

One Anothering, Part 4

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- [0 : 0 0] With the kids, so we're going to wait. Brooke Seekins is going to share her ministry in Malawi here in just a moment.! Instead of dismissing the kids right now, we're going to give an opportunity for the kids to listen to Brooke share about what's going on Malawi.
- There's pictures and all kinds of cool stuff, so I think it should be interesting to everybody. But after she's finished, I'll come up and I'll do the boring part. No, I'm just kidding.
- It's actually, I'll try to keep it exciting. But then we'll dismiss the kids to their children's class after that. So, Brooke, come up.
- And many of you already know Brooke. She was here about two years ago. She's been a long time, or we've been a long time supporter of her ministry. I'm not sure how long that's been. She works through Grace Ministries International and has been in Africa for how long?
- 24 years almost. Four years, and in Malawi, what, four? No, since 2018. Oh, okay. It's been that long. Okay. So, in Malawi that long. Before that, it was? Tanzania.
- [1 : 0 8] Tanzania. And so, Brooke, she, I don't know how long, because I know you guys moved around, but her father is pastor in Tip City, a church that's kind of like a sister church.
- Good friends with our church over in Tip City. And so, I've just known you for, I don't know. Since you started your job. Since I started, yeah. Here.
- But thanks for coming and sharing. And she's going to share her ministry and what's going on in Malawi. Thank you very much. All right. Everybody can see the screen, right? Pretty much. Yeah, okay.
- Let me move this just a little bit. Okay. So, it's good to be back. And good to see you guys again. And I have only lived in Malawi since I've been a missionary, which means I haven't really, I mean, in Ohio.
- Sorry. Not Malawi. Wrong country. My folks moved here about the same time I moved to Africa. And so, you've got to have a home base where you get a driver's license and pay taxes. But, yeah.
- [2 : 0 6] So, I'm a citizen of Ohio only when I come back from the mission field. So, sorry. I grew up mostly in South Dakota. That's why I talk funny like this. So, yeah. But, yeah.
- It's good to be back. And like you said, I've been a missionary with GMI since 2001. And so, it's definitely my career. And I've been in Malawi since 2018.
- And I come back about every two years. Sometimes I go to the West Coast. This time I've been more East Coast. And I'm at the end of my six months that I usually come back. And so, I will be heading back to Malawi on June 11th.
- And so, you guys being close to home, it's handy to come over and just speak on Sunday. Last week, I was in Alabama. And before that, New York. So, that means you can't do your normal preparation to pack.
- But you guys are close enough that I like putting you kind of toward the end so I can keep packing. For those of you who have never been to Africa, which I'm guessing is 99% of you, right?

[3 : 05] This is a map of Africa. Did you know that three continental U.S. can fit inside of Africa? It's a large continent.

So, without Alaska. Take Alaska away. Three Americas can fit inside of the continent of Africa, which has about 55 countries. And so, I do live in Africa.

But that's like you saying you live in the Americas, right? There's quite a difference in culture. Where I was in Tanzania, it borders Malawi. So, the cultures are somewhat similar.

Different language. I'm in process of learning the language. Last year was the first year I was able to teach in the local language, which was a big highlight for me. I still made some pretty bad mistakes, but I'm definitely getting there.

And so, Malawi, as you see, is a tiny country. About 20 million people, half the size of Michigan. And it is one of the poorest countries of the world.

[4 : 05] So, when you're talking about poverty, Malawi is definitely there. It's usually ranked in the bottom five of the entire world for poverty. Average salary is about \$600, \$700 a year.

And so, Malawi struggles. Partially, they have a lot of climate issues. They've had a couple cyclones that have gone through recently. And I know you guys have prayed definitely for that.

A cyclone is a hurricane in the Indian Ocean, destroying a lot of things. But they also don't have a lot of exports. And so, that complicates life. When you can't sell anything outside, it's difficult to get funds to buy things.

And so, we often have fuel shortages and things in country. Not because fuel is not available, but because we don't have dollars or yen or euros or whatever it is to buy the fuel that's outside.

And so, that complicates life for us right now. And so, you can always pray as we try and figure out how. I actually switch cars from petrol car to diesel car. Because diesel is usually available.

