



Reaching Out Together

Philippians 1:5

Welcome to '40 Days of Community' - Week 2, Day 15.

Now, during the 40 days, we are doing two things: deepening the sense of community within our church family, and reaching out to the community around our church family. We're learning to build stronger relationships in our church and reach out in relationships of love to those around our church. And the reason we're doing this is because the Bible says "*we're better together.*"

Last week, we looked at why we need each other, and that is foundational for everything we are looking at the next six weeks.

Now today, we are actually going to talk about the last purpose. We're going to start with the end. The last purpose is you're made for a mission, and God wants you to share his love with other people, with your friends, with your family, with the people you work with, and to show his love to those who don't know Christ yet, who are not in his family.

Now why does he want us to do that? Because God wants everybody in his family. God has never made a person He didn't love, that He didn't have a purpose for. God has never made a person that Jesus Christ didn't die for. So God wants us to share the good news. But you're not alone. God wants you to do it with other people.

A couple of verses are there at the top of your outline. In the book of **Philippians**, Paul says this in verse

27. Let's read it aloud together, "*I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*" Now circle "*contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel.*" That's what we're looking at today. How do we do it together?

In fact, inside your program, there is a space for writing "My 40 Days of Community Story". Anything that happens in your life, in your group or your community, we want to know about it.

How do I share with my friends that God loves them? And how do I do it in a partnership with other people? How do we do it together as a small group because we are to reach out together?

The next verse in your notes says this, **Philippians 1:5** *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,* Circle that word 'partnership.' We're going to look at seven ways to partner with other believers, with other people in the family of God, to help reach your friends, your relatives, the people you care about most with the good news.

I. 'P' STANDS FOR PRAY TOGETHER.

And the first thing you do is you ask your small group to pray for YOU, your friends -- for your friends that haven't stepped across the line, who are still considering the claims of Christ, who don't really know God in a personal way yet. And you ask them to pray and you pray together. You know, you can't force anybody to love God, but you can pray for them. And *prayer can do what God can do.* Prayer can melt a hard heart. Prayer can warm up a cold heart. Prayer can activate and arouse an apathetic heart, and prayer can change a stubborn heart. I have seen it done thousands and thousands of times. Prayer can do whatever God can do.

You see, people can reject your arguments. They may refuse to listen to your logic, but they are powerless against your prayers. And it goes straight to their heart. There is tremendous power in prayer. And when you pray together and you say, "These are

the people I want you to pray about," God actually works.

"Well what are we supposed to pray about as a group?" Well one of the things, as in **Colossians 3:4**, the Bible says this, "*Pray for us that God will give us the opportunity to tell people His message.*" So we pray for God's opportunity to share with our friends and our loved ones and people we care about, the great news about God. And as we pray for opportunity, you know what happens? You start seeing them everywhere. Actually, you've got lots of opportunities. They are all around you. You just don't notice them. Will you write this down? 'Prayer makes me aware.' 'Prayer makes me aware.'

And so, here's the **first ACTION STEP** in sharing the good news: **Make a group prayer list**, and then share it with each other. I want you to ask everybody in your small group, "Name one person that you would really like to know the Lord but they don't know the Lord yet." And we'll all share those names, and we'll make a list of six names or seven names or ten names or whatever. And then, we'll start praying for each other's friends or each other's family, and everybody starts praying. And there's power in that.

II. THE 'A' IN 'PARTNER' STANDS FOR **APPEAL. APPEAL TO COMMON INTERESTS.**

1 Corinthians 9:22 *"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."* (NIV)

Before you can share the good news with anybody, you have to establish a relationship with them. Before you can reach them, you must relate to them. So you find out, 'What do we have in common? What do we like to talk about? What do we have... common experiences? Common interests? Common needs? Common hurts? Do we like to fish? Do we like to golf? Do we like to cook? Do we like to shop? Do we have kids? Are we interested in soccer, baseball or basketball or whatever?'

So the **second ACTION STEP**, if you're getting your group to reach out, is to **discover the common interests in your group**. "What do we like to do?"

and you just make a list of all the things that you find. "Oh, you like to do that? Well, I like to do that to." And you share it with each other, and then you ask, "Who do we know who'd also like to do that who isn't yet a believer? Or which of my coworkers or neighbors would like to do that?"

What do we have in common? (Welcome to the Club)"

I know of a group where they are all college football fans, and they love football. So what they did, everybody in the group bought a season ticket to the local college team and then they all pitched in together and they bought two more season tickets. And every time they go to a game, they take two new people with them to the game. And they just go and they have a good time at the football game. At the end, they say, "Did you enjoy this?" "Yeah, that was fun." "Well, you know this same group meets on Thursday night over at Bob's house. Would you like to join us?" "Well yeah, you guys are normal people. That'd be fun."

