

Family Matters

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Date: 16 May 2021

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[0 : 00] But we're going to open God's Word this morning to Acts chapter 6. One of the greatest things about the early church as we look at the early church in the book of Acts, one of the greatest things about the early church is that it was really and truly a family.

It was really and truly a family. A lot of people, when they became Christians and they were baptized as Christians, that baptism meant cutting ties with their family of origin.

It meant breaking off those relationships. They were disowned in some cases. And so for many of these early Christians, the church became their new and only family.

And so what you see in the early church is this wonderful growing family where people from all walks of life were able to find, and some of them for the first time, a place where they could belong and be cared for by a community of believers.

And that's a vision that has long captivated our hearts. That's something that we strongly desire to be in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding areas.

[1 : 08] We desire for Church of the Advent to be a place of belonging, where people from all walks of life can come together and be known and loved and cared for like a family.

You know, whenever people say, you know, I moved here from somewhere else and my family is far away, but this church is like my family now, that just delights me. I feel like that means we are fulfilling what God has called us to be in this city.

But being a family is not without its challenges. And being this kind of community requires that we overcome some major obstacles.

The good news or the bad news, depending on your perspective, is that these challenges have been with the church since the very beginning. It's very tempting to idealize the early church.

But it was far from perfect. And thankfully for us, Luke the historian, as he's recording these accounts, doesn't shy away from the challenges. And that's good news because it shows us how they were able to meet and overcome the same obstacles that we face today in the early days of the church.

[2 : 15] And so we're going to be focusing on Acts chapter 6, verses 1 through 7. Some of the biggest threats to the health and the vitality of our church are represented in these verses.

So we're going to see first the problem that they were facing, then we'll see the solution, and then we'll see the result of that solution. And then we'll apply that to our context.

So let's pray. Lord, we ring bells at the mention of your resurrection.

But we know that this is more than just ceremony or liturgy. The truth of your resurrection means that these aren't dead words. It means that they're living words.

It means that these words have a life and a mind and an intention and a power all their own. All we need to do is sit under them and allow you to do your work in our hearts.

[3 : 15] And so that's what we pray for this morning, Lord, that you would do your work through your word in and through us for your glory. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. Amen. So first of all, let's look at the problem.

I'll give you a little context so you understand what's happening here. It says in verse 1, Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, they were very much increasing in number.

The Jerusalem church was growing exponentially. At this point, we know there were at least 5,000 households. When it says 5,000 people or 5,000 men, those are heads of households.

So it's maybe three to four times that many people in the church. And it says that there were a growing number of widows in this community who needed care and support. Widows in this community were particularly vulnerable.

If you outlived your husband, you didn't have many options to get your needs met other than your immediate family. And for a lot of people, they didn't have an immediate family or extended family relationship, and they had to rely on the church.

[4 : 22] There's a growing number of widows who need material support. So here's the problem given that context. There are two subgroups of people in the church. Two subcultures.

There are the Hebrews, and there are the Hellenists. And it says that a dispute breaks out between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. So the Hebrews were native-born Palestinian Jews who were culturally Jewish, and they spoke Aramaic.

So that's one culture language group. And then you have the Hellenists who were Jews living in the Diaspora. They had been scattered throughout the known world outside of Jerusalem.

Many of them spoke Greek as their first language. Some had Greek names, and they were culturally Greek. So they're all Jews, but some are Palestinian, Hebrew culture, Aramaic-speaking Jews, and some are Greek-speaking Jews.

Some are from Jerusalem. Some are from the outer reaches. And you can easily see how tension would already exist between these two subcultures. And the Hellenists are complaining, and they're grumbling, that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution.

[5 : 44] Right? And it's very easy to see how this kind of thing would be interpreted. Native-born Aramaic-speaking Jews are being prioritized. Right? The real Jews, the culturally Jewish Jews, they're getting preferential treatment.

And these Greek-speaking, culturally Greek Jews from other parts of the world who had come into Jerusalem, they were being neglected. Right? And this is a group that probably already felt like outsiders.

Right? They already felt like they didn't fit in. And now all of a sudden they're just seeing clear as day, this is evidence that we don't really belong here. You're neglecting our widows. And you can see how this would have been.

