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Series Title: Connected: Finding Your Place in Our Journey of Faith

GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Romans 12:4-5, 10-16; Ephesians 4:11-16

What a privilege it is to share God's word with you this morning. We have so enjoyed getting to know many of you over the last month. We have had the opportunity to share a meal with many of the elders, deacons, and others active in ministry here. What a blessing. God has brought together *a beautiful local body of believers* with so many gifts and experiences!

Those of you that know me well know how important relationships and building and pouring into people is to me and is really the makeup of my God-gifted DNA. By God's grace, He has given me the opportunity to be a Church Planter and Church Planting Trainer. The privilege that came with that was turning over the ministry to national leaders that we would train up to take over. This series, and especially these next two messages, are really close to my heart for ministry.

Review Slides

As a Christian, You Play a Vital Role in Christ's Church

Christian - You Must Choose to Love!

The first two messages in the series have set us up well with the Biblical foundation, and these next two move towards the application of God's plan for His church. The first message showed us that we all matter and have a unique role and giftedness to be used in the local church or body! It is an amazing joy when we are using that giftedness in the right way and place! The second message really showed us where the supernatural love of Christ is to flow through believers as it empowers us to love one another. All the other "one another's" are rooted in Christ's love. They flow from the love of Christ, and we must choose love.

Introduction: So this morning, we are going to do a general overview of the biblical commands referred to as the "one another" commands in the New Testament. This is not an in-depth study of each one but more of a general review. Many of us, many of you, have gone to probably series of teachings on each "one another" command, maybe a 13-week series or even more. They are a key part of living out our Christian life both in

community within the church. And for the world to see it modeled for example, "they will know that we are Christians by our love for one another".

For the next few minutes, let us look at a few slides and the handout on the back of the sermon notes so you may follow along.

All the One Anothers in the New Testament

Some lists include 59x that the "one another's" are mentioned specifically. I will not read them all but just highlight! If you want to dig deeper - please do later on your own! Great Study!

Greek word - for "one another"

Here's an overview of how it's applied to the New Testament church.

UNITY 1/3

One third of the "one another" commands deal with the church getting along in Unity! Or Community!

LOVE 1/3

One third of these commands instruct Christians to love one another. Message from last week: Foundational as all is rested in Christ's Love given to us, and we are commended to...

OneAnotherPassages

The "one-anothers" of Scripture were never intended to serve as a collection of quotable quotes. Nor do they present a one-hundred-step plan to vibrant church life. But that's often what we're left with if our familiarity prevents us from wrestling with what the apostles meant by them. They are commands. They are meant to be obeyed within the context of vulnerable, growing, trusting relationships within the local church context. So, with this as our backdrop, our Biblical Foundation, let us now look at our third message.

Main Idea:

Our First Point

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY IS CRUCIAL TO BEING ONE IN CHRIST

What does it mean to cultivate? To stir up, to prepare for service, planting seeds, work on, develop

Cultivating Community through Christ-Centered Connections

A. Cultivating Unity (Romans 12:4-5) For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Romans 12:4-5

Embracing diversity within the body (vs.4): do not have same function

Serving one another with humility (vs.5): together

We need others. We need the Body of Christ. We need Christian community to fulfill God's purposes because with God and His plan we are actually "Better Together." I realize this goes counter to our American culture. It's the exact opposite of what we've been taught our entire life. In America, we have been taught that independence is what it's all about. Vulnerability is weakness! We have been taught to think that success and happiness is the result of being independent; it is unfortunately not part of God's plan, and therefore, we are seeing the results of where independence is leading us as individuals in our country: isolation, loneliness, depression, greed, and to be honest, we tend to become more self-absorbed, caring less about others or about God. Eventually, independence leads not to happiness but to emptiness and lack of fulfillment. Why? Because we are not doing what God placed us on this earth to do; we find the greatest fulfillment when we love God and love others. Independence & individuality is not God's answer. God's answer is community, unity, purpose, obedience to God's one another commands. Whether you realize it or not, we do need each other. God created all of us in such a way that we can only fulfill his purposes for our lives in community, in his family, in relationship to each other. It's impossible to accomplish all of God's purposes without other Christians in community.

B. Embracing Different Spiritual Gifts (vs.11)

C. Serving the Body (vs.12)

Why do you think the enemy strives to cause division? But God has a different plan. Look at our main passage. Ephesians 4:11 READ

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12)

Using our gifts to edify the church.

Engaging in acts of service. (to build up the body for what purpose?)

D. Building Unity in Diversity

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith... (Eph. 4:13a)

What is the purpose for all of this?

- Working together for the common goal of Glorifying Christ (being One in Christ for his glory)

2. Cultivating Community through Nurturing Love in Small Groups

Fellowship Last week I Corinthians 13

A. Loving One Another - Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. (Romans 12:10)

Showing genuine affection and care.

Respecting and honoring each other.

B. Rejoice and Weep with One Another. (Romans 12:15)

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)

What does this look like?

Celebrating victories together.

Sharing in each other's joys and blessings.

Supporting each other in times of need.

Practicing empathy and compassion

C. Growing and Praying Together.

...and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Eph. 4:13b-14)

Growing mature knowing what we believe helping each other to not be deceived or tossed...

Growing in Faith together (vs. 13)

Question: What is the best way or venue for these one anothers to take place?

Where do these type of relationships develop? How do they develop? Connection through small groups

Small groups are a powerful way to practice the one anothers and grow spiritually. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles." (Acts 12:42-43)

Let's look again at Acts 12

Studying the Word collectively (vs.13)

Praying for one another and especially one another's spiritual growth. (vs. 14)

Can you grow spiritually without ever being in a small group? Of course, you can. But...

