erma and I have a group that we meet with for prayer and support. They are helping us do life and navigate some of the challenges.

God never intended for any of us to do life alone. That's why he created the church and called it "family".

In God's family is mutual care for each other. In the early church we see them sharing their lives in a very personal way. Even selling some of their possessions to help those in need.

4. We want our church family to be spiritually invigorating, fun, encouraging, caring, and attractive to those looking for genuine relationship with God and people.

I know Petra is far from perfect because it is made up of imperfect people whose hearts and lives are being transformed. We come from so many different places and experiences and fall short at times, yet we have decided to be family and do life together.

We have committed ourselves together to learn what it means to "be the church".

We are leaning to do the "One Another" of **1 Th 5:11**. **Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

Petra, you are doing a great job being the church. Keep it up. We together are making a difference in both our church and community.

Conclusion:

I have a very simple assignment for us this week. Do something intentionally to encourage at least one person this week. – Text something, email, messenger, card - a compliment or word of appreciation, an act of appreciation. "Double tip"

Closing Song:

Prayer Ministry