

“One Another” Small Group Lessons

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The “do’s”

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Lesson 1: “One Another Series”

There is a little Greek word that has a lot to teach us about how we treat others. It is the word “allelon” [pronounced – ah (like open your mouth and say ahhh) – lay – lawn] which is usually translated “one another”. This word occurs 100 times in the Greek New Testament and is used in all but 5 books of the New Testament (1 & 2 Timothy, Philemon, 3 John and Jude).

We are going to spend the next several months looking at these “one another” passages of scripture so that it will encourage us to treat others with love, care, compassion, hospitality, and so much more.

Read these examples & answer this question for each one: *“What impact would it have on your relationships if you really did what the verse said?”*

- Romans 12:16
- Galatians 6:2
- James 5:16

“One another’s” improve our relationships with others

The “one another’s” impact our relationships with others for the good. These aren’t just words on a page. These words command us to treat other people as Christ treated people. When we do that we will far more likely live lives of peace and great joy.

What would happen in the church if every single Christian lived out these verses?

In **Romans 12:5 Paul** tells us that we are to see each other as all united through Christ and in doing so, recognize that we actually belong to “one another”. The NIV here translates “allelon” as “all the others” but the idea is the same. We are all connected but more than that, we belong to one another. When we say “belong” we usually think of property...Paul isn’t talking about some sort of spiritual slavery here. Paul is talking about identity. He is saying that in Christ our “one another” runs so deep that we are united to the very core of who we are in Christ.

In John 17:23, how does Jesus tell us the world will know that we come from Christ?

As we talk about these one another passages we are first and foremost going to talk about how these transform us and unite us as the people of God. Second, we will spend time talking about what an impact these verses can have on the world around us as we live them out daily.

How might the world see the church and Christians differently if we really lived these out?

- If every Christian lived out these verses, the world would have little trouble seeing the church as a place of love.
- When these scriptures are ignored, churches divide, people are bitter and things fall apart.

The world doesn’t usually like unity. The world thrives on distrust, deception and drama. Instead, unity comes out of peace, well-being, and wholeness.

Have you ever been around a group of Christians that thrived on conflict and drama? How was it?

As we study these different commands telling us how God wants us to treat each other the goal is for us to do something with it, to put it into practice so that God's love can shine through us and be more than just good thoughts to discussion.

American self-reliance

We don't like to have to rely on anyone. We avoid it like the plague. Instead, we have created a culture of self-reliance which has resulted in fewer and fewer connections with others and a loss of community.

How many of your neighbors do you know?

Has that changed since you grew up? If so, how?

What have we lost as a society by becoming more isolated?

How might this LIFE group provide some of that community for those who attend?

Who are some people you know that you could invite to group that might benefit from this kind of connection?

Spend some time this week really thinking about the people around you. Pray for them. Talk with them and be a blessing to their lives.

Next week we will begin studying more of the "One anothers" of the New Testament.

Introduce "Church Steps"

This year we are going to incorporate some outreach into our LIFE Groups. Two years ago we started an outreach ministry called "Church Steps". Its goal was to get more people from Northwest involved in inviting friends and studying the Bible with people. We decided the next step for this ministry was to periodically incorporate this into our LIFE groups. Here is how it works. It is all about three things: Asking questions, making assignments and prayer

Questions:

Who do you know that your or your group might reach out to by inviting them to group or Sunday worship?

What good things is God up to in regard to reaching people for Christ that we can celebrate?

Assignments:

Groups will be given names of visitors that have come to Sunday worship to reach out to by inviting them back to Sunday worship or to their group. Those names will be given to the group leaders to assign to someone in the group to make that contact. Second, take the names mentioned in the first question, "Who do you know we can reach out to?" and encourage the group to reach out.

Prayer/thanksgiving:

At prayer time, make sure to mention the people you guys are thinking about. Also, give God thanks for the good things he is doing in regard to outreach.

Lesson 2: Mutual Edification

When was the last time someone really encouraged you?

When was a time when you encouraged someone and they also encouraged you (mutual encouragement)?

In the Bible, when two or more people encourage each other it is called “mutual edification”. The word “edify” means to build something up. That is exactly the meaning of the Greek word here...it means “to up-build” someone or something. When this happens, everyone goes away blessed by the interaction.

Encouragement doesn’t always work in a mutual way. Often encouragement is more one-directional and that is okay. That has its place. *Have you ever encouraged others but felt like you needed some encouragement back?*

How does it feel to give and give but never get anything in return?

It can be draining. Encouragement is at its best when it runs both ways as both people benefit from the interaction.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Here Paul is doing some teaching about the Lord’s return. *Why does Paul say he is telling them all of this (4:13)?*

How can thinking about the Lord’s return and being with God in heaven given us hope when we are going through tough things?

