

Back to Church Sunday

Week 3: Together We Grow Stronger

I want to thank you all for being here today as we *continue our series* **Together**.
We are drawing from lessons in the book of Ephesians.

We've talked about the church in Ephesus as a group of believers who faced similar challenges the church faces today. Like us, they were a group of people living in a fast-paced city, surrounded by powerful religions and various philosophies with a multicultural mix of Jews and Gentiles trying to figure out how to live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

And if you have not been with us over the last couple weeks, we've explored the concepts of *Together We Find Peace* and *Together We Experience Love*.

Today we're going to explore the truth that **Together We Grow Stronger**.

I want you to know that, this is a word speaking directly to the body of Christ.

Thinking and studying on this series reminded me of a story I read, of a man who went to visit an asylum for the criminally insane. Once inside he was amazed and a bit surprised to find that there were only three guards caring for over a hundred inmates. Intrigued and filled with curiosity, he posed a question to one of the guards saying, "Aren't you afraid that the inmates will unite, overcome you, and escape?" The guard looks up at the man and simply says "Lunatics never unite."

Believers should unite. Please note I am not speaking in this instance of race, culture, those who refuse to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, but I am speaking of **believers**. Those who have been called and answered, those who serve in the body of Christ, and those who have chose and believe He is the Risen Savior. When we as believers refuse or fail to operate in unity, is the moment our power is displaced. We have it, but cannot seem to locate it. We possess power, but seemingly have difficulty gaining access to it in-order-to activate it when our power is displaced due to the lack of unity. The church by its very nature is a place where we come together to fuel our faith, live and learn, worship and grow **together** with the intention to impact the entire world **together**.

I love it how the scripture reads; “How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers (believers) live together in harmony! For harmony (which is unity) is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron’s head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe.”

Understand the anointing is regarded as a means of health and comfort, as a token of honor, and a symbol of consecration. Thus in the scripture it compares harmony, unity, brotherly love with the anointing of oil. The anointing of oil was not poured over just any man, but was set aside for the high priest alone. There is also significance why it states that the oil ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe, which symbolizes how unity extends power and bless all who are beneath its influence.

Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting. (Psalms 133:1-3 NLT)

The Bible says that the Lord commands His blessing on the church and that **God’s blessings come upon the people of God whom are united.**

Exploring the truth that **Together We Grow Stronger**, we must embrace the trust that **uniformity is not equal to unity.**

UNIFORMITY IS NOT EQUAL TO UNITY:

Notice that each of the words, unity and uniformity begin with **UNI**. When we have **u·ni·ty - we are then in a state of being united or joined as a whole.**

But when we have **u·ni·form·i·ty - we look the part as if we have unity but are not unified.**

But God displayed the unity He desired for us to have through the oneness of the Trinity. This is the Devine relationship between the father the son and holy spirit. When we reflect on the nature of the Holy Trinity, we see the greatest relationship ever shown. It is a loving, self-giving unity of three Divine Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The amazing thing here is that God modeled the exact relationship he called for us to have with one another.

John 17:11 New Living Translation (NLT)
(Jesus Prays for All Believers). Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

John 17:22-23 New Living Translation (NLT)

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.” I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

Where there is division in the body, the witness of Christ is blocked and it hinders God’s glory from being revealed to the world.

The church will never be a perfect place because it will always be made of imperfect people. We can acknowledge this. But we don’t want to use it as an excuse or settle for habits or practices that we know fall short of God’s best for us. God calls us to so much more. And He wants to carry us to fullness in Christ. He wants to strengthen and use us **as His body here on earth.** He wants us to experience the joy of being one body, healthy and growing and full of love.

Ephesians 4:3-6 New Living Translation (NLT)

3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. **4** For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

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There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

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one God and Father of all,
who is over all, in all, and living through all.

STRENGTH IN THE DIFFERENCE:

Sometimes our independent spirits and thoughts get the best of us. We don’t want to belong to others (Acts, “All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had” (Acts 2:44, NLT). Often we do not want to share, but we’d rather do our own thing. **But** when all the parts are working together as one, the body functions smoothly and correctly and the body becomes stronger. It matures and is able to live out the things it was made for.

