



How We Help Each Other Grow

Welcome to '40 Days of Community' We're now on day 28. Now let's look at our outlines, and let's read together, **Romans 8:29** *²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,... (NIV)*

The purpose of life is to become like Jesus Christ. While you're here on earth, God wants to get you ready for heaven and he wants you to grow in character. He wants you to grow spiritually. That's what we're going to look at today.

How do I grow spiritually? But more than that, how do we help each other grow? Because the Bible teaches, you cannot grow spiritually on your own. You have to have other people in your life. That's why we talk so much about small groups in this church. You have to have other people to help you grow.

In fact, look at the next verse, **1 Thessalonians 5:11**, I'd like for you to read this aloud with me; plus also read the reference, 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Let's say it together, *"Encourage each other and build each other up,"* Now this is this week's memory verse.

So let's say it again together. *"Encourage each other and build each other up,"* First Thessalonians 5:11. Everybody look up here, and don't look down now. *"Encourage each other and build each other up,"* First Thessalonians 5:11. You've memorized a Bible verse! Whoopee! Turn to somebody and say, "I did it. I did it." Okay? One more time, 1 Thessalonians 5:11: *"Encourage*

each other and build each other up," First Thessalonians 5:11.

The goal of '40 Days of Community' is learning how to love, learning how to love each other. And one of the ways we do that is when we decide to help each other grow, and there's a lot of ways we can do that. But I think this first one may be one of the most powerful choices you and I can make during each week, and that is the decision to love other people, help them grow by:

I. BY AFFIRMING EACH OTHER'S WORTH.

Here's a little secret, if you haven't figured this out in life, everybody is looking for affirmation. Everybody is looking for affirmation, and people will do almost anything to get it. If you don't believe that, just watch some of the reality shows. Look at what people do to get on TV, to get affirmed, eat worms, do whatever just so people will applaud you. Pretty ridiculous.

Here's a question: How? How do I do this? How do I make the choice to affirm people in everyday life?

Well, there's four ways you can do that there on the outline:

A. You do it with ACCEPTANCE.

By doing what the Bible says in **Romans 15:7** when it says, *"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you."* Instead of choosing to snub people and belittle people and demean people, which is an easy choice to make, especially if you're having a bad day.

B. The second way is by showing ATTENTION,

Not just acceptance but attention. Now that takes more time than acceptance. You know you can accept somebody but still ignore them. "I accept you, just stay out of my life," and so you can disregard people, you can overlook them.

And the Bible says in **Galatians 6:10**, *"Give special attention to those who are in the family of*

believers." Now why do they get special attention? That's one of the benefits of being in the family of God. It's one of the benefits of being a part of a church. You get special attention. It's the flip side of what we looked at two weeks where it said, "Pay attention to those outside the family." But this says, "Give special attention to those who are believers in the family of God." Why?

Because here's the general principle, whatever you pay attention to is going to grow. If I pay attention to my garden, it's going to grow. If I pay attention to my kids, they're going to grow. If I pay attention to my marriage, it's going to grow and get better. If I pay attention to my work, that's going to grow. The only principle where this doesn't work is my hair. The more attention I pay to it, the more it falls out.

And what people want more than anything else is focused attention. They want to know that their thoughts matter, that their lives matter, that they are valuable. You're not just watching the TV or reading the paper while you're listening to them, you are focusing on them.

God pays attention to you. He says, "*Even the hairs on your head are numbered*" and Jesus said that the essence of relationships is not what we do for each other. And the essence of relationships is not even what we give to each other, provide for each other. The essence of relationships is how much of ourselves we give to each other, focused attention.

Now here's the third practical way that you can affirm people's worth:

C. You affirm worth by showing AFFECTION.

Philippians 1:8 *God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

AFFECTION. I'm talking about physical touch.

Now we've all read about babies, and the failure to thrive syndrome. That means that little infants, if they are not stroked, if they're not caressed, if they're not touched as they grow up, they don't develop. They don't grow the way that God intended for them to grow.

