

Redemptive Relationships

Ephesians

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, continuing to look at that passage as we continue to work out a practical ecclesiology. I think we'll be here another couple of weeks, Lord willing, and then return to James, but we started the new year looking at, as we are preparing for our ministry update and considering what the Lord wants us to do as a body, the space needs that we have and things like that, we felt like it was important to really focus on the essence of what the church really is and so we would not if we are led to, start some kind of building program which we're certainly leaning that way and we'll be sharing more about that, but we want to make sure that we're not letting anything like that obscure the main building program which is the body of Christ, that we are to build one another, that's what we're here for, and so it's so helpful to me to look at the Scriptures and really remind myself of these things and I hope it's been helpful to you as well.

We started looking at the beauty of the church, the glory of the church, what we're called to build is this body, the spiritual body made up of all those who love Jesus Christ who are spiritual stones, who the Lord is shaping our lives, changing us, and as we individually are made more like Christ, that corporately in our relationships, we visibly manifest the glory of Jesus Christ and that's what we see in the passage we've been looking at, Ephesians 4:11-16, so that God has called us to this glorious work. Then two weeks ago we started looking at what this passage says about how we actually go about doing it, how do we go about building this spiritual body, what does this passage tell us, and we said we need to begin by being equipped, by being good expository listeners. That's what we talked about two weeks ago, to listen to the word of God in such a way that we're ready to apply it and to live it out and to work hard at listening, being equipped. Then last time we looked at the importance of conversations. We titled last week's message "Life Changing Conversations"; that we are to talk to one another in such a way that we expect God to use our words for the edification of one another, that it's going to make long-term eternal impacts when we speak truth to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and this morning we want to continue unpacking what it means to speak the truth in love. We focused more last time on speaking truth and this morning we want to look at what that means, the context of "in love, speak the truth in love," and the title of this morning's message is "Redemptive Relationships." Redemptive relationships, so that we need to be expository listeners, we need to engage in conversations that we hope will

be life changing, and we need to see that those life changing conversations happen in the context of relationships that need to be aimed at God's purpose, redemptive relationships. So that's what we're gonna look at this morning, redemptive relationships.

Since our greatest need is to hear the truth, which is what we saw last time, it's an urgent need that we always have, it's how we're saved, it's how we're sanctified, it's everything, the truth. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Sanctify them in thy truth, Father, thy word is truth." So we desperately need the truth. God has ordained that we normally and most often receive his truth from the lips of another human being. It's just the way he works. Therefore we need to work at relationships that facilitate that kind of delivery of the message of the truth. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. We're not just to go around preaching the word to each other, the text shows us in relationship and our connection. So we're gonna look at unpacking that this morning, what are redemptive relationships and how can we be about cultivating redemptive relationships in the body of Christ for the glory of God.

So let's read verse 11 to 16, Ephesians 4.

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You by Your Spirit might now work in our hearts, that You would speak through Your word to each one of us and to call us to believe and repent and walk in light of Your life changing truth for the glory of our Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.

Redemptive relationships. Relationships provide the context by which the truth is delivered and it's the connections of the body that we also need to work at. We need to work at loving one another. What does that look like? How do you put that into practice? How do you make that happen? It's something that doesn't just happen, you know, accidentally, we have to labor at it. In fact, our flesh, the world, the devil, are all working against the things of God all the time and so we have to be intentional about facilitating

and creating the environment for relationships to happen and we have to work at relationships and relationships are messy.

Paul Tripp has a book, I haven't read it actually yet, I've just looked at a little bit of it, but I've got it in my office, "Relationships: A Mess Worth Making." That kind of sums it up, that it's messy. Relationships with human beings are difficult and messy because we're all sinners. Even redeemed sinners, our lives are messy and when we get together, it's messy but it is a mess worth making because God works through relationships. This is what he has ordained to use as a primary means in making us like Christ and this is what we see in the chapter. He wants to bring us together so that as we're relating, somehow as we're learning to love one another pass the messes, help one another clean up messes, making more messes, cleaning up messes, we're working together, Jesus is made visible in our corporate experience as people watch our relationships. That is the glorious purpose of our God.

