

Fingerprint — Community

October 6, 2013

Before I begin, I have some questions. I don't want you to raise your hand, just respond in your heart. Do you struggle with depression? Do you feel lonely? Do you have an addiction? It maybe it is an Internet addiction that is compromising your purity, a drug addiction or a food addiction. How do you get free?

This morning, we are talking about one of the powerful tools God uses in a Christian's life to transform his or her depression into joy, loneliness into family and addictions into an escape. What is it?

We are in a series called, Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique? We are looking at Faith's core values. It is important for us to refresh ourselves in Spirit Lake. As we add campuses in Spencer and wherever God may take us, it is important for us to clarify how Faith Church is different.

Last week, we looked at our first core value that we summed up in one word. *Bible*. God's Word is in the center of all we do. We believe the Bible is the Word of God and is without error. God gave us the Bible to know him and guide us in life. We believe all of the Bible is important. We place an especially high value on the teaching of God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is profitable for teaching." We believe that. The key ideas we learned last week about the Bible are:

1. The people of God are created by the Word of God. Teaching God's Word is how God gathers a people to himself.

2. The people of God are sustained by the Word of God. As Christians, to walk with God, we need to devote ourselves to living under the preached for of God. We are to read the Word of God in our own times of personal worship and preach it to ourselves. God makes us more like Christ and guides us through life by reading and meditating on the Bible.

This morning we come to our next core value. It is also summed up in one word. *Community*. In Faith Church, we value relationships. This is why we eat together after church, at least once a month. This is why we have a coffee bar. It is not because we love coffee. It is because we want you to hang out and build community. This is why the women have Sit n' Sip Tuesday mornings. It is biblical for them to enjoy time in community together. This is why we have Life Groups where people build deep relationships and do life together. This is why the guys play football after church. It is extremely important for us to live in community, to do life together.

Why is community such a high value? When you think about it, most of the train wrecks in the Christian life come when Christians ignore what the Bible says about living in community. No Christian is a lone ranger. God intentionally created us incomplete. He created us to need one another to survive and thrive in following Jesus. When Christians ignore biblical community, they face depression, loneliness and find themselves caught in addictions with no one to help them escape.

Unfortunately, most churches do not understand the importance of biblical community. They do not offer it. At Faith, we want to be different. Let's read our teaching point and dive in to our study.

COMMUNITY — We believe authentic relationships that serve one another honor Christ in the life of the church.

There are two key words in this statement I want you to circle. They are *authentic* and *serve*. We value being authentic with one another and serving one another.

Authentic relationships honor Christ in the life of the church.

As many of you know, I grew up in New Jersey, just outside of New York City. Occasionally people asked how the Midwest is different from the East Coast. One of the ways the East Coast is different is the people there are known for being very direct. If someone has a problem with you, they get about six inches away from your face, and in a very animated way, tell you about it. When you are done working it out, you go out to coffee. When I moved to the Midwest, I discovered something called *Midwestern-nice*. This means that if someone has a problem with you, he or she tells everybody else about it but you. When you ask if there is a problem between the two of you, he or she puts on a plastic smile that looks like it's from a Barbie doll. He or she tells you everything is fine. No worries. No problems. You know that person is lying through his or her teeth. Does anybody know what I am talking about? That Midwestern plastic smile may be culturally acceptable but it is unbiblical. A fake face is not the way Christians do community in the church.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, Ephesians 4:15 (ESV)

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Ephesians 4:25 (ESV)

The Bible tells us that when we have questions or concerns about a brother or sister in Christ, or if we have questions about church leadership, we are to come to them in love and talk about it. Maybe there is something we don't understand? Maybe there is something they misunderstood? Unless Christians in a church can be authentic with one another, the church will not grow in Christ. I know I am talking to Midwesterners. I am stroking the duck's feathers in the wrong direction. Look at what Ephesians 4 tells us to do.

Why are we committed to authentic relationships?

1. Inauthenticity keeps the entire body from growing. Midwestern nice, where we stuff our feelings or we walk away and quietly not participate doesn't just affect us, it affects the entire church body. Ephesians 4:15 says we are all members of one another. The plastic smile doesn't hide it. Our frustrations will come out in other ways that will infect the entire church. Our inauthenticity will keep the entire body from growing. The Midwestern-nice approach of smiling while we lie through our teeth affects others. It hurts the entire church's growth in Christ-like character.

2. Inauthenticity is living a lie. Paul says Christians that refuse to speak the truth, in love, are living in falsehood. They are living a lie. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is be real and tell someone how you feel about something. It takes courage. Nobody likes confrontation. It is a risk. You may be rejected.

