

Growing Stronger Together

The Foundation of Community • Message 1

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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray that your heart would fully grasp how deeply God loves you.
- Pray that your life would be a light that points others to Jesus.
- Pray that Brookwood continues to Grow Stronger Together.

Scripture Reading:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:1-7 (ESV)

A. Introduction.

So glad you are with us today. We are kicking off a series called *Growing Stronger Together*... which is all about finding and building a Godly community...

Now let me tell you where this came from...

On March 30, I preached what I called an anchor talk....meaning, if I could only preach one talk this year, it would be this one... and I preached from Psalms 1 about a vision God had been stirring in my heart for a couple of years.

And I shared this tree... and three things that came from Psalms 1....

Rooted in the Spirit- which is all about learning to hear from God, it's about learning to be with God... so I spent 10 weeks on it in the spring.

Growing stronger together- which is on community- because you walk like who you walk with... if you walk with negative, bitter, angry people who aren't interested in God, then you become that... but if you walk with people who are passionate, devoted, faithful Christians, then you will become that...

Reaching the hurting and lost... which is all about bearing fruit... having a life that blesses others... because once God gets in you, He always moves through you...

So today, I'm kicking off: ***Growing Stronger Together***.

The title of today's message is: **The Foundation of Community**.

You can't build a Godly community without what I'm going to talk to you about today... in fact, if you don't have this step, you will end up getting into a community and at some point you will end up being disillusioned and frustrated and quitting...

Community in our cultural moment

Jean Twenge, a psychologist, wrote a book called *Generations*. In it, she discusses all the generations alive right now and why community is so difficult for so many people. It is one of the largest datasets to evaluate generations, looking at over 39 million people.

There are six generations alive today: it's a unique moment. This is roughly what it is...

Silent: born 1925-1945. (78+ -) This is the silent group, so they aren't going to make much noise.

Boomer: born 1946-1964 (59-77)

Gen X: born 1965-1979 (44-58)

Millennial: born 1980-1994 (29-43)

Gen Z: born 1995-2012 (11-28)

Polars: born 2013-2029 (0-10)

Anybody under age 10... they are all next door.

Now most people say the generations are different because of major events in each year... things like JFK, 90's rock, 9/11 and so on... and they impact you..

In her book, Twenge argues that what creates distinct culture shifts isn't historical events as much as technology ... technology is what changes the way you grow up, the way you live, and the way you think about things.. technology is what made the shift.

And it makes sense, right?

What's the first thing you do? The most common thing for most people is to reach for their phone. They reach to see what notifications they have and what they have missed, and they check their email...

Now this way of living is a relatively new thing.

I want to begin today, not in the present day. I want to take you back to a distant time, a faraway and most forgotten place known as the 90s! ☺

Do you remember this time?

You waited for people, and all you did was wait—with nothing to distract yourself. You walked and looked around and noticed things. Nowadays, how many of you grab your phone at a red light? Shame on you! ... Waiting in line...you are on the phone... I was at the Grand Canyon about three years ago, and there was a kid who was watching a movie while walking around the Grand Canyon.

In older generations, it was all about community..

She points out that with boomers ... they move away from collective values and towards individuality, and each generation has continued and grown this way through the years ... valuing individualization over community.

In the 1800s, you didn't say... *I'm going to hit the Oregon Trail alone*... if you did, that's the last thing you would say... clothes washers didn't come out until the 1940s, and as things advanced, people got more time... I remember when my dad would pull out a road map. Remember those things? Millennials, you can Google it... I was thinking the other day... kids driving now will never know what it's like to suffer a wrong turn. Do you remember this? You had to pull out the road map... I did MapQuest when I was driving, there was no rerouting... You had to turn around and retrace your roads..

Millennials, we were raised on the flip phone. Remember that? ... but it's why Gen Z has a harder time connecting... As technology changed... kids started doing more of this... staring at their phones... instead of this... talking back and forth.

But we have more margin... so as a result, people fill it with more individual tasks.

Until the year 2012, anxiety wasn't a term used widely, but as connectivity to this has increased, so have fear, weight, and overwhelming feelings...

One media personality said, *Let's face it... checking your likes is the new smoking. But Tabacco just wanted lungs, the app store wants your soul...*

Now if you work in Tech, I just want you to know that I'm so glad you are here ☺...

The rise in technology has done some good things—it gives you freedom of choice and new careers... but technology has also created loneliness and a wrong approach to community.