It doesn't seem like a big deal, but it would have been a kind of powder keg of tension beginning to grow. Right? And what we see here, there's at least three threats to the vitality of this church that emerge that we see here in this text.

The first threat is the threat that the church is going to divide. This is the kind of thing that divides churches. And history shows us many, many churches have divided over far less than this.

[6 : 57] But you have a kind of ethnic, cultural tension between two groups. And what you see throughout history is the larger a church grows and the more diverse a church becomes, the more likely it will be that some people feel marginalized and some people seem as though they're receiving preferential treatment.

And that's a very common reason why churches divide. And it's a very common reason why people leave churches. And these kind of dynamics are inevitable even in the best of churches.

I mean, if this is the Holy Spirit-filled early church of Acts and it's happening there, chances are it's happening everywhere. You know, 10 years ago, some of you were here, 10, 11 years ago, Church of the Advent was primarily made up of unmarried people in their 20s and their 30s.

And there were a few families who had kids, but they were very much the minority. You know, we had our oldest son 10 years ago, and we were one of the only families in the church at that time who had a young baby.

And so we have mostly unmarried people, mostly people without kids. And as a result, there were a few families who I think, for understandable reasons, felt neglected.

[8 : 14] They felt like the church was mainly a church for single people and that their needs as parents with young children weren't really being attended to. And there was probably some truth to that, to be totally honest. Now, I don't have to tell you, it's completely flip-flopped, right?

10 years later, we have 75% people who are married with young children. We have about 150 kids alone who are elementary age or younger in our church.

It's a very different church. And so if you don't fit that demographic, if there's somebody who's here and you don't have kids or you're older or you're divorced or you're unmarried or any of the reasons that you might not fit that demographic, you're probably much more likely to feel like you're being neglected, that your needs aren't being prioritized, that this church only cares about families with kids.

Right? So that's a very understandable thing. And it shifts with time and with changing demographics. I think it's fair to say that in our church, we have a majority probably of politically left-leaning people.

And so from time to time, I have people coming to me saying, you know, I'm on the political right. You know, I vote Republican. Am I welcome here? Can I belong here? Because I really don't feel like it. When we have discussions in small group, I don't ever feel like I can speak up.

[9 : 22] I don't feel like it's a safe place for me to share a conservative viewpoint because I don't think it's welcome here. Right? Is this church giving preferential treatment to people on the political left? We're a majority white church.

And so I know from conversations that there are times when people of color come to me and they say, I'm just not sure if I feel like I belong in this church. Right? We still skew younger.

Right? Now, not as young as we used to. Right? But we still skew younger compared to a lot of churches. So people who aren't in their 20s, 30s, 40s, sometimes are like, I don't know if I fit in here.

Right? And that's one of the first questions that people ask when they walk into a church within five minutes before they've even listened to the music or the sermon or noted the decor or any of the other things. The most important thing that most people ask when they walk in the door is, is this a place I can belong?

And most people answer that question within the first few seconds of walking in the door of a church. So these kinds of dynamics are inevitable.

[10 : 22] And, you know, understandably, if you're one of the people who looks around and says, I'm not sure if I belong here, it's very easy to think, man, it would be so much easier for me to go to a church full of people who are in my stage of life or full of people who politically align with me or full of people who look like me, full of people who see the world the way I see the world.

Right? Because that would be a lot easier. It would be a lot less tension. You'd immediately fit right in. But that's not what happens in the early church. What we see from the earliest days of the church is it's a multicultural, multilingual community of people worshiping together.

And if our desire is to reflect that in D.C., if our desire is to reflect more the demographics of the neighborhoods where we live, and I believe that it is, right?

If our desire is to become more multi-generational, more politically diverse, more ethnically and culturally diverse, more socioeconomically diverse, if that's where we feel like we're being called to go, we need to be vigilant.

And we need to be very proactive in making sure that nobody's sitting here thinking, nobody knows me, nobody cares about me, I'll never fit in here.

[11 : 48] Right? We have to be proactive. So this is the first problem, the problem of division. People saying, this isn't my community. The second problem is equally, equally pernicious. The problem of grumbling.

And I say, well, where do you get that? This is a legitimate issue. And it is. The issue in Acts chapter 6 is a very legitimate problem. And it's a problem that needs to be solved. The widows, we need to make sure that we're caring for all the widows in the community.