You may hurt someone. The problem is that unless we are authentic with one another we cannot grow. We can't clear up misunderstandings. We are living a lie as we smile on the outside while we growl on the inside.

3. Inauthenticity is unloving. I appreciate friends who love me enough to ask me tough questions on my preaching and leadership then offer me feedback because they care. A few years ago, we did a series called Solomon on Sex. I overdid my promotion and said it was such a hot series that it would melt the snow off the roof all winter long. Incidentally, that was the warmest winter in the last six years but I don't think it had much to do with my preaching.

I will admit that my promotion was a little over-the-top. People reacted two ways. Some left the church before the series started in fear of what might be said. When I realized they weren't attending and heard rumors why, I called them. Most of them told me they were busy with family and friends but they would return. They didn't. It was Midwestern-nice to them. To me, it was lying to my face and not allowing me to talk about their concerns.

Others came into my office, told me about their fears and let me talk with them. That wasn't easy on their part. It took courage. Who do you think I felt loved by? Whom did I grow in my love for? People who love me enough to talk with me hold a special spot in my heart. The most unloving thing is to not care enough to say something to someone and just walk away. I think each one of us feels the same way.

Faith Church is not a place where we walk away. In Christian love and candor, we talk it out. That is the only way we will grow. We value authentic relationships.

A number of the Life Groups at Faith Church are known for their brutal authenticity. I love this. That is the way we do life around here. There are guys' groups that are hardcore honest. They hold one another accountable on Internet purity. There are guys that are holding another accountable financially and for loving his wife. Life Groups visit people in the hospital when they are sick. They help one another financially, just like family, in tough financial times.

I am thankful to say this kind of loving authenticity is not just in a few pockets but it is part of the staff and the board. I like the brutal honesty at Faith. We are going to hold that value high on every campus. Authentic community is what God uses to help us grow up into Jesus. By way of application, if God is convicting you that you are living an inauthentic way with a plastic smile, God is calling you to repent.

Serving one another honors Christ in the life of the church.

The other key word is *serve*.

When a church is small, it is like a family. Everyone has a role to play. As a church gets larger, there are a growing number of spectators. Going to church becomes like attending a football game. There are a small number of professionals that work really hard while the rest of us eat popcorn and peanuts while we cheer from the pews. Spectators live in the stands; they don't expect to step on the field. We are at this size. Many of us come to church thinking it is a

football game, not a family. We have a growing number of spectators and less on-the-field players. This is very dangerous. What I am about to say is very important. If you live as a church spectator, you will cap your growth in Christ. You will handicap the growth of the rest of the body. The church is different from every other institution. There are no spectators. It is an all-hands-on-deck institution. Let me show you why.

God created us to fit together.

This morning, each of you received a Lego piece. Could you hold that up? There are two things I want you to notice about Legos.



- 1. Legos are designed to be different.** Some are big; others are small. Some are red; others are blue. Some are short and square; others are long and skinny. Legos are designed to be different.
- 2. Legos are created to connect.** The top and bottom of every Lego piece is created to connect with another Lego piece. It is in that connecting with others that Lego pieces find their purpose. When Legos connect, they become a fire truck, car, boat or plane. Legos are created to connect with other Legos. If they don't do that, what is their purpose in life?

According to the Bible, each of us is created by God like a Lego. He designed us to be different. He created us to connect with others by serving them. It is only when we connect with others by serving that we come together in the church and fulfill our purposes.

The Bible teaches this in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 (ESV)

One of the problems in the Corinthian church was a spectator mindset. Those who weren't über-gifted began to think they weren't important at church. They arrived late. They left early. They came to watch the über-gifted people sing and speak in tongues. They looked at church like it was a spectator sport, like football. Paul told them they had the wrong picture. The church is not a show for everyone to watch the gifted. It is a body where everyone has a part to play.

God gives every Christian natural and spiritual gifts to play a role in the church body. Just like Legos, God created each one of us to connect with others by serving them in the church body. *This is not just an illustration. This is actually the way it is. Each one of us a part of this church body.* Nobody is here

as extra baggage. Nobody is here to be a spectator. I want to draw out five applications from this text.

1. Everyone has a part to play in the body. If Faith is your church home, you are needed. God shaped you just the way he wants you to be to serve others in this body. You may look at others who serve, compare yourself, and feel like you aren't needed. You may look at others and be discouraged because you can't do what they do. That is called gift-envy. Don't go there. That doesn't mean you don't have a part to play in the body. God says everyone in the body has a part to play. To illustrate, would anyone like to volunteer to give up an unneeded body part this morning? We can cut it off in the church kitchen. The knives in our church kitchen are dull but we can make it work. (pause) What? No takers? Everybody wants to keep his or her own body parts. Apparently every part of your body is needed, just like every part of the church body is needed.