[5 : 06] Right now, my friends are texting where they can buy petrol in town. And you go wait in line for hours. And so, that's part of life sometimes with some of that. I am blessed.

The team right now in Malawi is six families with five different nationalities. And so, that is a blessing, but it's also a challenge.

The blessing is that we have a lot of different cultures and a lot of different advice when we are in meetings. Ways that we understand from our cultures how it might work best to do things. But sometimes there's a challenge.

So, an example, we were in a meeting the other day, about a year ago. And somebody said, okay, this agenda, we're going to table that. What does that mean? Okay, all of you are from America.

You say it means set aside. If you learn British English, which is what they use in Africa, that means to bring it to the table for discussion. So, you can imagine the confusion in our own meeting when half of the people thought, okay, we're going to put that and talk about it later.

[6 : 06] And half of them said, okay, this is what we're talking about right now. So, it's just little things like that that we find, oh, all of a sudden we think we're communicating and we're not. And so, we work extra hard to keep our team healthy and communicating.

And as much as you see that, there's one couple there that will be retiring in one year. And that will be a great loss. That's our team leader there, Bill and Sue Vinton. They've been missionaries for almost 40 years. So, I want to give you guys a glimpse.

You can look in your own Bibles if you'd like. We're going to be in Acts 11. We're going to start in verse 20. Otherwise, you can read it on the screen. And it says, this is in context.

I've got to give you context. In the book of Acts, Stephen was stoned. And what happened? All the believers started to disperse and run away from the persecution pretty quick.

Then you have Peter getting a vision with a sheet and Saul getting saved on the road to Damascus. You guys all know these stories, I believe. But that gives you context where we're jumping in in chapter 11.

[7 : 06] Some of these men are people that were running away from persecution in Jerusalem. They're dispersed. And so, there were some of them men from Cyprus and Cyrene.

Guess what? You need more geography. Do you know how geography helps you understand the Bible? Where's Cyprus? It's an island in the Mediterranean. I've heard it's a great place.

I even have met people that retire there. Beautiful place. Cyrene. Not called Cyrene today. It's called Libya today.

It's in northern Africa. So, here's men who were in Jerusalem at one time. But they are from an island in the Mediterranean. And they're from northern Africa, which I always find is unique.

They came to a city called Antioch. This is the Antioch that today is on the border of Syria and Turkey. Okay? I think that's it for geography lessons for now.

[8 : 04] Okay? So, these men were dispersed. They come to a town of Antioch. And they begin speaking to the Greeks, also proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what you guys think of as missions, right?

When you go to another country or another culture and you preach the gospel. You teach people the good news that Christ died for your sins. He was buried and he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

And when you believe that Christ died for your sins, you become a child of God. This is what we think of when we think of missions. Is that right? Sharing the gospel in another country.

But I want to make your mind think a little bit more today. And so, the hand of the Lord was with them and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. This is great. Share the gospel and some come to Christ.

That's good news, right? This is what all missionaries hope for. But I don't know if you guys have met, but I have a lot of friends who are missionaries in certain cultures. Like in Asia, it takes about seven years from your first contact until somebody comes to Christ.

[9 : 13] Seven years of relationship before they accept Christ. That's typical in Asian countries. Now, Africa's not that way, thankfully. But this is a situation where it wasn't that way either.

They preached and many people came to Christ. This is awesome. In mission work, we want to share the gospel and we want people to come to Christ. Now, news about this reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem.

And I want you to think, today you guys were just talking about if you subscribe. Is that the word you used? I like that word. If you subscribe, you can get my emails and you can know right away what happened in Africa.

Or you can see it on Facebook or Instagram, right? We know that yesterday a boat hit a bridge in Brooklyn. I found out nine minutes after it happened. I happened to be on that, right? But in this day, there was no internet.

There were no TVs. There was none of that technology stuff. It would have taken weeks for the word to reach Jerusalem. Hey, there's some believers in Antioch. Some Greek believers over there.

[10 : 16] And what do the guys do in the leadership in Jerusalem? Like, huh, are we sure this is not a rumor? Hey, Barnabas, will you go check that out? That's what they did, right?

So they sent a guy named Barnabas, a leader in the church, off to Antioch. And what does he do? In verse 23, this is very important. When he arrived, he, what?

