

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

We > Me

PART

2

TITLE

Serving One Another

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1-8



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I hope you have had a great start in the new year. I know that this has been a really challenging week, and so, if you are new here, we're thrilled that you are our guest.

And if you're not, this is your family, I want to just share just a few thoughts with you about what we see in the world. We all know this week, we saw a fresh chapter of the fallen-ness of mankind. The confusion, and the sin, and the heartache that we have. It's true that America has a high fever, and I'm not talking about COVID, I mean spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically.

Now, there's a sickness that is very... Well, it's common, and it's pervasive throughout our land. And we've seen it this week, at least splashes up of what this sickness really is. And here's the challenge, is that anytime you have a people group, whether it's a family, whether it's a church, or whether it's a nation, and a critical mass of that people disregards God's word as the compass for life, and love, and leadership, and justice, and truth, things fall apart.

Things get confusing, and people get confused. Wrong is considered right, and right is considered wrong, and as a result, we'll see corruption, we'll see lawlessness, we'll see injustice, and we will see widespread misinformation. We'll see lying, and deception. We should expect to see this in a world who's turned its back upon the Lord.

The question is, what do we do as the people of God, as we live here? We know where we're going, we've read the book, and we know, that it's going to be okay. In fact, if you need to hear that here this morning, let me just tell you if you are in Christ, it's going to be okay. All right? It's going to be okay. But what do we do in the meantime while we're living in the middle of this? And the three things that popped in my mind this last week as I thought about what is so critical to do when there's upheaval in the land. You've heard these from me before, but I want to share them once again.

The first thing is this, do not fret. Do not fret, unless you won't repent, right? But do not fret. You see, our world, this nation is shaking, it's trembling, and yet Jesus is not. He is not trembling, He's not shaking, His kingdom is not shaken. In fact, His kingdom only grows. Every single person who comes to faith in Christ, adds to the kingdom by one, and it only adds. His kingdom is not shaken, and what you find in church history is this, is that in the darkest of times, if the church will give themselves over to holiness, and truth, and love, is that the church will shine all the brighter in the midst of the darkest darkness.

And that's where we're at, and so, this is in one sense is a sad thing, it's a tragic thing. We see all kinds of things are opposite of what godliness is. And yet, this is our moment to shine. This is our moment to be holy, to be different, to be marked by love, and to be marked by truth. So, let me encourage you not to fret.

The second thing I want to encourage us as a people, is to hold fast to the word of God, the truth of God's word so that we can speak what is true. And that's a common thread today that we all know, and that is that, what is true? We don't know. There's all kinds of voices and it's really difficult in this day and age to know what's true. What actually, is happening, and who's doing it, and why are they doing it? It's hard to know.

But let me tell you something I absolutely know to be true, and that is that in the end, the Bible, and those who live it, love it, and share it, will be proven true, and reliable. And so, when you need a moment in time when you feel like all the information around you, you're uncertain as to its validity, and you feel the weight of that uncertainty, open up the Bible, and find something that is true forever, and reliable forever, and then you can speak into a world, that right now is so confused, and you can add to it the contribution of God's truth.

And let me encourage us also to direct whatever emotion it is that you feel to pray. We all feel something. Some people, sorrow, some people, fear, some people angry, some people may feel relief. I don't know what it is that you feel, but whatever it is, your emotion that just percolates within your heart, let me encourage you to translate that, to transfer that into fuel to pray. To pray for you, to pray for your soul, to pray for your family, to pray for your church, to pray for your leaders of your church to make good decisions. To pray for your city, to pray for your state, to pray for those leaders, and the national leaders, the nation, and the world.

Whatever is that you feel, let me encourage you not waste any of that emotion on idle chat, complaint, and grumbling, use it to pray. Which is what we want to do now so, would you join me?

Father in heaven, we give you our lives. We trust you with our lives, and we confess to you that not only is the world broken, but we confess to you that we have contributed to the brokenness. Our own sin, and selfishness, our own hatred, our own confusion, our own malice. We have erred, and we have sinned against you. And we ask that you would forgive us, we ask that you would cleanse us. And now we ask, God, that you would open up our eyes to be able to see wonderful things in your word. That you would feed us, and instruct us, and teach us, and change us from your word. And so, would you speak through weakness, for your glory we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have a Bible, turn to Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12. We're going to do the second part of our series, the importance of community. And this is important to all of us. It's not only something that we all identify with, and need to avoid loneliness and have people around us, but it's interesting... And this is a common thing that people are studying today. In fact this week, I read a little study from Cigna Insurance, it was their... In 2019, they did just a broad, general survey study of Americans, and what it said was that 60% of the people who participated in their survey, 60% of Americans confessed to feeling noticeably, or significantly lonely.