Why do we think parts of the church body are expendable? It may be because we have a behind-the-scene gift that serves and doesn't get noticed. This morning, I want to introduce you to someone who has served me behind the scenes for the last 45 years. He has a stinky job. Nobody sees him but if it wasn't for him, my entire body would be a wreck. Let me introduce you to my foot. My foot is a behind-the-scenes person. He is always in a stinky shoe. Nobody sees my foot but without him, the rest of the body would fall apart. What happens if one day the foot wakes up and thinks he isn't an important part of the



body. Nobody will miss him; after all, nobody sees him. He decides he is jealous of the eye. My eye is front and center all of the time. The foot decides just to stop showing up for body functions. What happens? If the foot goes out of commission, the entire body is affected.

One thing that is happening at Faith Church is our faithfulness index is going down. That means the total number of people involved in Faith Church is increasing but the number of people in the weekend worship service is increasing only slightly. People are gone more weekends each month. They want to be involved serving in the church body less. When they come, they just want to be a spectator. That isn't the way God designed the church. It is not a football game to watch. It is a body where everyone has a role to play, and when parts of the body are out of commission, the entire body is affected.

2. God gave us the gifts he wanted us to have. This is important. God is sovereign. God doesn't make mistakes. God made you. God saved you. God gave you the natural and spiritual gifts he sovereignly wanted you to have to serve others. This means if we look around the room, in theory, if we put all our Lego pieces together, we would have all the pieces needed to make a healthy functioning body right in this room. God intentionally made us different. He also distributed all the gifts needed for this church to function by spreading them among all the members so everyone is necessary. God shaped each one of us to serve others. Each one of us needs one another. God created you and gifted you to be part of this body. God gave you the gifts he wanted you to have and they are the gifts he knows this church needs.. He didn't make a mistake when

he created you the way you are. When we work together, we are a healthy body, unless some people refuse to participate. Then we are a handicapped body. Is Faith Church a handicapped body because you are missing?



I ran across a photo of a Lego artist in Manhattan named Nathan Sawaya. He has a Lego creation that makes my point. We are all sovereignly gifted by God to come together into a healthy body, unless some people refuse to participate, like this guy's arm. When that happens, the whole body is handicapped.

3. The parts of the body that look weaker are indispensable. The problem with people who have front and center gifts is it is easy for them to become prideful. I love the wisdom of God. *God composed the body so that there would be greater honor given to the parts that lack it so there would be no divisions in the body.* It is the behind-the-scenes people, with the ordinary gifts, that are the most essential for the health of the church. It is the ushers, the greeters, the youth group leaders, the AWANA leaders, the women who bring the sick a meal. It is those who work in the nursery. It is the people who simply invite people over for lunch that are the most important parts of the church body, not the up-front people. That is backward compared to the way we think about it, but it is true! Ordinary people with ordinary gifts are the most essential parts of the body.

I want to applaud those of you who serve behind-the-scenes in the kitchen, the nursery, by acting as greeters, and making phone calls of encouragement. You are the heroes around here.

4. We succeed and fail together. If one part of the body is hurting, everyone in the body hurts. If one part of the body succeeds, we celebrate together. In the church, we are connected.

Recently, a friend of mine fell and broke his shoulder and ribs. Even though the injury was only in one part of his body, his entire body is hurting. The same is true for the church body. We succeed and fail together. When some of us don't serve, all of us hurt. When others serve, all of us are blessed.

This morning, some of us need to reframe our thinking. Salvation is an isolated event, but we are saved into a body. Not using our gifts to serve others in the body handicaps the entire body.

Everyone grows in Christ when we play our roles in the body of Christ.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV)

The spiritual health of the church is dependent on each part of the body working so the body builds itself up in Christ. When the heart is healthy, the rest of the body is strong. When the intestines are working, the rest of the body gets nutrition. When all parts of the church body are working properly, the entire church builds itself up. The entire church matures in Christ when everyone in the body uses his or her God-given gifts.

As I thought about this, my favorite part is not the downside of not connecting but the upside of everyone serving in the church. When we use our gifts, we build others up in Christ. We go to bed knowing there are people built up in Christ because of the simple ways we served. There are husbands and wives together, because we used the simple gift of hospitality to invite a new couple out to lunch. There are kids that are following Jesus because someone used his or her simple gift of playing with kids on Wednesday night at youth group. Knowing that God promises to use our ordinary gifts to grow others in Christ, that fires me up to serve. I hope it fires you up! What could be better than knowing God uses our ordinary serving to rescue lives and make an eternal difference?