So we need to see our relationships, then, as redemptive relationships so we're going to consider this outline under four points this morning and if we get through all of them, we'll have four, if we don't, you'll know that we didn't get through all of them. Anyway, the first point is the purpose of redemptive relationships. The purpose of redemptive relationships and basically, actually the answer is there in the very thing, the purpose of redemptive relationships is redemption. I mean, the purpose of our relationships in the body of Christ ought to always be spiritual and eternal. It's not merely for our pleasure. This is such an important thing and it's because we're made for relationships, we enjoy relationships that are good, but there's a danger in the body of Christ that we can just approach each other as consumers of enjoying each other. Now there's a place, we need to enjoy one another. It's not that that's a bad thing, but the purpose of our relationships is to build this glorious body that he's talking about here in Ephesians 4:11-16. The purpose of our relationships is to be a vessel in the hand of God, an instrument in the Redeemer's hands to build someone else in the image of Christ and at the same time to be built.

So our relationships are to be redemptive in purpose. I borrowed that title, even redemption relationships from Paul Tripp's book "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands," where he talks about redemptive relationships and the difference between how we often approach relationships. He writes, he says, you know, he talks about how when we come as consumers to relationships, we find ourselves getting frustrated because people don't do what we want them to do, even though we enjoy them in general, people that we like, that we love, enjoy being with, they still don't do things the way we want them to do so we get frustrated and some people we have more difficulty loving or enjoying and we find ourselves frustrated. So he says this, he says, "How much are the people in your life a source of personal frustration?" Think about that. How much are the people in your life a source of personal frustration? "How often do you give into stress and do things that do not honor Christ or incarnate his character? How often do you see people as obstacles to ministry rather than the objects of it? Whom have you given up on? We have been loved by Christ and called to incarnate that self-sacrificing love wherever he places us. Do people sense that love in you?" That self-sacrificing love, do they sense that love in me? In you?

He goes on, "When we forget the call to incarnate the love of Christ, we take our relationships as our own. Soon they are governed by our pleasure, comfort and ease. We get irritated at people who interfere with these things and much of our anger is due to the fact that we are relationship thieves. People do not belong to us, they belong to God. Relationships are not primarily for our fulfillment. Relationships are given to us as a means of accomplishing God's purpose in our lives and the lives of others." Relationship thieves, that's a powerful image. That's what we can be. That's what we are by default, actually. If we're not walking in the Spirit, we tend to, we will walk in the flesh, Galatians 5:16. So if we walk in the flesh in relationships, it means that we're using these things, these wonderful gifts God has given us, these wonderful opportunities, we're using them for our own pleasure, comfort and ease rather than as an opportunity to build his kingdom and to edify someone and love them.

So the purpose of redemptive relationships is to get on God's agenda. The reason I have relationships in my life is so that I might build others to be more like Jesus and might be at the same time built by them to be made like Jesus. A helpful book that really I think unpacks a lot of this that we don't have time, I started to try to bring a lot of it into my outline, some of it's gonna be in it, a book by Ed Welch, "Side By Side." He really kind of unpacks in the whole book what it means to be in relationship with people, loving people, and just trying to help one another to accomplish what Ephesians 4:11-16 is talking about. He titles his chapters, you're gonna see it a little bit later, I'm gonna talk about some of it, but one of the things he says in that book that I think's really helpful at the very beginning in his basically outline of his whole book is these two main points and then he's got chapters underneath. Basically we are needy, that's the first big outline point. We are all needy. We are unfinished products. We can't do it on our own. We need help in our sanctification. We are needy. The second point is we are needed. We are needed. We are needy and we are needed and because we are needy and we are needed, the purpose of relationships is to be about doing what God has called us to do. We need others to help us become like Christ, and others need, we are needed by others to help them become like Christ.