And when legitimate problems arise in the church, they need to be addressed. The longer they fester, the worse it gets. But one of the things that you notice in the Greek is that Luke uses the same word in the Greek version, in the Greek, that you see in the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is called the Septuagint, that is used to describe the grumbling of the Israelites under Moses.

So Luke uses the same word to describe this grumbling that Moses uses to describe the grumbling in amongst the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness after being set free.

And I think that there's an intentionality behind this. In other words, a newly formed Israelite community wandering the wilderness, the first thing they do is they begin to grumble. Luke says, you're looking at a new Israel, the new Israel, the new church, they're now in the wilderness of the Greco-Roman world, and one of the first things that they begin to do is to grumble.

[13 : 10] And what we need to understand is in the Bible, grumbling is very dangerous. Grumbling, because grumbling can start out as a legitimate concern, right?

Somebody has a legitimate concern or issue or grievance, and it can be absolutely a problem that needs to be solved. But if you're not very careful, grumbling can start to get out of control, and it can

start to become harmful and start to become toxic and start to become corrosive.

And so we need to ask, how can we tell the difference? There are always going to be legitimate concerns in the church. Leaders are always going to make mistakes. The church is never going to be perfect.

And so from time to time for people to say, hey, here's a way that I think that we can improve this ministry, and here's a way that I think I can help with that. Or for people to say, in light of what we just said, hey, I'm not sure if you're aware of the needs over here, but I just want to make sure that you're aware of what's happening over here.

Like, those kinds of things are immensely valuable. Harmful grumbling is different. Jude, in verse 16, refers to people who are grumblers and fault finders who follow their own evil desires.

[14:23] This is grumbling that is not motivated by a love for God or His people. It's grumbling motivated by evil desires, right, with an ulterior motive. Grumbling. So Jude is describing someone who perpetually complains.

It's not just kind of every now and then they say, hey, you should be aware of this. It's somebody who just always seems to be complaining, who's always seemed to be focusing on the negative. Someone who sort of finds reasons to be critical wherever they look, right?

So it's just in their wiring. And so I want to just give you three common examples of harmful grumbling. One very common example is the example of people who complain from a position of superiority.

Complaining from a position of superiority. People who say, you know, I've gone to like three small groups and a Bible study and just, I don't know, I just, I'm looking for people who just take God's word more seriously.

You know, as seriously as I do, right? Or people who say, you know, this church just doesn't really care about this particular issue as much as I do.

[15:31] I'm more passionate about it. I want to find people who are just as passionate as I am about this issue. Right? So complaining from a position of superiority. That's one. Another type of harmful grumbling is people who complain based on unrealistic expectations.

Unrealistic expectations. Expecting people to read your mind and anticipate your needs even if you've never voiced them. Right? Expecting people to know you and care about you if you've never made any effort to get involved or gone to any events.

Expecting the church to produce timely, thorough, biblical responses to every major news event.

Expecting people to control or change situations that human beings have no control over.

Right? Those are examples of unrealistic expectations. And I got to tell you, with that last example, complaining about things that human beings can't control, there are times when I get angry emails and they're legitimate.

And there are times when I get angry emails and I kind of look at the email and I look at the craftsmanship that went into it. And I think, man, all the time that went into writing this email would have probably been better spent praying.

[16:48] Right? Talk to the one who can actually make a difference here. And then the third category of harmful grumbling is people who complain without a willingness to help solve the problem.

Right? People who say, hey, you should really do something about this. I don't have time. I'm busy. I got kids. I'm working. But you should really get on this. Right? That kind of complaining. And I want to be clear about this.

I'm not exempting myself from this. I mean, you may know this already. But pastors are just as bad, if not worse, as anyone else at complaining. And I've heard a lot of pastors who grumble all the time about their congregations.

Right? And so that can be a major challenge for pastors. Right? So this is something that we all struggle with. Here's what I want you to understand. That kind of grumbling is very easy to do.

It's very easy to fall into that pattern. But it's incredibly toxic. It sucks the life out of ministry leaders. It sucks the life out of small group leaders. It burns people out.

[17:47] It sucks the life out of clergy and staff. And it's contagious. You know, the more airtime you give somebody who's a grumbler, it's like feeding a fire with oxygen.