And it's important for us to recognize that loneliness, whether you feel it or not, loneliness is not necessarily being alone, loneliness is the distress in the soul of feeling alone, feeling unheard, feeling unseen. And that's why you can walk into a place like this... There's a lot of people in the room right now, or perhaps you're at home, and there's people sitting next to you, or near you, and you can still feel lonely in the presence of other people.

You can go to college as a freshman, or a sophomore, junior, senior, and there's all kinds of people who are experiencing meaningful face-to-face relationships, and for whatever reason, you look around and you feel like, "I'm just alone, I feel lonely," even though there's people all around you. Loneliness makes us vulnerable, it makes us susceptible to temptation. But what's interesting is, both the CDC, and the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, this week I read, said that chronic loneliness actually, increases the risk that we face of depression, anxiety, self-harm, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and substance abuse.

It's destructive, and God knows that it is destructive. What's interesting though is this, is that the loneliness that we all felt before COVID, or that many of us, or 60% of us felt before COVID, has only been exasperated by months, and months of social isolation. Now many of you, you're near people. Some of you at home still, maybe, even since March, maybe you have been isolated, and maybe that's absolutely necessary in your case. But the fact is, is that as somebody who listens to a lot of people, and the burdens on their heart, it is being socially, psychologically, and emotionally destructive to us as a people.

You see, we need to remember that there's more kinds of health than physical health. There's emotional health, there's relational health, there's psychological health. And while we're in a time when it's really important for us to protect people physically, we need to remember, is that there's no part of God's word, and there's no need that we have that He states within His word, such as community, that is allowed to hit the pause button, no matter what's happening in the world. Amen.

In other words is that, though our community will look differently during this time, it's still a necessity. We still have to pursue it, we still have to pursue people, we still have to pursue relationships with people. We can't just wait indefinitely.

And so, I think it's also really important for us to recognize, and to heed that when you open up the Bible, and you look at the very first time that you find a denouncement from God. Meaning the very first time that the Scriptures tell of a concern that He has in His heart, has nothing to do with our moral depravity, it has to do with our loneliness. He looks at a man who's alone, and He says, "That's not good. It is not good for the man to be alone." You see, life is designed to be lived surrounded by people who love, encourage one another, and who believe that a life that is full of, we, is superior, and richer, and better, more protective than a life that is full of, me.

And that's what we want to talk about, right? Last week we looked from the beginning to the end, sort of the macro story of the Bible, of how God made us in His image for relationships, put us together, we sin one to another, and as a result of that, we're fragmented in our relationships. And so, Christ came, and not only did He bring us back to God, He brought us back to one another. We looked at that last week, but what I want to do this week, and the next two weeks, is something I think really important. It's this, is what does community look like?

We know we're built for it, but what does it actually, look like? How is it built? And in particular, what are the principles that in creative ways, we need to apply, and we need to apply them even today during COVID? How do we pursue it today? Now, our third son just joined his two brothers, and he made the last rank as a Boy Scout, he made Eagle, and so, we have three Eagles in our house, and so, dad has had a lot of practice with knot tying.

And I'm really nervous right now, because I can just tell that all of you are so proficient in tying knots. But there's this one knot that was really cool, and it has tremendous spiritual practice. And in particular, you're going to find it in our text, which is why I'm going to take the time to do this, and it's called the square knot.

What's interesting about it is, the intent of it is to take two different ropes, and to tie them to each other, right? And so, what's interesting about this knot is, it's really easy to tie, it's really strong, but what's also interesting about it is... If I get my fingers on it... Is it's really easy to untie. It's very, very practical. You say, "Well, why is he tying knots?"

This is why, when you open up the Bible, you actually find two different kinds of knots, or two different kinds of ropes, I should say. Two different ropes that God says, "I want you to connect these, and I want you to keep them connected." One of those ropes is called a indicative, okay? An indicative is simply... It indicates what God did that we are to believe, okay?

