

# OpenTheo

## Being the Church



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Being the Church," Steve Gregg discusses the modern definition of "church" and how it differs from the biblical definition. He emphasizes that the church is not merely an organization or building, but a community of genuine followers of Christ who care for and serve one another. Gregg argues that success in church should not be measured by the size of the congregation or an entertaining service, but by the practical ways in which people help each other. He encourages believers to use their unique gifts to serve the body of Christ and to prioritize relationships and community over religious meetings.

### Transcript

I was asked if I'd speak tonight about being the church, which is, of course, as I'm sure you all know what we are. If we're Christians, we're members of the church. But the church is a term that has come to have a cultural definition, in a way, which has sometimes eclipsed the biblical definition of what the church is.

Because a church, of course, in our culture, is generally viewed as maybe a building where Christians meet, or an organization of Christians that meet in the building. The church could refer to the building itself. In some cases, in modern times, they didn't have church buildings in biblical times, so it never meant that there.

But often today, the word church refers to a corporation, a 501c3, a corporation that meets in a building, or even if it doesn't meet in a building, so it's a tax-exempt organization with a corporate structure, with a leader who's the pastor, and a board of directors who are the elders and membership that are there to support and finance the pastor's vision. Now, the church never was anything like that in biblical times, but it's hardly anything other than that today. Now, there are exceptions, because there's a wide range of things that go under the name church in America.

We're living 2,000 years after the beginning of that concept of church, and it's been evolved not always in the same direction. But for the most part, church in modern times is thought of as an organized group of people. They may or may not have a corporation, but they usually do, because the pastor is usually seen as something like the CEO, the

director of the organization, and the people are there to submit to him.

At least that's how most pastors feel about it. And that he's supposed to come up with a vision, or what I would usually call an agenda, and he says, okay, I've got a vision for this people, and you guys are going to have to support it. We're gonna need this much money to build the sanctuary that I've got in mind, or to start the ministry outreach that I have in mind, or to build the gymnasium on for the community outreach I've got planned.

I've got plans for you people, and those plans are for you to give money to support my vision. And I'm not saying that pastors are always that crass about it. In fact, they never say it quite that way.

But often that's what it boils down to. That's really what it comes down to. Now, in the meantime, to keep the people in the pews who will pay the bills, the pastor has to entertain.

And depending on the type of his crowd and their tastes, he may entertain them by giving them spiritual meat, which is good. It's good to get spiritual food. That is to say, his sermons will be spiritually edifying, uplifting, and so forth.

That's great. They should be. If he's got a different kind of a crowd, maybe they won't be so much so.

They might not have much Bible, they may not have much spirituality, and they might be more of a pep talk, you know, self-help kind of subject matter. There are big, big, big churches whose sermons are that way. Whatever he thinks the congregation either, well, in many cases, what he thinks will keep the congregation from going to another church.

Whatever keeps them entertained, keeps the customer satisfied. Now, I've just given a very cynical description of church. I don't want to suggest that I think every church is that way.

There are certainly pastors who don't have that attitude. There are churches that are spiritual communities, fellowship. There are certainly pastors who are not the least bit in it for the money.

Believe me, there are. There are some. I've met people like that.

There are exceptions. But the big, big, big churches usually are fairly the way I describe. And I know this partly because I've been in church leadership in more than one church in my younger years, and I've been in on elders meetings, and I know, you know, I know how churches operate, and I know the attitudes of many churches.

And I have people report back to me, people who were pastors and they left the

denomination because of these attitudes that they were supposed to have. So, unfortunately, when we say church today, it's not entirely clear what that means. When I say, be in the church, are you thinking about, well, how, you know, does that mean supporting the pastor? Does that mean attending meetings? Does that mean doing church a certain way? Now, I want to distinguish between being the church and doing church.

Doing church usually has to do with protocols. And, you know, the things that make up a meeting of Christians on usually a Sunday morning, you know, the number of songs that are sung, the number of announcements given, the length of the sermon, maybe there's some special music in some cases, maybe there's a short video clip to tell you what the church is doing in the mission field, or maybe just to entertain or warm you up to what the pastors are talking about. There's protocol.

There's what we might call it, liturgy, although it's not very much like what we think of as liturgy in the Catholic or the more structured churches. A lot of evangelical churches have a very different kind of liturgy. There's, you know, they have songs, they have announcements, they have a sermon, then the pastor gets an invitation, perhaps, or something.

You know, there's things that are expected to take place when you're doing church. But I'm not going to talk about doing church. When I was asked to speak about being church, I expected that it's supposed to go a different direction than that.

When we talk about doing church, a lot of people are talking about, well, should we go leave the big buildings, the old meeting homes? Should we have house churches? And that's a big trend now. And that's actually, frankly, the way I do church myself with my wife and I, and we're in a home church. But that's not necessarily something I would say is the solution to the modern church's weakness or the modern church's problem.

Sometimes a church that meets in a home is just doing church there the same way that it was done in a big building. It's, you know, the venue is not what makes the church. Although if you meet in a home, there are certain advantages, there are certain disadvantages, too.

And so people will get together and say, we want to start a church. How are we going to do it here? Where are we going to meet? Who's going to lead us? Blah, blah, blah. Okay, all of that is the logistics of running a church organization or a church meeting or something like that, doing church.

Being church is something much more holistic. It has to do with what you are 24-7, what you are when you wake up in the morning, what you are all day long, what you are when you go to bed. And that's when you're meeting with people or not meeting with people.

Now, obviously the church is supposed to meet. Christians are supposed to meet with other Christians. We're not supposed to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

But meetings or assembling of ourselves, there's nobody who does that 24-7, nor is anyone expected to, because church isn't what happens when you meet. Church is what we are if we are genuine followers of Jesus Christ. If you've been born again, then you have the Spirit of Christ in you and you are following Jesus as your head.

That makes you part of His body. If your head is Jesus and His Spirit is in you, then you are part of His body. That's actually a supernatural thing.

It's not a club that you join. It's not an organization, certainly not a corporation. It's more like, well, a body or like a family.

Now, there are different metaphors the Bible uses to help us understand what the church is. And if we're going to be the church and understand how to be the church, then we need to understand what the church actually is. Sometimes the church is referred to as the family of God.

In fact, this is the most common metaphor in the Bible. That is to say, we often use, see in the Bible, the use of the word brothers, sisters, children of God. God is spoken of as our Father.

Those kinds of expressions are extremely numerous in scripture and they indicate that we're to see ourselves as a family. God is the Father. We're His children.

We're all brothers and sisters. I don't have to find passages to tell you that unless you've never opened your Bible. You know very well that those are very common expressions.

And that's the primary way in which church is identified in scripture. The body of Christ is yet another metaphor. It tells us how we are related to Christ.

The family of God tells us how we're related to the Father. The Father has children. We are them.

Jesus has a body. He is the head and we are the members of the body. That metaphor should not be unfamiliar to you either.

We're going to look at some of the things the Bible says about that, but just so we'll understand. The church is, with reference to God the Father, the church is a family. And the dynamics of being the church should be the dynamics of a real family.

With reference to Jesus, the church is a body and a bride. The term the bride of Christ is not used anywhere near as often as body of Christ, but of course we know that's in there too. But Paul, in Ephesians 5, talks as if there's really not that big a difference between a body and a bride, because the man and his wife are one flesh.

And therefore, a man should cherish his own wife as he cherishes his own body, because he's one flesh with his wife, she's one flesh with him. We are Christ's body and thus we're his bride. Or maybe see in other words, we're his bride and therefore we're his body.

So with reference to the Father, a family. With reference to Christ, a body. With reference to the Holy Spirit, the church is a temple.

Peter said in 1 Peter 2, 5, that we all as living stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. The church is made up of stones like a building. And we are a spiritual building.

Now that's why, of course, the church building, or what is usually called a church building, isn't really a church at all. It's just an assembly hall. When the Quakers first were established, they, especially George Fox, the founder, he didn't, he spoke with disdain about church buildings.

He called them steeple houses, which is not insulting, but it's basically, it's descriptive. They're just steeple houses. He couldn't say that today because no churches have steeples anymore.