Paul concludes these verses with a command. He says that Christians are to “encourage one another with these words”. *How can the thought of being with God forever encourage us?*

What tough stuff are you going through right now? What encouragement do you receive by thinking about God’s faithfulness and heaven?

Do you know any Christians who are going through a rough time? How might you encourage them with the thought of heaven?

These verses remind us that God is faithful. Jesus is going to do what he said he was going to do. When he said he would come back and get us (John 14:1-2) he really meant it and he will really do it. What about death? Death won’t stop him! So be encouraged and use these words to encourage someone who is having a rough time. Remember, the worst thing the world can do to you is just send you to be with God forever...not too shabby!

Read Romans 14:17-19

Here, Paul is talking about an issue in the Roman church. Some people in the church believed some food was clean and right to eat and that other food was unclean and shouldn’t be eaten. Others believed all food was appropriate to be eaten.

Why do you think Christians get so divided over any and every kind of issue?

A lot of conflict comes from people wanting to be right more than from people who want to live in peace with others. *What does Paul command in 14:19?*

What would the church be like if we obeyed that command?

Application

How does this change the way we deal with disagreements with other Christians?

Is there anyone you know who needs encouragement? How can you as an individual or your small group offer that encouragement this week?

Is there anyone who has encouraged you but you never let them know how thankful you were for it? Go to that person and tell them what a difference they made in your life. That will make the encouragement mutual.

Church steps

Assignments - Review any visitor names and coordinate contact/invitation to Sunday church or group

Questions

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Prayer time – prayers that God will encourage us to reach out and thanksgiving for progress made toward the people reached out to in the past

Lesson 3: Mutual Submission

When you hear the word “submit” what comes to mind?

What do you think about submitting to God?

We all realize that we should submit to God. We might not do it well and go our own way at times but we realize God is someone we should submit to. *What is it about God that makes us think submitting to Him would be the right thing to do?*

- God is wiser and more powerful than we are
- Submitting to God is important because we know God loves us

What isn't as obvious is our need to submit to other people.

Read Ephesians 5:21

Now that is a difficult teaching!

When you hear that, what reservations, complaints or concerns do you have about it?

This is one of those teachings that everyone has to do well in order for it to work at its maximum effectiveness. In other words, if just one or two people decide to “lord it over” everyone else and be a bully they break this command and make it harder on everyone else to obey what Paul wrote here.

That is why this is called “mutual” submission because it goes both ways.

Let's talk about this in terms of making decisions that affect more than one person. *How can a church, a leadership or a family practice mutual submission in making decisions about their direction, their decisions, etc?*

- Each person is considering what is best for the other
- This is not one person running the show and calling the shots while being unconcerned for everyone else.

What happens when the decision makers forget about what is best for those they lead?

What do you do when church leaders, group leaders or just other Christians make decisions you don't like? How do your actions show maturity or immaturity on your part?

Now, let's look at Jesus. Jesus submitted to God in all things. In doing so, Jesus also submitted to other people. *How do you think Jesus showed submission to people?*

- The cross
- His arrest and torture

Jesus was in submission to the Romans who tortured and killed him because he knew that submission is what God called for. Bottom line, submission to the Roman soldiers was submission to God's plan.

Same is true for us. Submission to others is part of being pleasing to God.

Read Hebrews 13:17

How does submission show confidence in the one you submit to?

How does the Hebrew writer remind them that their leaders also have accountability and must also submit to a higher power?

What result does the Hebrew writer say happens when submission works the way it is supposed to work?

Application

Are there any areas of your life you feel God wants you to be more submissive?

If you are someone who has authority or is in charge of people, how do you find ways to be more mindful of the people you oversee?

If you are a parent, how do you allow your children to know their input is welcome and appreciated but that they still live under your authority?

How do you find this balance in marriage?

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Lesson 4: “Love One Another”

One of the most important things about being a Christian is being a person who is loving toward others.

When was a time for you that you really felt loved by other Christians?

We are going to look at three scriptures that tell us about how we are to love each other. It isn't anything new to say we are to be people who love but it is a powerful reminder to know that the God of the universe has told us that his people will be the kind of people who have a deep love for each other.

Before we get to the verses, the popular belief is that Christians are unloving. *Why do you think Christians are portrayed or stereotyped that way?*

What can we, as Christians, do to change people's minds?

Read Romans 13:8-10.

Paul says that Christians all have a debt to love one another. *What kind of debt did he say this deb was?*

- Continuing

So what does it mean for every Christian to keep on paying this debt of love...to never stop?

There isn't ever an excuse for being unloving toward others. You might be upset with someone but don't be unloving. *How do we find the balance between disagreeing or even having to confront someone about something while still being loving?*

Paul says that God tells us to do and not do many things in Scripture but love covers them all.