And so, one of these is what God did, he says, "I simply want you to believe this." But then there's these things called imperatives. And an imperative is what God commanded that we are to do, okay? And so, let me give you an example in one verse that has both of them tied together. You ready? Ephesians 4:32, "Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Forgive one another, is something we're supposed to do, He commanded us to do it. As God in Christ forgave you, is what He did that we're supposed to believe. And He ties them together with the word, as.

And now, why is this so important? This is why, okay? First of all, this knot... Indicatives and imperatives, first of all, they're really easy to tie to together, just like a square knot. They fit, don't they? I mean, it just kind of rhymes, forgive as you've been forgiven. It just fits together. Well, here's the other thing, it's interesting, is it's really strong when they're together. You see, when you are conscious of how God has forgiven you, and what He has forgiven you of, it acts as motivation and power to be able to forgive one another.

But here's the problem, is they're really easy to untie. If I put any half of this verse on the screen, you would agree with it. If I just said, "Forgive one another", you'd go, "We should do that." If I said, "You know what, God has forgiven you", you'd go, "Praise God." But here's the problem, is that when we keep them untied, we lose the power, because we lose the recognition, the appreciation of what He has done in our life.

And so, what you find throughout Scripture is this, there's not a single imperative in the entire Bible that He calls you to do, that He is not supplied, and fortified by what He has done, that He told us to believe. You just simply have to look for the indicative. When you see an instruction of something that we're supposed to do. Now, why am I doing this? This is why. Because in Romans chapter 12, what happens is, this man named Paul who wrote the letter to a church in Rome, he has spent 11 chapters talking about indicatives, what God has done to save us, and give us mercy.

Then he gets to chapter 12, and from chapter 12 to the end of chapter 16, this was full of imperatives, things that we're supposed to do in response to what He has done. When you get to chapter 12, the very first section of it, he's about to give us 36 imperatives that we're going to study over the next three weeks, 36 of them. Every one of them are relational, and every one of them are designed to build community among ourselves.

But before he gives a single one, Paul feels absolutely compelled to tie the knot once again. Notice what he does in verse one, he says, "I appeal to you..." I am appealing, I'm about to give you imperatives that are important for your life, and relationship, "Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God..." In other words, if you don't recognize the mercies of God, you're not going to have the motivation that is necessary to pursue community, in particular, when your pursuit is frustrated by failure.

It's the mercies of God, and your recognition of those mercies that's going to propel us as a people to be able to fight the loneliness that's within our heart. We need to recognize... Well, what is this mercy? I want to show you in a really brief flyover of Romans 1 through 12, what is the mercy that should capture our hearts so, that we can do what He tells us to do?

Well, in chapter 1, verse 18, he says that, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In other words, when God Almighty... I know, it starts bad, doesn't it? It starts with wrath, that's the first thing you need to recognize. That's why mercy is so sweet, it's because something is bad. God looks down upon the Earth, and wherever He sees sin, it says that His wrath ignites. You say, "Well, I wonder who that's toward?"

Well, Romans chapter three tells us who that's toward. He says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith." Now, if you're new here, or you're new to these ideas, let me just walk through just some significant words here so, that you could feel the mercy that we have received, if you have trusted Christ.

First of all, if there is wrath that's directed to people who were sinful, we should know, who were those sinners? And He starts, and He says, "Oh, that's you, me, all of us." His wrath was ignited towards you, and towards me. But that's not all, what it says is that God, that same God who was full of wrath towards our sin, He says that He put forward Jesus Christ as a propitiation by His blood. Now, we don't use propitiation very much in our day and age. What it means is, substitutionary sacrifice. In other words is that, in our sin God's wrath was directed towards us. And so, God, by His grace, sent His son to stand in front of us, to absorb all of that wrath that was directed towards us.

He died on a cross for your sin, and for my sin, and He did so in order to redeem us. The word redeem means to pay a price we cannot pay, in order to set us free from our debt. And that's what He did. Jesus did that for us, He died on a cross, He was buried in a grave, and He rose from the dead. And He says, "If you believe in me... Faith... I'm going to do something", and so, all of us have a problem. Wrath is directed to every one of us, God sent His son to be a substitutionary sacrifice in order to redeem us, but not everybody. Oh, He died for everybody, but not everyone will enjoy the benefits of His death and resurrection. Only those who receive it by faith, who put their faith in Christ, recognize they need a savior, and they see Christ as the only sufficient savior.