They're more like storefronts or, you know, community center type buildings. But they always used to have steeples. That's just about the only thing that made a church different than some other building and distinguish it.

But the church building is not the church. I'm assuming that is something that you know without me telling you. But Paul, speaking of the church as a building of a sort, is talking about a building made up of people, out of, as Peter called them, living stones.

Paul spoke the same way in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 20 through 22, Paul said that we have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in which the whole building, he's thinking of us as people being built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, collective, where the whole building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God through his Spirit. So the church is the dwelling place of God, just like the temple Solomon built once was the dwelling place of God. But it was made of dead stones and Christ's body, Christ's church, the Holy Spirit's temple, is now made up of living stones.

Now each of these metaphors tell us something. I think this last one is going to be less what we'll focus on tonight because being the church has more to do with what we are in relation to each other. And stones, living stones, stacked and arranged doesn't really describe relationships very well, though certainly stones in a wall of a building do have relationship to each other.

Some are above and some are below. Some are side by side, some are in immediate proximity, some are around the corner from others. I mean that's relational kind of language, but I'm talking about more the language of human relationships, because when we talk about being the church, we need to be talking about how we are relating to the church, which is people.

And it's so hard to get this across to certain persons who have only institutional or established church kind of notions of church. And many pastors, I'm afraid they don't have a clue. I know this because I know some pastors who apparently don't have a clue.

A pastor often feels that the church is the organization that he's running. And he'll be a successful leader of that organization if he can make it bigger and multiply the number of activities it's involved in and keep the people loyal and keep the offerings coming in. I had a friend who left a denomination that you'd be familiar with if I told you what it was.

A good evangelical denomination, one that I have fairly high regard for. But he left it because as a pastor, he'd go to these pastors' conferences and they would always emphasize the three things necessary for a pastor is to increase bricks, bodies, and bucks. The three Bs.

Bricks, that is bigger buildings, bodies, bigger congregations, bucks, a bigger budget. And that's really what these pastors were to aim at. They were encouraged to aim at.

I will tell you what denomination it is, but not by name. It's the same denomination that A.W. Tozer was part of, and he would roll over in his grave. He would never have approved of that.

But they're not a bad denomination, it's just that almost all denominations have this same emphasis. And so you might say, well, then you must be against going to churches like that. Not necessarily.

You've got to find Christian fellowship somewhere. A lot of people, that's the easiest and most obvious place to find other Christians to go to meetings with. As you see a church that's got the name on it, such and such church, you figure on Sunday morning there's going to be some people there worshipping God.

Hopefully there's going to be some teaching of the scripture. Hopefully there's going to be some real Christians there I can connect with because during the rest of my week, I'm in the world. The rest of the week, I'm at my job.

I'm in my neighborhood. There's not a lot of Christians there. I don't know a lot of Christians there.

So I'm surrounded by unbelievers, so I need to go and meet with people who are Christians, and that's what people need to do from time to time. And these churches are

frankly the most predictable place to find other Christians gathering. I'm not saying they're the best possible kind of gathering that Christians could have for mutual edification, but sometimes it's the best you can find and you've got to live with what you've got to live with.

But going to these meetings is not being the church. And many times, pastors feel like their church is thriving because it's getting bigger. And they've got to expand the building, they've got to put in more seats, they've got more money to manage and so forth, and this is in their denomination.

Those three things, the bricks, bodies, and books, that's what is the measure of success of a man of God. If you are a pastor and you take over a small congregation, and three years later, you've got ten times as many people in a much bigger building, then you're going to be speaking at the pastoral conferences for your denomination telling people how you did it. None of which has anything to do with biblical ideas of church, but it's the modern idea of church and many people have a hard time thinking of anything else.

Many pastors don't realize that what's best for the congregation is not always that they get a bigger building and more seats and louder band playing the music up in front and more entertaining sermons. That keeps the customer satisfied, but it's not necessarily the best thing for them. In many cases, it might be good to shed a lot of that stuff.

I mean, think about it. I don't know how many of you have done this. Have you ever gone to a church, as I have more than once, where they hand out earplugs for the older people? When you come in there, they have a bowl of earplugs.

You've been there? Anyone ever been there? Why do they do that, I wonder? What are those earplugs for? It's the music is too loud and they know it is. If they're handing out earplugs, they know the music is too loud. Now, I sometimes want to go up to the guy at the sound bar and say, you know they have knobs on those.

You could save a lot of money on earplugs. These knobs, you've got to set at nine. It can be set down at five and it really works.

You don't have to hurt people's ears. In other words, are they making decisions in this case about the music and its volume and so forth on the basis of what's really blessing the people here? No, the older people can barely tolerate it. They're trying to hand out foam cylinders to stick in your ears so that you can endure the service.

Well, who's being served here? I don't know who's being served. I guess if the pastor wants to have a lot of young people who value loud music more than they value things of God, and I'm not saying the music isn't godly music, but godly music is just as godly if you turn the volume down. Turn it way up so that the parents and grandparents can hardly stand it means that you're trying to appeal to a certain element in the young

people, a certain part of them.

Now, I'm not against contemporary music. I played in a Christian rock band for years. I'm not against rock and roll.

I'm not even against listening to secular rock and roll sometimes if it's clean enough. I'm not against the style of music. But I just don't think that entertainment is the thing that the pastor is supposed to be concerned with.

He's supposed to be concerned about edifying the body of Christ. And if the pastor won't do it, well, he's not the only one who's supposed to. We're supposed to edify each other, and this is what we want to talk about as a body of Christ.

There's things we're supposed to do for each other. Many people assume that the pastor's the professional, so he should be making sure that all the needs of the people are met. Well, he should be concerned about all the needs of the people, but he can't handle that all himself.

Even if you have an eldership, which is more scriptural than a single pastor of the church, it's very probable the elders themselves would have their hands full just trying to keep track of everything, every person in the church who's going through a trial, who's struggling in their faith, who's got a financial need that they might not be making known publicly, who's got a marriage that's almost on the rocks, who's discouraged, who's frightened, who's suicidal. I mean, in a church of any size, there's going to be a lot more people with those kinds of needs than the pastor could possibly know. And he's not supposed to know all that.

If he knows about it, he should do something about it. But if he doesn't know about it, how's that supposed to be taken care of? By the body of Christ. Being the church means we are part of each other.

And it was never the plan of God that the church should be a collection of people who look to a professional guy or a few paid professional guys to handle all the needs of the church. I've heard people say, you know, at our church there's a couple there that are living in sin. I've told the pastor to do something, he hasn't even spoken to them about it.

Well, I say shame on him, he should. But if he hasn't, you can. You can speak to them.

Speaking the truth in love, we build each other up, we build up the body of Christ. Being the church means not leaving it to the professional clergy to do church for us. Being the church means you're a family.

It means you care about each other like brothers and sisters care about each other. It means that you have as much a stake in the well-being of the others in the body as



members of your physical body have a stake in the well-being of your whole body. Paul said if one member of the body suffers, all suffer.

If one is exalted, all rejoice. Paul said, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of each other. Members of one another.

Now, I'm a member of the whole body of Christ, but I'm a member of you and of me, too, which is interesting. If something is going wrong in your life, that's as much a concern to me as if something is going wrong in my life. Because we're one body.

We're members of each other. Just like the members of your body all have the same concern for each other. We are members of each other.

We're not just members of Christ's body collectively, which we are. Individually, we're members of each other. And Paul said the same thing in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 25.

He said, therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Would you lie to yourself? Well, some people do, by the way. A lot of people live their whole life as a liar, and they're lying to themselves all the time.

But you wouldn't want to think that you're lying to yourself. If you're lying to yourself, it's probably a blind spot. We are not desirous to be lied to by ourselves or anyone else, and therefore we shouldn't lie to others.

But what we wish for ourselves is what we should wish for others. And that's basically, isn't that the great commandment? What you would that men should do to you, do likewise to them, or putting it another way, love your neighbor as you love yourself. There's a whole bunch of scriptures in the New Testament.