Name some of the ten commandments:

- Do not steal
- Do not murder
- Do not covet

How does following the command to be loving actually fulfill those commands?

- You won't murder or steal from someone you love

Read 1 Peter 1:22-23

Sometimes in church we talk about believing the truth. Here Peter says we, as Christians are to do what with the truth?

What does it mean to be obedient to the truth?

- It means you live your life in line with what you believe.

What does Peter say results from obeying the truth?

Here is the point – if we really live as God wants us to live we will be people of love. If every Christian did that, the world would have a real hard time saying Christians are unloving people. When we fail to be loving we fail to live in the truth and then people fail to see Christ in us.

Read 1 Thess 3:12-13

What two words does Paul use to describe what will happen to the love they have for one another?

The point here is that God doesn't want us to love others half way or love people because we have to...that isn't love! Love grows. Love builds. Love should be overflowing and unquenchable.

What challenges do we face in really loving people, even difficult people?

How does looking to Christ's example help us overcome those difficulties?

What do you think about Paul asking God to increase the love of Christians for each other?

Love seems like our work. It is something we do. But Paul prays that God will intervene to increase their love for each other. Maybe that is the missing piece. Maybe we struggle with love because we haven't asked God to help us love more and love unconditionally.

Application

Without naming names, think of some people you really struggle to love? What can you do to increase your love for that person/those people?

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to increase our love for those around us...even those who are difficult to love.

Do you think you have ever been difficult for someone else to love? How does that put it in perspective?

Last, know how much God loves you and how much other people love you. Some people really struggle with feeling loved and it is important that we all have the assurance that, as Randy Harris says so well, "There is nothing you can do to make God love you more than he already does." So let us be people who love and also people who realized we are loved by God more than we can imagine – **John 3:16**

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Lesson 5: Humility Toward One Another

Read 1 Peter 5:5-11

Peter commands “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.” That is a pretty descriptive way to talk about having humility. *What is the image here?*

What does the image of putting humility on like clothing teach us about the kind of humility God is looking for in us?

- Two parts to that
 - It covers us
 - but we do have to put it on

Let’s look at two Greek words used in this verse:

1 – The Greek word normally translated “clothe” refers to types of clothing you tie on to yourself. He is saying we are to bind humility to ourselves like a piece of clothing. When we bind humility to our lives it makes it that much harder for the devil to tempt us. If you read down a little further Peter talks about how humility is the key to defeating Satan’s temptations. **Read 1 Peter 5:8-9**

What does self-control have to do with humility?

2 – The word “humility” can also mean “modesty” which fits with the whole clothing idea. Put it this way...Peter is saying to think of yourself in a modest way. If you dress modestly, you aren’t showing off. If you live modestly, the same is true.

What trouble do we run into in the church when Christians stop thinking of themselves with humility?

Humility helps us with a few things

Humility helps us deal with temptation

Humility takes effort. It isn’t easy and it doesn’t come natural. It is going to take controlling our instincts and reactions in order to respond to things as God would have us do. So when Satan tempts us, it is often our pride or selfishness that gets us in trouble and responds with sin.

Many of the sins we engage in have a lot to do with pride. *Why is that?*

Humility draws us close to God

Read 1 Peter 5:6-7 to see how mutual humility keeps our pride in check. *What does God do to those who bind humility to their lives in this way?*

Peter tells us that when we are held in God’s hand like that, that there is no need for anxiety because you know God cares for you (5:7).

So humility leads to a closeness with God that removes our anxiety and humility keeps us from the devil’s traps. Humility is pretty important!

Last, humility connects us with other Christians.

Go back to 1 Peter 5:5. Peter tells us that when we humble ourselves toward each other that we all receive the grace of God in our lives. But that's not all. **Read 1 Peter 5:9-11**

Peter points out that they aren't the only ones having a tough time but that there are Christians throughout the world who are undergoing sufferings and persecution. The path through suffering is humility.

Imagine two people who are going through the exact same type of suffering. One is proud and the other is humble. *What will probably be the difference in how they experience that suffering? Which one will be more likely to seek God in the midst of their suffering? Why?*

How does humility help us endure suffering?

If you think highly of yourself and you go through suffering, your faith will suffer. But if you think highly of God and less of yourself, suffering will help you focus on God.

Application

What makes being humble difficult?

What might you do in order to grow in your humility?

Spend some time celebrating humility and pointing out times when you have seen others in your group display this talent. There is nothing like celebrating something to help us remember how important it is.

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Lesson 6: Be Hospitable

How would you define hospitality?