It just gets worse. The more of a platform you give somebody like that, the worse it gets. And the problem with that is it's contagious. It starts to spread to other people.

Right? So a kind of culture of grumbling, I've seen it take over small groups. It can take over entire churches. It's incredibly toxic. And it destroys momentum.

And it breeds a sense of hopelessness and discouragement. It may not seem like a big deal, but grumbling is like acid. And if left unchecked, it can rot the church from the inside out.

So this is a major danger confronting the early church and confronting all churches. And then the third danger is, as bad as grumbling is, the third danger is actually the biggest danger facing any church.

[18 : 48] The biggest danger in Acts chapter 6 is that the ministry of word and prayer gets neglected. That's the biggest threat facing any church.

And listen, Washington, D.C. is filled with empty church buildings. And the reason is not just because people got secularized.

That's part of it. The reason is because at some point along the way, that church decided that the word of God needed to be put aside to focus most of the attention on a more pressing issue that at the time seemed more urgent.

Now nobody remembers the issue. Nobody remembers that church. It's an empty tomb. Right?

So that's a kind of warning that we drive or walk by every day. Here's what happens when you neglect the word of God and prayer. Churches die. It's a very simple equation.

[19 : 49] Right? So these are the dangers facing the church. And we ask, well, how do we guard against all of these dangers? And here's where we come to the solution.

Here's the solution that we see in Acts. It's so wonderful. Most pastors and church leaders I know would be strongly tempted in a situation like this to rush in and solve the problem themselves.

Right? Oh, the widows are being neglected? Okay. I'm going to go fix it. Because most people in ministry, we love to be the hero. We love to rush in and say, you know, I'll take care of it. You know, I'm here now.

But that's not what the apostles do. This is a problem that affects everybody. And so everybody is responsible for helping to solve it.

So in verse 2, it says, and the 12 summoned the full number of disciples. They say, well, okay, we've all got to be involved in the solution for this thing to work.

[20 : 46] And the reason they do that is because that's how families work. Right? And families is not just mom who does everything or dad who does everything. In a healthy family, everybody's contributing. Then they say it's not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

And it's easy to read that and say, like, the word of God is up here and serving tables is down here. But that's not how we should read it. They're not saying that one is better than the other. There are two competing priorities.

And they're saying it wouldn't be right to neglect this priority in order to focus on this priority. In the same way that it wouldn't be right for me to tell you, you really need to choose. Do you want to breathe or do you want to eat?

Right? That's not a fair choice. You need both. And so they're saying we need both, but we can't do both. So the only answer is to raise up more people to share in the work of ministry.

People to focus on this ministry and people to focus on this ministry. So they say pick seven men who have good reputations, who are full of the Spirit, who are wise, great qualities in any leader in the church.

[21 : 50] And we see two general categories of ministry emerge. And this really begins to set the tone for the rest of the church. Two categories of ministry.

And by the way, the same Greek word, diakonia, is used for both. Right? In verse 2, we see the sort of birth of what we might think of as the ministry of tables.

This is what we might think of. It's not just helping at the communion table or the daily distribution. This is what we might think of broadly as social work.

This is the ministry of meeting the practical needs of people in the community. It's the ministry of doing justice. It's the ministry of caring for the poor and the vulnerable and the marginalized. That's one ministry, one diakonia that emerges.

And then in verse 4, we see the ministry of the word and of prayer. Preaching and teaching the word of God to the whole community. And so we have these two categories of ministry.

[22 : 50] And you see the same general categories applied to the whole church in 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11. He says, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace.

So what Peter is saying is, all of you fall into one of these two categories of ministry. And some people can do both. But all of you fall into these one categories and everybody's been given gifts and everybody's called to serve in these broad areas of ministry.

Right? He says, whoever speaks, speak as one who speaks oracles of God. That's the ministry of the word. Whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. That's the ministry of tables.

Here's the principle. In a spirit-filled church, a spirit-filled church is one where ministry is both vertical and it's horizontal.

There is a strong commitment to preaching the word of God, to worship, to prayer, to the sacraments. And there is an equally strong commitment to meeting material needs, to the horizontal, to caring for the poor, to serving others in tangible ways.

[24 : 05] And of course, by the way, this makes sense if you go back to the fact that the church is the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. How is Jesus' ministry summarized in the gospel accounts?