So the purpose of relationships is to further redemption to make one another more like Jesus. So that's the purpose of redemptive relationships. The second point we're gonna look at this morning is the pattern for redemptive relationships. This is all really unpacking this idea of speaking the truth in love and the connectedness. I mean, just to show you that, verse 15 after he's talked about the danger of staying infants that we talked about last week and being tossed here and there and carried about by every wind of doctrine, he says, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies." There's this sense in which the body has to be fitted and held together. We have to be connected. If we're not connected, this truth cannot flow. So we have to work at holding on to one another, going after one another, you know, pursuing one another, knowing how much we need one another and how much we're needed by one another. So we're to then love is the key ingredient then that pursues

that the best for others, that seeks to give ourselves for them, there is no longer we're consumers, we're givers who give to those around us.

So the pattern for redemptive relationships, though, what I want to do is step back a little bit from this passage and look at it in context because the Apostle Paul has a lot to say about love in the book of Ephesians, and one of the really helpful things he does right after this passage or after chapter 4, is what he says in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. He helps us to see, listen if we want to have redemptive relationships, relationships that are really aimed at someone's best ultimate good, which is really the essence of what love is, it seeks someone else's ultimate good, then we need to pattern ourselves after God. That's what verse 1 of chapter 5 says. The pattern for redemptive relationships is seen in Ephesians 5:1 and 2. Our second point: the pattern for redemptive relationships.

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." What you're called to do as a Christian, you've been born again, you've been adopted into God's family and Paul sums it up, this is what you are to do each day, imitate your Father. Look at your Father and seek to be like him. The verb is *mimeo*, we get our word "mimic" from it. Mimic your Father. I mean, you think how little children will sometimes do that. Little boys want to be like dad and they'll try to do whatever dad is doing. That's why they have those little like plastic lawnmowers and stuff, remember? Do they still have those? Now kids are always doing stuff on their phones, aren't they, they don't do that kind of stuff anymore. But you want to mimic. I guess maybe that's because dad's over on his phone too. That's something to think about.

So you want to mimic our Father. We want to look like our dad and that's what it's all about. God has taken us out of the world, he's given us a new heart, he's given us his word to make us more like him because that was originally why he created us in the first place, remember? "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." He made man to reflect his glory to be like him. In our hearts, what we think, what we value, what we choose to do, in all of these ways to be like God.

So in this sense, the pattern for redemptive relationships is look how God relates to us and pattern the way he relates to us, pattern how we relate to others after the way he relates to us. That's essentially what he says here, "be imitators of God, as beloved children." You think about in Matthew 5:43-48, you can read this later, Jesus basically says, you know, you love those who love you, you're no better than the world essentially. If you want to be children of your Father, love those who persecute you. Love those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you because your Father causes it to rain on the just and the unjust. He causes the sun to rise on both the just and the unjust. You see, your Father shows kindness and love to all people, even those who hate him. So he says if you want to be like your Father, do that, and he essentially says that's what you're called to do, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What's interesting, though, when Paul calls us to be imitators of God, he even takes it a step further. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children," and he gives us the second imperative that I think helps even to help us walk out what, well, walk in love. It helps us

to work out what he's told us in the previous thing. How do you imitate God? Well, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you." He says, "You'll be like your Father when you walk like Jesus walked." Perfect logic here. I mean, what did Jesus say? "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." If you want to know what the Father is like, look at Jesus. So if we walk like Jesus walks and we imitate Jesus, we will be imitating our Father.

So he says "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you," so the pattern is to be like God, to be like the Father by being like Jesus. In our relationships, we should be like Jesus. We are called, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." That's the standard. Think about that, how that turns things back rightside up. Our relationships that we get frustrated with because we're being self-focused, relationship thieves, and we turn it around and we see, wait a minute, we're called to be like Jesus who gave himself up for those he loved. That's exactly what he told us was his desire. If you sum up, in fact, the main command in the New Testament is love one another. Remember Jesus gives that the night before he's crucified, "A new commandment I give to you," John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you're My disciples by your love for one another." The way people will know that we're Jesus' disciples is not by how sharp our theology is, though that is important. He didn't say that. He say, "The way people will know that you are a follower of Me." A disciple is a learner who wants to imitate his master, who wants to mimic his master. How will they know that you are someone who is a mimicker, a follower of Jesus? You will love like Jesus loved and when you do that, you'll be just like your heavenly Father too.