In the war in Afghanistan an unlikely moment of hospitality stands out in a time of conflict and hostility. The story is recorded in Marcus Luttrell's autobiography "Lone Survivor". Luttrell and his team of Navy Seals stumble upon a goat herder behind enemy lines. They know if they let him live he will tell the Taliban they are there and they will all probably die. If they kill him they might save their own lives. They take a vote and decide the right thing to do is to spare the man's life, even though it might cost them their own. The man leaves and tells the local Taliban soldiers about the presence of the Navy Seals and a battle begins. The Seals are surrounded and all are killed except Marcus Luttrell. He escapes, though seriously wounded, to the house of an Afghan man who takes him under his roof and saves Luttrell's life. Why would an Afghan man take in a wounded enemy combatant and risk his own life and the safety of his family in the process? Hospitality. In their culture, if someone comes to your door asking for help, you are obligated to help them but more than that, under your roof it is as if this person is a part of your family.

What is the difference between that type of hospitality and how you defined hospitality at the beginning of the lesson?

Now, that is an extreme example but it highlights the case that many of us don't really view or practice hospitality like they did in Jesus' day. They followed similar hospitality practices as in the above story. Today, hospitality is to have someone over for dinner. To them it was much deeper than that. It was "life on life", people spending time with people...helping with whatever needs they had and treating them like family.

Why has hospitality become sort of a "lost art" in the United States today?

What do you think we can do to reclaim it?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

Peter lists a few things that all go together. Hospitality is one of them but what are the rest?

When you combine deep love for others, hospitality and serving others...how does our view of hospitality expand to more than having someone over for dinner?

When was a time you spent time with another Christian in an environment like that...where love and serving and hospitality was shared among Christians?

If we practiced that more regularly, how might it strengthen our faith and the church?

The Danger of Routine

Our LIFE groups are one of the primary ways we show hospitality as a church. Let us always make sure that our time together is loving and that we are able to serve each other through these times and even

beyond Sunday evening. Once we do something enough times it can become routine. Once something is routine, it can lose part of its meaning and purpose.

What are some ways we keep LIFE Groups from becoming routine?

What are some ways we can keep our Sunday morning worship from becoming routine?

Using our gifts for others

In verse 10 Peter says that we all have gifts that we have been blessed with and that God expects us to use those gifts to the benefit of others. All we need is opportunity. Using our gifts for others won't happen by accident. It may not even happen on Sunday. If we are really going to use our gifts for others, chances are it will happen during the 99% of the week that is not in the assembly.

What are some creative ways we can use our gifts for others?

In verse 11 Peter tells us that it is God who supplies us with everything we need to do this. On one hand that means there are no excuses to keep our gifts to ourselves. On the other hand it reminds us that the whole point of this is that when we love, serve and show hospitality to one another that the end result is, "that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

How does our hospitality actually bring glory to God?

How might that encourage us to be more purposeful in using our homes and/or resources to show hospitality to others?

Last, does hospitality require a home? How can we show hospitality in ways other than through using a home?

Hospitality is just as much an attitude of the heart toward others as anything else. It is about thinking of others and showing kindness and love toward others. This whole thing boils down to this, *just how valuable are other people to you?*

Lesson 7: Peace & Harmony

What does peace mean you to?

What does it mean to have peace in your relationships?

Why is that important?

When we think of peace we think of the absence of war, times of tranquility and calm. When we think about peace in relationships it brings a new dimension to peace because the scale is smaller. Peace and war about nations. But peace in your relationships brings it closer to home.

Have you ever had a really rocky relationship? What was it like living in the middle of that?

Read Rom 12:14-16

Here Paul gives the Roman Christians a few things they need to make sure they do. They all go together and boil down the living in harmony with others. Paul begins with finding harmony with those who curse you.

What does Paul say to do to such people? How do you actually do that?

What result might come from being a blessing and speaking a blessing toward those who curse you?

Next, Paul talks about finding harmony in our emotions. He says that we mourn with the mourners and rejoice with the rejoicers.

What value is there in that?

What does it mean to you if you are mourning to have someone to mourn with you?

We aren't talking about a pity party here where you just want everyone to share in your misery. We are talking about times of profound sadness and loss.

How does mourning with someone or rejoicing with someone bring about harmony with that person?

Living at peace and harmony with people takes effort. It isn't going to happen on its own. You are going to have to desire it and pursue it. Chaos and conflict happen quite naturally but peace and harmony take work.

Read Rom 14:19

Name some effort it make take in order to bring peace and harmony to a broken relationship?

