



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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HOW WE HELP EACH OTHER GROW

40 Days of Community, Part 4

Based on the sermon by Rick Warren

Philippians 1:3 – 6

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“I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:3-6

The third purpose of life is discipleship: to become like Jesus Christ. God wants you to grow in strength of character. He wants you to grow spiritually, but not all by yourself. 1 Thes. 5:11 *“Encourage each other and build each other up.”* The goal of 40 Days of Community is learning how to love one another, and one of the ways we do that is when we decide to help each other grow. One of the most powerful choices you and I can make during each week is the decision to love other people and help them grow...

1. First, 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. Just look at TV and places like Youtube.com. We will do anything just so people will applaud us. It's crazy.

So when you and I affirm other people we're doing some incredible things in this world. We're ministering like Jesus ministered. If you haven't figured this out yet, God is an incredibly affirming and loving Father. We're showing the world a little bit more about what God is like. There's four ways we can do this in everyday life.

1. With your acceptance. Romans 15:7 *“Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you...”*. Accept one another. Don't snub people and demean people. We live in sort of a put-down world. Here's the underlying problem: Because we are naturally self-centered rather than God-centered, we have a tendency to take our strengths and project them on other people and notice how other people don't quite measure up. It makes us feel good. For instance, you folks who are on time sadistically love the fact that we have big windows here, and you can watch the people come in late. And some of you are tidy people. You sort of like to go into other people's houses and sort of notice. You don't say anything about it but you see it. It makes you feel better about yourself. (We tend forget that we have *other* weaknesses.) Let me tell you a better way to feel better about yourself. Instead of put downs, lift other people up. It gives you a thrill like nothing else.

I don't know when the last time you looked at somebody and said, “I've noticed you're good at ‘this’.” It's *easy* to say, “You stink at that.” That's just lazy. Anybody can notice that. Instead, begin with acceptance. The Bible says in Romans 14:10 *“Why do you look down on another Christian? Remember each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God.”* Who are we to look down on other believers? God made us. And we each lean on Him in our weakness and our strength. The truth of the matter is God lifts *every one of us* up. So who am I to put down somebody else?

Let's make this personal. Who is it in your group that you have sort of a hard time accepting? *Don't look at them!* Just remember God wants to use you in their lives to help them to grow, and visa versa. But it all starts with acceptance. How do you tell when you've accepted someone? Here's one of the tests. You stop insisting that they be just like you. Second, you affirm someone's worth...

2. With your attention. Attention takes more time than acceptance. You can accept somebody and still ignore them. “I accept you, just stay out of my life.” The Bible says in Galatians 6:10 “*Give special attention [circle “give special attention”] to those who are in the family of believers.*” One of the benefits of being in the family of God is you get special attention. Whatever you pay attention to is going to grow and get better. If I pay attention to my garden, the right stuff is going to grow. If I pay attention to my kids they’re going to grow. Same with my marriage and work. The only principle where this doesn’t work is my hair. The more attention I pay to it, the more it falls out.

The greatest gift of love you can give is focused attention. And Jesus said that the essence of relationships is how much of *ourselves* we give to each other. Focused attention. Kids don’t need things. They need parents, not just watching from the sidelines, but playing *with* them! They need time. Marriages need time. Friendships need time. The average American now watches or works or plays on their computer or TV five to six hours a day. It’s no wonder we don’t have time for relationships. The joke was when *Friends* was on people would rather watch *Friends* than make friends. They religiously spend an hour every night watching reruns. But they wouldn’t think of spending an hour every night making a friend.

And knowing our pace of life here, I would bet *most* of us are in time starved relationships, starving for attention. So let me ask you, who do you tend to overlook? It’s often the people closest to you: the receptionist, the secretary, or the mail person, or your mom? Who is the person who’s in your life all the time but you just don’t see them? Because you’re too busy doing something else. Here’s what I want you to do this week. Make opportunities to show attention. And schedule time this week with both your small group and your family. Because you need both of them in your life to grow.