So we're called to love like Jesus loved. We're called to in our relationships approach them the way he did. I think there's two things we can just draw out of this particular verse, that love is costly, true love is costly to us, it was to Jesus. How did he love? He loved you and gave himself up as an offering. He spent himself completely. So love does, it's the exact opposite of looking at relationships as for our pleasure and comfort and ease. No, relationships are an opportunity to lay down our lives for one another, to pour out ourselves. This is what God is calling us to do.

It was costly, but secondly, the second little subpoint here about Jesus' love, it was costly but it was also God-ward. It's an interesting thing he says at the end of that verse. He gave himself up for us but he wasn't just looking at us. He was looking at us, he was loving us and he was giving himself up for us but what does he say? Even more than he was looking at us, he was looking somewhere else. As Jesus gave that offering, he was making an offering and a sacrifice to his Father, to God.

So the second thing, love is costly but love is also God-ward at its root. True love exercised in relationship is God-ward. For Jesus, he was offering himself up to save us but he was doing it as a fragrant aroma to his Father. Because of his love for his Father, he surrendered himself up for us. Now he loved us too but it was the ultimate love of his Father. Now what does that look like for you and me? That means that when we love each other, we're to spend ourselves and be willing to go through difficulty and pain and

the mess of relationships at cost to ourselves but our eyes ultimately are on Christ. We're doing this because you have loved me. I'm offering this as a fragrant aroma to you and to the Father as well, to the Triune God, and when you have the focus right, there is power to love.

So the pattern for redemptive relationships is to be like our Father so we ought to be thinking when we're relating, we ought to be disciplining ourselves, meditating on these facts because I don't know about you, I find it very easy just to enjoy people. I really enjoy being around the body of Christ. I enjoy being with you. I really do. I mean, that's one of my favorite places to be, my favorite place in the world is with the body of Christ and to be home in Providence with y'all. You know, to have our elders' meetings. I enjoy being with those guys and when we talk, you know, Wednesday nights, I just enjoy it. Well, it's okay to enjoy it, it's actually a good thing, it's part of it, but there must be, the enjoyment of it must be submitted to love, that the first purpose is not to just enjoy the presence of these wonderful people and the experiences laughing, it's all good, we can, God made us to laugh, God made us to enjoy one another, but the highest purpose is to serve one another. So we should be disciplining ourselves to think as we're relating, as we're enjoying one another, "Lord, help me, help me to be like You. Help me to mimic You." That is, when someone's not loving to me in the body of Christ, maybe they're having a bad day, they say something harsh, if I'm gonna be like my Father, what am I gonna do? My attitude toward them is not gonna be sinful anger, it's gonna be love. Now love often, then, has to address an issue but it's love. It's rooted in love. I am not protecting myself from you and striking back at you in self-protection. No, I'm moving toward you in love because that's what love does, love moves toward someone, not away. So when there's need, it moves toward it.

So that's the pattern for redemptive relationships, to be like our Father, to be like Jesus by being willing to offer a love that's costly and that is God-ward. Then thirdly, the practice of redemptive relationships. We've considered the purpose of redemptive relationships, to make one another like Christ; the pattern is to be like God, to be like Christ, the pattern for redemptive relationships, we looked at that; now we come to, third, the practice of redemptive relationships. Speaking the truth in love. So how do we create that, the "in love" part for speaking the truth? How do we actually do this? What's this look like in practice?