Take a couple of minutes to consider the following

- 1 - Think for a moment about someone you are not living at peace and harmony with.
- 2 - Pray silently for that person/those people

3 – Think of one thing you could do to try to bless that person or bring harmony back to your relationship

Application

Living at peace isn't easy. You might get burned from time to time but God honors it and loves it when he sees people living at peace with each other. Last, notice that Paul doesn't say to try half-hearted to live at peace. Instead he says to do whatever it takes to make it happen. That is a pretty strong statement! Why? Because peace is so, so important for God's people.

How can you be someone others see as peaceful and approachable?

How can your group practice what Paul said in Romans 12:15?

Last, sometimes LIFE Groups end up being a little too exclusive. Some people have a hard time breaking into a group and connecting there in meaningful ways. We have to make every effort to help people feel at home and connect in the group. It isn't always easy since group time tends to be at time we catch up with people we already know but we have to remember, we were all new at some point in time.

Lesson 8: Confess & Forgive Each Other

God is big about forgiveness. Aren't you glad? That is so important because every last one of us needs God's forgiveness very badly. But scripture is also big about the way we forgive other people and how necessary it is to forgive others if we intend on following Christ.

Read Colossians 3:12-14

Paul starts these verses off by reminding us of who we are in Christ. *What does Paul call us in 3:12?*

Why is our identity in Christ an important starting point when talking about forgiveness?

Paul says we are to both bear with each other and forgive each other. *How do those two things go together?*

Often in order to really forgive someone you are going to have to get over a few things. There are going to be obstacles and reasons why you really might not want to forgive someone. That is why Paul says to first be willing to bear with someone. *What does it mean to bear with someone?*

What is more Paul reminds us of another reason we must forgive others at the end of 3:13. *What is that reason? Why is that a powerful motivator?*

Forgiveness is about passing on the blessing we have received from the Lord. The Lord didn't forgive us because we deserved it. He forgave us because He is graceful. Now, take that principle over to us. *Why is it that we sometimes think someone must earn or really deserve to be forgiven before we offer forgiveness?*

What do you think Paul would say about that kind of attitude?

Forgiveness is crucial to our growth as Christians. Unforgiveness is poison to the soul that will ultimately result in your own destruction. Some have said not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. We just hurt ourselves.

What are the negative consequences of unforgiveness?

In Ephesians 4:32 Paul tells us that we are going to need kindness and compassion if we are really going to forgive someone. Like in past lessons, forgiveness doesn't always come naturally. We don't like to get hurt twice so we protect ourselves. *Is it possible to forgive someone but still remain guarded against them for a while? Do you think God minds us doing that?*

Read James 5:16

Sometimes before we can be forgiven it is important that we confess what we have done, particularly to the person we have wronged.

Have you ever confessed your sins to someone? How did that go?

What did you learn from it?

It is a humbling thing to confess your sins to another person. Paul tells us to do it anyway. This is a command in scripture, not a suggestion and yet we typically don't have any outlets for this in the church outside of the invitation song.

How might we go about confessing our sins in ways that are beneficial?

What would be some ways that might not be healthy to do it?

Application

You may not be ready to confess your sins to another person but you can confess them to God. If you are willing and feel safe enough with another, mature Christian, to confess to you could invite them into that process sometime. Let them know you need accountability and that you would like to check in with them at times and share things with them in regard to what you are struggling with them. Ask them if they would be okay with that.

Confession and accountability are good for us but they can't ever be forced. If you don't already know who the person is you would confess to if you needed to, then you may not be ready to do it.

Lesson 9: Serve & Bear Burdens

Nov 3 – Serve & Bear burdens (Gal 5:13-14, Gal 6:2)

Most people want to be a part of something larger than themselves. When we involve ourselves in those things it gives us a sense of meaning and fulfillment. That doesn't mean that we are supposed to make everything about us or about what we get out of it but fulfillment can certainly be a by-product of living the life God has called us to live.

It is important that we are able to identify our main priorities. One of the ways to figure that out is to ask yourself this question – *At the end of your life what is going to matter most to you?*

Most of us won't be thinking about our stuff...what will matter are the people in our lives. It will matter how we treated them and loved them. It is vitally important that we figure that out before we get to the end of our lives.

Read Galatians 5:13-14

What does Paul command us to do in these verses?

How do you see that happening in the church (worship, LIFE group, classes, etc)?

How do you see yourself doing that for others?

Imagine a church where everyone served everyone else. *What would that place be like?*

Most of us would want to be involved in a place like that. If it is ever going to be that, it is going to take men and women of faith who make others a priority.

What makes it hard to make others a priority?

- Part of the difficulty is our own busyness. Often we have our own problems to manage and that makes it hard to help others.

The beauty of all of this is, if we all actually served each other in love the burdens we all have would be lifted to some degree. That takes us to our second scripture.

