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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: The Right Response

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Romans 12:15

In Ecclesiastes chapter 3, it is Solomon in those opening 8 verses of that chapter who gives to us what is really the full spectrum of life. he goes through 14 different polar contrasts and he basically brings to us a pretty adequate summary of what life really looks like. I'm not going to read all of them but you'll recognize them. Listen as he begins in verse 1 "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck what was planted, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." I have to believe that the apostle Paul who knew the Old Testament Scriptures so very well. he has shown us that repeatedly in our study in Romans as he draws sometimes from obscure Old Testament passages to make his point. I have to believe that as Paul writes in Romans 12 verse 15, these words that we look at this morning, that in his mind was in fact this contrast that Solomon sets before us back in Ecclesiastes chapter 3. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

This morning this 15th verse we want to see that the mercies of God call us to empathize in both the joys and in the sorrows of life. There is a time to laugh and there is also a time to cry. Let's begin by reminding ourselves once again of what spiritual transformation looks like. Some of you are new to our study in Romans so it's always helpful for us to go back and just touch base together so we're all on the same page moving forward. This is the whole point of Romans 12. Romans 12 is all about life transformation. In fact, I have to say again my prayer for us as a church family in going through Romans 12 is that even 10 years from now we'll look back and go that was a transformative time in the life of our church. I just think the truths that Paul brings to us in this chapter are so relevant, so important, so helpful to body life that if we will as the people of God step into these truths – point by point, admonition by admonition,

imperative by imperative – God will change us. When He changes us, He'll change this church because it is about transformation. That's what is on the heart of Paul in this 12th chapter. As he had laid out all of the doctrines of our great and glorious faith in the opening 11 chapters, what does transformation look like?

First of all, it looks like a change in attitude. A change in our attitude. That's the transformation of the mind he talks about in that 2nd verse. He wants our mind to be transformed by this glorious truth that he has put before us. We are to be thinking differently. People should look at you sometimes and just come to the conclusion that you're kind of odd because you're thinking differently than the world thinks. You don't have to be odd in a weird way, but you should be odd in a Biblical way because you think differently than the world thinks. The number one manifestation I think Paul would say as this passage unfolds is in verse 3. We're not conformed to the world, and we're transformed in our mind.

Then he says in that 3rd verse that one of the evidences of that is how we see ourselves. We see ourselves properly we said way back then. We see ourselves the way God wants us to see ourselves, and that is to not think more highly of ourselves than we should think which is where we naturally go. If we get that right, if we really understand verse 3, then it seems to me that all of these other imperatives that we've been looking at just kind of fall into place. If you leave verse 3 still thinking highly of yourself, which is the exact opposite of what Paul has instructed us, but if we feel pretty good about ourselves in terms of how we handle life and how we're better than somebody else, then we're going to just miss the rest of what he says in this 12th chapter. But if we get verse 3 right, then we really have a good chance at getting the rest of it right.

The second thing that we see is it looks like a change of behavior. A change of behavior. Blessed are those who do. Blessed are those who walk in the truth. Blessed are those who actually live out what they say they believe. It's one thing for us to lay claim to what we believe, but it's a whole different thing to literally walk in that truth and to obey what God has called us to obey. So blessed are the doers of the word not just those who are hearing.

Then thirdly, it looks like a change of feelings. It looks like a change of feelings. We saw that back in verse 14 when he said don't be persecuting those who persecute you. In fact, you bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them. It's not just a matter of controlling our fists. It is not just a matter of controlling our tongue. We better do both of those. We better be in control of our fists. We better be in control of our bodies. We better be in control of our tongue. But I think he would say that's not enough. We also have to be in control of our emotions. Here in this 15th verse, he is going to stick to speak to the fact that we're to laugh with those who laugh at the appropriate time. We're to cry with those who cry at the appropriate time. Grant Osborne says it well when he says, "Christianity is neither denying life's hardships nor dulling life's excitements. Our perspective of eternity in Christ frees us to enter into the full variety of living. Both laughter and tears are appropriate before God." That's what we're going to see even in the life of our Lord here in just a little bit.