I think that's why he made them so soft because you want to touch them. You want to hold them close, and they need that stimulation of skin in order to grow and development. What most people don't know is that adults need it too.

UCLA did a study a while back and discovered that to be a healthy, fulfilled, satisfied adult; you need 8-10 meaningful touches a day. You say, "Boy, I'm getting cheated." You need touches in your life in order to grow and to be all that God wants you to be.

Everybody stand up right now. You say, "Oh no!" Everybody stand up. Come on, stand up. Okay? Stretch. Everybody stretch. Go ahead, stretch. Touch your toes. Touch your neighbor's toes. Okay. I want you to turn around, and I want you to hug a total stranger. Go ahead. Turn around, hug a total stranger. All right, all right, sit down. Okay, sit down.

Now I know that there were two reactions to what we just did. Some of you are thinking, "I'm never going back to that church again," and the smarter ones are thinking, "Next week, I'm sitting by somebody cute. So Pastor Dave, do it again next week and I'll be ready next time."

D. By showing APPRECIATION

Now here's the fourth way: By showing acceptance, showing attention, showing affection and showing APPRECIATION. We affirm each other's worth with appreciation. Now appreciation means *to raise in value*. It goes up in value. If you've ever bought a car, you know the meaning of 'depreciation,' they lose in value. The moment you drive it off the lot, it loses value: depreciates.

Every time you appreciate somebody, you raise their value to you and to others. When you appreciate your wife, you raise her value. When you appreciate your husband or your boyfriend or your girlfriend or a friend, you raise their value. When you appreciate your kids, you raise their value. When you appreciate your small group, you raise its value to you. Everything you appreciate increases in value.

Now look at this next verse. The Bible says, **1 Thessalonians 5:12** *But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, (NASB95)*

Now when was the last time, you thanked the Sunday School teacher if you have children. Today when this service is over, before you leave this place, find three people to appreciate. If you've got somebody in children's Sunday school, go over and thank one of the teachers, "Thank you for teaching my kids." Thank the ushers. Thank the greeters. Thank the musicians.

II. BY PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER'S GROWTH

There's another way that we can all help each other grow and that is by praying for each other's growth; by PRAYING for each other's GROWTH. By doing what this guy Epaphras did in **Colossians**

4:12, "*Epaphras*," Paul wrote, **Colossians 4:12** *...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* (KJV) That guy's a hero to me. I love the fact that he prayed for people's spiritual growth. We usually pray for people's needs, they have health needs, and financial needs, and we should pray for these things. But we don't spend nearly enough time praying for people's spiritual growth that our character will change because that's going to last.

I think one of the reasons probably is we don't know what to pray about. How would I pray for somebody's spiritual growth? Well fortunately, the Bible is filled with verses about how to pray for somebody to grow spiritually.

In fact, the next FIVE verses in your outline are prayers for people's spiritual growth and... I'll tell you what. Instead of me reading these and telling you what they mean, let's spend a few minutes just doing what these verses say. There are people in your life that you'd like to pray for their spiritual growth, people in your group, your family, your friends.

Let me just share these verses with you, and as I do so, let's pray for them right now.

- For instance, this first verse from **Ephesians 3:18 and 19**. Who could you pray this verse for? "*I pray that you'll be able to feel and understand how long, wide, deep and high Christ's love really is*" and to experience this love for yourselves.

Who do you know that needs God's love in their life right now? That's maybe struggling a little bit. Well bring their name to mind and say, "God show them your love. Let them know today how much you really love them."

- Who do you know that you need to pray the next verse for? **Hebrews 13:21**, "*I pray that you'll always be eager to do what is right.*" Let's pray. (Parents wouldn't you like to pray that for your kids. I mean really that they not only do what was right, but they'd be eager to do the right thing. Pray for them right now, or some friend, or somebody at work. God give them integrity)
- Or how about this next one, **Romans 15:13**, let's read this together, "*I pray God who gives hope*

will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him." Who wouldn't like some hope in their lives? Who doesn't need more joy, more peace in their lives?