Read Galatians 6:1-5

Paul says it two ways here. In 6:2 he says we should bear each other's burdens but then in 6:5 he says to bear your own burdens. Which is it? One commentator attempts to answer that question by saying there is both corporate (church-wide) responsibility but also individual accountability. That means that we have a responsibility as a church to help people. It also means that people should be doing the best they can themselves. So let's examine each of those.

Corporate responsibility for bearing burdens

How might you identify a need to be met and help meet it?

What do you do if the burden is too big for you to help with by yourself?

What do you do if the person you are helping doesn't care to help themselves?

Individual accountability

What burdens do you have that you struggle to bear on your own? That is a hard thing to say out loud but allow some space for people to address that. If you are willing as a leader to share something, feel free as it might show other people it is safe to share.

How do we bear our own burdens even when it is hard to do?

How do we know when it is time to ask for help?

Some of us are pretty stubborn when it comes to asking for help. That can be seen as commendable, as they don't want to take advantage of people. It can also be seen as foolish, as God has commanded us to help each other. That means we must be open to receiving help at times.

What makes asking for and/or receiving help quite hard to do?

When we allow others to bear our burdens with us or even for us it allows the helper to “fulfill the law of Christ”. *What is the law of Christ?* – it probably refers to either **John 13:34** or **Matt 22:39-40**

Application

How can your group serve someone else?

How can you bear the burdens of other people?

In doing these things, the body of Christ is strengthened and we bring God great pleasure that His children are loving one another in these ways.

This lesson concludes the “one another's” we are supposed to do to each other. Next week starts up a series of lessons on things Christians are not supposed to do to one another.

Lesson 10: Do Not Lie or Slander

We have wrapped up the “one another’s” God expects us to do to one another. Now it is time to begin some lessons on things we should never do to each other.

Read Col 3:5-10

These verses are all about how to live in new and righteous ways once you have become a Christian. Paul says before we can put on our new self (3:10) we must take off our old self. *What does it mean to take off our old self and put on a new one?*

- We were dead but through Christ we are made alive
- We took all of our old desires and ways of living and put them to death in order that Christ could live in us and through us.

In verse 7 Paul says they “used to walk in these ways” and yet in verse 8 he says they still need to completely rid their lives of those same things. *How can it be both ways?*

- It sounds like at one point these behaviors were a huge part of the way they lived and they had, for the most part done away with it. But they still had some room to grow and some things to deal with.

Do you ever find yourself there...you have gotten rid of much of your former way of life before Christ but still struggle occasionally with some of those same things?

Paul says it is time to rid our lives of anything that is not compatible with new life in Christ. Even stronger, he also says we are to put those things to death. *What does it mean to put a behavior to death?*

In 3:9 Paul points out lying in particular. *What makes lying so devastating?*

Why do people lie?

Lying can have the illusion that it will keep you from harm or get you closer to your goal by taking the lie shortcut but the reality is it never really works out.

What is the harm in lying even if no one finds out?

The harm is that even if the other person never finds out you have still put a dent in your relationship and in your trust. What is more your character is tarnished even though no one knows you did it. Character is more than what people perceive of you...character is who you really are.

How does lying destroy community?

We have to live in reality, speak in reality and deal with reality. Lying is a wedge that distances us from reality and from others around us. It is hurtful, harmful and incompatible with new life in Christ.

Read James 4:11

What does the word "slander" actually mean?

Slander is more than just speaking poorly of someone. It is possible to say something negative about someone and it be true. Slander is a step further down that road. Slander is lying about someone in order to give them a bad reputation. There is no basis in reality. There is no truthfulness to it.

Why would someone do that to another person?

The intent of slander is to actually do damage to another person. People do this to get their way by making people afraid of the other person, to win a court decision by questioning the other person's character through untruths, and for many other reasons. This is the last thing a Christian should ever do.

James goes on to say that God is the Judge and that God actually has the ability to both save and destroy. What is more, God knows the truth. He knows slander for what it is because God is the author of truth and knows a lie when he hears it. So don't slander. When you do, you risk God's judgment.

Application

Have any of you ever struggled with telling lies? What made it so appealing?

How do we keep our hearts in check to speak of others honestly and well?

Church Steps

Church steps check in time. It has been a while since we had the Church Steps at the end of a lesson. Let's get back to it with our questions,

What good things has God done in bringing non-Christians into your life and/or into the church that we can celebrate?

Who do you know you can reach out to this week by inviting them to group or worship?

Lesson 11 – Don't Bite & Devour

This one should go without saying...don't bite! You probably learned that when you were 2 years old. The problem is some people never learn the lesson. **Read Galatians 5:15**

What do you think Paul means by Christians biting and devouring each other...are they actually biting other people?

It is a metaphor for the way they are treating other people. They are viewing others as expendable and using them up. They are having anger and rage and ripping at each other with words like teeth. It is a gruesome image of nasty conflicts and disputes among God's people.