Let's look at this matter of identifying with each other. Again, let's step back in and remind ourselves of the context of what we're looking at. The context, you remember we said last Sunday when we looked at verse 14, that we were now entering this new section. In chapter 12:14 to 21, we really step into a new section of this chapter. We commented at the time that you can look at this unfolding of this chapter and it looks like three concentric circles. We're in the middle of that. We get the perspective of ourselves the way it's supposed to be. Verse 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 really is in our relationships with other believers. Then I suggested that in 14 to 21 we kind of stepped out of that and it really engages how it is that we relate to those in the world and those who are not believers. Remember I also said but it's not a hard and fast and tight rule. Here is I believe the first exception to that. There is a breadth of scope in verses 14 to 21. But I kind of feel like verses 15 and 16 draw us back into our relationships to each other as the body of Christ. I think there's application to both how we relate to the world, but there is also here something specific to how we relate in the body. There is in view I believe in verse 15 an admonition here that has to do with body life in the church, how it is that we relate to each other. We relate to unbelievers with the same empathy but it begins when we properly understand how it is that we relate to each other in the body of Christ.

The point is simply this. Don't live in isolation. Don't live in isolation. If you're going to laugh with those who laugh and rejoice with those who rejoice, and you're going to cry and weep with those who weep, you cannot do that in isolation from each other. That's very important. Don't come late and hurry out. Come a little early and hang around. Allow yourself the opportunity to connect to other people, other believers even if it's just a casual conversation, even if it's just a hi and some conversation about the past week. Or maybe make it a goal to meet somebody new every week. I think the point that I would make and how we get to where we want to be in verse 15 is you cannot live in isolation from each other. I think it's a very common tendency and I've spoken to it before about this underdeveloped ecclesiology that we have about the church and how easy it is to think that the church is just a whole bunch of individual people who come together on any given occasion especially on a Sunday morning. We just hang together for a little bit and then we go our separate ways. Now of course individually we have to come. So there is truth to the picture that we individually have to come. We gather in that sense. But we need to see that the gathering is not as an individual. The gathering is as the church, the family of God. We just sang about being a child of God. That's what we're looking at here. If we're going to accomplish what Paul has called us to, we see ourselves as in this context of the corporate body of God. This is so important that we're involved in each other's lives.

Verse 15 is also to be seen again as imperatives. Yes, I know they're participles, but they're participles with an imperatival force. These are commands. We have two more of them in verse 15. We're piling up these commands in this 12th chapter. But here it is again. If we're going to engage in each other's lives, then we're stepping into all of these one another. That's what we're doing. That list in the New Testament of relating to one another, those are commands. They're not suggestions. They're not take it or leave it. If you want to walk in obedience to God, if you want God's blessing on your life as a child of God, then that's the call to obedience. If you don't want that as a child of God, then you need to repent. Ask God to give you that heart because that's what he's talking about here.

Thirdly then, this is best understood as a response to something that is Biblical. I think that needs to be said. In other words, as we read verse 15 this is not a one size

fits all command. I don't believe that I am required to celebrate every celebration that I see. I don't frankly believe that I am required to weep and be sad with every circumstance and every situation that I see. Let me explain that. Just this last summer Roe vs. Wade was overturned. The news feeds out of Washington DC surrounding the Supreme Court had all kinds of people absolutely distraught that life was now once and forever changed and over and nothing would ever be the same again. I can tell you one thing. I didn't step into their weeping and tears. I in a sense celebrated a long-asked-for prayer. The same thing is true in so many areas of our society today. I feel at times overwhelmed by reading things with regard to the transformation that is happening within our culture and our society, especially in the area of human sexuality. It seems to me we're sacrificing generations of children and young people on an ideological altar. I am not going to celebrate what the world celebrates in that regard. The world has lost their collective mind with regard to that issue.

Carl Truman wrote a great piece this last week in which he said it is time for evangelical Christians – he was really calling out evangelical leaders – who have remained largely silent in the face of what's going on in our culture and our society. If I could just opinionize here for a moment, many of them like to bring corrective words to the church about their favorite issues. I would say with Carl Truman, it's time they step up on this one as well. Instead of always bringing a rebuke to the church, maybe in the name of Christ bring a rebuke to the world where the church is standing and trying to stand with some measure of truth. I'm not going to weep with those who are weeping for unbiblical reasons. I'm not going to celebrate with those who are celebrating with things that are absolutely contrary to the word of God. So then what are we going to do? We're going to rejoice with those who rejoice. We're going to weep with those who weep. We're going to do so in a thoughtful and compassionate way. When you look at the next verse, at verse 16: "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight." You see it just follows that this is to be considerate, to be compassionate. It's to be Biblical. It is to be thought through.