You might have seen a list of them, because I'm certainly not the first person to make this observation. Lots of preachers have pointed out. There's a phrase in the New Testament that occurs a lot of times.

It's the phrase, one another. Have you noticed how many scriptures talk about how we are to be toward one another? Now, one another means mutually back and forth. For example, when Jesus said in John chapter 13, verse 34 and 35, he said, a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you so that you love one another.

By this, all men will know that you are my disciples. If you have one love one for another. Now, I am one person, you're another.

I'm supposed to love you. But loving one another means it kind of goes both ways. We're

all supposed to love each other.

A community that loves each other is going to look like disciples of Jesus. He said that's how people, that's how the world will know that you're my disciples, if you love one another. Now, he didn't say they'll know you're my disciples if you attend church regularly, although I think Christians should attend gatherings regularly with other Christians.

Most Christians would not flourish well without some kind of regular connections like that. Now, there are some Christians who are strong enough that if they never have any fellowship, they don't lose any spiritual ground. And if you live in Turkey or Saudi Arabia, you'd better be one of those if you're a Christian at all, because you might not find another Christian, and it's illegal to meet with them if you do.

There are some parts of the world where you just got to be strong on your own, like Daniel was. Daniel was hauled off from Israel from a Jewish religious environment, sort of like a fellowship, and he's drawn away from that to Babylon where there's only pagans around. He has a few friends who have similar faith as him, but they're not living together most of the time.

He's not even in the same town in some of those stories with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But for the most part, he's just in a pagan land, a pagan world, and he's got to be uncompromising, and he is. Same thing with Joseph, when he's taken away from his family in Israel, or in Canaan where they live, into Egypt.

He's the only Israelite in a pagan land. His parents and his brothers don't even know he's still alive. He's got no accountability, except to God.

You know, some people say, well, you've got to have accountability or else your spiritual life will flop. It might. It shouldn't.

You should be so accountable to God that even if you had no fellowship at all, and some people are forced in that situation, that you'll still be as faithful to God as if you did have fellowship with other people. That's important. But let's face it, most people really are in need of other Christians.

For one thing, you begin to doubt that what you believe is necessarily true or normal if you're never around anyone else who affirms it. Every time you turn on the TV, every time you hear a song, every time you hear a conversation at work, everyone has values that are totally at odds with your values as a Christian. And you think, boy, am I the only nut around here who thinks this way? Everybody else seems to agree with each other that, you know, things have changed since the days when Christianity dominated the culture.

Now, the person who still holds Christian ideas feels like a real outsider until they go to

be with other Christians who share in their Christian viewpoint and affirm it and celebrate it and encourage each other in it. That's a necessary thing for most people. Now, I'm not saying every time you go to church you're going to get that.

When you go to church, you might just sit at a meeting that's not much different than going to a concert or a comedy show, and you go home having been entertained or uplifted by some good music. I'll tell you, a lot of that loud music at these churches, it's good music. Have you noticed that? I mean, these guys are really professional these days.

The professional quality of Christian music at these big churches has really gone up. It's like listening to a concert. You don't dare sing.

You'd hurt your throat trying to even hear your own voice. It's much too loud. But you can listen.

And listening can be edifying. I'm not being sarcastic. Going to a Christian concert can be edifying.

And it's just not a group participation kind of a thing. It's just someone singing songs at you, and if they're good, edifying songs, you can go home feeling better about God. That's good.

We need that encouragement from other Christians. Nicer still if the singing is something we can participate in and have some sense of being a part of the worship as well as that. But the purpose of going to fellowship like that is so we can encourage one another in the area of life that the world is trying to stamp down and keep us from continuing.

Basically, Christians are seen by many people as just sticks in the mud. The world's going forward, and you guys are just stuck. And it's not just that you're stuck and you're pitiful.

You're kind of dangerous. Because this progress that society is making is usually viewed as what has to happen to end hatred and to end war and division among people. If people would just kind of get along with the progressive program, then we'd all have a blissful world.

There'd be no more poor because the government would feed everybody, and there'd be no more hatred because there wouldn't be any racist anymore and so forth. Now, the irony is how many times these people who are speaking of these progressive policies are creating an increase in these problems rather than diminishing them. But I'm not here to make a political commentary.

I'm just saying that we are often viewed, because we aren't going along with some of the stuff, as holding back the well-being of humanity. It's like our views are not only archaic,

they're dangerous and cannot be tolerated. Suddenly, we are the haters, only because we haven't changed, only because we believe the same thing we believed 40 years ago.

We were never haters then, and we're not haters now, but because we're not getting with the program. Now, that's why it's so important for Christians to have community among themselves, and community is not the same thing that you find when you go to church necessarily. Now, there are some churches where there is definitely a real sense of community.

Usually, it's a smallish church. I'm not saying it can never be a large church, because large churches sometimes have smaller groups and smaller fellowship connections among some people more than others. But in a very big church, you can't really have personal connections with everybody.

You can't even get to know everyone's name. In fact, you might go to a really big church for years, and there may be someone who's been going the same number of years as you, and you've never seen them. You meet them in the store, and you get talking, and you find out they go to the same church you do.

And they've been going there for 10 years, and so have you. You never saw them before. They're total strangers.

That's not community. It's a lot easier if you're in a somewhat smaller church. I'm not saying a little tiny church necessarily.

You don't have to know everybody. But in a church that's got 100, 200 people, something like that, you can actually, over time, get familiar with every family in some respect, know who they are. If someone says, hey, did you hear that this family is going through some trials? He lost his job, or he's been diagnosed with cancer, or they're having struggles with their rebellious child.

You say, oh, I know those people. When I pray for them, I can think of who they are. I'm praying for someone I really know.

I might even be able to speak into their lives something. I might be able to give some encouragement to them, because I know who they are. And some people, I not only know who they are, but I really know really well, because I actually spend time with them in real life.

Now, community is a phenomenon, a dynamic, that used to exist even in secular culture, but has diminished considerably in the West. When my parents were young, they and their parents and their grandparents probably all went to the same church for generations, lived in the same town, same house. People tended to live most of their lives in one place with the same neighbors.

They knew the guy at the grocery store, the guy at the post office, the guy, you know, everyone. They knew the policemen, like Mayberry RFD, you know. And everyone knew each other.

It wasn't a perfect town. It wasn't a perfect community. But everyone was connected.

They felt like they belonged to a larger group, socially. And in all likelihood, they knew each other's children and grandchildren, and probably married their children off to the children of the others, and expected to see their grandchildren all stay around, and grow up in the town, and carry on the same culture, and probably go to the same church for generations. There was this community phenomenon in ordinary secular life.

Now the church, therefore, of course in the West, several generations ago, most people went to church. So the community was also kind of a religious community in a sense, although it was very secular. Church was not all that it should be.

I'm not saying that it was. What I'm saying is that secular world was more like church is supposed to be than much of anything you find in the modern situation. Because people who go to the church you go to, probably half of them won't be there five years from now.

A lot of them are going to take jobs in other towns, or they're going to retire and move away. Or they're going to just stay in town and go to another church. They're tired of the preaching or the music, and so they're going to sample some others around.

They're going to go from church to church. You can't count on very many of them being in the same place. My wife and I belong to a house church.

A house church is supposed to be small and community oriented and so forth. It started out with several families. Then one family moved to Texas, one family moved to the East Coast, and another family moved up to Sacramento.

Some of the ones thought, well I'd like to try something else, and they're visiting around. Now there's like three families left. How did this happen? Where did our community go? But people don't have a community mindset anymore.

They're not committed to each other's long-term well-being. And that's what the church is. Now I'm not saying it's wrong to move out of town or take another job.

Sometimes that's what you've got to do to make a living, to support your family. But I'm saying that because there is not the same sense of community in the world, there is also not a sense of community in the church. Because people in the church bring with them a lot of times the worldly culture and attitude that they have the rest of the week.

Being the church means you're not just walking through a church door once or twice a

week and sitting with other Christians doing Christian things, as valuable as that may be, as necessary as that may be. But it means that all the other days, too, you're still thinking in terms of, I belong to these people. They belong to me.