Does this still happen today?

What does Paul say will be the result?

When two people attack each other like this, the result is they both get destroyed. Now, obviously no one is actually getting eaten here. So *what does Paul mean by this kind of behavior destroying someone?*

- When Christians attack each other, it never ends well...people get hurt. People run away. People even leave God.
- What is more, if non-Christians witness this, they too might run far from God thinking, if this is how God's people act I don't want anything to do with it!

Read Galatians 5:16-17

What does Paul tell them to do instead?

Paul is putting the flesh against the Spirit. Both have desires. Following the flesh results in death and destruction. Following the Spirit results in life. Paul says we have to be led by the Spirit.

What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?

- It means we walk in line with God's Word, that we live at peace with others and that we exhibit/produce the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

Now comes the tough question, *have you ever had such a big blowup argument with another Christian that you took it too far?*

What should you do if that ever happens?

Notice, Paul is specifically saying they are doing this to one another. That means both parties are guilty of it. It is entirely possible for someone to yell at you at verbally bite at you but you respond in step with the Spirit of God.

What would that Spirit-led response look like if someone verbally assaulted you?

Why is it hard to do that and not retaliate with words of our own?

It is important that we always treat people with love and respect, even when it is the hardest thing in the world to do. Often a loving word or a gentle question will put the conversation back on the right track.

What if that fails and the other person keeps on attacking? What do you do then?

All of this reminds us how much we should be praying for those around us. It is hard to argue and fight with someone you pray for regularly. It is hard to be bitter and angry toward those you pray for.

Prayer – Pray that God will give us patience to deal with others in loving ways. Pray that God will help us respond to hate with love and anger with patience.

Church Steps

Do a quick check in time to see if anything resulted from last week's questions.

Lesson 12 - Stop Passing Judgment

This lesson is going to take a little more digging around in Scripture than usual so buckle up! First, let's read **Romans 14:13**. If you rip this verse out of Romans 14, write it on a post-it note and put it up in your house it would remind you to not pass judgment on others. The question is, is that really what Paul is teaching here or is he referring to something specific that is going on in the church in Rome?

How do you find the answer to that question? The answer is found in the context. **Read Romans 14:1-13**

There are two issues in the church in Rome that are dividing Christians there that Paul mentions in these verses. *Can you find the two issues (See 14:2 & 5)?*

- Dietary laws
- Holy days

These were two really big things in Judaism. You couldn't be a Jew unless you ate certain things and abstained from eating other things. You also had to observe special holy days to be a Jew (Sabbath, Passover, etc). In Paul's audience he has both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians were continuing in their traditions and it sounds like they were trying to get the Gentiles to go along with it (We know that from other parts of Romans in Galatians as well).

What is Paul's advice on these matters?

- If you are going to eat certain things, great. If you don't want to great
- If you want to celebrate a special day, great. If you don't want to great.

What was the problem here?

- The problem was that some of the Jewish Christians were trying to bind these dietary laws and holy days on Gentile Christians.
- They were judging the Gentile Christians for not participating.

Now that is what Paul is condemning. Paul is condemning them judging their brother on matters of opinion and tradition.

How does that happen in Christian circles today? Any issues where people bind opinion and judge you for not following their opinion?

What does Paul reminds them of in verse 10 that serves as a warning to be careful in how they judge?

So Paul doesn't want Christians judging each other on disputable matters of opinion. *Is there ever a time a Christian should pass judgment on something?*

How do we know where the line is?

Last, Paul says that when you pass judgment on others for disputable matters you actually put a "stumbling block" in their way. *What does that mean?*

- It means you place obstacles in the path of faith that they have to jump over

Has anyone ever put a stumbling block in your path? How do you know that is what it was? What did you do about it?

This is all about how we treat each other. If we cause disputes over ridiculous matters we show that really don't have the care and compassion for others that Christ desires for us to have. It can also show how selfish we are. So be careful before you judge someone because God is watching and God knows the standard you are using to make those judgments. It is okay to call a sin, sin but it is not okay to judge someone on matters of opinion.

Application

Are there areas of opinion that you find yourself judging others on? How might you see this in a new light and put a stop to it?

Do you feel someone else has put a stumbling block in your way? How might you reconcile with that person?

Pray that God would help us see others with great clarity and that God would give us the power to be patient.

Lesson 13: Do Not Grumble

What does it mean to grumble?

Why do people grumble?

Read James 5:7-11

Patience

What does James start off telling us to do?