What does empathy look like? Empathy on display. Joy and happiness. Rejoicing with the rejoicing ones is the command. This is a command again. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing. The first thing I wonder is what sounds easy on the front end may in

fact be difficult. Just hear that statement. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Sure, that's easy. You lifelong Philadelphia Eagle fans. How fun was it to rejoice with those obnoxious Kansas City Chief fans? I'm just kidding. There are things in life we quickly realize this isn't an easy thing to rejoice with somebody who rejoices. The person that comes up you at work and says you would never believe what happened to me today at work. I was just promoted. I'm your new boss. Praise the Lord! Not may be so joyful because you had interviewed for that same position. You're a parent and another parent is sharing with you very joyfully something that their child has achieved, some accomplishment and you have been hoping and praying and actually working towards that same thing for your child and it hasn't come. How easy is it to rejoice with those who rejoice in that circumstance? As a couple trying to start a family and it is not happening. How easy is it to rejoice when you hear the news of one of your friends who is now expecting. There are a hundred different things like that where we step into things that are not necessarily easy.

It's true in the spiritual realm too. We're hearing wonderful things coming out of Asbury and what God is doing in Asbury. It is very easy to look at that and go yeah, well, I wish that was happening with me, with us. We diminish what God is doing. Here is something that another church in our community or within the area is doing where God is granting favor. Is our first thought that we rejoice with them at what God is doing? Or is it something else? That's why when we read this rejoice with those who rejoice, don't fool ourselves into thinking that's easy, because it's not always easy. It reminds me of the guy who looked very sad and someone who knew him well said either something bad has happened to him or something good has happened to somebody he knows. We don't want to be that guy, do we? We don't want to be that person.

What are some reasons for not rejoicing with those who rejoice? Just look at this. There are four here and we could probably come up with 14. Envy, jealousy, pride, and selfishness. It's an ugly list. But those are the things in my heart very often when I have difficulty rejoicing with somebody over something they're rejoicing over. Why would I not? Pretty simple. I'm envious. I'm jealous. My heart is filled with pride for what I want rather than entering into what they've experienced. Selfishness. All of these things are

part of my daily struggle. These are all joy killers. Think of Saul and his response to David. They had even written a song in celebration of David and instead of Saul joining in and singing that David has killed his thousands, he's angry and deciding he's going to get this guy. Other examples are all through the Scriptures. Jonah. Jonah sent by God to bring about a revival in Nineveh. A revival no less. He proclaims the good news and a revival breaks out. Does Jonah enter into the joy? No, he actually is mad that people have repented. What is that? It is a strong sense of pride, envy, jealousy, and a few other things added on. What about the Pharisees of Jesus's time? They weren't very often entering into the joy that Christ brought into people's lives as He ministered, healed, and brought good news. All of us can find ourselves acting and thinking a lot like the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. He had great difficulty rejoicing with his father and his younger brother.

I think there is a principle to remember as we think in terms of what this looks like in our life. It is from 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 26. It gives us the sense I think of Romans 12:15 when Paul writes and says, "When one member suffers all suffer. When one member is honored all rejoice together." What is in view in 1 Corinthians 12:26? The same thing that we need to see in Romans 12:15. It is the principle of self-forgetfulness. It is simply the principle of self-forgetfulness, putting self to the side. Philippians 2. We count it joy when we see others who are lifted up and who are honored. We see them as more significant. This is really the theme of this Romans 12 set of imperatives to us. The principle of self-forgetfulness flows through all of them. If we have the heart of God, then we have a heart that rejoices with others who rejoice because the heart of God rejoices with those who rejoice.

Let's look at the second part of this verse. The second part of this verse is to be seen as heartache. Weeping with the weeping ones. That's the way this is translated. Rejoice with the rejoicing ones. Weep with the weeping ones. that's really a nice way to understand the flow of what Paul is saying here. Why do I need this instruction? Why do I need the instruction to weep with those who weep? Again, I go back to the overall context and say this is body life. this is life rightly understood as we relate to each other in the body of Christ.

What does that look like? How do we do that? Again, love can't stand on the sideline and be disengaged. Love has to engage. Love has to engage. One has to connect to fulfill this statement weep with those who weep. Why do I need that instruction? Because sometimes I naturally want to just be on the sideline. Sometimes I don't feel like connecting and I've got to overcome those feelings in obedience to what God has called me to do. I can't simply yield continually to my feelings. I acknowledge my feelings. I realize God has given me emotions and feelings, but sometimes those have to be overcome. Sometimes we just need to realize that we are called on to step into places and people's lives that are dealing with losses of different kinds. Weep with those who weep. Anything less is to miss the opportunity that God has called us to as we serve each other.