This is where I was helped by Ed Welch's book, "Side By Side," some of these points, and so I encourage we ought to get that book in our bookshop hopefully soon. But anyway, I want to give you seven subpoints here under this third point, seven things that we can do in the practice of redemptive relationships and some of it sounds obvious but I think it's the kind, sometimes the move obvious things are the most important things that we just miss. Isn't that funny how that's the truth? Have you not found that so many times somebody will tell you something and it's exactly what you needed to hear and it's like, "I knew that but I so needed to hear it"?

Well, here are seven things. How do you practice redemptive relationships? How do you connect so that the body is fitted together and held together and jointed together? How do

we do that across the body? The first thing is we greet one another warmly. The first subpoint under point 3: greet one another warmly. It's interesting to note, several times in the New Testament Paul says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss," so I think we should all start kissing one another. I'm just kidding. I think that's an application that was to a particular time and place. If we started kissing one another, I don't think we would grow in our sanctification, I think we'd be messed up. We'd be like dreading to come to church. "I gotta kiss other guys. I'm just, I'm sorry, not gonna happen." So, I mean, the Lord could take us there if we had to, right? If you go to another country, you have to, you know, blend in. They do that in Europe and stuff. Europeans are messed up in a lot of ways. No, obviously that's really not true. It was what was going on. We're messed up more than they are probably because they were greeting one another with a holy kiss.

I'm not advocating for that, I'm saying greet one another warmly. The idea is greet one another like family. Greet one another like you are greeting someone in your family. Your heart is open and this is just in the greeting, I'm just talking about the greetings. I'm just talking about the greetings, how you smile at people and say good morning. You walk up and you introduce yourself to someone. Greet them as warmly as you can by faith, "Lord, give me love for the people that I meet today and anyone who's here, I'm gonna treat them as a brother or sister." I mean, God knows where all of our hearts are but I'm gonna treat them as a brother or sister. I'm gonna welcome them into my heart as the family of God because that's what the body of Christ is. This really is my family.

I mean, think about what Jesus said. Remember when he was teaching and they came and they said to him, "Your brothers and your mother are here," and he said, "Who are My brother and My mother but he who does the will of My Father? They are My brother. They are My mother." So he's saying that the true family for him was the people who obeyed his Father. Isn't that exactly right? That's real family, the spiritual family who is obeying the Father that we have been born again from, adopted by.

So the same is true here. We greet one another warmly. We discipline ourselves to think of each other as family. You have to meditate on that. Some of us, it's harder. Some of us have more difficulty really practicing it. Others are more outgoing but even there a lot of times your natural bent is to be outgoing but not necessarily to connect. So whatever your weakness is, prayerfully be intentional about, "Lord, I want to learn what it means to really greet someone with familial love and openness and make myself available."

That's the first thing, greet one another warmly and I'm gonna say one other thing about that. You know, I think we should be really honest about this, as I get older I feel more the need to do this, we're gonna forget one another's names. You know, everybody knows that already, right, it's not a big secret, but as you get older, it's funny how, we were talking about this the other day, names that you know. I mean, it's not like somebody that you just met. This is somebody in my family and suddenly I can't remember their name. You know, or your nephew or whatever. It's like the story about the two men, you know, how we get older and we forget and these two elderly couples were having dinner together and the ladies had cleared the plates and had gone in the kitchen and one guy was saying to the other, one man was saying to the other man, "You know, we had a

wonderful meal last night at that new restaurant. It was fantastic." The other guy say, "Oh really? What's the name of the restaurant?" And he said, "Ah, I can't remember." He said, "Hey, what's that flower that's romantic, you know, that you give when...?" He said, "A rose." He said, "Yeah, thanks, rose. Hey, Rose, where did we eat last night?"

I mean, we are human beings. We're frail and as we get older, we find things like that don't seem that far-fetched so let's just be honest. The fact that we don't remember someone's name doesn't mean we don't love them and, you know, let's just be understanding and gracious and realize that when we get to heaven we won't have that problem.