- Be patient

James relates a lot of grumbling to being impatient. There are some things you just have to wait for, that no matter how hard you try or how much you want it. Grumble all you want, it won't speed things up. James mentions two things that just have to work that way. *What is the first illustration James uses to remind us that some things just have to wait on?*

- You can't make crops grow faster. With all of our technology we have learned ways to speed up some of the process but some things just have to take their time.

That points us to the second thing James is actually talking about here, the coming of the Lord. We can't make Jesus come back. He is going to do it on his own timing.

Strengthen your heart

Because we have to wait, James tells us a second thing we have to do. *What does he say to do in 5:8?*

- It literally says to "establish your heart" or "strengthen your heart"

If you want a strong spiritual heart, there are few things that will strengthen it faster than having to practice patience. *Why does having to be patient have a strengthening effect on our hearts?*

Have you ever prayed for patience? If so, did you get tested?

Finally, our "one another" – **Read 5:9**

Grumbling doesn't work well with patience and having a strong heart. I love how often in the Bible we get more than just what not to do. Instead of just flat out saying "don't grumble" and that is all we are told, we are also told to be patient and have strong hearts. If you do that, grumbling just won't happen very often.

What kinds of things make you grumble?

Sometimes what we grumble about says a lot about how we see ourselves. If we grumble because other people are slow and slow us down, it might be that we have an attitude of self-importance that we need to get over.

Is there a difference between grumbling to yourself vs. grumbling at someone else?

When we grumble at other people it really shows we aren't that interested in reconciliation. We are just interested in complaining and expressing frustration at the expense of everyone else.

How does it make us look when we grumble and complain about things?

A warning

If looking bad wasn't enough, James gives us a final reminder about how serious grumbling is.

What warning does James give in James 5:9?

Do you think that is a pretty strong warning for something that seems as small as grumbling?

Maybe grumbling is a bigger thing to God than we might imagine. That might just be due to the fact that God has blessed us in numerous ways. He has given us life. He has given us forgiveness. He has provided all of our needs. For us to grumble, in light of all God has done for us demonstrates that we have an ungrateful heart that is displeasing to God.

Application

How do you begin the process of turning grumbling into being more appreciative?

James gives us a starting point for answering that question. He gives us examples of people who have gone before us who had to be patient and then reminds us how God blessed them and was so merciful to them. The implied point is, if God is merciful and gracious to them in the midst of their patient endurance, He will be to us as well.

Close with mentioning things we can be appreciative for

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for all God has done. Ask that God would keep grumbling and complaining far from our hearts and that instead, he would strengthen our hearts and help us with our patience.

Lesson 14: Do Not Provoke & Do Not Envy

Read Galatians 5:22-26

The “Fruits of the Spirit” are a pretty well known list. We sing songs about them, hear sermons about them and hear about them in Bible class. Typically we stop at the end of the list and don’t talk about what comes before this list or what comes after.

The fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are things God wants our lives to produce. Bookending that list are the things God doesn’t want us to do. **Read Galatians 5:19-21 & 24-26**

What does Paul say all Christians have done in their lives (5:24)?

Why is that important?

Since we have crucified the passions of the flesh, we have no room left for them in our lives. Yet, somehow these things still creep in at times. Paul reminds us that as Christians we live “by the Spirit” and that means we live “in step with the Spirit”.

What do you think it means to live “in step with the Spirit”?

- We do the things that the Spirit would approve of and avoid the things that are incompatible with life lived by the Holy Spirit.

What does Paul say not to do in 5:26?

Paul puts being conceited together with provoking and envying others.

How are these three related?

- Conceit is the attitude of the heart
- Envy and provoking others are the action

Read Luke 6:43-45

Our life produces fruit in line with what is on the inside. In other words the things we do come out of the person who we really are. Evil in your heart will produce evil actions. Goodness in your heart will produce acts of love and kindness.

This is why Paul wants us to produce fruits of the Spirit, which are the kinds of fruit the Spirit would produce because we have God’s Spirit inside of us.

How does a life committed to producing the fruits of the Spirit resist this kind of attitude and these actions?

Have you ever known someone who was extremely conceited? What was it like to spend time with that person?

Do you ever struggle with conceit?

You might not think you do but if you find yourself envying others and provoking others, it might just be that you really do struggle with conceit.

In Greek, the word for conceited is a compound word “keno – empty” and “doxa” – glory = Empty glory or “vain glory”. Conceit is wanting to receive glory when there is nothing glorious about it. Glory comes to things of substance but a person with conceit is just empty inside. That is why conceit results in provoking and envying others because it is a desire to take from others and fill oneself up.

Instead of being conceited, as Christians we are called to build others up. We are called to add value to others, not take value. We are called to consider the needs of others over our own needs (Philippians 2).

Application

Why is selfishness such a struggle?

How do we resist the urge to be conceited?

How do you handle someone when they are provoking and envying others?