We are parts of one body. If I know of a Christian who has a need, and I've got what it takes to fill it, then that's an obligation, I feel, like I would if it was my own sister or my own brother. I had someone write to me recently from Chicago, a listener, and she was asking advice because she said she and another of her sisters, I mean siblings, they have a brother who is irresponsible.

He keeps getting himself in trouble, he uses drugs, he doesn't hold jobs, he lives at home with his parents, and they always have to bail him out financially. And I actually wrote to her and said, you know, don't bail him out. But, you know, it was so hard for them not to because he's their brother.

There's this strong instinct that, well, we're siblings here. If one of us is hurting, even if it's his own fault for his own bad behavior, who's it going to fall on but me, his brother or sister? And that is a very natural thing for brothers and sisters or family to feel responsible for each other, and that's the most frequent metaphor for church in the Bible. We are family.

Now, obviously, let's say a group this small, if they met regularly, you'd soon know everybody. You wouldn't know everybody equally well. You'd find certain friends that you were with more often than others and do things more socially with, but you'd get to know each other over a period of years.

But there's a lot of other Christians who aren't in this group that are still in this town, and if you heard that there were some needs in one of those other churches, that should be on your heart too because it's one body. Paul went around to the Gentile churches in Greece and in Asia Minor, and he took up collections of money for Christians in Judea because the Judean church had been hit with a famine and they were in poverty and needy. And because of the persecution they experienced from the temple Jews, many of them were fired from their jobs and they didn't really have ways to get employment because sometimes they were boycotted by the Jews who resented them leaving the temple and so forth.

And so there was needs in the Judean church, and Paul went around to all these Gentile churches, which are mainly made up of people who would never meet one of those people in Judea. But he said, listen, we belong to them and they belong to us. And so these Gentiles were taking up collections.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8 that the Macedonian Christians, which are in northern Greece, they gave beyond their comfort level. He says they gave to their ability and beyond their ability. They begged us to take the offering from them to give to these

Judean Christians, whom they'd never even met and probably never would.

They were across the Mediterranean Sea from them and most of them would never travel there. But they knew we're brothers and sisters. When you hear of Christians in another country being persecuted, a Christian pastor in Turkey who recently was released, we know.

When we know that there are Christians in prison like that, it says in Hebrews 13 that we should remember those who are in prison as being in bonds with them. The fact that my brother or sister is in chains, there's a sense which I should feel those chains on myself too because I'm a member of him and he's a member of me. I don't even know him.

The fact that I hear that somebody's child died. I've never had one of my children die. I've had some serious trials.

I had a wife who died once but I've never had a child die and it seems like it would be extremely excruciatingly hard to get over. When I hear of somebody whose child died, to me I feel it like my child died. When I hear of someone who had a serious injury, I feel like I had that injury.

Now I don't know if that's just my temperament or if that's something that everybody can do or should do, but I'm saying that we should be so connected in our own mentality with all other Christians. Whether they're the ones we go to a fellowship with on a regular basis, whether they're other Christians in the same town who go somewhere else that we don't go to, or whether they're in some other country and we'll never even meet them. They're part of one body.

There's only one body. This is not a corporation. This is not a building.

It's not an organization. It's a family and it's a body. A body with many members.

Now Paul, when he discussed the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he did so in the context of the church being a body. It's in 1 Corinthians 12 that Paul first speaks of the body of Christ and he first speaks there of the gifts of the spirit also. He basically says to one is given the gift of the word of wisdom, to another the gift of the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another miracles, to another healings, to another prophecy and so forth.

And then he says because we're all one body, he says as a human body is one body having many members. Yet though it is many members is one body so also is Christ, he said. That's 1 Corinthians 12.

That Christ himself, he said, is a body made up of many members. Jesus is the head. We are his bones and his flesh.

We are his hands and his feet. And just like the members of your body have different

functions, your hands do something for you that your feet can't do as well. If you need to scratch some parts of your body, you can do it with your toes if you need to, but you'd rather do it with your hands.

They're more suited for reaching and doing those kind of things. Sometimes one member of the body can step in and serve in the emergency when the normal one wouldn't. But in general there are some things that are not interchangeable.

What the eye does is not interchangeable with what the hand does. What the ear does is not interchangeable with what the foot does. You can't really, there are different gifts.

The eye has a certain gift. It's the gift of being able to see. The ear has the gift of being able to hear.

The nose, the gift of smelling. The hands, the gift of tactile, you know, manipulation things, working things. And, you know, if you lost your legs, you could get by walking on your hands.

I've seen it done. But it's not really very natural. I mean, if a member of the body is lost, the whole body suffers.

I've actually heard someone say that if you actually lose one of your pinkies, one of your baby toes, a small toe on your foot, that seems like a really minor member of the body, that if you lose it, it's really hard to keep balance. I've heard people say that they couldn't play tennis anymore because they lost their little toe and they just couldn't balance. You wouldn't think it would matter that much.

You know, there are parts of our body that scientists used to say have no use to us. They call them vestigial structures. They say they're left over from evolution, like your tailbone.

You've got a tailbone. You don't have a tail. What do you need a tailbone for? Well, they say, the evolutionists say, you don't need a tail or a tailbone, but your ancestor, a monkey, did need a tail.

And in the course of evolution, that tail has gradually disappeared, but the tailbone remains as a vestige or a testimony that that tail once existed there. And it's of no use. They say, therefore, God didn't create you because he wouldn't make parts of you that are of no use.

And I'm going to agree that God wouldn't make parts of us that are of no use. The interesting thing is, back in the 19th century, H.G. Wells listed 180 features in the human body that have no function. And he said, every one of them is a testimony against divine creation.



He said, they're vestiges of evolution. God would never give us 180 parts of our body that don't function. But guess what? You can probably imagine what's happened since the 19th century.

Science has progressed. The list has dwindled from 180 to about 5. That is to say, there's now about 5 things in our bodies that people say, we don't know what they're for. But there were once an additional 175 that they said the same thing about, but now they do know what they're for.

The cossacks, the tailbone in the human, that's one of those things. Is it necessary or is it unnecessary? Well, you'll find out if you ever have cancer in that part of your body, you have to have it removed. You'll find out if it was necessary or not.

There's certain essential pelvic muscles that anchor there. And I've been told that if you lose your tailbone, you can't sit comfortably. Can you imagine? You'd be rocking back and forth all the time.

You don't have a tripod anymore. It's now just a two-legged stool instead of a three-legged stool. There is a function for it.

And there's no part of the body that is totally expendable. Now, you can get along without some. You lose that little toe, you won't be able to play tennis as well, but you still survive.

People have lost fingers, hands, whole arms, legs in war and other ways. Even a lung can be sacrificed to cancer. I had a grandfather who had a lung removed when he was 60.

He lived for another 24 years or so without a lung. He had another one, unfortunately. He wouldn't live without that one.

Same thing with the kidney. You can lose certain parts of your body and survive, but not as optimally. And so the body of Christ can do that too.

If you backslide or if you just don't function. If you don't function in the gift God's given you, the body of Christ will survive. It'll limp along.

But that doesn't mean you're not needed. It doesn't mean you're expendable. Something that's expendable can be gotten rid of and there's no adverse effect.

There's no one in this room who's expendable to the body of Christ. If you backslide, if you don't function as a member of the body that God wants you to, the body of Christ will survive. Probably someone else will step up.

You know, lizards. I always wonder why God makes things the way he does in the natural world. Lizards, as you I'm sure know, can lose their tails.

Almost everyone has seen a lizard without its tail. And almost everyone has seen a lizard that's grown back a tail that it lost. And you can always tell that it's grown back a tail that it lost.

In other words, the new tail might be as long as the original. It's a different color. It sometimes grows out crooked from the stump.

It's not perfect. It'll do. It'll serve in the emergency.

But it's not the original. It's not the one God had in mind for it in the beginning. I wouldn't be surprised if God made lizards able to do that, which is a strange function most animals don't have.