3. Third, you help them grow by showing affection. I’m talking about physical touch. We’ve all read about babies and the failure-to-thrive syndrome. That means that little infants, if they’re not touched and kissed and held as they grow up, don’t develop. They don’t grow the way that God intended for them to grow. What most people don’t know is adults need it too. Think about this: for some people here today, the only physical affection they get all week is at church when someone shakes their hand, gives them a hug, or a pat on the back. You never know how long that hug has to last that person. Romans 12:10 “*Love one another with brotherly affection as members of one family.*” We’re family. Here’s the fourth way... Showing acceptance, showing attention, showing affection, and:

4. Showing appreciation. We affirm each other’s worth with appreciation. Appreciation means to raise in value. Every time you appreciate somebody you raise their value to you and to others. When you appreciate your wife, your husband, or a friend, you raise their value. When you appreciate your kids, you raise their value.

The Bible says “*Brothers and sisters... appreciate those who work hard among you, who led you in the Lord and teach you.*” When was the last time you thanked a Sunday school teacher or an usher? Today when this service is over before you leave this campus find three people to appreciate. It takes dozens of people just to pull off a weekend here. You don’t have to thank me because I know you appreciate me except those of you who are afraid I’m going to hug you.

Let me appreciate you. 3 years ago I showed up and preached that God is opening a wiiiide door of opportunity for effective service right here in Dexter. And you stepped through that door. Giving went up. Inviting friends to church went up. Missions went up. And a youth building is going up right now, all in the midst of a recession. You’ve stretched yourselves in hundreds of new ways. And that’s what maturity is all about. Putting your faith into action. You’re an amazing group of people! You’re my family, and I’m proud of you!

2. Praying for each other’s growth. By doing what this guy name Epaphras did in Colossians 4:12. Paul wrote, “*Epaphras ... always prays for you that you will grow to be spiritually mature.*” Epaphras impresses me that he took the time. He had the discipline to always take time to pray for people.

He prayed for peoples’ spiritual growth. We usually pray for peoples’ needs – health needs and financial needs. And we should but we don’t spend nearly as much time praying for peoples’ spiritual growth. That our character will change. Because someone’s character is 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? Take this list of verses from Scripture home and pray through them for someone in your life.

"I pray ... 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? Or Hebrews 13:21 "I pray... that you will always be eager to do what is right." Parents, wouldn't you like to pray that for your kids or for some friend or colleague. "God, give them integrity." Bring their name to mind. Or Romans 15:13 "I pray God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in Him." The foundation of it all is that you trust in the Lord Jesus. Or "I pray God... would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation...." Who do you know that's facing a decision in the need of God's wisdom? Or 2 Thessalonians 3:5 "I pray the Lord will guide you to be as loving as God and as patient as Christ." Or who do you know that's feeling pretty overwhelmed by life? Pray this for them, Ephesians 3:16 "I pray... that God may strengthen you with power through His Spirit." Pray by yourself and pray in groups. I love Tuesdays at 6:30am, because About 16 men meet every Tuesday for breakfast, fellowship, and about 20 minutes of prayer time together. Join us!

Here's a toughie: Romans 15:5 says this "*May... God develop maturity in you, so that you will all get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us.*" Notice here that the test of maturity is relationships; not content or knowledge, but relationships. Ultimately maturity is the ability to get along with other people. And there's a secret ingredient that builds community faster than anything else. It is this...

3. By admitting our mistakes. By admitting our mistakes, we build community, intimacy, and relationships faster than any other way. Ephesians 4:25 says this "*Tell each other the truth because we all belong to each other.*" Confession does not mean just confessing your deep, dark sins. Confession just means admitting what's going on in your life. "I'm having some doubts today." That's a confession. "I'm worried about..." such and such. Or "I'm feeling a little lonely." Or "I'm having a hard time forgiving that person." Those are confessions. When you are honest about what's going on in your life and you're not blaming anybody else for it, it draws you closer to people.