And what it says is this, is that for those people who put their faith in Jesus Christ, they are justified. God takes away our sin in forgiveness, and He gives us His righteousness so, that we stand before Him in innocence. And then Romans chapter 8, verse 1, last verse of His mercy, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Now listen, if you recognize that you're a sinner, and then you get to that place where you see, you are not going to be condemned for it, that is good news, isn't it? Is that good news? That is so pathetic... Isn't that good news? It's amazing news, all right, there's no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.

And that is what He has in mind when He says to us, "Now, I'm about to make 36 appeals of how you're going to get along, and build community, to finish the mission on the Earth. But before you do any one of them, I want you to build everything on my mercy. Consider my mercy, consider what I've done in your life."

Then He says this... Chapter 12, verse 1, let's read it, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 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. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in his generosity; the one who leads,

with zeal; and the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Now, I want to show you several points that, starting in verse 1, that move all the way towards the first installment of what we can do as a church family to build community today. The first truth I want you to see is this, is that God’s mercy transforms our priorities around His will. What I mean, God’s mercy, what I mean is that when we recognize His mercy, when we’re aware of His mercy, when we’re looking at His mercy. What it does, is it transforms the priorities of our heart, what we’re seeking, what we’re loving, what we’re pursuing in our life, and it transforms those priorities, and it wraps them around His will.

You see, God wants to transform us so, that we love to do, and pursue that which he wills we ought to do. This is one of the greatest problems we have, it’s not simply that we sinned over the weekend, it’s that we wanted to. Think how wonderful it would’ve been if you didn’t even want to. How easy it would be to fight that temptation if you didn’t want to. And so, His will, He says is really important, and God has a will for our lives that can be known. The word will, it means dream, or wish. In other words, that God looks at our life, and He says, “It may not all be easy for you, but I want you to know something, is the plan that I have for you is ultimately a good plan.”

It’s also a discernible plan, you can know God’s will for your life, and that’s what He says starting in verse 1 and 2. He says... Look, in verse two he says, “That by testing you may discern what is the will of God,” and then He tells us some of the characteristics of the will of God for our life. And He says, “It’s good, acceptable, and perfect”, and sometimes we hear those words, and just think, “Oh, they all kind of stack up in a bucket called good, and good’s better than bad.” That’s not really what it means. The word, good, here is not simply less than great, or not bad. It means intrinsically good, righteously good.

In other words, that God’s will for us is not just... It’s not easy good, it’s morally good. It’s us living in accord with how He created us, and what he says is right and wrong, and therefore, it’s also acceptable. What that means is, it’s acceptable to Him, it’s pleasing to Him, and therefore, when He is pleased, and we love Him, and we know Him, and we’re filled with the Spirit, what happens is, we feel a sense of pleasure in our own hearts when we’re doing His will.

But then, it’s also perfect. When it means perfect, that doesn’t mean easy, it doesn’t mean you’re going to have perfect health and wealth and friendships, and no stress, not perfect that way. The word perfect means complete. What that means is this, is that God’s will doesn’t run up when you’re 60, and then He says, “I have no idea what’s left, just good luck.” No, His will takes us everyday throughout our entire life into eternal life with Him. It’s a will that is utterly complete, and so, we should ask the question, “Well then, how then do we start to discern this will for our life?” And what He says is this, the way that you start to discern His will for your life, is to consider His mercy.

Some of you, in particular, those who are young, you ask the question, “What am I supposed to do in life? What’s God’s will for my life? Let me tell you where to start, think about the cross, think about mercy, think about the fact that He’s saved you, because that becomes motivation for doing what He tells you to do. His mercy. Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with him graciously give us all things?”

You know what that means? It means that if God Almighty would not spare His own son, in order to save our soul, then we can also trust that whatever He’s going to instruct us, in order to build community is in our best interest even if it’s hard. It’s still worth doing, because He is good. You see, when we’re looking at the goodness of God that’s expressed to us, and the mercy that we’ve received, what it does is it creates three different kinds of behaviors. It propels us in three ways, and that’s what you find in verse 1 and 2 that are all underlined here.

First He says this, in view of the mercies of God, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice...” Now, many of you know in the Old Testament, there was dead sacrifices, right? God prescribed a sacrificial system to atone for our sin, before He sent Jesus as the final, perfect sacrifice for our sin. And what would happen is, you would kill an animal that was unblemished in your place, then you would place it on the altar, and you would burn that animal. And so, once the animal was up there, and it got hot, the animal couldn’t say, “You know what, this is uncomfortable, I don’t really like the altar so much, so I’m going to run.”