In order to illustrate that, you know, if you don't, if you are lost to the body of Christ, the function you perform in the body, it won't be totally gone without. But what steps in to replace you won't be as perfect as you would have been because God made you perfectly to fit a certain place in the body of Christ. What is that place? Now, when you talk about the gifts of the Spirit, we often think of churches that affirm the gifts of the Spirit and those who don't.

Those that do, we call them charismatic churches. Churches that say that the gifts of the Spirit are not for today, we call them cessationist churches. They believe the gifts ceased in the apostolic age.

But when we discuss this, did the gifts cease or do they continue? What we're really thinking of are gifts like working miracles, divine healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, those kinds of gifts. Those are the controversial ones. Those are the ones that some churches affirm and some deny today.

Pentecostal churches affirm them, charismatic churches affirm them, non-charismatic churches typically say those are not for today. But when they say gifts and they're thinking of those gifts, they're hardly thinking of the whole category. Paul listed over 15 gifts of the Spirit in his various lists.

He listed 9 in 1 Corinthians 12. He listed 7 of them, of which there was one overlapping gift in the two lists. He listed 7 of them in Romans 12.

But when you take the total list of gifts of the Spirit, there are some of them that are pretty sensational, including working miracles. That's pretty sensational. Prophecy, if it's genuine, is pretty amazing.

You're hearing God's voice speaking through someone, that's an amazing thing. But a lot of gifts are like the gift of giving, the gift of showing mercy, the gift of helps, the gift of leading, the gift of, well those are some of the main ones I would think of that are, they're not the least bit sensational. If you have the gift of giving, what does that mean?

It means you give to people's needs.

If you have the gift of helps, that means you help people with things they need help with. If you have the gift of showing mercy, it means that you have compassion for people who are down and out and you reach out to them and you do something for them. A gift of hospitality would be in that category.

What Mother Teresa did with her life was like an extreme example of a gift of showing mercy, you know. Reaching out and pitying people and helping people in practical ways that no one else is really paying attention to. This is something that some people have the gift for, but when they do, no one doubts that that gift is deceased, except that you hardly ever see it.

Or if you do see it, you don't recognize it as a gift of the Spirit. You say, well that person is just a really nice person or loving person. But the point is, most people probably have one of these other gifts that aren't sensational.

I don't have any sensational gifts. My gift, I assume, is teaching. I've assumed that for many decades and if it's not, I've been wasting my life.

But that's what I do. I don't do much of anything else well. I do some giving.

I do a little bit of helping. I'm not very practical. I do a little of everything I can do, but I mean I have one particular gift I do mostly.

And other people don't have gifts that put them up in front of people speaking to a crowd or whatever, but they have gifts that are every bit as essential. The gifts, the members of the body that are not as honorable, Paul said, we bestow greater honor upon them because they are necessary, he said. You know, how many people does it take to support one missionary? Well, it depends how much they're giving, but let's just say you had ten people giving a tenth of their income, just for example, then that'd be ten-tenths of the average income of those ten people that could support a missionary.

So how many givers do there have to be for every preacher? Frankly, you need probably as many as ten or more givers to support one preacher. So we need more people to have the gift of giving than we need to have the gift of preaching. In the early church in Acts chapter 2, 3,000 people were converted on one day, and we read that the average Christian was spending his time doing what? It says in Acts chapter 2, they met and sat under the apostles' teaching, and they broke bread, and they prayed, and they fellowshiped.

And then it says, and with great power, the apostles gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So there were 12 preachers in a church with 3,000 people. How were those preachers supported? No doubt by the 3,000.

But those 3,000, most of them were not preachers. They had much less visible gifts, but their gifts were necessary. The apostles couldn't be out there doing it if they weren't people doing other things.

The apostles initially were also doing the food distribution to the poor, and they found they couldn't do anything well, so they appointed seven guys to take over that from them, and these guys had a gift of helps, and they helped. The thing is, everyone has something different that God has for them to do, and as you do it, you are being the church. You're being the body of Christ.

You're involving yourself in each other's lives in ways that are helpful to each other. Let me show you something Peter said about this matter in 1 Peter chapter 4. 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 10 and 11. Peter said, as each one has received a gift.

Now, not every reference in the Bible to gifts is the same kind of gift. Not always some of the gifts of the Spirit, but Peter is talking about the gifts of the Spirit here. He's using the same word charisma, which is the gift, the Greek word for gift that Paul uses when he talks about the gifts.

As everyone has received a gift, he means a gift of the Holy Spirit. Minister it to one another. That's a one another passage.

Minister your gifts to one another. What's minister mean? Everyone know what the word minister means? Serve. The word minister is an older word for serve.

When we think of someone as a minister, we might think of them as the CEO of a big religious organization. He's the minister. No, the word minister means servant.

It's not a religious term per se. If you go into the ministry, it just means you're going to serve him. Service.

So as each of you has received a gift, so serve one another with that gift, he says, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Manifold means varied. Now what he's saying here is everyone's got a gift as each one has a gift.

What are you supposed to do? Serve each other with the gift that you have, and he says, that way you'll be a good steward of the various manifestations of the grace of God. Each gift is a manifestation of the grace of God, a different kind in every person, and you are a steward. What's a steward? Somebody who's managing something.

They're taking responsibility to manage and to manage it well. Are you a good steward of your gift or not? That's really what comes down to it. Peter says, you will be a good steward if you use the gift that God's given you to serve, to minister to each other.

He says in verse 11, if anyone's gift involves speaking to people, let him do it as the

oracles of God. An oracle of God is like a prophet, somebody who's speaking from God. Before I speak someplace, I would say, God, let me speak as the oracles of God.

I can't do it unless he makes it happen. Fill me with your spirit. Give me your words to speak.

Let me speak as an oracle of God. Why should people sit and listen to me if I'm not speaking as an oracle of God? What good is my opinion? I'm just another man. Why should people sit and listen to my opinions? I might as well sit and listen to your opinions.

You should be up here. I should be down there. If we're just going to share human opinions, we've all got some.

Why would my opinions warrant you coming out on a Saturday night, leaving other things you might be doing, and sitting there for an hour or more to hear me give my opinions? What an arrogant thing it is when a minister feels that it's his brilliance, it's his presentation skills, or whatever, that justifies him expecting a crowd to come and sit and listen to him for an hour or whatever it is he's speaking. If you speak, if you have a gift that involves speaking, what kind of gifts are speaking? Prophecy, teaching, evangelism, exhortation, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, these are speaking gifts. If you've got a gift that involves speaking, then when you use it, do it as an oracle of God.

That is, depend on the Holy Spirit to give you what you should say and to say it powerfully through you as a prophet does. And that's what he's saying. Not everyone is a prophet, but everyone who speaks for God with a gifting to speak should be as much depending on the Holy Spirit to illuminate, to direct the words, to bring conviction with the words, as if they were an actual prophet like Elijah.

Let everyone who speaks speak as the oracles of God. That's one kind of gifts. Then there's another kind of gifts he mentions in verse 11.

If anyone ministers, again that word means serves, there are gifts of speaking and there are gifts of serving. As I mentioned, showing mercy, helps, giving, leading, those are services provided. Some people can't teach, can't even speak in front of a group, but they're very smart about administrating and organizing things.

They have a gift of administration, a gift of leading in some ways. Some people, they can hardly read a book, but they can build a house. We have someone in our home church like that.

He says, nothing is more torturing him than to sit down and try to read a book. We meet in his house. I've never seen a house like that.

He built it. It's amazing. He's an amazing builder.

Some people can fix a car. Some people can build a house. Some people can fix a computer.

I can't do any of those things. I can't fix a toaster. I'm not practical.

Those people are geniuses in those areas. It's not a fancy gift. It's not a gift that's going to get a lot of attention up in front of the church, but it's a necessary gift.

It's certainly valued by those who receive the benefit of it. If you have the gift, if your gift is serving, then use it. To what? To benefit the body of Christ.

He says, if anyone ministers and he serves, let him do it with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God might be glorified through Jesus Christ. If you have a gift, consider that that gift is not yours to revel in or to exploit or to get a following for yourself or to make money with it. It's to serve.

