

Listen to the words of this song and see if you recognize them, if you do raise your hand: "Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got; Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always you came; You want to be where you can see, our troubles are all the same; you want to be where everybody knows your name." If you recognize that song, raise your hand.

That's the theme song from a popular television show back in the 80's that centered around a group of people who lived in Boston and the show emanated from a bar. Let's see those hands again.

Now as much as I like that show, I don't think it was an accurate description of what a bar truly is. I've never been one to frequent a bar, but I don't think most bars have that warm, cozy atmosphere depicted on the show. But wouldn't be great if there was such a place...a place where you could go where you felt welcomed and accepted. A place where everybody knew your name and was always glad you were there. A place that genuinely cared for you.

That's what we want. We want to know that folks care about us. Years ago, when former speaker of the house Sam Rayburn heard he had terminal cancer, he shocked everyone when he announced he was going back to his small town in Bonham, Texas. People said to him: "They have got the finest facilities in Washington, D. C. Why go back to that little town?" Rayburn said, "Because in Bonham, Texas, they know if you're sick, and they care when you die."

There is something within us that desires that type of belonging, that type of fellowship. A longing for belonging you could say. We want to know others and be known by others, to love and to be loved. And we need to belong to that type of community.

There's a book out there that really hits home with this. It's titled, *Making Room for Life – Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships*, by Randy Frazee.

In the book, He points out that when God said, "It's not good for man to be alone," that was more than a foundation for marriage." God was underscoring our basic need for fellowship with other people. God didn't make us to be hermits, but instead we were created to be involved with other people. And he stresses that we need that.

To prove it, Frazee cites studies from the American Institute of Stress that show a sense of community is essential not only for a meaningful life but for good health. For example research was conducted on 232 patients who had undergone cardiac surgery. Of those patients, 21 died within six

months. Two significant mortality predictors that emerged from that study were “a lack of participation in social or community groups and the absence of strength and comfort from religion.” You see, being in church is healthy for you. For some of you, it’s also where you get your Sunday nap in!

There was a research report recently that said being part of a church is important to your health. Those who went to church lived longer than those who don’t. Randy Frazee suggest that this is because of our need for fellowship. In his book he goes on to cite a report indicating that a person’s involvement in activities that involve having relationships with other people can predict cardiac mortality as strongly as elevated cholesterol levels can. Their studies show that social isolation contributes to illness and death just as much and if not more than smoking does. Frazee says, “So if you feel you must smoke, for goodness sake, don’t do it alone!”

Loneliness can be hazardous to your health. ***Maybe that’s why Mother Theresa once said, “The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer. It’s the feeling of being uncared for, unwanted-of being deserted and alone.”*** And interestingly enough, there was a study done a while back and it determined that the groups that were the most lonely was first, college students, second senior citizens, and third divorcees. Do you know who makes up a large part of our community in Starkville?

People not only desire, but they desperately need that loving fellowship, and the church is often missing a wonderful opportunity to reach out to these people, an opportunity to fill the void of loneliness with the love of Christ and the type of fellowship that only the church can offer. So what I want to do this morning, is I want us to get to know the church as a place of dynamic fellowship, a place where everybody knows your name and they are always glad you came. A place where you can belong to this morning.

Now in the text that was read to you earlier, you got a glimpse of the dynamic fellowship that the early church experienced. This is the type of fellowship I desire for this church, so let’s look at what it is that enabled this group of Christians to have such a dynamic fellowship, and then let’s experience it ourselves. The first thing that enabled this group, which numbers in the thousands, to experience this type of fellowship was that they were a united church. Look at vs. **32**, it says that **they were all of one heart and mind**. These people shared a common bond that held them together.

Now we can be bonded with other people on just about anything. We form bonds with people who share the same hobbies as we do, the same occupation, or the same political views. We can have bonds based off of family relations; we can share a bond that is centered on our love for the

same sports team. Now I'm not sure if you have picked up on this yet or not, but I am somewhat of a University of Kentucky fan, and a while back, we went to Wal-mart and I was wearing a blue UK shirt, I had on my UK watch, and I think I was even wearing my UK ball-cap. While in line, a lady looked at me and asked, "Are you a Kentucky fan?" Really, What gave it away. (Here's your sign!) But she said she was from Lexington, Kentucky and I started to talk a bit about next years UK basketball season, but after about a minute of my ranting you could tell she didn't really care. I find that a lot. We had a bond, but not much was there.

But even if someone does care, that bond is a shallow bond at best. I don't want to go and tell my most inner secrets to a person who is my friend because we like the same sports team. When a tragedy happens in my life, I want someone there who shares more with me than just the same taste in music. I want a person who knows what it means to follow Christ.

As a Christian, we have a bond that can unite us despite how different we may be. This past Sunday I got to get up on stage and fellowship with men who were very different from me. They were of different color, they were from a different denomination, they didn't like NASCAR, but we had a deep fellowship, why? Because we had a uniting bond that was greater than anything that could divide us.