Saw. This is what happened. When I first went to Malawi, the church had been going since about 2009, 2010. I arrived in 2018. The first thing I did is I just watched. Wow.

Hey, this is cool. We have so many churches. Wow. This is how their church services are. Wow. Praise the Lord. We got some lead, right? This is what happens. We see it with our eyes.

You guys right now are seeing with your eyes, you're going to, or you did this morning, some of the things going on in Malawi. So you see the grace of God. That's God at work, right? And then what did they do?

[11 : 17] Okay, this is homework. You guys ready for homework? Kids, you ready? Okay. I'm going to give you a couple of homeworks today. One of them. Pastor, I'm going to hold you guys accountable. Okay.

When you see God at work, it is our responsibility to rejoice. Okay. This is not an Ohio State game. All right. But if Ohio State, if you're an Ohio State fan and they score a touchdown, what happens?

Even when you're at home alone watching the, yes! How come we don't do that when we see God at work? So your homework for the rest of this presentation right now is you guys need to practice.

Rejoice. I want to hear you. Rejoice. Hallelujah. Amen. Woo-hoo! Whatever you're going to do. Anytime you see a picture or something where you can tell God is at work, I want to hear you.

Okay? This is your homework. Can you do that? So when those guys went to Antioch, many people believed and were saved. Rejoice. Uh-uh.

[12 : 23] Don't say rejoice. Rejoice. I want you to rejoice. Rejoice. What would you say if you're rejoicing? Hallelujah. Amen. Woo-hoo! Whatever you want to do. It's okay. All right? I know that gets us out of our comfort zone for our culture here.

But Barnabas saw he rejoiced. And then what did he do? He began to encourage them. In King James it says exhort.

This is where missionaries, we spend most of our time actually. Yes, we spend time doing evangelism. But after someone is saved, it takes a while for them to grow up.

And so myself in my ministry, I spend a ton of time in these yellow words where after somebody is saved, then what? We're teaching them that with a purposeful heart, they should remain true to the Lord.

We want Christians who are mature. And you know what? That takes purpose. It takes a decision in your heart. But hey, I need to stick to it. A determination.

[13 : 31] To do what? To remain true to the Lord. That's what we want all new believers to do. Because it's not just, oh, I believe I'm saved and I'll do whatever I want.

No. There's a lifestyle change that we expect to happen. And so this is where missions goes for a long time. And for Barnabas, he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit of faith.

And a considerable crowd was brought to the Lord. Oh, you guys are pathetic. Come on. He is preaching to the Christians to help them learn how to follow God.

And more people come to the Lord. There, you're getting it. You're getting it. Okay. You can still be a little bit louder. Because I know at a football game you would be, right? So Barnabas is there.

And this is great. And then what does he do? He leaves them. He left for a city of Tarsus to search for a guy named Saul. He abandoned them.

[14 : 29] Is what you first think when you read this. Especially if your Bible has part of it on one page and then you turn the other page, right? And that's how it was when I first read it recently. And I was like, what?

He just is starting and he leaves? No. But sadly, a lot of people do that in missions. They sign up for just a four-year term. And they're just starting and then they leave. Now, sometimes circumstances happen.

But it takes commitment to be there for the long run. And so what happens? He left to find a guy named Paul. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.

And it happened that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a considerable crowd. What happened? He said, this is too much.

More people are Christians. I can't do it alone. I need help. And hey, Saul is around. He can help me. He speaks Greek well. He knows. And so he went and got Saul.

[15 : 31] He went to recruit. Guess what? I'm in America. I'm not in Malawi where I have a lot of work to do. I'm here. And one of my jobs this past six months is to recruit. We need more missionaries.

Even though I have six families over there, one couple is going to retire. You're going to see we have more work and we don't have enough people to fill it. And every missionary will tell you the same thing. We need more people to help us.

And so for a whole year they ran like a Bible school here in Antioch. Barnabas and Saul teaching and training people how to remain true to the Lord.

And as they're teaching, there's some fruit. And there the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. And you know why they were called Christians? Because their lives changed and their neighbors started noticing.

This guy's not living like he used to live anymore. He's living differently. Huh. These are Christ followers. And so their lives changed because they started following the teaching of Barnabas and Saul.