So greet one another warmly. Secondly, try to engage in meaningful conversation. Now I want to say something, this is not just about the sermon. Remember we talked a couple of weeks ago about expository listening is talking about the things of God that we've just received, I think it's a very important way we can sort of corporately meditate and I'm saying we should keep doing that but it's not that we should only do that. Getting to know one another, engaging in meaningful conversation is not just talking about spiritual things. You're talking to another person, God made us persons, he made us for relationship and part of that is having even appropriate small talk, learning how to do that, learning how to maybe move from small talk to some things that are, interests, you know, get to know the person. That's what part of it is, it's like engaging in meaningful conversation, we're just wanting to open the door to relationship.

In fact, the third thing, let's go ahead and the third point is seek to know one another, which is really what meaningful conversation then leads to. You just want to know this person. "You're family. I want to know you. Tell me about yourself." You know, guys, it's natural for us to say, "Hey, what do you do for a living?" That's good. That's fine. Find out about each other. Share those things. "What are your hobbies? Oh, so you like, you know, basketball or football or soccer." Whatever, you find out about that. Ladies, the same thing. You know, "What are your interests? Tell me about your family, about your children, about what you do. Let's share these things."

So what that means, seeking to know one another maybe two little subpoints under number 3, this third subpoint, seek to know one another. We said greet one another warmly, engage in meaningful connection, thirdly, seek to know one another. To do that, you need to listen carefully. Make it, realize this is a spiritual exercise when I just listen to someone tell me about themselves. This is love being lived out because love, biblical love and the way God loves always involves knowledge. He knows us. In fact, that's a word he uses almost synonymous with love. "Of all the people, all the nations of the earth, you alone have I known," he says through the prophet and he means not just knowing, he knows everyone, no, he means love and knowledge. He's known and loved is almost synonymous.

So if you love someone, you want to know them so listen carefully, and also be willing to share openly yourself. If we're gonna really have relationships, we have to be willing to open up our own hearts so we have to be willing, and then having conversations that are

somewhat difficult. One of the ways that my wife and daughter challenge me and John, my son, is they like to sometimes talk about things like, have you had these like what are the kinds of things you guys do? You'll find those things online that are like asking questions, you know? I can't even think of a good example right now but it's stuff like what's your favorite color? What's your second favorite color? What's your third favorite? It's not quite that but it feels like that. I'm like, oh, I hate thinking about these things. You know, what makes you the happiest? Well, hey, that's actually good stuff. I mean, it's not fun to me, it's fun to them, but it's actually loving. When they do that they're saying, "We want to know you," and I should be saying, "I want to know you," and it's a weakness in me and it tends to be more kind of a guy thing, not universally, every person is different but a lot of times we aren't as into relationships as we need to be.

So actually then it's a spiritual gift of God to help you then really tune into someone who's telling you about something that you may not be that interested in. You're choosing to take interest in it because it's important to them. That's love and that is gonna create the opportunity for the free flow of truth later when necessary. So seek to know one another, and like I said, that also involves sharing. Be willing to open up. I think one of the most helpful things that I've been challenged with in the last couple of years in thinking about this is that the best way I can ask good questions to other people is be willing to admit my own weaknesses and failures. A lot of times you won't ask about something if you don't think you're doing that well in that area. This is when you get into deeper conversations like, you know, "Hey, how are you doing shepherding your family right now?" Well, sometimes we want to ask that when we've been doing really well. I can't wait to tell you how I'm doing. But that's not love. We should be willing to do it when we have to say, you know, "How are you doing with that? I've really been sort of dropped off lately. The last couple of weeks have not been good." Or I realize something that's real challenging that I've just been failing at. Even opening up like that, that creates the opportunity for someone else to open up. That's love. That's you expending cost to connect.

So seek to know one another. Greet one another warmly, engage in meaningful conversation, seek to know one another, fourthly, enjoy one another. Part of getting to know people is learning to just enjoy what they enjoy, enjoy them, enjoy the unique things about them. Thank God for them and learn to appreciate something new. You know, I didn't understand this. I remember years back Patty and I went to the mountains with Charlie and Thelma W. Those of you who have been here a long time remember Charlie, he died I guess almost six years ago now from cancer, but Thelma's been a precious part of our church since then and they were both a precious part of our church for a number of years. We went with Charlie to the mountains, Charlie used to turn wood which turning wood is like, you know, you're spinning it and you're sculpting bowls, you're making things out of it. It's amazing what he would do and watching him do it was phenomenal. I mean, watching him turn the stuff and it's the skill he had.