All through the gospels, you see Jesus' ministry summed up as this. He's preaching the gospel of the kingdom, ministry of the word, and he is caring for the poor and the afflicted, the ministry of tables.

He's doing both, the vertical and the horizontal. In Jesus, the ministries of word and service come together.

They come together because he is the word incarnate. There's no one more qualified to do the ministry of the word than the word. And on the cross, you see the ultimate act of sacrificial service. Right? Someone willing to give his life as an innocent to take on the sin of the world and to die on behalf of people he loves in order to save them. That's the ultimate example of sacrificial service.

[25 : 08] So in a spirit-filled church, you see both kinds of ministry. And this is why everyone is called to serve in one way or another. Everybody here is called to serve in one way or another.

It's called to play a role in these kinds of ministry. Here's the result. The result of all of this, it says in the last verse of our passage.

Now just think about this. The problem in the Jerusalem church could easily have resulted in a divided church. It could have easily resulted in a dissolved church if grumbling just took over. It could have easily resulted in a distracted church. They got focused on something else and died. Instead, we have verse 7.

And the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Why?

[26 : 06] Why? Because two things. They kept their focus on the word and they multiplied the number of people doing ministry. They kept their focus on the word and they multiplied the number of people doing the work of ministry.

So a spirit-filled church is one where every single member, every single woman, every single man, every single child is actively involved in the work of ministry.

You know, one of the most valuable lessons that I have learned over the years as a pastor is the importance of discerning when to step in and when to get out of the way.

And when I was younger in ministry, I very much wanted to be able to do it all. And I thought because I was a pastor, I should be good at all of the things. And very quickly, in like the first month of being a pastor, I began to realize that I wasn't.

And that actually the list of things that I wasn't good at was a lot longer than the list of things that I could do decently well. And about 14 years in now, I've come to this place where I absolutely delight.

[27 : 08] I absolutely delight in the fact that there are people in this room who are far better than I am at many of the things that need to be done in the life of this church. And I've come to this place where I love stepping out of the way and I love watching somebody in action who is just really good at something, who is really gifted at something.

And, you know, one great example of this is our healing prayer ministry. I have wanted to move in the direction of growing a healing prayer ministry at Advent for years, but it's not my thing. I just

have no idea how to do it.

I know how to pray for people, but it's not my gift. Healing prayer is not my gift. And I knew that. And so I prayed. And so God has, you know, we've raised up Lisa.

God has sent us Rob Kretsch. We have a growing core of people in our community. It is their gift. They are passionate about it. They just want to be let loose to do what God has called them to do in his community.

And I love just stepping back and saying, man, look at God work through these people. I love that kind of thing. On an average Sunday, when all of our programming is working, children's ministry is up and running, on an average Sunday, just for Sunday, how many men and women do you think it takes outside of clergy and staff?

[28 : 25] To put clergy and staff aside, how many men and women from the congregation need to be involved on an average Sunday, would you think? The answer is about 45. We need about 45 men and women actively serving just so that we can come together and worship the Lord.

And I look around every Sunday, and it is beautiful. I see people coming early and staying late in order to set up and clean up. I see people who are willing to miss the service so that they can care for and teach our children.

I see people who are not comfortable yet worshiping in person because of COVID, who nevertheless come before the service. And then they come back after the service just to make sure things get done.

I see people up here prepping and running cables and solving tech issues and praying over possessed printers and all kinds of things. And it is a beauty to behold.

It is a symphony. It is a symphony, sometimes verging on cacophony, of God's gifts and God's Holy Spirit at work. That's a Holy Spirit-filled church.

[29 : 33] And that doesn't even include the people outside of Sunday, right? The people who serve on parish council. The people who are investing in the lives of our children. The people who are leading small groups.

The people who are discipling and leading triads. The people who are serving with DC 127 or Little Lights or other area ministries. In a Spirit-filled church, every single member and regular attender is actively serving to meet the needs of the community.

That's just the way it is. And see, the trend in every church is to turn inward. The trend in every church is to focus more and more on your own needs, on your own preferences.

To become more and more consumeristic. And to think of the church primarily as a service provider. And listen, for the last year, that's essentially what we've been. We've been literally providing an online service experience.