[16 : 37] And people started labeling them. And that's the goal, right, Pastor? Not only for people to come to Christ, but to remain true to the Lord and their lifestyle to show it.

And that's our goal as missionaries. Bring people to Christ, but to help them grow and mature until their neighbors notice. This guy's a little different. And so what's going on in Malawi right now is that the Grace Church, we have more than 30 churches throughout Malawi.

Especially in those areas with circles. We have another 15 what we call preaching points. Meaning they have 10 adults regularly attending a Bible study or a church plant.

Thank you. A couple of you guys remembered. Most of you forgot, right? God is at work in Malawi. Throughout the country of Malawi.

And here's what a little church service looks like. Can we take a break? and things like you guys are doing.

[18 : 04] Now, as a mission, we work with that organization called the Grace Church in Malawi. It's a denomination, and it has these churches. We are specifically helping them with certain ministries.

Some of them are children's ministries, men's ministries, women's ministries, youth ministries, training ministries, which means training pastors and leaders. That's Bible colleges and things. And evangelism plus other community development work that we do.

Now, do you see the brackets there? Do you see the parentheses? What does it say? Youth is what age? 13 to 35.

So if you are a baby, you're called a baby. If you're a child, that's up to about 12 years old. Then you become a young person. After you become a young person at about 35, 40, you become an old person.

Sorry. But that's how their language works. And so they don't really have a word for adult. They only have young person and older person.

[19 : 05] And so my focus of ministry is actually the youth. Now, most of the time when I'm working with local churches, we're talking about the younger youth, college, high school age. But I travel around the U.S. with a yield sign I did not steal.

It was retired by the Michigan Road Department. It stands for Youth Instructed in Evangelism, Leadership, and Development. Kids, are you here? Are you ready? Because you know what?

Kids are better at this than the adults. Okay? You ready for this? Yeah. I guarantee you the kids are going to be better. Now, not that the adults are off the hook, but here's your second homework.

I gave you one homework already, right? Second homework. When mom and dad or somebody are driving and you see a yield sign, will you pray for me in Africa? Yeah? Okay?

So you adults, too. Roundabouts, merging onto the interstate, you're going to find yield signs. When you see a yield sign, oh, Lord, please help Brooke in Malawi. And if you sign up and get the emails and things, then you're going to know what's going on.

[20 : 07] You might say, oh, they're doing youth conference right now. We'll pray for that. Or there's this, pray for that, okay? But that doesn't, all of you, that's your second assignment, okay? You're going to rejoice when you see God at work, and you're going to pray for me in Africa when you see a yield sign.

Can you do that? In fact, take a prayer card. I've got a lot of them on the table. Put them on your fridge, and you'll see a yield sign every time you open your fridge. You can pray, right? Or in your Bible or something like that.

So that's the focus of my ministry, and I work with a team of leaders. Each of those guys in the middle represents one of those circled areas on the map, areas where we have churches. We call them zones.

Each of those zones has a leader who's been appointed by their own believers, and that guy does training in each zone. And I take those guys in, and I do training with them, and then I send them.

I've been getting reports just recently. They go to their own region, and they gather youth group leaders and train them how to teach Bible studies for the youth.

[21 : 08] Our goal, every single one of those churches, we want them to have a youth group where they're meeting every week with a Bible study for the youth in their church. That's the goal. Now, since 2020 about, we've trained more than 30 people for youth groups.

Two people got it, guys. You guys fail. Oh, no. Praise the Lord, right? Now, not everybody is doing their job. Some of them take the materials, and then we never hear or see of them again, and they quit going to church, or they just don't teach very well.

And so we still have our, it's not that 30 of those churches are doing healthy youth groups. But each time we train that many, more and more get it, and more and more are doing their job. And so I'm meeting more and more youth who can answer questions based on the Bible studies we're giving them.

And that's a great thing. And so we also do youth conferences. And here's a glimpse. Thank you. So every summer, there's school holidays the month of August.

And so we're trying to go to the different regions and run conferences or like camps for the young people who are already in our youth groups. And so last year we did four of them. This year, I just yesterday received the dates for three of them coming up this summer.