Again, the Bible isn't asking us to disconnect from our emotions. Our emotions are valid. They're good. They're God-given. But we also know that we don't weep and we don't sorrow as those who have no hope. There's a big difference. I'm so glad he doesn't say don't weep and don't be sorrowful because that would be to diminish our emotion. But no, God knows our emotion. He's created us that way. When we experience loss in our life, He fully expects that we're going to weep, that we're going to cry, that we're going to sorrow. That's valid. That's good. It's necessary. And yet we don't do it as the world does it. That takes us all the way back to Romans 1 and 2. We're different than the world.

What are some reasons for not weeping? What might hold us back a little? Let me just suggest three things. I think first of all maybe fear. Maybe just a general sense of insecurity. We are not sure what to say. We're unprepared for some of the hard discussions that could be a part of stepping into somebody's experience in which they're walking through and dealing with loss on any number of levels. So, we hold back. We don't want to get too close to the pain because we're not sure what we're going to do with it.

Secondly, I think the pace of life. the pace of life. we all find ourselves living life at a hectic pace, going faster and faster. To weep with those who weep takes time. We have to open up parts of our life timewise to accomplish what God has called us to here. I know that in all of my many years of ministry and walking with people through losses,

one of the things that consistently is part of their experience is that it seems that life just kind of stops in that moment of loss. Whatever that is. There is just a tendency to get stuck there. Not in a bad way; it's just that's the nature of it. They observe everybody else in their world going on with life at the same hectic pace as before. It's easy to forget in the midst of the pace of life that somebody else is back here needing maybe for us to slow down just a little bit too.

Then maybe a casual faith. By that I mean when we think about what it looks like to weep with those who weep, we have to come to grips with the fact that in times of weeping we may be confronted with what we do really believe. What is it that is the anchor of our life? What's the foundation beneath us? If we have what I'm just calling here a casual faith, if we've really never stepped into true discipleship, if we've never given ourselves over to counting the cost and learning what God wants for us, then when we come up against some of these more challenging experiences of life in which we're really confronted with, we're not sure what to do. Is God as good as I believe He is? Is God in control as the Scriptures indicate that He is? We confront these challenging doctrinal truths. If our faith is a casual faith, if all we do in engaging God in our walk with Him is show up occasionally on a Sunday morning that is a casual faith. When you encounter the difficulties of life, that faith will be tested severely like the man who built his house on the sand. That will erode away very quickly. Weeping is a matter of obedience.

How then do we weep with the weeping? Here are just three brief observations. I'm going to ask Jim to come. I think he can exegete these points better than I can. When we think about what actually does that look like: presence before words, understanding that everybody walks through grief differently, and then just practical expressions of love and care. I'll wrap up when Jim is done.

[Jim Webb testimony] Good morning, church. My name is Jim Webb. I know a lot of people here but there are a lot of faces that I don't know. Stacy and I have been in this church since I think around 1996-97. All five of our boys have grown up here at the church. I actually love what Carlon said leading into this about not living in isolation, because I can tell you from our family's perspective, I'll start and end with this, we've watched over the last three and half years Romans 12:15 with skin on from the people

in this room. What it actually looks like. You can see the picture up on the left. This is our family most recently, one of our most recent rejoicings that you all rejoiced with us, and that was when Lauren somehow said yes to Sam when he asked her to marry him. We are all very excited about that. We are looking forward to that here in the next month or so. On the right many of you know who that is. On the right is Peter.

Three and half years ago, our family's life changed forever. Peter was a sophomore at Southwest Covenant Schools. He was 16 years old. He was playing a football game for Southwest Covenant. He went down on the field and didn't wake up. He died of a head injury and it was ... to say it was a tough time is the understatement of the year. But again, you guys came alongside us through that whole process. For us, our grief was about the death of somebody that we loved very much, but grief doesn't always look like that. Ours was also very public because of the nature of what happened. It was on the news. There was a lot of coverage about that. Obviously that doesn't happen very often, and it's a terrible thing when it does. It was very public for us. I know that most of the time grief is a lot more private. I'm looking at faces right now. There are all kinds of grief happening right here in this body today sitting in the pews. It could be loss of health, loss of relationships, loss of jobs, all kinds of things that we grieve. I stand up here to just give you my experience, our families experience, but everybody's experience is different and we'll talk about that in a moment.