Well, you see the foundation of it all there is that you trust in him. So pray, "God, I know somebody who needs some hope. Help them to trust in you during this difficult time." I know somebody who needs some joy, help them to trust in you so their heart can be lifted up," just bring their name to mind right now.

- Or this next verse where the Bible says, **Ephesians 1:17** *¹⁷That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:* (KJV) Who do you know that's facing a decision? Ask God to give him his wisdom right now. He says he'll give it if we ask. Well you pray on their behalf. Pray for their growth.
- Or this next one, who do you know who's feeling pretty overwhelmed by life? Who do you know that maybe doesn't feel like they're going to make it, or feels like they're having to do everything on their own energy, own power? Pray this verse for them, **Ephesians 3:16**, "*I pray that God may strengthen you with power through his spirit.*" Bring their name to mind and say, "God help them to know they're not alone today that you'll give them strength and power."

Now we just prayed individually for a lot of people, and there is power in that. (I have a feeling that these prayers we're praying right now are going to have a lot more impact than anything I say today.)

But there's even more power when we pray together, when you get in a group of other people and I want to encourage you to do that in your group. Pray for each other's spiritual growth.

Now there is a secret ingredient that builds community faster than anything else, and it is this:

III. NUMBER THREE: BY BEING HONEST ABOUT OURSELVES.

By honestly admitting our mistakes, we build community, intimacy, relationships faster than any other way. **Ephesians 4:25** says this, **Ephesians**

4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* Tell the truth about yourself, your fears, your doubts, your hang-ups.

And when you are honest about what is going on in your life and you're not blaming anybody else for it, it draws you closer to them and them closer to you. Now why in the world would anybody do that? Why would anybody risk honesty? Because it's worth the risk.

God says there are three benefits of being honest about our mistakes, about our feelings, our faults, our fatigue, our failures, our fears. And you only get these benefits when you're honest with one other person or a group. Here they are:

A) Emotional healing. Emotional healing comes from being honest with other people with what's going on in your life. **James 5:16** *Therefore confess your sins to each other* Circle that. Notice it doesn't say, "Confess them to God." It doesn't say, "Confess them to a counselor." It says, "*Confess them to each other,*" and that's your group and, read it with me, "*and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*"

Now everybody look up here because this is extremely important. There is a big difference between forgiveness and emotional healing. They are not the same. They are not.

Now I'm not making this up. This is what God says, "*Confess your faults to one another,*" not to God, to one another, "*and you will be healed.*" You want forgiveness, you confess it to God. You want healing, you want to let go of that pain, you want to get it behind you, you want to stop having to think about it, you need to tell it to somebody else. That thing you've kept as a secret your entire life.

Now you don't have to tell everybody, in fact, I don't recommend that. Don't tell everybody, but you need to tell somebody, a small group of trusted individuals or a spiritual partner, who can pray with you. God has wired us that way that we need to tell others.

B) Here's the second thing that's the benefit of honesty: You get God's power to change. God's power to change when we admit our mistakes to others. **James 4:10** *Humble yourselves before the*

Lord, and he will lift you up.," Notice he doesn't scold you, he doesn't shame you, he doesn't put you down, he lifts you up and gives you honor. How does this work?

God wants you to learn to be like him, and God is humble. So the Bible says, "God resists the proud," that means when you're prideful, you're on the opposite side of God. You're fighting God. He resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So that means this: When I'm honest about my weaknesses, then I'm humble. When I'm humble, I get God's grace. God's grace is the power to change. When I get God's grace, I can change the things that I've always wanted to change in my life. But it only comes through humility and humility comes through honesty. Does that make sense?

C) Now here's the third benefit of honesty: Deeper fellowship. Deeper fellowship when we admit our mistakes. **First John 1:7** says, "*If we live in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.*" We get fellowship, why? Because in the light, we can't hide anything. The darkness is where we hide. But when we are honest, we live in the light, we have fellowship.