They were dead sacrifices, but He says we are a living sacrifice, and what that means is this, is that when you came to faith in Christ, He didn’t take away your free will. He didn’t take away your ability to rebel, and so, when His will gets hot, and uncomfortable, and it does, you and I have the ability to say, “No.”

And that’s why, when we are conscious, and aware of His mercy, we say, “Wait a minute, even though it’s difficult, I’m going to stay here, I’m going to remain faithful, I’m going to endure in this marriage, I’m going to endure in this class, I’m going to endure with this church, I’m going to endure with this small group, I’m going to endure, and the reason I’m going to do so is because His mercy is real, I know He’s for me and not against me.”

We present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which simply means we open our hands, and say, “God, here’s my life.” And then what we do, is we say, “God, here’s my sin.” And that’s why He says holy, and acceptable. We’re not going to hold on to it, and clutch it, we’re going to say, “If you say that it’s not in my best interest to have that attitude, or that practice in my life, then I’m going to give it to you.” So, the mercy of God, in discerning the will of God, it opens up our hands to Him, and then it opens up our hearts to say, “God, whatever sin is in my life, I’m ready to part with.”

And the third thing that it propels us to do is to be renewed. You notice He says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” See our heart is being downloaded, or to our heart is being downloaded everything that we are ingesting into our mind. What you listen to, it’s all there, it’s all coming in, and it eventually it comes out of the mouth, it comes out in how we treat people, it always comes out. What’s in, it always comes out.

And so, what He says is really, a beautiful thing to us. And He says this, “Don’t be conformed to the world, don’t be put in its press, its stamp, and made in its image,” He goes, “Instead,” he goes, “Be transformed.” The word, be transformed, means metamorphosis, that’s where it comes from, metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is to be transformed over time. When we think of the word, back in high school science class, is we think of what? We think of the butterflies, right? We think to where over a period of time, there’s a metamorphosis, there’s a transition of the outer shell. What it looks like of this creature over time.

And that’s what He says, He goes... As you deposit the word of God into your mind, what happens is that we are being made changed, is what the word is. It’s being made changed. And what you’re going to find in Scripture is this, is that Christ not only saved us, but then He fills us with the Holy Spirit to train us with His word, to love to do, and to pursue doing what He says, and wills that we ought to do. This is how you live the Christian life. And it all begins with the mercies of God, and so, let me encourage us on this point to consider the mercies of Christ every morning.

Every one of us, we need this. We need some time where we’re either in the Scriptures, or we’re thinking about what did Jesus do in order to bring about the fact that, even though I am a sinner, there is now no condemnation for me, because I’m in Christ. Think about it every day. Second thing I want you to see is this, is that God’s mercy, our awareness of it produces humility in our heart. It produces humility in our heart. Even a very brief look at the cross where we receive the mercy, reminds us that we are not the hero. We are not the hero of our home, our marriage, our family, our church, or the world, we’re not the hero. He’s the hero.

And so, notice what He says in verse 3, He says, “By the grace given to me...” Notice, indicative... Grace has been given, we’re supposed to believe that. “I say to everyone among you...” And now, He’s about to give an imperative, this is what we’re supposed to do, “To think of himself...” I’m sorry, “Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.” You hear the word, sober, it’s the opposite of drunkenness. And one characteristic of drunkenness, is we don’t see things as they are, things get blurry. Things that are there, we don’t recognize, and things that aren’t there we don’t recognize.

It’s a state that God says, “Hey, this is not good, and healthy for you.” And notice what He says here, there was something about pride, it’s opposite of being sober-minded. In other words, selfishness is drunkenness of the mind. Selfishness is being so intoxicated with ourselves that we do not see the value of God, and we do not see the value of people who are near us. In other words... Let me say it a different way... Selfishness is inherently anti-social. Selfishness is inherently anti-community, and therefore, selfishness is inherently lonely.

Which is why one of the very first things we should do after we consider His mercy, if we feel lonely, is to examine our heart, if we are full of ourself, because we are never so empty as when we are full of ourself. How do we avoid this trap, this pride? Well, let's fight pride by pursuing greater faith... Faith.