[22 : 55] And the goal is obviously to do evangelism. We even reach the village that hosts us. And sometimes people in the village come to Christ through our conferences. But the youth are challenged and encouraged.

Some of them come to Christ. They also learn more about their faith and how to grow. And so the month of August is really busy for me. But to me, the bonus is training the leaders. I usually have about 12 national leaders who I invest specific time in.

In fact, around the 1st of July, we're going to be training them. I've got some curriculum to write. For staff training so that they can go and they can help preach in the chapels and teach small group Bible studies during the weeks of our youth conferences.

So that's a big program that happens every summer. Now, all of that and many, many more things, meetings, training leaders, and other ministries. I do a lot of curriculum writing.

I write all the lessons for the conferences. I write the curriculum for training youth leaders as well as other training seminars that we do with pastors and elders and other people.

[23 : 58] So that's a lot of my time is spent at home on the computer writing curriculum, getting it translated and editing, and then teaching seminars, both in our capital city where I live and sometimes out in the villages.

So it's a big job, but I also want to say thank you. You guys have been faithful supporters for many, many years. And some of the things that you guys have helped with definitely make this happen, right?

You helped in Tanzania. You're helping in Malawi. This is how we do this when people are supporting, not only financially, but also in prayer. Pray for these ministries and make sure you know what's going on by signing up for the letters.

God is definitely at work and how can you be involved in any missionary that comes? You can pray and you can rejoice. Any missionary coming to visit, they should be surprised because you guys are saying, amen, hallelujah, right?

Okay? You can always give. You can send people to the mission field. You can come visit. We often like having short-term mission trips.

[25 : 01] Teams seeing firsthand, like Barnabas, what's going on. If you can teach, we can put you to work, teach in a seminar with different topics. And you can join the team, guys. We need more missionaries around the world.

And pray that God would raise up more people to do his work. So as I close, I just want to remind you, sign up so you know what to pray for. But please pray when you see a yield sign.

So thank you, guys. Thank you. Thank you.

to the comforts that we enjoy here in the U.S. And then when you go to a different country, it's a whole different world. And then sometimes you kind of get used to that and then you come back to the U.S.

and then you have to transition all over again. So thank you for the ministry that you're doing there in Malawi. And like she said, check out her table, see, you know, get some more information and sign up for the email list so you can keep in contact with what's going on over there.

[26 : 58] We're going to transition. Though we have a lot of overlap here, we're going to be looking, this is our final message in a series on one another. And we've been looking at this idea of how we ought to care for one another in the church, the body of Christ.

There are lots of passages in the scriptures that use that phrase, one another. Just, I'm going to, we've listed this off in past weeks, but we'll list them off again.

Love one another. Be kindly affectionate to one another. Receive one another. Serve one another. Bear one another's burdens. Forgive one another. Comfort each other. Edify one another.

Exhort or encourage one another. Consider one another. And even confess your sins to one another. So the whole purpose of this kind of series is to help provide a groundwork, a foundation for how we ought to live together as the body of Christ, especially in this local context of a local church.

I'd like you to think about a question. I'm going to ask this question and just think about it for a little bit. Is there a time that you can think of in your history as a Christian in the local church, in some kind of church context, when somebody said or did something that was kind of rude or thoughtless or inconsiderate?

[28 : 26] I gave you a few seconds to think about that. Was it hard to come up with something or was it kind of easy?

You know, we've been looking at ways of one anothering as far as actively serving one another, edifying one another, building each other up, teaching instruction.

And all of that is a fair bit of work, but it's not too challenging, especially when everyone is getting along with one another.

But it becomes even more challenging when there are conflicts. What do you do when people are not so easy to get along with? Thankfully, in church, we don't have to worry about that, right?

Or do we? You know, as Christians, we have the same kind of conflicts. Hopefully, as we grow and mature, we have less than we have in the past before we became believers, that we are growing in maturity, that all of us are growing.

[29 : 39] But I think most of us are probably not anywhere close to where we ought to be. And there are things that we need to deal with, relational challenges. And so today, what we're going to be talking about, the big picture topic of one anothering is this forgiving one another.

And we'll kind of broaden that to look at just relationships where we get along with one another. Being unified. The Bible talks a lot, especially Paul in the body of Christ, about the unity that God wants among believers.