Think about it. The silent-born generation had a bent toward community for the sake of others. Nowadays, because of tech and culture, when we talk about community, it's all about you. What do I get out of this group?... Who meets my needs?... The problem is, if everyone comes in wanting or taking, and no one is giving... this isn't the kind of community God wants...

Here's my point- Community culture's way doesn't seem to be working, so today I want us to get back to Community God's way.

Have to build the foundation...

B. Building Community God's Way

1. WAKE UP to God's love for you and others. (Ephesians 1-3)

Now, in Ephesians chapters 1-3, there is only one command: remember the love of God. That's it.

Ephesians 1- it's about God loving us and adopting us.

Ephesians 2- it's about God making us alive to his grace- it's by grace you've been saved.

Ephesians 3- Paul prays that you would know the love of God.

And here's the point, you can't love others, truly love others, until you are first loved.

You can't build a community until you are first deeply loved by God.

He moves first, then we move in response... I love what pastor Ben Stuart, whom I know, illustrated... now I'm going to need a little help for this...

Bring five people on stage...

Three are huddled up as the trinity. Do you realize God is a party... God is already in the community. God is one God in three persons... one what, three who's... and huddled up for all eternity, enjoying each other. They don't need anything; they are happy... God is a party... but the problem is, He sees us missing out on His great love. So, according to Ephesians 1, He reaches out to us by sending His son...

The father extends his son in love... the son takes on sin, death, Satan, and hell and is crucified but rises again... then the son says it's better that I go... because now I'm extending the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes to you and shows you the truth about your sin, that you are not okay, the truth about you, and the truth about the Son. (wrap person up towards Son.) And how he died for you to show you how rich the Father's love is... (fold them back in)—now you are wrapped up in a communal and most powerful love the world has ever known... that existed before the foundation of the world!

So, this is Ephesians 1-3. There is only one command to remember... or to wake up to: God's love for you and for others.

But it doesn't stop there. Love God and love people the triune God continues to draw others in to...

You can't really love others and care for others until you first wake up to God's love...

(as they are wrapped up together!) Talk about asking for God's heart for you.

(I'm going to demote you... I need those.)

2. WALK IN love with others. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

So, he first moves, but then you respond... so you have a part to play... In Ephesians 4-6, there are 40 commands... He moves first, but then we move in response.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)

The words *walk in* literally mean to walk out... he says, *I want you to walk around in God's love, I want what Ephesians 1-3 says to permeate your mind...* what God has done for you...

And when it talks about the manner worthy of calling, its Greek word has the idea of a balancing scale...

That if someone looks at your life, they would go, *Oh yeah, of course they are a Christian, they live differently... Their life balances out with what they say...* on the flip, you don't want people to go, *Really? She's a Christian?*
(lower hand on scale)

So, how do you know your life measures up? How do you know you are living out God's love?

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
Ephesians 4:2 (ESV)

These aren't extra-credit things... these are things that flow through us. Said another way, we don't walk in these things to be worthy of his love; we do these things because he loves us...

A.) Humility

There was no word for humility in Greek... that's why some versions say lowliness... in Roman culture, the word for humility wasn't a great word...

It has more of the idea of humiliation. But when Christians repurposed the word, it meant voluntary submission out of security... I don't think lowly of myself... I have so much dignity and value in Jesus, I gladly serve.

B.) Gentleness

The idea of self-control... of power under control. *Son, remember when I told you to do that 14 times... I meant it.*
That takes the power of the Holy Spirit...

C.) Patience

This means to delay the outbreak of wrath...

D.) Bearing with one another in love

It literally means to tolerate each other... So, God wraps us in His love, and here he's going... *All I want is for you to tolerate each other...* which doesn't seem that hard until you read a history book and you remember we love to tear down and destroy each other.

Sometimes we destroy each other with a weapon.

But more often than not, we tear each other down with a word or something we type on a screen. And I love that he throws the word "love" in there, which means you don't go, *Okay, I guess I'll join a small group. I guess I'll do this...*

There is an eagerness... no, I want to love, I want to do this, I want to offer kindness..

Then it goes on to say...

eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:3-6 (ESV)

So, the spirit is the one who builds unity... I just maintain it by doing what verse 2 says: I'm humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with each other in love...

Then he goes on to talk seven times about one... which is the number for perfection and wholeness. The trinity is mentioned in there...

The way we show up to groups matters... You walk like who you walk with... so let's plug into groups... but let's make sure we are being the kind of groups that cause us to grow stronger together.