It's to serve other people. This is something that I wish I could sit every pastor in the world down and say, are you the leader of your church? If you are, then I hope you have a gift of leading because that's one of the gifts of the Spirit. If you do have a gift of leadership, that is a service provided.

It's not an authority imposed. If you came up to me and said, let me wash your car. I said, oh no, that's okay.

I just washed it the other day. Oh no, but I want to wash it. Well, but that'd be a waste of energy.

My car's quite clean. No, I have a gift of helps. I love to wash people's cars.

I need to wash your car. I think, hey, back off. Okay, find someone who needs it more than I do.

I appreciate your good intentions, but really, if you've got so much energy, wash somebody's car who's got a dirty car. Because you don't force upon people your service if they don't need it. If someone comes to me and says, I want to write you a big check.

I think, you know what, I'm doing okay right now, thanks. There's people who have more needs than I do. Give it somewhere else.

Listen, if you give it to me, I'll just give it to someone else anyway, because I don't have a need right now. But I insist. Well, okay, do what you want to do, but that's kind of imposing it.

Now, most people don't feel bad with someone imposing money on them, I'll have to admit. But it doesn't make much sense to be giving to someone who doesn't have need when there's people who do have need. So the point is, a gift is something you serve,

not something you impose on others.

A pastor, if he's a good pastor and a genuine pastor and God-ordained pastor, then he's going to have a gift of leadership. That's a service to provide for people who need it. Do you know there's plenty of people in the church who get along real well without the pastor? In fact, get along better without him.

There's people who are self-feeders, right? People who, no one needs to teach them anything. I go to church because I love to be with people and worship God and I love to be with the brethren. I don't need the sermon.

I'm not saying I never get anything out of the sermon, I often do. But what I got I could have gotten on my own and probably would have, because I'm a self-feeder. I like to study, I like to read the Bible, I don't need someone to teach me the Bible anymore.

I'm not saying I don't want to listen, because I sometimes do learn. I can learn from reading a book or from hearing a sermon. I'm just saying that I'm not struggling in my Christian life to survive and desperately make it from Sunday to Sunday to hear another sermon to give me a shot in the arm to keep me spiritually alive.

I don't need that from the pastor. I don't mind that he provides it because lots of people in the church do need it. But what if, I'll just give you an example.

I was going to a church some years ago in Oregon and the pastor wanted everyone to be in a small group. That was part of his agenda, his vision for the church. Everyone was going to be in a small group.

Now, my family didn't need to be in a small group. I was running a Bible school down the street from the church. I was in fellowship every single day.

My students lived together in community. We were, like the early church, we were daily under teaching and fellowship and breaking bread and prayers. I didn't need another meeting on a weeknight to drag my three kids to, four at that time I guess, and to just take up another evening.

But I thought, well, we'll submit. We're part of this church. We don't want to cause problems.

So we went to one of these small groups and it was as dull as could be. It was of no value. It finally broke up.

So we went to one of the other small groups just to continue to be cooperative. Okay, we'll join another small group. We did that.

After a few weeks, the couple that was running it, they went off to be missionaries in Japan. So that group broke up. And we're starting to think, we're not getting that much

out of these groups.

And now we've had two that have broken up. And I went to the pastor and said, you know, do you mind if we don't go to a small group? You know, it's not serving the interests of our family. We've got plenty of fellowship.

We're not needy. So is it okay if we kind of get an exemption from, I know you want everyone in a small group, but do you mind if we don't? And he said, well, we want the whole church to be in small groups because that's how we plan to minister to them. I said, well, but you know, it's not ministering to us and could you make an exception? And he said, well, how do you expect us to disciple people if they're not all involved in these ways? He said, how do you expect us to shepherd the flock? I thought, wow, I've got a pretty good answer for that.

How about shepherd it the way Jesus said? He said, if a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them is going to stray and 99 are not going to stray, why don't you contract your attention on the one that's going to stray? Leave the 99. They're doing fine. And go after the one that's having trouble.

Pastors want everyone to be, in many cases, they want everyone to be under the same program because that's how you run an organization. That's not how you shepherd people. A pastor should be delighted to have most of the people in his church not need him very much, not need his programs.

That they're doing so well that the program just interferes with them doing well. The program may help people who need a program like that. And I'm not against programs that help people, but to try to say, okay, everyone's got to be under the same pattern because that's the way the pastor wants it done.

I don't see that as biblical. The pastor's imposing his leadership on people who are saying, you know, I'm doing fine without, thanks. I mean, not that I'm not recognizing you as the elder or pastor or whatever it is you call yourself here, but I'm okay.

I'm not proud. I'm not, I don't have an independent spirit. I'm just telling you the truth.

We're flourishing. I'm flourishing. I'm a sheep that's grazing well.

I'm not wandering off the wrong direction. I'm one of the 99. You don't have to worry about it.

Concentrate on the one that's out straying. That's what Jesus said. That's what a shepherd does.

He's a good shepherd. And you see what happens is sometimes the pastor wants to impose his authority or his gift in controlling people who it makes no positive



contribution to their spiritual life. It just keeps them in the system.

And, and that's not right. A pastor should say, if he thinks I'm, I'm gifted to lead this church, I've got a gift of leadership. He should say, well, let's see who needs some leadership.

Anyone here needs some counsel? Anyone, you know, confused about anything? Anyone really struggling with your life? Make an appointment. Come see me. You know, I've got my, my whole week laid out to, to deal with people like you who are struggling.

Any of you who don't need help, leave me alone. I'm here to serve those who have a need for leadership. If you're being led by the Holy Spirit, fine, without me, that's, that's a load off my mind.

That's what a pastor should say, but that's not what a CEO says. That's not how, that's not how the system runs, but it's how a body would run the, all the members of the body concentrate on the needs of the one that's injured or the one that's got a special need at the time. And not all the members of the body need the same attention at the same time.

But being in the church means that we're tuned into, and we're actually involved in the lives of other people enough to have an awareness that someone I, someone I see at church from time to time, they're in a crisis right now. I just know it because I happen to be in fellowship with them. They're not my closest friends.

They don't, they don't let me in on all their secrets, but I've heard through the grapevine that they've got a problem, and I have something I can do to help them. You need to see whatever your gift is as something that's there to serve people, not serve the organization. If you serve people, then the, the organism will flourish.

As every, let me just show you something Paul said about that in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, verse, well we'll start with verse 11. Christ himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers. That's just a short list.

There's many more things he could list, but these are the ones who are given especially for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ. Until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, that is a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

But speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Christ, who is the head. From whom? From Christ, the whole body, that's all of, all of us, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does

its share, causes growth of the whole body for the edifying of itself in love. Now Paul envisages the body of Christ as a whole growing more mature unto a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Church has to reach that state, needs to grow up into a mature man. How does that happen? Well, the body grows as every part does its share, and by that which every joint supplies. Now the picture of a joint is part of a body has joints, elbows, shoulders, knees, such, these are joints.

But what is a joint in terms of the metaphor of the body? When Paul talks about members of the body, he talks about hands, feet, eyes, nose, those kinds of things. What is a joint? A joint is a relationship between two members. A joint connects two members in a certain way so that they function cooperatively with each other.

Your wrists, your elbows, those are joints. They connect two members, they are a relationship. What supplies the needs of the body of Christ for growth is the relationships between the members who are cooperative and by that which every member supplies.

Every member does its part, he says. So as every Christian is not only doing what Christians are supposed to do individually, but doing so in the proper relationships with other members, the body is healthy, the body is functional, the body grows, and the body becomes more like Christ. Corporately like Christ.

And so the main way to be the church is to stop thinking about church the way that we've all been conditioned to think about church. It's not the meetings, it's not the organization that's sponsoring the meeting or owns the building. It's not the corporation.

It's people. It's people that you are meeting with, it's people you don't meet with but who are also Christians. You are part of them.

You need to see yourself as not radically individualistic, although you have individual responsibility in the body of Christ. You're not radically individualistic. You are an individual who's doing your part for a larger organism.

Not organization, but organism. It's a body. And every part of the body serves every other part of the body.