Well, one time we were up in the mountains together and we stopped at like a craft kind of place, we go in and somebody's talking about doing, making pottery, and like I was not interested. Pottery, I don't want to make pottery. You know, I mean, sure, walked through, fine, there's some cool, a coffee mug that was really neat and I bought a coffee

mug on that trip too, but Charlie stopped and he just was asking question after question after question to this person, just really engaging with them. Here was one craftsman talking to another craftsman about a craft he didn't know about who wanted to understand it, and I was challenged by the Lord, "You, Ty, you get too quickly over things like this. You should be more interested in that." What is it that really is happening when someone does this, the skill it takes to make something like that? I was blessed by that.

So enjoying one another, me enjoying Charlie made me enjoy that pottery a little more because I sat there and I had to sit there with him, we were in the same car, but sat there with him as this person explained how they did it. So enjoy one another. Fifthly, care for one another. As we enjoy one another, we need to care for one another. We need to ask the Lord to help us be more concerned. You know, when we see someone's not themselves that day, be willing to ask and to probe a little bit. "Hey, how are you really doing? You don't seem yourself today, is something troubling you? Something I can do to help?" We need to ask those kinds of things, care for another, ask questions, move toward need. When you see someone that appears to be in need, move toward them. That's what love does. Sometimes we in our seeking comfort, we can avoid that. We've got to repent of that. That's not like our Father would be.

So care for one another, and then sixthly, pray for one another. We should pray for our friends that we've talked to that Sunday. You know, make it a point during the week just to pray for that person, thanking God for them. If they shared some need, pray for them. Pray for their witness. But even I think we need to pray for one another connects you to them. Taking someone before the Lord makes you love them more and then it gives more investment. You've invested more in the relationship and so you have more at stake there, there's more natural connection.

One of the things I want to encourage you to do, something that I've started doing a little more recently is when someone has a need, we should feel free to stop and pray for it right then. You know, rather than say I'll pray for you and then often we do, sometimes we don't though, right? You see them the next time, oh, I didn't even pray for them. Well, one of the good things that you can do is, "Hey, let's just stop right now and step over here to the side and pray." And there could be a whole room going on, all kinds of stuff, but you can get over to the side and pray about this particular need. You know, of course with appropriate confidentiality and stuff and that kind of thing, sensitivity, but that's something I think we miss opportunities. So pray for one another.

Then seventhly, having done these things, greeting one another, engaging in meaningful conversation, seeking to really know one another, enjoying one another, caring for one another, praying for one another, seventh, we encourage one another and this is really the speaking part. You know, we encourage is another way to say speak the truth. There's a helpful article that Jess had shared with me this week and shared with the elders by a guy named Chuck G. who was talking about, he's a pastor/elder himself and he shared his own experience. He said he had come home from a missions trip and he had some symptoms of fever and stuff and so they quarantined him at the hospital and so that's kind of rough. You know, you don't know how long it's gonna last. I'm quarantined. People

can't come see me. You know, maybe a few people with all the mask and everything on and here I am isolated. Nobody wants to be around me. So but the friends that could come, one friend came and he said this friend came and he shared a message with him, really it was kind of like a mini-sermon about the sovereignty of God and God's goodness. And Chuck, a pastor himself, so another elder kind of sharing with him and he said, "You know, my friend missed the mark." He realized as he left, he appreciated his heart but he then talked to him about it later and then they talked about it as elders and he said, "You know, he missed the mark because he preached, it was a good sermon but it wasn't what I needed. I wasn't struggling with the lack of trusting the sovereignty of God, I was just struggling with being, I was impatient that I needed to get, there's so much to do." I mean, you could say it was related to the sovereignty of God but it was really more, "I was struggling with just being impatient. I've got too much to do." This kind of thing. And he said, "If my friend had asked me some more questions and found out where I was hurting, he could've addressed it more directly. If he had known me more."