Now here's the myth: We think that if we are open about our fears, about our hang-ups, about our imperfections, about our secret faults that people are going to think less of us. The opposite is true, actually the more honest you are, the more people want to be with you and like you. What is more attractive to you? Deceitfulness or honesty. Well honesty is.

Now let me speak to those of you who have realized, "My life is messed up. My life is really messed up. I've got some hang-ups, some habits, some bad responses, some bad patterns. The relationships... I don't know what it is." Well God brought you here because he wants to turn that hurt into a healing and then he wants to use you in the lives of other people. And he brought you here because he just wants you to stop denying it. He's waiting for you to surrender and get with the program.

Now here's the fourth, here's the fourth way that we help each other grow. And by the way, the way God wired it, this is cool. When you help other

people grow, God helps you grow. You never grow faster than when you're helping somebody else.

IV. BY ENCOURAGING EACH OTHER'S COMMITMENT

And the fourth way that we can help each other grow is by ENCOURAGING each other's COMMITMENT, by encouraging each other's commitment. Now, nothing affects your life more than your commitments. Tell me what you're committed to. I'll tell you what you're going to be in 20 years because you are becoming whatever you're committed to. Your commitments shape your life; and if you're not committed to anything, other people are shaping your life. I'm sorry to tell you this, but other people are running your life if you don't have any commitments.

Now, not only do your commitments affect here and now, they affect eternity because every choice you make has eternal consequences. That's why the Bible says in Romans chapter 1, **Romans 1:12** *that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (NIV) Or as the NCV says: "I want us to help each other with the faith we have. Your faith will help me, and my faith will help you."* Now that's why you need a church family, and that's why you need a small group, because we help each other out.

Now First Baptist Church is committed to and organized around helping you fulfill God's five purposes for your life. You were put on this planet for five reasons, and the purpose of this church is to help you fulfill those five purposes, and to help you make and grow in the five basic commitments of life.

So let's just review them as we close. They are:

1. First, God wants you to **commit to love Jesus Christ**. Love God with all your heart and soul in mind and strength. That's called worship. If you have done this, today's your day. Commit to loving Jesus Christ because you're made, you're planned, for his pleasure.

2. **You commit to love other believers**. Once you're in the family of God, God says, "I want you to learn to get along with others." That's called fellowship. That means you get in the small group, you take Pastor's Class, our membership class. You

get baptized as evidence, as an expression of your faith. You join this church. Now once you start loving Jesus, you start loving other believers.

3. The third thing is to **commit to grow in God's Word**; this is called discipleship. God wants you to become like Christ and you grow in his word, and you help others to grow in his word by sharing what God's teaching you, inviting them to Bible studies, inviting to your small group.

4. The fourth commitment is to **commit to serving in ministry**. God gave you some talents, some abilities, and he didn't give them to you for your benefit. He gave them to you to bless the world. And he wants you to use them. Any time you use your talents to help others, that's called your ministry.

5. Then the fifth, **commit to sharing the Good News**. Once you know the good news, you share it with other people.

Let's bow our heads. The fact is spiritual maturity is a choice. As I've said many times to you, you're as close to God as you choose to be. And one day you're going to stand before God and give an account of your life, and he's going to ask, "Did you ever make these commitments? Did you ever fulfill the purposes I put you on earth to fulfill?"

So my question to you is what's your next step? Do you need to invite Christ into your life? Do you need to be baptized? Join a church, take Pastor's Class, get in a small group, find a ministry. Why don't you pray this prayer?

Dear God, I want to grow up spiritually. I don't want to stay a spiritual baby. So today, I'm choosing to make some serious commitments. First, I commit all of my life to you Jesus. I want to follow your purpose and plan, and I commit to publicly announcing my faith through baptism. And I want to join this church, and I want to get in a group and I want to grow and be the person you want me to be. I commit to the journey, and I want you to make your home in my heart. In your name I pray. Amen.