And so we have to be vigilant, I think is a good word, vigilant in guarding against anything as a body of Christ that would prevent us from being unified.

Things that would divide us. Things that would unnecessarily divide us. Because we'll talk in a second about sometimes it is necessary to divide.

Romans 12, 4 has been one of our key verses here. It says this, for as we have many members in one body but all the members do not have the same function so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

[31 : 00] As believers we are part of one group, this body of Christ. And we are members of one another. Building each other up, edifying one another. We are a spiritual family.

And God calls us to invest in one another. And to care for each other. And we're called ultimately to get along with one another.

That's what's needed. Turn if you will, open your Bibles if you have them to Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1. It is so important to the Lord that Christian believers are committed to staying unified.

To avoiding the things that would divide. Here's what he says concerning the body of Christ in Ephesians chapter 4. Starting with verse 1.

I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. With all lowliness and gentleness with long suffering bearing with one another in love.

[32 : 16] And he says this, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He wants us to endeavor. That means to work. It means this isn't something that's going to happen on its own.

it's something we have to work at. It's keeping that unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Jesus, when he was praying for his own disciples, this is in John chapter 17, a famous kind of long prayer.

John chapter 17 in verse 20, he said this, I do not pray for these alone, he's talking about his disciples, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

Who's that talking about? That's talking about you and me. All believers who came after. And here's his prayer, that they may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.

[33 : 24] He wants the same unity among the believers in the body of Christ that the Son has with the Father. That's quite a unity, isn't it? And there is an outcome.

When believers are unified, then the world pays attention. The world looks and sees that. This group of people is different from other groups that we see in the world.

You know, unity is so important that Paul gave some instruction. This is in the book of Romans chapter 16, the very end of his letter and usually at the end of Paul's letters, he's doing some, just some final greetings and talking about logistical things and how to handle certain things that are going on maybe in that church.

And that's what he's doing here. Romans 16, 17. He says this, Now I urge you, brethren, to note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by soothed words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

[34 : 51] And so he's saying, listen, if there are people who are causing divisions, we need to avoid them because we need unity in the body of Christ.

In the book of Titus, he puts it this way, Titus 3.10, Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Say, listen, if there's somebody who's causing divisions in the church, and there are lots of ways that you can do that, and people can be very creative in how they can cause divisions in a church. Give them one or two warnings, and then reject them.

We cannot allow people in the church who are going to cause divisions. It is that important. Now, it's not always possible to keep unity, right?

Otherwise, he wouldn't have said that. But he says, this is a passage in Romans 12, he says this, if it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

[36 : 05] God wants us to live especially with one another in the body of Christ, to live at peace with one another, to avoid conflict. Christ. But it takes two, right?

It takes a commitment from all the parties involved. Like I said, there are times when division is necessary.

And because our unity needs to be based on something, right? It can't be unity for its own sake. Unity must be, in fact, I think Brooke shared a passage this morning about the unity of the faith, right?

Our unity is based on truth, the faith that we have in Jesus Christ. And the things delivered to us through the apostles and prophets, through the scriptures, believers, that is what our unity is based on.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul is dealing with how Christians ought to live. One, how they ought to live in the world among unbelievers, but then also how they ought to live with the body of Christ, with other believers.

[37 : 22] And he actually gives two different standards. He says this, when it comes to living and working with people in the world, you're going to have all kinds of people with all kinds of bad behavior, and you know what?

You need to continue to live with them. Otherwise, here's what he says, you'd have to what? Leave the entire world. Get on one of Musk's rockets and off to Mars you go, right?

Because that's the way of the world. But he actually gives a different standard in the body of Christ, and here's what he teaches, 1 Corinthians 5.11. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater worshipping idols, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, not even to eat with such a person.

And so there are times when division is necessary because of these blatant bad behaviors. Does that mean that if somebody makes a mistake in church that we need to divide with them?

Not at all. But he's talking about those who are rebellious, who resist living the Christian life the way they ought to. And so as we're going to go through here just some, we're going to actually look at Colossians chapter 3 so you can turn there to wrap this up.

[38 : 52] But just keep that in mind as we talk about keeping unified. Remember that we're not talking about these matters of intense or gross immorality.