Why would anybody risk honesty? Because it's worth the risk to be honest about our mistakes, about our feelings, our faults, our fatigue, our failures, our fears. There are four benefits that come when you're honest with another person or a group.

1. Emotional healing. Emotional healing comes from being honest with other people about what's going on in your life. James 5:16 says "*Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*" God has wired the universe in such a way that emotional healing comes not from telling God. He already knows it. God says, "*Confess your faults to one another and you will be healed.*" If you want forgiveness, you confess it to God. If you want healing, you want to let go of that pain, you want to get it behind you, you need to tell it to somebody else.

2. A fresh start. Not only emotional healing but you get a fresh start. Proverbs 28:13 "*Anyone who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them he gets another chance.*" God wants to take the worst thing in your life, heal you of it, and turn you into a leader and a person of influence. There is nothing that has happened in your life that God can't use for good. But you have to be honest about it.

3. You get God's power to change. James 4:10 says this "*When you bow down before the Lord and you admit your dependence upon Him, God will lift you up, [Notice He doesn't scold you, shame you, or put you down. He lifts you up] and gives you honor.*" Our pattern is that we hide. But healing and a fresh start and the power to change come from being open with other people. I'm not perfect. You're not perfect. Nobody's perfect. So who are we kidding? We just need to be honest about it.

4. Deeper fellowship. Deeper fellowship results when we admit our mistakes. 1 John 1:7 says "*If we live in the light... as He is in the light then we have fellowship with one another*". Here's the myth. We think that if we're open about our fears, our hang-ups, and our secret faults that people are going to think less of us.

The opposite is true. The more honest you are, the more people want to be with you and like you. What we don't like are people who fake it, pretend they're perfect, and try to hide everything. That's not attractive. That's neurotic. God has brought you here because He wants to turn your hurts into healing. Then He wants to use you in the lives of other people. So stop denying it and surrender to Jesus.

Finally, we help each other grow **4. By encouraging each other's commitment.** The Bible says in 1 Timothy 4:7 *"Keep yourselves in training for a godly life."* How do you do that? You stay in small group and you get a spiritual partner. You get a training partner. I've only missed one physical work out in 2 months because DeWayne Grann said he'd be there at 5:45am to work out with me. It's the same spiritually.

Nothing affects your life more than your commitments. Tell me what you're committed to and I'll tell you what you're going to be in twenty years. Your commitments shape your life. That's why the Bible says in Romans 1 *"I want us to help each other with the faith we have. Your faith will help me and my faith will help you."* That's why you need a church family. And that's why you need a small group. We help each other out.

Church, we're committed to helping each one of us fulfill God's purposes for your life. You were put on this planet for five reasons. Let's review them:

1. First God wants you to commit to love Jesus Christ. *"Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength."* That's called **worship**. Commit to loving Jesus Christ.
2. You commit to love other believers. That's called **fellowship**. That means you plug in and join and Get involved.
3. Commit to grow in God's word. This is called **discipleship**. God wants you to become like Christ. You grow in His word and you help others to grow in His Word.
4. Commit to serve in **ministry**. God gave you some talents and abilities for your benefit, but mostly for the benefit of others. Bless the world! Use them in honor of Jesus! Help others.
5. Commit to share the good news. **Evangelism**. Once you know the good news you share it with other people.

The fact is spiritual maturity is a choice. You're as close to God as you choose to be. Do you need to invite Christ into your life? Do you need to be baptized? Join a church? Get in a small group? Find a ministry? Today may be your day!

Let's pray: Dear God, I want to grow up spiritually. I don't want to stay a spiritual baby any more. I'm tired of being an outsider. 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. I want You to make Your home in my heart. And please help me affirm those around me. Help me pray for their growth, and admit my mistakes, that I may encourage someone else in their commitment. In Your name I pray. Amen.