And so, you just have fun with them. Well see, that's finding common interests that people would like to do. So you pray together. You appeal to common interest.

III. THE 'R' IN 'PARTNER' STANDS FOR **REACH OUT IN LOVE.**

Mark 12:31 ³¹*The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Reach out in love. Why? Because you have to have the right motive in reaching out to your neighbors and friends. Jesus said, "*Love you neighbor...*" how? *As yourself.* Yeah. You know the old cliché: *People don't care what we know until they know we care.* And so everything we do is out of love.

Well why are we doing this? Why are we even talking about reaching out to our community? Why don't we just focus on us? I mean we've got enough people in our church. Why don't we just focus on making the love in our church warmer and stronger? Why in the world should we focus out on the community around our church? Why would we do that?

Well, we certainly don't do it out of *guilt*, and we certainly don't do it out of *pressure*. And we don't do it out of *duty*. And we don't do it to make God like us because He already loves us. We don't do it because we're better than anybody else because we're not. We do it for three reasons.

1) First, we have the greatest news in the world to share. If I had the cure for cancer, I'd be shouting it in the streets. If I had the cure for AIDS, I'd be telling everybody I could. But I've got something better than that: the key to purpose in life and eternal life.

The Bible says we're to share the good news. What is the good news? Okay here it is in a nutshell. The good news is this: You're not an accident. You were made by God, and he has a purpose and plan for your life. And you were made to last forever. And God wants you to live forever with him in eternity, but he wants you to get to know him here on earth. He knows and loves everything about you, and he wants you to know and love him too.

And Jesus Christ came to earth so you could get to know what God is like, and he died on the cross and paid for all your sins. So everything you've ever done wrong is completely wiped out and forgotten and forgiven. And it gives you a purpose for living in the present, and it gives you a home in heaven in the future.

Now that's good news! Where else am I going to hear that good news? I mean it's not like we're trying to give people rabies or something. Okay, this is the best news in the world and everybody needs to hear it.

2) The second is out of a heart of gratitude. You know if God never did another thing for me, I still owe him my life. Just for the fact that he has forgiven everything I've ever done wrong and he's given me a security of a home in heaven and a purpose for living now and he's helped me with so many problems in my life. I owe him everything. So I do it out of gratitude.

3) But then there's the third reason why we reach out, and that's because the Bible says, "God is love." And when God comes into your life, you start loving other people. In fact, I'll be real honest with you. If you don't love anybody else, it's real simple -- you don't have God in your life. You don't. You may think you do, but you don't because the Bible says in 1 John 4, "*God is love.*" And you can't have somebody as big as God come into your life and not change you. And all of a sudden, you start becoming less selfish and more loving.

The Bible says this, there on your outline, "*Because we loved you,*" that's the motive for reaching out in love, "*Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's good news but even our own lives.*" And God says, "When you share with people who don't know me yet, I don't want you to share the good news. I want you to share your life with them. If you don't do both, it's not really love."

And you know **what the problem is?** Sadly today, most people who don't know the Lord, who are unbelievers, who haven't stepped across the line, most people, they expect Christians to reach out in judgment, not to reach out in love. There is this idea of, "*Oh Christians, they think they are better than everybody else. They think they've got all the answers. They put down everybody else.*" That's the common conception, not the idea that we love people because Christ is in our lives.

What is sharing the good news? It's one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. That's it. I'm not any better than anybody else, but we just pass it on.

Here's the **ACTION STEP: Ask God to give you a deeper love for other people.** Ask God to give you a deeper love for other people.

There is a fourth way that you and I can partner together to let other people know how great God's love is and that is to

IV. TELL YOUR STORY.

To tell your story. To do what the Bible talks about in **1 Peter 2:9** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* You tell your story. In fact, the most effective way to let other people know about the great things that God can do in their lives is to tell the story of what God's done in your life. That is what makes a difference.

And the great thing about telling stories is you are the expert on your story. What God has done in your life.

And I've found over the years that people, they want to hear your story. What they don't want to hear is your **S T O R Y!** [You know what I'm

talking about? You know, those stories where they are 15 minutes into the story and they are still five years' old..., that kind of a story.] People just want to hear the "short" story. So we owe it to them to take a few minutes to think it through so we can tell the story of what God's done in two or three minutes, not two or three hours. Tell the story.