But that's not really what a church is. It's been helpful. But we've been in survival mode. Like, we've just come through major crises. And so we're all still in this kind of survival mode.

[30 : 39] I've just got to hunker down and just meet my most basic needs. But a church is not a service provider. A church is a family. And in a family, everybody has a job to do.

You know, I don't know about your family. Those of you with kids. But in our family, everybody shares in the work that needs to be done. And if my kids are listening, just want to remind you of this. Everybody shares in the work that needs to be done.

Our boys are 10 and 8. And our boys fix meals occasionally when they need to. They empty the dishwasher every single day. They take out all the trash and recycling.

They roll the canisters out to the road once a week. They can fold and put away laundry. They started trimming the hedges. They feed and water the dog. Like these are their jobs.

And they do them. And when they don't do them, the dog doesn't eat. Right? So they do them. Our 3-year-old is currently learning how to wash dishes. And she loves vacuuming up stuff with the Dustbuster.

[31 : 38] And those are her jobs. Right? Because that's how families work. Here's the best part of this, though. And this is true in your own. This is going to be true in your family.

Or if you have roommates, it's the same deal. You know, I used to live with a bunch of guys. And we had this rule that if you didn't wash your own dishes, if you didn't wash your own dishes, and it went more than a couple of days, you would find those dishes often under your covers down at the foot of your bed.

So you'd be up studying late. You know, you'd get back from the library. It's like, you know, midnight. And you're climbing into bed. And you stick your feet down into an old bowl of mac and cheese that's been sitting around for a couple of days.

That happens exactly once. And then you start washing your dishes. Because we tried to operate like a family in that household. Right? And I'm not suggesting you do that to your kids. But I'm not saying you shouldn't do it to your kids.

But here's the best part. The more you invest in the life of a community, the more you will get out of it. The more you invest, the more you will get out of it.

[32 : 45] When you invest in a church community, that will bring with it an entirely new sense of belonging, sense of meaning, and sense of purpose.

There is a massive spiritual difference between coming to church as a consumer and coming to church as a stakeholder. You will get to know people. You will develop friendships and relationships.

You will feel a sense of shared ownership in the life of the community. It will completely transform your relationship with church. So I want to end this sermon with simply an invitation. Right?

To those of you who are serving, I praise God for you. I praise God for you. Thank you for helping us to be a spirit-filled church. For those of you who are not yet serving, I would just love for you to start praying about ways that you might get actively involved.

Right? And if this is your first Sunday, you're exempt because you're a newcomer. Welcome. If this is not your first Sunday, I'm talking to you. I want you to start praying about ways that you might start investing in the life of this church.

[33 : 47] Kids? Kids? You hear me? Hi. You hear me? Hi. Two things for you. One, I want you to go home, and I want to ask your parents, what's one way that I can start contributing to the life of our household?

Do that. And then talk to your parents about one way that you might start getting involved in helping in the life of this church. Your two families.

Deal? Deal. That's what I like to hear. Number three, as I said, even if you're new to our community, my hope is, and COVID may have screwed this up a little bit, my hope is that at some point somebody greeted you with a handshake, or a fist bump, or an elbow bump, or a wave that would have been a handshake before the pandemic, but you were greeted in some way.

My hope is that that's happened. And at some point, our desire is to see everybody move to the other side of that handshake. At one time, I was welcomed in, but now I'm the one welcoming others in.

Right? You're on the other side of that handshake. You're the one sticking out your hand, or your fist, or your elbow, and saying, hey, welcome. I don't think we've met. My name's Tommy. What's yours? I'm really glad to see you here.

[35 : 00] Is there anything that I can do to help you be more comfortable? Right? So start praying about ways that you might get involved. And in this way, brothers and sisters, brothers, my hope is that we do become a more diverse, welcoming community for this city, that we do become more of the family that God has called us to be, and that we become more of a spirit-filled community that God has called his church to be for the sake of the world.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for these messages that come from your word that are, Lord, sometimes they are messages that focus us outward and get us thinking about the needs and the ministries in the world, but other times, Lord, we need to be reminded of what we're called to be and what it means to be your family.

And so, Lord, I pray that we would be moved by your Holy Spirit and gain a vision for what it means to be a spirit-filled community where every part is working properly and everyone is serving out of their gifts. We pray this in your son's holy name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.