I think when Carlon mentioned how we're not to live in isolation, it made me think about what grief has been like for me and I think I speak for my family when I say this. Grief is a very deep, pervasive loneliness. It's a deep pervasive loneliness even in the midst of a crowd, even with people that you love very much. Even amongst the family. It's like there's a wall built up between the person grieving and everybody else in the world. The trick for me at least, and the tough thing about it is, if I'm the grieving person I can't break down that wall. You have to. I can't do it. I can't see my way out of it. The question becomes how do you do that? Carlon's got those three ideas that I think are eminently practical and real.

Your presence. Your presence matters so much. We obviously had presence at Peter's funeral that was here at the church. But we had presence in the hospital on the night he went down. I still remember a nurse coming in saying I don't know who this kid

is but every single waiting room in Children's Hospital is jam-packed full of people at midnight that Friday night. That was you. Again, that was Romans 12:15 with skin on. We had the presence in the hospital. We had the presence in our home, and the next week, and in the coming weeks after that. Just your presence with us individually in dealing with us either on our own or as a family. The memories of your presence are really, really incredibly clear. I still have vivid memories and some of them just come back to me. Something will trigger a memory of your presence.

Honestly, most of the words that were spoken I don't remember. You are completely in a spot where you can't think straight. You can't hear anything. But I would say this. Your presence is more important than your words, but your words matter. You've got to speak words. The most awkward thing for someone in the midst of grief is if you stand there and act like it's not happening. You have to acknowledge with words that this is happening, that this is real.

I'm often asked since we've gone through this, what do you not want to say to somebody's who is going through grief. There's lots of thoughts about that. I can just tell you again from my personal expense, my own opinion, anything that starts with "at least". It is probably not something to say. At least you know he is in heaven. At least you have other kids and you have Stacy. At least he didn't suffer. Again, well-meaning, but not helpful.

Another one is I know how you feel. I've caught myself saying that to people that are going through either similar situations or others. The fact is no. you don't. you may have lost your kid. You have lost your mom. You may have lost your dog. You may have lost whatever, but you didn't lose Peter. I have to think about that when I'm talking to other people. I can't step in and know exactly what it is that they're grieving. I can empathize with them. I can understand this is incredibly, incredibly difficult. It's gut-wrenching. It completely rocks your world, but I don't know how you feel in that setting.

Another thing, and Carlon hit on this back months ago when we were earlier on in Romans, quoting Biblical truth is really pretty dangerous. You need to be wise about it. For someone going through grief to quote to them that God works all things together for good, that's true. I believe that in my heart of hearts. That's absolutely true. It's completely unhelpful when you're in the middle of that grief. You just can't see that. The

worst things I think that people say are just bad theology. God needed another angel. I don't know how many times I heard that. I hate to tell you, that's just not Biblical. It's not even true and it's not helpful. Another one that is not helpful – it might be good for bumper stickers but that's not true – is that God doesn't give us any more than we can handle. Again, well-meaning but probably not things to say.

So what do you say? I will tell you, it's the exact words we heard from you and we continue to hear them from you. We love you. We're so sorry. This is terrible. I'm so sad. And most importantly, I don't know what words to say. I don't have anything to say. If there are magic words, those are the magic words because that is the truth. There's nothing you can say that can make our grief any less. It's your presence that is going to do that.

I mentioned before and Carlon mentioned too that grief is different for everyone. I told the boys and Stacy that night when the doctors called us into a room to tell us that Peter wasn't going to make it, I have no idea where this came from, but I said we're all going to go through this completely differently. But I will tell you right now we're going to come out on the other side of this. Mom and I are going to be ok. Our marriage is going to be stronger. Our family is going to be stronger. I don't know how that's going to look, but we're all going to do things completely differently. You've got to give yourself grace, because don't look at me or mom or your brothers and say they're doing this so I need to do that.

I think there is a common misperception. I studied psychology in college and I remember studying Kubler-Ross's stages of grief and I think if you just did a poll of a lot of people, they'd say there are five stages of grief that are kind of linear and you go through this. Kubler-Ross even said that's not true. She discounted her own research. The fact is everybody deals with it completely differently. Everybody doesn't do all the stages. Everybody doesn't feel the same emotions. Everybody doesn't process in the same way. I processed it by reading. I've probably read a hundred books on grief these last three years. There are other members of my family that wouldn't touch a grief book if you forced them to sit down and look at it. That's just not the way they deal with it, and that makes it tough for us as believers and how we respond to people. But it's again why our presence is so important and why that last point that Carlon made, why

practical acts count no matter what. You don't have the words to say. You don't really know exactly how that person's processing the grief, but the practical expressions of love and care are incredible.