So he gave three points to his little article that I'll add to the end of this. So this will be 10 points on this third point, subpoint. These are three separate little subpoints though. So what does it mean to encourage one another? So point 7 A, B, C. Encouragement is not making someone feel better. It's not merely that. In fact, the biblical word for encouragement that's used throughout the New Testament has nothing to do with feelings, it's more about, I mean the English word talks about putting courage inside of us, right? En-courage-ment. But the Greek word that's used most often is the word *parakaleo* which means "to call to one side; to come to one's side and to call to one's side." The idea is that someone is hurting and you go to their side, you meet them where they are, you get them to come along with you out of that. Well, what happened to his friend, his friend didn't go to where he was. He friend offered a shotgun approach blessing and he missed him. When I read that, I thought, man, I've missed people a lot through the years, I think, because as a pastor, it's like, "Okay, I think I know what you need." Okay a little mini-sermon, boom, boom, there it is. "Okay, take two more verses and call me in the morning."

So the reality, though, is if we really love someone, we want to find out where they are and what is it, and so his second point is a really good point. He says, "Encouragement is not merely making someone feel better, B, 7B, is ask good questions to really understand their particular struggle. Hey, how are you dealing with this? What's going through your mind? Tell me, really are you feeling, what are you feeling? What are you struggling with? Are you struggling with anything? Tell me about it."

And the third thing which takes this to another level, he says encouragement is not making someone feel better, ask good questions to understand their true struggle, thirdly, help them honestly with their struggle, and I think part of that is to actually let people, this is an interesting balance, let people know that it's safe to tell you what they're really thinking and feeling. It's not like you're gonna rule as a referee, "Hey, you're doubting the sovereignty of God," there's a flag. "Oh, you're out of line over here. Like, you know, you stepped on the sideline here." No. "Tell me what you're really struggling with." I think this is exactly what God is like. This is what the Psalms are all about. The Psalms are

basically sanctified, inspired men writing about their struggles with God and God put it in the canon for us to say, "This is how you come to Me. Come to Me honestly."

So how should we deal with each other? We should invite honest, open, "Hey, I'm really struggling with this," and it's okay. And basically we know we all know better but, "Tell me what you're really feeling," and then you meet that person and you sometimes you spend some time just hurting with them, acknowledging it, "Yeah, I could see how, man, that's gotta be tough." And then after you spend some time there, now you have the word to speak that's gonna really be edifying and uplifting and build them up. It may be a totally different thing and often it will be a totally different thing than what you thought what might needed to be there. You might have been going as you're thinking, "I've got a passage I want to share with Bill," and when you get there it's like, "No, that's not what the Lord wanted," and you may have to Google your phone to find the passage. So just wait and see what's going on and then offer that encouragement.

That's the practice of redemptive relationships. We work at creating an environment where real truth can be shared through the vehicle of real connectedness. This is the way God is. God really connects with us. He made us like him to be relational people and that's what we're called to do.

We'll have to do point 4, Lord willing, next Sunday.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the way that You have created us to be like You and that You have not left us after we rebelled against You in our sin, turned away from You, lived for our own purposes, our own glory, You didn't leave us in that. You sent Jesus to die on the cross to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, to make us Your children, to bring us into Your family, and then You gave us Your Spirit and Your word to keep changing us, and You put us and connected us to a body of believers where that, the laboratory where that can happen. Lord, help us be more committed. Help us see the high calling that You've given us and let us be about Your business. Father, we pray for those that are here who have not yet come to Christ. May they look to Jesus and His finished work shedding His blood to pay for the sins of those who could never pay themselves, rising from the dead, a mighty Savior. May they look to Him in true faith and follow Him. And Lord, may we all walk together, helping one another become more like our Father, more like our elder Brother, the Lord Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.