We're talking about where somebody just makes a rude comment or does something that is annoying or inconsiderate, things like that.

how many times in a week are there opportunities for division and conflict among the body of Christ?

It's got to be every Sunday. Maybe not every Sunday, but right, it happens continually all the time. Sometimes very minor, sometimes bigger things.

Proverbs chapter 3 is going to provide us a little template for Christian unity. We're going to look at four things. One, our attitude towards one another.

[39 : 56] Two, that we need to put up with one another. Three, that we need to forgive one another and reconcile at times. Then four, we need to let love be the driving force in our relationships with one another.

Here's Colossians chapter 3 verse 12. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.

If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

The first thing I want to look at is that first sentence. As the elect of God, holy, so that means set apart, loved by God, we are his people. We have to have this kind of attitude towards one another.

And he puts it this way, put on tender mercies. Tender mercies is compassion towards those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Kindness.

- [41 : 04] We need to be kind to one another. Humility. Humility is lowering yourself, putting others above ourselves, considering others as even more important than ourselves.
- Meekness, which is a gentle humility. And long suffering. Long suffering is having an attitude where you are willing to suffer or be patient with others.
- You're willing to endure something that you probably wouldn't rather have to endure. So having an attitude of grace.
- Having an attitude of grace. The second part of that verse starts in verse 13. And it says this, bearing with one another. What does that mean to bear with someone?
- Well, in the King James version, it actually uses the word to forbear. to forbear. Well, what does that mean?
- [42 : 11] In just basic modern day English, it just means to put up with somebody. That's what it means. And do we need to kind of put up with people sometimes? We do.
- Endure with. Enduring what? Differences of opinion. Sometimes we just have differences of opinion. It might be, what color should the carpet be?
- Or what color should we paint the bathroom? Or it might be other things. We have to endure minor offenses. People just being inconsiderate, not maybe thinking about others like they should.
- Enduring minor or putting up with just slights, rudeness, things like that. Just a few examples. An inconsiderate remark.
- Somebody says something and they didn't really consider what they were saying. They didn't really think it through. Sometimes people speak before they think. Or maybe an oversight.
- [43 : 17] There was an event and everybody got invited but I got left out. Has that ever happened? And maybe it's just not intentional but, and we ought to write, be considerate, consider everyone.
- But sometimes that doesn't happen. And so forbearing is just saying, you know what? They should have been more considerate but they weren't this time.
- I'm just going to let it go. I'm just going to let it go. So, the next thing I'd like to look at is the next verse here.
- This is in, or actually it's continuing on verse 13. It says, bearing with one another, and it says this, and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.
- And so sometimes the offenses, they get to the point where it's not something that you can just let go. Right? And this happens in relationships. It's important. There are certain things that are small enough we can just let them go, but then as things get bigger, whether it's a repeated minor thing or maybe it's more of a major thing, we need to have really reconciliation because of that offense.
- [44 : 41] And reconciliation requires two people to become agreed. And that's what forgiveness is. You need one person to initiate and sometimes, you know what, it's always best if you do something that was rude and considerate, whatever it might be, and you realize it, whether it's in the moment or maybe it's ten minutes later or maybe a day later or a week later, and you think, you know what, I should have been more considerate.
- And you can go to that person and you can say, you know what, I'm sorry, I apologize, would you forgive me? And most of the time, especially in the body of Christ, people would be more than willing to say, yes, I forgive you.
- And so the person who was at fault can be the one who initiates that reconciliation of forgiveness. But other times, that's not what happens.

Maybe someone's just, they're not paying attention. But they ought to be. And somebody else who's the one, the offended party, or maybe somebody who just saw it from a distance, can come to that person and say, you know what, I noticed this.

In a spirit of gentleness, right, that's what we looked at over the last couple of weeks. In a spirit of gentleness and say, hey, listen, I saw this, you know, during this Bible study, you kind of just overtook the whole meeting, and other people really wanted to say something, but you weren't really giving people an opportunity.

[46 : 12] Just one example. And so, I think you ought to consider, you know, how you're approaching these relationships and these groups.