Serving brings glory to God.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10–11 (ESV)

At the end of the day, all of us want to put a smile on the face of God. We want to glorify God with our lives. Unfortunately, we often limit our understanding of living to glorify God to our personal obedience. Did I obey the Ten Commandments? Did I help an old lady across the street? Did I use kind words around my family? Did I do my Bible reading and pray? While it is true God calls us to glorify him in our private lives, one of the best ways we bring glory to God's name is by serving others.

Think about how Jesus brought glory to God the Father. Jesus came as a servant. Everything about his life was about serving us and saving us. One of the great pieces of news is that Jesus saved us so completely that we are free to not focus on obeying the law to glorify God. We are free to glorify God by serving others in Christ's name.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

What more could we ask for than for God's name to be made famous through our lives? It all begins by choosing to serve others in the body.

That is the vision of Faith Church. Faith Church is a place where everyone is using their gifts to serve one another, and in doing so, we build one another up in Christ. There are no spectators. We are not at a football game. We are all Legos designed to be different but created to connect with one another by serving with our God-given gifts. We are committed to all of our campuses being known for their serving where everyone is involved.

I know what some of you are thinking. "This isn't for me. This message is for somebody else. I have my excuses."

What are your excuses?

1. I already served my time. I often hear this from the retired. When I hear that, it makes me think of church like a prison. The church is not a prison we serve in, it is a privilege to serve. It is an honor to be used by God to bring glory to his name by building others up in the body.

As far as I can tell, I don't see retirement in the Bible. It is a privilege to serve, and we get to serve all the way to the end. As we get older, we may change the way we serve. We may change the pace at which we serve, but we don't stop serving and become narcissistic, focusing just on ourselves.

2. I am don't know enough to serve. I hear this from those new in church. They are worried they don't know enough to serve. The truth is that the best way to learn to serve is to plug in and serve. It may be a simple job like greeting or working at the Gathering Grounds coffee bar. It may be working with kids or plugging in at the ladies Sit n' Sip on Tuesday. There is a principle called, "need to know, need to grow." This means that you just jump in and when you run across something you don't understand, it causes us to grow. That is the way things work in the church.

3. I am too busy to serve. This is probably the most common excuse I hear. If you are too busy to serve others in the body, you are too busy. One of the reasons people are too busy is because you are worshipping another god. An idol isn't just something carved out of a piece of rock or a stick. An idol is anything we pursue to bring meaning and significance to our life more than God. Your job may be your idol. Sports may be your idol. School may be your idol. Family may be your idol. Whatever you make so important that it keeps you from playing your part in the body is your idol.

Think of the consequences of not serving. If you are too busy to serve, you are committing yourselves to spiritual immaturity and depriving others of growth. If you are too busy to serve, the entire body is handicapped without you.

If you are too busy to serve, you are robbing God from the glory he deserves from the gifts he gave you. If you think your serving is low-profile and unimportant, remember God ordered the body so it is the behind-the-scenes gifts that are the most essential for the health of the body.

4. I just don't want to get involved. To those who just want to stay on the sidelines, I want you to go back to what we learned. *We are saved by faith but we are saved into a body.* My spiritual health and the health of others is dependent upon me using my gifts, especially an ordinary gift.

How should I respond?

The best way to respond is simply one word, repent. Repenting doesn't mean just feeling bad about something; it means taking the actions necessary to change. If this morning you are on the sidelines, I want to challenge you in the following areas:

1. Serve relationally. Life Groups are where we do life together and have deep authentic relationships. What I love about Life Groups is the healthiest ones have the highest levels of authenticity. Some of you don't want to be involved in Life Groups because you don't feel you get anything out of them. When was a Life Group about what you get out of it? A Life Group is what you bring to it. It is about serving others in the group relationally and supporting them in life.

2. Serve practically. God doesn't make a part of the body that is useless. Each part, that means you, has a purpose. We are committed to helping you find a place of service that fits you. In your bulletin is a blue card with a list of places to serve. Fill that out and I will have someone from Pastor Dave's team contact you

and get you plugged in. This will be especially important as the calendar turns over to 2014 and we open the Spencer campus. That will be an all-hands-on-deck time for the body. We will need everyone to serve to have both campuses running on day one.

3. Improve your ability to serve. Dan Foote and Deb Lenertz are teaching a class during the Faith University hour called SHAPE. It is designed to help each of us understand how God wired us to serve others. It is a great class. Take it this next semester if you haven't already.

Conclusion

Turn to the front of your bulletin and let's read our second core value together.

COMMUNITY — We believe authentic relationships that serve one another honor Christ in the life of the church.

In Faith Church, we value community. It is the tool God uses to turn our depression into joy, our loneliness into family and our addictions into freedom.



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