Not necessarily directly. But if you're in a good relationship with somebody else, that makes the whole body healthier. Or just think of the reverse.

If you've got an ongoing feud with somebody else who's a Christian, that soils the whole body. I went to a church once and after I'd been there a few weeks, someone said, you see that couple over there on that side of the aisle and there's another couple over there? Those two women are sisters. They grew up daughters of the same parents.

They haven't spoken to each other for years. They've had some kind of a falling out. They go to church, the same church.

They sit across the alfresco. They don't speak to each other. I've heard people say, you know, my husband left me and the children and he shacked up with his girlfriend.

And now they come to the same church. And my children and I sit on one side. My husband and his new mistress or whatever sits on the other side.

There's problems there in those relationships. That's not the way Christian relationships are. Where there's a fouled relationship in the church, it fouls the whole spirit of the whole meeting and the whole community that's aware of it.

But when relationships are good, it enhances the health of the body. The body grows. And the more of the right kinds of relationships you can personally be in, that is the more that God actually puts you into, the greater I think the impact can be by having that.

You might go to a big church where you have hardly any relationship with anyone there. You might have been gone there for months and you can't give the names of three people there. Because as soon as it's done, after you've all been holding your ears through the music and laughing through the entertainment of the sermon, after the last prayer, everyone goes out and leaves the building.

Maybe you've never had any community in the so-called church that you attend. But outside the church, you can find and should find fellowship with people who are of like mind, who you actually will get together with. In church meetings, maybe, maybe not.

Maybe over coffee, regularly. I used to get together twice a week with a couple of brothers that were just friends. I mean, it wasn't an accountability group or anything like that.

We were just friends, Christian friends. We talked about the things of God. We knew each other's lives.

I became aware of how their marriages were doing. They became aware of how mine was doing and things like that. I mean, where there's actual connections, joints in the body where two members are connected and relating.

And it was a very healthy thing. A very healthy thing. You may have heard me say on the air before, if you listen to my program, I went for several years to a church in Idaho.

Actually, the whole time that I was in Idaho. I was going to this little church, about 150 people. Started out as a home church in the home of the postmaster.

He was an evangelistic guy. He'd evangelize to the people even while he was on the job

and off the job. He won people to Christ all over the place.

And he decided that he was going to start meeting in his home with whoever wanted to come. Well, the thing just became huge for a home church. I mean, too big for a house, let's put it that way.

And so they had to find someplace else to meet bigger than a home. And they found this little chapel that was on a Christian campground. And they rented it for \$10 a week.

And it grew to be about 150 people. It was all homeschooled families. Just so happened.

About 30 families, probably. And the church had no name. It didn't own a building.

It didn't have a statement of faith. It had no corporation. It had no pastor, no elders.

At least none that were official. It didn't have anything that churches should have. No membership.

No budget. I mean, the \$10 a week to rent the building, the postmaster, he paid it himself. There's no budget for the church.

But in this little chapel, there's a little box in the back. And although nothing was ever said about it, there'd be people put money in it before they'd leave. It wasn't even our box.

It belonged to the campground. But what they put in it was, I guess, for us to administrate. So this little group, they just thought, what are we going to do with the money? Well, all the brothers got together once a week on a Tuesday to discuss what are we going to do with the money that's been given.

And they say, well, this family here, they weren't able to pay their rent. I guess we'll pay that for them. This guy lost his job.

Let's bring groceries to him. And there was a kid, a young guy who had three kids. He had bought five acres of bare land and lived in a camp trailer with his family of five.

He had no money. And so once we decided, we'll just go build him a house. So we took the funds that had come in, bought the materials, and every man in the church showed up at his property and built a house over the weekend.

It was not completed inside, but it was dried in with the roof and walls and everything like that. And by the end of the weekend, he got to do more with it. But, I mean, what else are you going to do with the money? You don't have a building to support.

You don't have anyone on salary. You don't even have anyone who's recognized as a pastor. Who preached? Well, sometimes the postmaster did.

He's the one who started his own. But he didn't preach any more than I did. I preached sometimes.

And there was another guy who had been a pastor, the one who left the bricks, bodies, and bucks church. He was in this group. And he preached too.

And frankly, anyone preached who wanted to. If someone wanted to preach, they'd just come up to this postmaster. His name was Steve also, another Steve.

And they'd say, you know, I have something I'd like to share. And he'd say, okay, I don't know anyone else. No one else has told me they want to do it.

Go ahead. I think in the time I was there, 14 different guys were in the pulpit. But three of us were more than any other.

But none of us were elders. None of us were pastors. None of us were officially leaders.

No one was paid. It was just a family. The needs of the whole group were the needs of every individual.

And the needs of every individual were the needs of the whole group. Like the three musketeers, all for one and one for all, you know. And that was the best church I was ever in.

Unfortunately, I experienced a family crisis while I was there. And that changed my life. I ended up moving out of the area and so forth.

I'm not part of that church now anymore, but it was a great church. Very unusual. But I'm not saying every church has to function like that.

But a church can. You know, people said, you're not a real church because you don't have members. You're not a real church because you don't have a name.

You're not a real church because you don't even have a statement of faith. There were Calvinists in it. There were non-Calvinists.

There were dispensationalists. There were non-dispensationalists. There were Mennonites who wore head coverings.

There were people who didn't. There were people who were Pentecostals, and people who didn't even believe in the gifts of the Spirit. There were all kinds of people.

And they were all fairly mature Christians. And those things were never an issue. And whoever preached would usually try to avoid stepping on someone else's toes over some controversial issue.

But if they didn't avoid it, that was okay. We had one Pentecostal guy in there. He

believed that tongues is a necessary evidence of the baptism of the Spirit.

There was no one else in the church who believed that, but he did. And he wanted to preach one Sunday. And lo and behold, he preached on that subject.

He was like not one of the smarter guys in the church, but he was a lovable guy. And he got up and he preached about how you need to speak in tongues. There wasn't another person in the church who believed him.

But they just said, oh, that's Monty. We know he believes that, so that's okay. No one felt like they had to believe what someone else believed about everything.

They just loved each other. They loved each other. They shared with each other.

They were in each other's lives. The women had a meeting once a week in the home of one of them, all the women in the church, talking about mothering and wifing, stuff like that. It was a great, wonderful, healthy church.

And it was the closest thing to, I think, what really happens in the New Testament, as I've ever seen. But what most pastors and most people in ordinary churches say, that's not even a church. But it was more church.

I mean, the meetings were not much different than most church meetings, but it was not the meetings. It was the community. The church is a community.

It's the community of Christ. It's his body. And we have the same care, one for another.

I had a long list of scriptures I was going to go through that I didn't even touch on, and they were the one and other scriptures. I was going to go over them with you and share what Paul said, but I've used up all my time, so I'm not going to do that. But I guess, if I could summarize, being the church has nothing to do with joining a church.

The Bible doesn't even say that you have to go to church. On a particular regular basis, it does say you should not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. But you can assemble with Christians over dinner.

You can assemble with Christians, you know, just three couples getting together to socialize in the midweek, and fellowship as Christians. Assembling together is never defined in the New Testament as a weekly meeting in a building called a church. Those meetings, I like meetings.

I'm a teacher. I teach in meetings. I think meetings are good.

Some of them. Some are not. Do you know that some meetings are so harmful, it's better to go to none than to them.

I say that on biblical authority. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, and he says, you know, when you come together, it's for the worse, not for the better. He's talking about how they're getting drunk at communion and things like that.

He says, you know, getting together for you, it makes you worse than if you didn't go at all. And I can see that in some churches. Not that they're doing overt harm, but more subtle harm.

They're just by functioning a certain way, they give the overall opinion to people that this is what church is. And it deprives people of the real vision of Christ, of church as a community of people who are joined to each other in organic relationships and who have the same concern one for another, who lay down their lives for each other, even lay down their lives for someone that doesn't attend their own group or gathering, because it is a brother or a sister. Maybe somewhere else.

That's being church. As far as getting into more practical things, we simply can't do that in a single talk. And so, I guess I'm going to leave it at that.