Jesus said, *"You're to be my witnesses."* It's a great picture. When you hear the word 'witness,' I think of a courtroom, most of us do. It's a perfect picture of what God's asking us to do to make a difference in the world. You're to be... I'm to be his witness. He doesn't ask us to be the attorney, arguing the case. He doesn't ask us to be the judge, judging other people. He says, "I want you to be my witnesses." And what does a witness do? A witness just says, "Here's what I've seen. Here's what I've heard." A witness just tells the story of what God's done in their life to other people.

How do you get into telling your story? Well one way is to listen for problems that Jesus has helped you with, and so you can say, "Look, God helped me with that. Maybe he can help you too."

Now here's an **ACTION STEP** with this: **Write out your story, and share it with your group.** Start there. Start with your group. Let other people that you know, that are close to you know first. Some of you have never even shared the story of what God's done in your life with someone in your group.

So in your group during '40 Days of Community,' each week have somebody share their story as a part of your group, just take two or three minutes to do that. Or maybe one night you pair up and everybody tells their story on the same night. But some way during '40 Days of Community,' everybody gets a chance to tell their story.

Look at what the Bible says in **Psalm 66** verse 16. In fact, let's read this verse together, *"Listen and I'll tell you what God has done for me."* Do that.

V. THE FIFTH WAY TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE IS TO NURTURE FRIENDSHIPS.

Just build friendships with them, so you can build a bridge between your heart and theirs that Jesus Christ can walk across. Now this step takes a

little bit more time and effort. It takes a little more energy to build a friendship. You just don't do it overnight.

I said earlier that very few people have a true friend in life, and **everybody is looking for a true friend.** I'm not talking about acquaintances. But I'm talking about people who are there with you when you need them most. And who do you build those friendships with? The people that are already in your life. They are the people you work with, you go to school with, that you live with, that are down the street, the people on your speed dial on your phone. They are all around you. And as I said, God has put these people in your life specifically so you can share the good news with them. **And if not you, who?** You are the only Bible some people will ever read. You represent Jesus Christ to them.

Now one of the best ways to build a friendship is a Biblical method - **Have a party.** Did you know that much of Jesus' ministry was done at parties? If you go read the Gospels, go read his life, you'll read that he often did ministry at parties. In fact, he was such a party animal that the religious leaders of that day, the Pharisees, called him a *glutton and a drunk.* They called Jesus a glutton and a drunk because he was always at parties. Why? Because that's where the people were that he wanted to share the love of God with.

LUKE 5 - He even taught his disciples to do this. One of his disciples named Levi, not the jeans guy but another guy. His name was also Matthew. Look at the next verse (29), *"In his home, Levi,"* also called Matthew, *"gave a big dinner party for Jesus and many fellow tax collectors and other guests were also there."* Now why does it say 'many fellow tax collectors'? Because that's what Matthew was. He was a tax collector. So he calls up the office, all his buddies, and says, "Come on over." He had an office party for Jesus. That's what he did.

Now here we are talking about a party. And I would encourage you to have a Matthew party. What's a 'Matthew's party?' You just bring some people over, who don't know the Lord and who you want to get acquainted with and just build friendship and show love to.

Christians tend to fall into one of two extremes, either **imitation** or **isolation.** Isolation or imitation.

On one hand, some Christians become isolationists and they say, "You know what, I don't want to get polluted by the world. I don't want to get dirtied by the world. I don't want to get my life messed up by the world. So I'm just going to isolate myself. And I'll build a wall and I'll build my own little culture. And we'll have our church culture, and our school culture and our family culture. And we're not going to let anybody get out there in the world because we don't want to get dirtied by those people." Well those people are the people that Jesus Christ died for, friend.

So isolation doesn't work where you just build your own little culture and you stay far away from the world. How are you going to build any friendships that way? That's wrong.

The other way is the other extreme, which is **imitation**, which says, "Let's just be just like the world. We'll dress like Britney Spears. We'll trash talk like Britney Spears. We'll say whatever we want to do. We'll have the same values, same goals, we'll be no different from the world." Well, that's not what God wants you to be either where you just give in and give in to all of the lowest, common denominator in society. That's not it either.

The answer is not isolation, and it's not imitation. It's **INSULATION** and **INFILTRATION** where the Bible says you are to be *"in the world but not of the world."* To be salt and light in the world; you are to penetrate the world with the goodness of God.

Now here's your **ACTION STEP: Bring a friend to your group. Plan a party.** During '40 Days,' bring somebody who is not yet a follower of Christ. Maybe they're considering it. Maybe they are not even considering it, but you just like them. You invite them to your group.

You say, "Well I don't have any friends who would want to come to my Bible study group." Are you kidding? I don't know if you saw the recent Gallup poll where they took a survey and found 34 million American said, "I'd go to church. I've just never been asked." 34 Million, some of those people you work with, some of them live on your block and they are far more willing to come to a small group than you are willing to ask them. But you nurture friendships.