Some of you said, "Wait a minute, I thought you'd say humility." No, He says faith. You see, the opposite of thinking highly of yourself, is not thinking lowly of yourself. Self-loathing is just as proud and divisive to the community as boasting. The opposite of pride is faith. You say, "Well, how do you know that?" Well, look what He says, this is God talking. Look at verse 3, "Think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."

In other words, when we see Jesus as supreme, and then we see it in His word, that He tells us things about ourself, and when we believe those things, that we were objects of wrath, and that we have received mercy, what happens is it cultivates humility in our heart. And do you know what that does? Well, it moves us to the third point which is, that God's mercy renews our appreciation of God's family. Once He humbles our heart with mercy, He then opens up our eyes to the value of other people in our life. We don't want to be selfish, because selfishness is drunkenness of mind, it's anti-social, it's anti-community, it's lonely.

You see, when we come to Christ, sometimes we think, oh He's going to set up this romantic table for two, just me and Jesus, and we have this personal relationship. And there's no doubt, that it is a personal relationship with Christ, but every time you see any kind of tables where people are eating with Christ, in the new testament, it's a big table with His whole family. You come to Christ, but you get a family, a big family.

That's why He says, verse 4 and 5, "As in one body, we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function..." In other words, we all have a body, and this body has different parts, there's hand, and foot, and they do different things. He goes, "So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." In other words, Christ did not save us to live unto ourselves, and therefore, only under extreme circumstances, like a pandemic, should we engage in corporate worship alone. That means there must be a commitment when this is over to return. Why? Well, because we need the body, and the body needs us. That's why.

Hebrews 12, says it this way, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us..." Some will say, "Well, when I run, I'm only thinking about myself." But here's the thing about the Christian race, you only win if you help others finish. That's why it says in verse 12, "Make level paths for your feet," the word your is plural, it's not just your feet, it's your feet. "So that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." In other words, sometimes you look around, and you see people who are hurting, and your goal is not simply to finish the Christian race, it's to help them to, as well.

And so, let's resist the notion of self-sufficiency, and let's run together. I have found those to be true over time, if you want to run fast, you run alone, if you want to finish, you run together. The mercy of Christ reminds us that we're like horses that are hitched together, running at different speeds. Sometimes we're the horse that's tired, and sometimes we're the one that's energetic, which is why we need others. And that gets us to the last point, and that is that God's mercy directs our gifts to serve one another.

One of the blessings of being at Providence is that, we have the privilege to see a lot of people who are guests, we're so thankful for that. If you're a guest, we're really glad you're here. And oftentimes, when folks come up to me, and they say I'm a guest, and I say, "Well, what brought you to Providence?" This is what oftentimes people say, and I think it's a noble, valid thing, as well. We know you teach the Bible, but what we're really looking for is community.

Let me tell you one of the mysteries, and the ironies of community, and that is it is never found by searching, it is only built by serving. Another way to say it is, people are found, but community is built. We can point you to where people are at, but you can be very lonely, even in a small group at Providence, unless community is built. Well, how do we build, then? Well, we find ways to serve. That's why it says in verse 6, "Having gifts that differ, according to the grace given us, let us use them..." And so, if your gift is proclaiming the truth, as in prophecy, or helping other people, as in serving, whether it's instructing, helping people understand, which is teaching. Encouraging, which is exhortation. Supplying, which is contributing. Directing, or overseeing, which is leadership, which is perceiving hurts that people might have, and moving to meet those needs, which is acts of mercy.

Let me encourage you to use your gifts. And the result of us using our gifts, is not only is Jesus glorified, and not only is the mission, what we as the church see progress, but also, another fruit is community. Let me encourage you with something that is so critically important, and it is this, let me encourage you to be a builder of community, and not an architect.

Is Bonhoeffer has said it this way, he says, "Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community, become destroyers of that Christian community." In other words, if you have, in your mind, the blueprint of the community, that you need, and you love that so much more so, than the actual human beings who are near you, you will end up destroying the relationships with those human beings who are near you.

In other words, aim for vision, aim for your vision of community, and you reap loneliness. Aim to serve, love people at their need, and you reap community. Let me encourage you to serve one another, and enjoy the community that it builds. And during this time, you need to be creative. You say, "Well, that's not very helpful." Some of you are locked at home, or maybe, in a nursing home, and you say, "Well, I have a gift of teaching, but who am I going to teach?" Well, there are a lot of ways to teach people, you can write people, you can call people, you can talk to people.