There were thousands of them that we saw. There are a whole bunch more that we didn't see. I literally will probably go to the grave not knowing what some of you did for our family. And knowing you, you probably want it that way. That's an amazing gift. Peter died in September 2019. This church did not have the ability to livestream. It's hard to believe. Pre-Covid. There was no ability to livestream. I know Carlon, Steve Genheimer, Todd, and a bunch of other people somehow came together in the course of Peter being declared brain-dead on Sunday to a large funeral that Friday that took place in here, took place in other rooms, took place in the school gym, and it was all because of the practical acts of people figuring out how we do this from a technology perspective. Again, an unbelievable gift to our family. Some of them were not as dramatic as that. I was sitting in our bedroom one day and I heard the sound of a lawnmower. I looked out and one of our good friends was mowing the lawn.

Back to the things not to say people when they're grieving, another one is probably on my list, don't say what can I do to help. When people would ask me that, I'm thinking I can't even breathe right now. I can't think straight. I don't know anything and you want to give me another task for me to figure out what you can do. I'll say fortunately nobody in this room did that. You guys just showed up. I'd look in the kitchen and one of you was emptying the dishwasher. Running errands, dropping off water, doing all kinds of jobs. I think we're still getting meals. No, I'm joking. We were incredibly grateful for that.

I think that the thing that I would just go back to just ending on is what Carlon was referencing in the verse. It says weep with those who weep. That means you cry with us. It doesn't mean you hold back the tears. It doesn't mean that you try to come up with some pretty wise statement that is going to make everything better, because that's not going to happen. But it's actually really painful. It was painful for me when I could tell people were afraid to cry and afraid to show the tears. Those are actually like healing to me when people cry with us. Again, it's right in the black and white of Scripture. It says weep with those who weep. It doesn't say hold back the tears because it might make

them more sad. You can't make them more sad. You really have to come alongside them.

I told you I like to read. One of my favorite books that I wish I never had to read but I've read it probably 20 times is called *Lament for a Son* and it's written by Nicholas Wolterstorff. He was a professor out east and he lost his son in a mountaineering accident. It's just his journals, like the CS Lewis *Grief Observed* after his wife died. I just want to read it a few words from this author because it really put into words what was going through my head. He says this: "What do you say to someone who is suffering? Some people are gifted with words of wisdom. For such one is profoundly grateful. There are many such for us, but not all are gifted in that way. Some blurted out strange inept things. That's okay too. Your words don't have to be wise. The heart speaking is heard more than words spoken." Again, your presence. "If you can't think of anything at all to say, just say I can't think of anything to say, but I want you to know that we're with you in your grief. But please, "and this goes back to what I was talking about before, the 'at least' comments, "but please don't say it's really not so bad because it is. Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforters is to tell me that really all things considered it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me. Over there, you're of no help. What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you're with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close."

This church came close for us. You're coming close to us now and in times of rejoicing. You came very close to us in the deepest, darkest moment of our lives thus far. We are immensely and forever grateful to each and every one of you for how you showed up. Thank you for living Romans 12:15 for our family. [End of Jim Webb testimony]

Thank you, Jim. Well said. I just end with this. When we think in terms of what we take away, both from what Paul said in Romans 12:15 and how well Jim reinforced that in their life experience, it is simply to say that empathizing with one another is really truly incarnational living. It is really being the hands and the feet of Christ. That's what He's called us to do. That's what He has called us to be. We empathize. We really take on the very role that God through His Son has entrusted to us, just being there for each

other, representing the fact that Christ came, took on human flesh so that we in turn could engage in each other's lives even as He has done in ours.

Let's pray. Father God, we are grateful for the strength again of Your word to carry us through all of life circumstances. We are grateful for the testimony of Jim and Stacy and their family, how they have walked with You by faith in this terribly difficult time. Lord, we pray that You will continue to strengthen them, that You will continue to use them in the life of our church family and within the context of our greater community. We are grateful, Lord Jesus, for Your love and Your grace and mercy to us. In Christ's name we pray, amen.