And it's an opportunity to just show somebody where the offense came in. And then they can have an opportunity to say, you know what, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that. So, whoever takes the initiative on either side, ultimately, you've got to have those two things, the apology and then the forgiveness.

When it comes to these things, whether it's forbearance or forgiveness and loving one another, that's the final thing here. That verse 14 says this, but above all things, you know, it is love that is, that word bond is just a tie, it's the thing that ties us together, is love.

Love for the Lord and his love for us, ultimately, that works in us to motivate us to love one another. you know, the motivation matters, right?

We talked about this last week. The motivation in serving one another, we serve others because Christ first served us. Here in Colossians, we forgive one another, why?

[47 : 47] Because Christ first forgave us. We love one another, why? Because Jesus first loved us.

And so, we need to come, we need to do these things from the right motivation. This is the way of grace. Our love for one another is not something that we just pull up by our own bootstraps.

In fact, Paul says this, he says, the love of God or the love of Christ compels us. We look to see what Jesus did for us.

And, you know, we were in pretty bad shape and we weren't exactly kind always to him. We didn't always honor him.

We didn't always love him. But he came and he laid down his life for us. and we ought to be willing to do the same thing for others.

[48 : 56] I want to provide just one practical bit of advice. This is something that I learned years ago as a young father.

When you have kids, kids make lots of mistakes. Has anybody noticed that? They're doing chores chores. And here's something I remember vividly in my mind.

In fact, this is, I think, where this tip came from. They're helping with the dishes. And it's important for kids to do chores. And in the beginning, right, they're not as helpful as you'd like them to be.

But they'd help with the dishes and next thing you know, crash. There's a glass or a dish and it's just shattered all over the floor. And did they do that on purpose?

No, almost certainly not, right? But as a young father, I'm thinking, we're going to run out of glasses here eventually. And I would get upset and I would try to, you know, make sure I didn't get too angry at them because they're just kids.

[49 : 57] They're just trying to figure things out. And I realized, okay, I'm getting a little bit too upset here. What's going on? And I realized something, that my expectations were wrong.

That what I should expect out of children is that they're going to break things every once in a while. And so in my mind, I started doing this. Does anybody have a budget, a financial budget, right?

Most of us have a limited amount of money, so we have a budget for our mortgage and our car payment, fuel, all these things. And we expect to pay those things each month.

And because we have a budget, we know that we're prepared whenever these expenses come up, whether they be big or small. And so in my mind, I thought, I need to have a budget for these things.

So that when a dish breaks, you know what happens? I don't think, oh no! I think, oh well, that was going to happen.

[50 : 57] And so that was just this month's broken dish. Right? Right? And I tended to use that kind of approach to other things in life and even with the body of Christ.

Because I can expect that whether it's once a week or once a month, somebody is going to say something to me that is going to be inconsiderate. And what am I going to do?

Am I going to be shocked? Oh, I can't believe that happened. Actually, you know what? It's in the budget now. It's in the budget.

It's going to happen. And you know what? And now I'm prepared. And so I can just think, you know what? I've kind of set aside some kindness and humility and gentleness.

And I'm going to pull that up when the time comes. And I'm ready because I've put that budget in place because I know that these kinds of things are going to happen.

[51 : 58] You know, it's easy to preach a sermon on this and to preach a message about being kind and forgiving and forbearing with one another. other. But the real hard work is in practicing it.

And so I'm going to finish up with just that call to action. You know, maybe consider that in this little budget thing is not something you necessarily need to write down. But just kind of put in your head this little mental budget.

You know what? God calls us to unity and to avoid divisions in the body of Christ. Christ. And I know things are going to happen. Things are going to happen and I need to be prepared when they do for the cost that it's going to cost me in humility and grace and mercy to give to that person when it comes up.

So let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the body of Christ, this group that you formed, that you created, that you designed, and for giving us instruction on how we ought to live and work and build each other up and be members together of one another.

And I pray that you would continue to do a work in us, that you would help us to be kinder, gentler, to put up with others, to build up one another, to serve one another, to do all these one another things with the motivation of your love, your service, your care for us behind it all.

[53 : 30] Remind us again and again, Paul, the wonderful things that you've done for us, that we would be inspired and encouraged and influenced by you to do the same thing to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We thank you for all these things. In Jesus' name, amen.