But I did have a list of scriptures. I don't know if you're taking notes or not. I can give you some references.

That won't take long if I don't talk about what they say. But if you look them up on your own, you'll see these are kind of one another passages. Do this to one another.

For example, 1 Corinthians 12.25 says, Have the same care one for another. Meaning the same care that you have for yourself. You have that care for each other in the same way.

That's 1 Corinthians 12.25. Galatians 5.13. It says, You're called to liberty, but don't use your liberty as an excuse for the flesh, but in love serve one another. So, you're going to serve one another. We just read that in 1 Peter 4. If you have a gift, use it to serve one another.

That's also Galatians 5.13. Galatians 6.2 says, Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ? Well, a new commandment I give you that you love one another. That's the law of Christ.

How do you do that? Well, bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6.2. Ephesians 4.2. Ephesians 4.2 says that we should be bearing with one another, or forbearing one another. That means tolerating each other when they're annoying.

When someone's annoying, bear with it. Love bears all things, you know. So, bear with one another.

Also in Ephesians 4.32. He says, Be kind one to another, and forgiving one another.

These are all one another passages, see. Be kind to one another.

Forgive one another. These are relational things. It's all about relationships.

It's not what you do in a meeting. It's what you do in life. It's what you do in relationships.

Christianity is relationships. It's not religious meetings. Religious meetings punctuate the Christian life.

Romans 12.10. It says, In honor preferring one another. That is, preferring one another to yourself. That's what it means.

You should honor others above yourself. In honor, you prefer each other to your own interests, to your own concerns. That's Romans 12.10. Ephesians 5.21. He says, Submit one to another.

By the way, that same instruction is given by Peter in 1 Peter 5.5. All of you be submissive one to another, he says, one to another. Submit. Now what's that mean? Are we supposed to be in some kind of hierarchy where you submit to me? Maybe this week and the next week I'll be in the other part of the hierarchy where I submit to you? No, it's case by case.

Basically, it's being servant-minded. When you're submitting to one another, you're putting down your priorities or your preferences in order to do what is going to bless somebody else. You're giving up your rights, pretty much.

You do that toward each other. Romans 15.7. This is a good one. It says, Receive one another as God through Christ or in Christ has received you.

Receive one another. What's that mean? It's in the context of people of different convictions. Some feel like they can eat all things and some feel they can't.

They have different convictions about that. Some people keep one day holy, some don't. They have different Christian convictions from each other.

He says, listen, receive each other. Receive one another is the opposite of reject one another. That's basically what it means.

In contrast to what people normally do when they can't agree, namely, they reject each other. No, do the opposite. For Christ's sake has received you.

Now, what he says, you receive people the same way God received you in Christ. How has God received you? Because you had all your doctrines right? Because you were living perfectly? Because you agreed with him on everything? Probably didn't. You had a lot to learn.



But he received you when you gave your heart to him. When you surrendered to Jesus Christ. Well, receive others who have surrendered to Jesus Christ on the same basis that God receives you.

Not on a more particular set of standards. There are several passages that tell us to exhort one another and admonish one another. Admonish means to warn.

To warn and exhort. Romans 15, 14 is one of those. Another one is Colossians 3, 16.

Some of them are in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 3, 13. Hebrews 10, 24 and 25.

These passages talk about the need to admonish one another, to exhort one another, to stir up one another to love and good works. In other words, when we see someone who needs to be corrected, needs to be encouraged, the word exhort essentially means encourage. Warn people, encourage people.

Encourage the good behavior and warn them about bad behavior. You might say, isn't that what the preacher is supposed to do? Yeah, that is what the preacher is supposed to do. But he's not with them all the time.

The preacher is not omnipresent. The body of Christ is ubiquitous. Members of the body of Christ are everywhere.

If a Christian starts going astray, there's someone within sight, someone within reach who can reach out to them and say, hey, you need to straighten out. The verse is very clear that it has to be done in a certain spirit. Galatians 6.1 says, Brethren, if any of you are overtaken in a fall, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.

If someone's going the wrong way, Galatians 6.1 says, you, if you're spiritual enough, should reach out to them and restore them. But you should do it in the spirit of meekness concerning yourself, lest you also be tempted. In other words, it's so much easier when you see someone going the wrong way to just say, okay, I'm going to not look.

Not because I approve. I don't. But I just don't want to get involved.

I don't like a confrontation. They probably would not like for me to confront them, and I wouldn't like the way they would then view me or act toward me if I did so. I don't care about their soul that much, really.

I care about my own comfort more than I care about their safety. That's not loving your neighbor as you love yourself. So, these scriptures talk about admonishing one another, exhorting one another, stirring up each other to love and good works.

And of course, in James 5, in verse 16, I'll give this as the last one. There's quite a few

more. If you go onto like a phrase, one another, you'll see there's dozens of them.

But James 5, 16 says, confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that you may be healed. So, that suggests a degree of transparency that isn't found very often in Christian assemblies. If you go to church regularly, in a normal church, there's a good chance that someone sitting not very far from you has got secret sin in their life.

No one knows about it because no one knows that person very well. And that person's not very transparent. That person's not telling anyone.

There's got to be more community, more relationship, more involvement, more vulnerability, or else the Christian community will never be a community and the body of Christ will never be a mature body. Just like you have to warn others when they're doing wrong, you need to confess to one another when you're doing wrong. Not everything, of course.

You might do some things wrong every day. You don't have to always, every time you get together in a group, say, I've got something more to confess. This week, let's see, on Monday I did this, this, and this.

I confess I did that. That was wrong. Tuesday, yeah, I did these things.

I got up and confessed everything they did wrong. It's more, you know, if I've got some kind of prevailing weakness in my life, some kind of sin, that, you know, it happens a lot, I've tried to beat it, it doesn't beat easily, it beats me, well, then I need to really get some brothers involved or sisters involved if you're a woman and get them to pray for me. Confess to them, it's really hard to do that because you figure everyone else is pretending like they've got it together.

You think you're the only one who doesn't. So you don't want to look like, you know, a really bad person by confessing the bad things in your life because these are all really holy people around you. You'd be amazed.

Some of the greatest meetings I've been to were times where, you know, it was kind of unplanned, but during time of prayer, someone just said, I want to confess to such and such a thing. And once they did, it kind of broke the ice and suddenly someone said, I want to confess something too. And it was genuine, heartfelt, humble repentance, you know.

And then, you know, one person after another, you know, the first person to confess probably thought that they're going to be the only bad guy and everyone else is holy, going to be judging them. It made the other people feel safe. We need to confess to one another and pray for one another.

And as long as we're keeping, giving each other space that we don't intrude into, that is

to say, I won't rebuke you if you don't rebuke me. I won't bother you with my problems if you don't bother me with yours. As long as that's our attitude, there's going to be no body of Christ.

There's going to be no community going on. So start thinking in terms of people are the church. Real people.

The problems of the church are the problems that people are having. It's not that the church needs more money to build a bigger building. That's not the church's problem.

That's an organization's problem. The church is people. The problems that people have are the church's problems.

And those are things that every member suffers if one suffers. I may not feel like I'm suffering, but I am. Because whether I know it or not, that person is part of the same organism as myself.

Okay, well, I'm going to have to quit there just because I can, I don't have to ever stop, ever. Because the whole New Testament is about this stuff. And so I just have the opportunity to say, okay, no more points tonight.

So I'm going to end right there. But I hope that, I hope at least a few points have got across. And I hope that this will be of use to you, and hopefully to many people.

Because I'd sure love to see the body of Christ grow into that mature man. And everyone here has something they can do about that. But it's going to have to be a commitment that you don't wait for the preacher to organize you.

You don't wait for the preacher to tell you how to do it. He's busy with his projects. He'd like to keep you busy and maybe you should help him out in his projects, if they're good projects.

But he's not going to have time to really help you grow up much and be involved in your life. He's going to need just ordinary brothers and sisters' involvement to do that. And it works.

Those relationships of what every joint in the body supplies contributes to the edification and growth of the body into a mature and healthy body. ¶¶ ¶¶