The idea is this, is that you've been given a gift, at least one gift, if you've come to faith in Christ, that builds up the church family. And if you're not using that gift, even in a strange time like this, you are suffering as is the body. Whatever your gift is, you need to find a way to employ it, to use it. To serve other people, to care for other people, sometimes you have to use what's not your gift, because that's what's needed at the time. What happens is this, is that when we look to one another, and we see the value of God, we see the amazing mercy of God, and we see the value of people, and we appreciate the family of God around us. We're presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, which keeps us building even when we get discouraged with our attempts. What happens is, we find community build over a period of time, and it changes peoples' lives.

That's what I want to show you now, I want to show you a little story, or a little video. A family here at Providence who was utterly changed, and transformed, and is being changed, and transformed, simply because of people saying, "We're going to build community among one another", so, watch this.

About a year, and a half ago, our oldest really started to struggle. He was 14 at the time, he was really just showing signs of heightened anxiety, and some of it even had to deal with the fact that he knew that we were talking about moving overseas. And we didn't know what that was going to look like, and those unknowns were exceptionally challenging for him, even when we reached a point with the whole missions process, where at that time, it didn't look like it was going to happen.

And fast forward until mid September, it's almost as if a switch went off in him, and he got very sick. And we found ourselves in a hospital room where he was struggling with what was real, and what wasn't.

Sometimes God doesn't give us the answers we want to hear, but when our son had to go to the hospital in mid September, all I could see was the hurt in my son's eyes, and on his face, and I couldn't help him.

And we would spend the next 21 days distanced in a very fragile, emotional state.

It's been the most difficult thing I've ever experienced in my life, but at the same time, I couldn't imagine what it would've been like without a community. Not just a big as our church, in Providence, but a small, tight community, in our life group, where people were praying for us, and caring for us in so many different ways.

They wrapped their arms around us so fully, truly, just with God's love and grace, and each of them acted in such a different way. Not everybody provided food, and not everybody was able to come to our house, and pray, but I honestly didn't realize the value of the village of people that surround you, 'til you're at a moment where you're so broken, that you don't even know what you need.

It was like God was just using them to remind me that, here is your little bit of sunlight on these very dark days.

And one of the biggest things for me, was just how many men made themselves available to me throughout the week, to meet for coffee, to talk, and to pray. They wanted to know how we were doing, how our son was doing, and how they could be lifting us up in prayer.

Honestly, prayer was and is the peace that passes all understanding, through all of this, it didn't matter how many gifts, or cards, or flowers we got, it was the inner peace that only God can give that only came because we have so many people behind us in our village praying for us.

At this point in the story, where we're still working through things, we are doing a whole lot better, but we're still not well, but we're continuing to press forward. Still praying daily for God to bring healing and restoration, and we're doing that in step with our community. Those relationships that God has established for us, are still going strong, they're still checking in on us, and still loving on us in so many ways.

Let me encourage you to build community, and let me encourage you to help us, help you to build that amazing need that we all have in our life. Let me close just by saying just a few thoughts to those who might be here today, or who are at home, who are still considering whether it's worthwhile to follow Christ.

We want you to know that we believe that it is. With all of my heart, with all of our heart, we want you to know that it's not easy to follow Christ, it's just worth it, because he's with you. He's with you to the end of the age, and then beyond. He's with us, and being with Him is simply better than anything that the world has to offer.

And so, I want to encourage you, that if you know the guilt of sin, and the shame of your sin, and if you need a solution for that, and you do, it's only found in Christ. And so, we commend you to admit your need to Him, to believe in Christ as the only savior, and to confess Him as Lord of your life. You do that, He'll forgive you of your sin. He'll justify you, He'll bring you into His family, where life may be still be very, very, difficult. And yet, it's still really, really good.

Let me pray. Father in love, we love you, we thank you that you love us, and now we give you our life. You ask us, tell us, in view of your mercy to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. It's holy and acceptable, and in doing so, this is our spiritual act of worship. And we desire to do that now with our whole life, whatever it is that you want from us, we want to give it to you so, with open hands, and open hearts, God, we give you everything that we have. We want to sing to you now, because you've been good to us. Help us to sing as people who recognize that we're recipients of mercy. We love you, thank you. Help people who are lonely to build community. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.



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