VI. LET ME SHARE WITH YOU THE SIXTH WAY TO HELP YOUR FRIENDS COME TO KNOW CHRIST: EXPECT GOD TO ACT.

Expect God to act. I don't know if you realize this, but God works in people's hearts when you expect him to do so.

The Bible says, *"According to your faith, it will be done unto you."*

The greatest pastor of the 19th century was a guy named Charles Spurgeon. He was the pastor of the largest church in the world at that time in London, England. He would often speak to up to about 10,000 people. And many people came to know Christ through his life. And one day, a young man came to him and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I don't understand it. Whenever you talk to people about the Lord, they always tend to open up their lives and they tend to accept Christ." He said, "But you know, when I talk to people about the Lord," he said, "Nobody's interested. Nobody comes to Christ. What's wrong?" Spurgeon says, "Well young man, you don't expect people to come to Jesus Christ every time you talk about him, do you?" He said, "Well of course not." He said, "That's your problem. That's your problem."

Now, I don't know how it works, but I do know that when I pray and expect God to act, He does. What happens is it makes it easier for them to choose the right way. God will never force anybody to choose, but it makes it easier.

LUKE 5 - Now again, I don't know how this works. But you know the story in the Bible...there were four guys who had a friend who was paralyzed and he needed to be healed. And so, they believed Jesus could heal him. So they put him on a mat and they take him to Jesus. And when they get there, they set him down. And Jesus says this, the next verse (20), *"When Jesus saw their faith, he said 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'"* and he healed the guy.

Now notice, he healed the guy on the basis of the friends' faith, not the guy who was sick. The guy who was sick, he didn't necessarily have any faith, but it was his friends. Jesus looked at these four guys and said, "You believed I would do it, so I'm going to do it." And sometimes you have to believe in faith for other people, and you expect God to act.

ACTION STEP - Never Give Up on Anybody!

Now let me let you in on a little secret. It doesn't take a lot of faith. It just takes a little faith. But if you put a little faith in a big God, you're going to get

big results. It is not the size of your faith that matters, it is the size of your God. So you take a little faith and say, "God I believe you're going to work in my friend's life and you're going to bring him to you" and you keep believing and believing, God will honor your faith.

Now here's the last way to help bring your friends to know the lord.

VII. 'R' IS REPRESENT CHRIST WITH YOUR LIFE.

Represent Christ with your life. The Bible says, *"Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus."* Whatever you do or say, we need audio-visual Christians, who walk the "walk and talk the talk." They do it and they say it. They are "show and tell" Christians. And you need both. You need to live it in your life, and you need to share it with your mouth.

And the Bible is very specific about this. **1 Thessalonians 4**, *"Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business. Do your own work. If you do, people who are not believers will respect you."*

The fact is, I'll say it again, God specifically put people in your life, and you are God's representative to them. And if not you, who? God put *you* there. Why would he put you there? He put you there to share with your relative, your loved one, your friend, your coworker. How will the people know? How will the people know unless we tell them?

Your friends who need the Lord, who need to be shown how to get to heaven... God isn't going to write it in the sky for them. He's not going to send them a telegram. He sent you! He has sent you to tell your friends, your family, whoever. He sent you.

ACTION STEP. Did you know that most dangerous prayer you could pray is two words, **"Use me."** I dare you to pray it during the next 40 days. *"God, use me. Use me to show your love to people who don't know you love them. Use me to show your purpose to people who don't know that you have purpose for their life."*

CONCLUSION

So here's my challenge to you: If you're in a small group, and if you're not, you need to get in one

this week. We want every person in this church in a group so that "together" we can start reaching our friends.

Imagine if every group in our church had the privilege of helping one person step across the line. At the end of 40 days, there would be maybe 10 or 15 more people headed for heaven than there are right now and you could be a part of that.

Let's bow our heads.

Father, you have given us a mission in the world to share your good news and your love with other people. Thank you that we don't have to do it alone. Thank you that right now as we share, you're going to give us your words and your love for others. And I pray that you will raise up an army with a heart to change the world.

Now you pray. Say, *"Dear God, I realize that you've put specific people in my life because you want me to share your love with them. Today I accept my mission. I want you to use me. Help me to be concerned about people around me who don't know you. Help me to take these seven steps of partnering with my small group. I realize that they are not going to know unless we show them. And help me to remember that no one is hopeless and nobody is beyond reach of your love. So in faith, I ask you to help our group reach one more for Jesus during the next 40 days. In your name, we pray. Amen."*