We were of one heart and one mind. You see, as Christians we share the same experience. We know what it means to be forgiven of our past, have purpose for today, and hope for tomorrow because of what Christ has done for us. We share the same basic Christian morality and values, we have the same goal and mission in life, and we are united in our love for the One who has saved and delivered us and who lives within us. And that is an eternal bond. That bond that unites us gives us the one heart and the one mind, and it is greater than anything that can divide us. ***One God, One Faith, One Baptism, one dynamic fellowship.***

The next thing I want you to see about this early church is that it was a harmonious church. They were of one heart and one mind, they got along, and that harmony was a witness to those around them. Remember, Jesus said it was by the love that you showed to each other that others would know that Jesus is the Christ.

Now even though we have so much in common as Christians, this harmony doesn't come easy. We are so different in so many ways, so how can we have this harmony within the church? Well, I want to give you a two things to do to help promote harmony within the church, the first is this: ***Make allowances for the faults of others.*** **Ephesians 4:2 in the Living bible** reads, "**Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance**

for each other's faults because of your love." In the church, there will be people who will do things that will irk you. Perhaps it's a member who is rude and interrupts you all the time. Perhaps it's a member who comes to church and chews gum while they are singing. At the first church I served, there was a man who sat in the front row (well, I say front row it was the first row with people in it which was actually about 5 rows back), but he would do 2 things during every service, and I could count on it. First, he would pull out his nail clippers and clip his nails. He always kept his eyes on me and I could tell he was listening, but he just clipped his nails. The second thing was that he would do that sucking noise with his teeth (make sound), like something was stuck there. You know how hard it is to preach when someone is going (make sound). But you learn to overlook things like that.

And if we are going to be a harmonious church we need to overlook the little things that others may do that get on our nerves. Maybe it's a person who sings off key, or a preacher who tends to preach just a little bit too long, but the bible says bear with each other in love. Love enables us to overlook these things. Just as in marriage, a woman can overlook her husband's faults, so in love shall we do the same.

The second thing to promote this harmony is for us to stay focused on our mission. When everybody has the same goal in mind and is busy working toward that goal, then harmony is not really a problem. Now if we know why we exist and where we are going, then we will be able to see the real needs we should address and we won't bicker over minor issues. As you read this text, you see that this church was a witnessing church, both in word and deed. They had a purpose and that was to spread the kingdom of God. And not persecution, and not even differences were going to stop that from happening, and God blessed their work. That's why it is so important to know our purpose as a church, and then to be busy fulfilling that purpose. Rick Warren once said, "If you are busy rowing the boat, then you won't be able to rock it."

Finally, I want you to see that this was a church that genuinely cared for each other. Acts 4:34-35 says "There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." This was a group of people, who were united in their love for Jesus Christ that enabled them to truly love one another. They were a family.

I like that title, the church is a family. The church is not an organization that has no concern for its members. The church is a family

where each child is precious and valuable. And just like in an ideal family, each person is loved, treasured, and cared for.

You know, this world can be a cold place; you are treated like a number. But the church is a place that counter acts that coldness. As the body of Christ, we are all joined together, so what one person feels we all feel. So when one member of the body hurts we all hurt, when one rejoices, we all rejoice. [Dr. David Jeremiah once said that God never intended for any of His children to laugh or cry alone.](#)

And over the years, many of you in this church have learned to laugh and cry together.. I know many of you have been touched in the past when you went through a tragedy and the church was there to support you. But in each of those tragedies and events, this church cared for one another. [\(tell story of George and Kay caring for Jack and Charlotte\)](#)

The past week I was driving back home on Wednesday night getting things ready for our bible study there at our house (Tell Story of Billy Joe lending his car, and Johnny getting it fixed.)

That is the fellowship of the church in action, where members care for one another. And maybe you have experienced that. Maybe it was with a gentle word, or perhaps the church provided a meal for you, or maybe even sent you a get well card that really uplifted you. And when you got those things, it eased your pain and you knew the love of Christ because of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Romans 13:8 says, "**Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another**" and there are some signs of love you just can't pay back. I can't pay back all the love my parents have shown to me, I can't even begin to pay back all the love that God has shown me, and I will always be indebted to the church for the love, the prayers, and the hope it has offered to me. We are the body of Christ. We are the family of God.

Look around you this morning. Take a moment, You have my permission to look around for a moment. Look at all these people. Because God loves you, he has brought these people into you life. They belong to you and you belong to them. And you need each other. There was a song a while back that went, "We all need somebody to lean on." And God made us in such a way where we need each other, and He gave us the church to meet that need. A place where people really cared about one another. And if you don't have a church to call home, I want to invite you into our fellowship this morning. Welcome home.