Bible Study, fellowship, and prayer are essential aspects that we need to devote ourselves to if we are going to experience connection with the Lord on an ongoing basis, and we need each other to practice and obey the one another commands!

2. Small Groups are a Powerful Way to Grow Relationally (Acts 2:44-47a)

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people..."

I have been at churches before where they just wanted their groups to be Bible studies. Do not misunderstand me here. Bible study is vital, but it is not the only purpose of why we should be getting together in small groups. Fellowship, getting to know one another, and growing in relationship is also vital to our continued growth in the Lord, as is prayer. Membership care, love, application, Life on life discipleship, teaching, correcting, and accountability! Walking life together.

Connection Groups

Here at ABC, we call our small groups Connection Groups.

SLIDE of the 4W's

There are 4 things that are vital aspects to every small group.

4W's: Welcome (encourage and care for one another) Worship, Word (application) & Witness (prayer for one another & outreach) spurring one another onto good works! Connection groups are where the people can connect with one another in caring for one another & fellowship, GROW in Bible study, Obedience-based discipleship, hearing and doing especially focusing on Application of the Word and prayer.

3. Cultivating Community through Growing Together in Faith and Maturity

A. Strengthening One Another's Faith - Strengthening each other's faith through support. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."(Col. 3:16)

Providing words of encouragement and affirmation

B. Growing and Equipping One Another to Spiritual Maturity - Edifying and equipping one another for ministry. "...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped..." (Eph. 4:15b-16a)

Building Up One Another's Faith

Growing in spiritual maturity through mutual accountability

C. Devoting Ourselves to Prayer.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

The last thing that we see in this verse that we need to do in the midst of a group to experience connection with the Lord is you need to Devote Yourself to Prayer. We mentioned this earlier! If we are going to be experiencing connection with the Lord then

we must be praying. Prayer is one of the essential ways we communicate with God. And it is through prayer that God hears and responds to us. We are connected through prayer. I think most of us know and believe that. But God is present in a special way when we pray together with other Christians. (Church History: Cottage Prayer Meetings, Campus Prayer Meetings, Our ABC groups)

SLIDE of the 5D's

Praying for Movement Spiritual Growth. Need to walk with Disciple Makers at every level along the way! These one anothers imply being together in relationship. Outside of relationship with other people, we cannot do the things that the Lord commanded us to do. And I want to tell you that coming to church on Sunday is also commanded and hearing the word of God from the pulpit, it is the heart of what we do here at ABC, but that is NOT all that is needed to be in relationship with others. And without experiencing deep fellowship with fellow believers, we will not experience the connection with the Lord that our soul and spirit longs for. Breaking of Bread Look in Acts 2:42, it talks about the breaking of bread. Some have thought this is solely a reference to communion, but I think it also means eating together and is a further explaining of an aspect of fellowship. You see it further explained in Acts 2:46 a few verses later: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Sharing a meal together is something that helps bond people together. But it goes back to the idea of fellowship, of growing our relationship with each other. We see this today. We want to get to know someone better, what do we do? We invite them over for dinner.

As a leadership, we feel it is important to provide opportunities for people to grow and connect in relationship with one another because God works through that, and it is vital to our growth in the Lord.

4. Cultivating Community through Biblical Application with Loving Accountability.
Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- Accountability and Fellowship
- Holding each other accountable in love (Ephesians 4:15)

What needs do we have that can be met most effectively by being a part of a connection group?

A. The Need for Accountability - You and I need accountability. We need people to ask us, "how are we doing?" "Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of us who is in the wrong." (Gal. 6:1)

Here are some synonyms and phrases for accountability that emphasize how accountability leads to personal and collective progress and success. By using these synonyms and positive phrases, we can help individuals see accountability as constructive and helpful for personal development rather than something to be feared or avoided.

- Empowerment: Highlight how being accountable empowers individuals to make positive changes and achieve their goals.
- Trustworthiness: Emphasize how accountability builds trust among peers and colleagues.
- Transparency: Encourage open communication and transparency in one's actions and decisions.
- Integrity: Frame accountability as a reflection of one's integrity and moral character.
- Collaboration: Show how accountability fosters collaboration and teamwork within a group or organization.

Small Groups, One Another's - Sharing life together in small groups. Eph. 4:16 "from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

B. The Need for Encouragement - So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. (1 Thess. 5:11)

You and I need encouragement. We need positive people in our lives. We need accountability to grow and resist temptation!

C. The Need for Ministry Opportunities

You and I need opportunities to exercise our spiritual gifts. The small group is the best place to discover and develop our spiritual gifts.

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:" (I Peter 4:10)

REVIEW

PRAY WITH US AS WE CULTIVATE COMMUNITY

- ... through Christ-Centered Connections.
- ... through Nurturing Love in Small Groups Fellowship
- ... through Growing Together in Faith and Maturity
- ... through Biblical application with loving accountability

PREVIEW FOR NEXT WEEK:

MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES THROUGH CONNECTION GROUPS: CONNECTING FOR THE GOSPEL (MATTHEW 28:18-20)

Reflection Questions:

1. What did we learn about God from the texts or Sunday's message?
2. What did we learn about cultivating community or unity from the text or Sunday's message?
3. What can you do to improve in the area of cultivating community?
4. What does God desire from us at ABC, or you personally as an individual in the area of cultivating community within our church?
5. If you or we as a church were to practically apply what we learned from this passage or message, what would that look like? What steps could you take? When?
6. Summarize what you learned in one sentence, and how does God want you to respond in obedience?
7. This week, who would benefit from this truth, and who will you share it with?