Consider This:

I have never known flour to taste good alone. Maybe you love the taste of vegetable oil from a table spoon, or love drinking raw eggs. None of these taste good alone.

Although when we place these ingredients inside a bowl and mix them together with other ingredients gives opportunity to a delicious cake. All the ingredients have a different function, but are working together for one purpose.

Cake ingredients (None of them taste good alone)

1. The main **function of the flour** is to build structure. When the proteins found in **flour** are hydrated, they interact with each other forming what is known as gluten. As dough or batter containing wheat **flour** is worked, an elastic network is developed.
2. The main **function** of liquid fats (oils) is to add richness and tenderness. And because they do not solidify (**they do not become hard**) when cooled they assist the creation of **baked** goods that are moist and more tender.
3. **Eggs** act as the glue (Emulsifier) while assisting the structure and stability. An Emulsifier prevents separation and aids the extending shelf life of a product.

The thing to understand is that the cake is the goal, and although the ingredients are all different they bring all the necessary gifting(s) that allow the cake to be baked with the confidence it rise.

If we want to extend the kingdom of God, we must come together with all our differences allowing God to take us through the process of emulsification. He is the ingredient that must be added to the differences, thus doing a new thing though us when we are brought together in Him.

Ephesians 4:16 NLT

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

(Remember He wants to strengthen and use us as His body here on earth.)

1 Corinthians 12:20-25 - NLT

20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. **21** The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. **23** And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, **24** while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. **25** This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.

We must get to the point as believers that all the members of the body care for each other in the strength of our differences. Here at Grace I cannot see the Connection Ministry saying to the Guest Services Ministry I don't need you, or the Family Life Ministry saying to the Equipping Ministry I don't need you. Better yet, like the scripture there are some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important but are actually the most necessary.

I call these the individual ministries of you and I. We cannot begin to look at each other or within ourselves and feeling as though we do not make an impact in the body. What God has placed in you is very unique. You cannot allow the enemy to have you thinking you are insignificant to the body of believers. Because when you isolate yourself and hold back the entire body loses the opportunity to unify at the highest level. I've already shared that God's blessings come upon the people of God whom are united. So to understand there's strength in the difference is also understanding there is power in agreement.

Matthew 18:19 New International Version (NIV)

19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.)

Paul in Ephesians four is basically saying to the body of believers, Grow up!

Ephesians 4:14-16 - NLT

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. **15** Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. **16** He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Speaking of Growth...

GROWTH REQUIRES CHANGE:

People understand the concept of growth in the physical....Although hate change in both mentally and physically.

Many problems result when the family of God fail to grow. A congregation matures as individual members mature. That maturity brings about growth, which produces some thing new and births change.

Paul spends much of the rest of Ephesians instructing and reminding the church at Ephesus that as believers, their behaviors and actions should look different from the world around them. He went on to talk about specific behaviors that need to change such as anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, etc. Instead, he encourages believers

to be kind, compassionate, forgiving, and thankful. But in-order for that to happen we must commit to the habits that bring change and trust the mystery of the Holy Spirit in us that gives us the courage and the power to change. Understand that it is in Christ where we obtain growth and the strength to change.

It's amazing that we struggle with change, because when we come to Christ we are continually changed and made into a new creature. His Grace changes us, his spirit transforms us when we encounter Him. God responds to our needs without reference to the merit, and He changes us. I could go on and on because **In Christ: We Are a New Creation, We Have Been Raised** (raised with Christ, setting our hearts on things above), **We Have Been Crucified** (crucified with Christ and we no longer live, but Christ lives in us), **We Have Been Born Again, and We Have Been Set Free from Sin.** None of that happened without the source of our strength, which is Jesus Christ. Understand **Growth Requires Change and if you want to change you must commit to growth.**

God will bring about meaningful growth and lasting change in our lives, in our church, and in our world because together we grow stronger.

Ephesians 4:21-25 NLT

21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,

22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. **23** Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. **24** Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.