

Small Groups: Engage in Community

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. That was a great job by our worship team, and that last song was an awesome song with an awesome, awesome message. If you have your Bible, let's turn to the Book of Romans, chapter number 12.

We were in the beginning of Corinthians, the last time, 2 Corinthians, but we will be in the Book of Romans today and be looking at chapter number 12.

And we've been talking about particularly small groups, but mostly about community and about the body life that we share together as the family of God.

And you do realize that community is not necessarily the easiest thing in the world. When you get people together with different passions, different gifts, different backgrounds, different life experiences, you can't always expect everything to go smoothly.

I heard about a book this week. I haven't read it, but it's called Everybody's Normal Until You Get to Know Them. And the funny thing is, community will be a lot easier if you didn't have to get to know people in the process.

[1 : 17] Because when you just have a very casual relationship, you know what? People get along. But when you get to know them, and when they get to know you, that's when problems can occur.

Because we are individuals, we have our own little idiosyncrasies, and we sometimes are rude, we sometimes are thoughtless, and that is how problems come up, issues come up in community, when we get to know one another.

And especially in our culture of individualism in America, we don't necessarily do community very well, because most of us in America really thrive on our individualism.

We can do it. We can get along. I don't need you. That's the mantra of America. And that's not the way God ordained His body, the family of Christ, to work.

And that's why we've been talking about getting together in community, whether it's for Sunday school, Bible study in the evening, getting together for coffee during the week, just getting together and doing things together.

[2 : 33] Find an outreach. Find a way to reach out in the community. Grab another body. Grab another believer and just go do something together. As we talked last week, we engage in care.

We saw how that suffering is not only intended for our sake, but it's also intended for others. And when we receive comfort in the midst of it, God doesn't just comfort us to make us comfortable. God comforts us in order to make us comforters. We saw that in 2 Corinthians. And the Apostle Paul said, I was comforted so I could comfort you. God comforts you so that you can comfort others.

It does not stop here. We are not a pool. We are a river. We flow God's love, God's compassion, God's care.

And as we're going to see today, God's mercy is to flow through us. And as we look at Romans chapter 12, we're going to read through the whole chapter.

[3 : 34] We're going to go through just a few verses, and then we're going to do a little bit more next week. But I want us to take a look at today, Romans chapter 12, from a bird's eye view and look at mercy.

We'll look at another facet of it next week. But I want us to just follow along and picture this. I want us to notice how the mercy of God affects the community of God.

How the mercy of God affects our relationships with one another. And how the mercy of God affects our relationship with the world. Let's listen to Romans chapter 12.

Let's listen to verses 1 through 8. Listen, talking about how we relate to each other. Paul says, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies the living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

[4 : 50] For I say, through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself or herself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

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.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering.

He who teaches in teaching. He who exhorts in exhortation. He who gives with liberality. He who leads with diligence. He who shows mercy with cheerfulness.

And then how we relate to another. Verse 9 and following. He says, let love be without hypocrisy.

[5 : 55] Paul has talked about the body being one body, but many different kinds of members. The Holy Spirit has given to us spiritual gifts so that we can take care of the body.

And whatever particular spiritual gift it is, we are to use that spiritual gift in relation to the body. And then he gets into verse 9, how we relate to one another.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love. In honor, giving preference to one another.

Not lagging in diligence. Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope. Patient in tribulation. Continuing steadfastly in prayer.

Distributing to the needs of the saints. Given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

[6 : 53] And weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Or those who are lower in state.

Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you. Live peaceably with all men.

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore, verse 20, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And what I want us to see this morning in this passage in Romans chapter 12, how we relate to God, how we relate to one another in the body of Christ, and how God wants us to relate to those who are in the world.

[8 : 02] Now, I want us to see how these three relationships are highlighted throughout this text as we go through chapter number 12.

However, before we dive in, I want us to look at the primary word. The primary word that we see, and upon this whole chapter is based. And it's in the beginning of Romans chapter 12, and it's in verse 1.

I beseech you, and what's the word? Therefore, Paul says, I urge you. Therefore, and the therefore is therefore a reason.

It is what has gone on, is what Paul has talked about from Romans chapter 1 through Romans chapter 11. The mercy of God is at the foundation of all that follows.

Chapter 1 of Romans starts off with the wrath of God upon all men, upon all people. Why? Because of sin in the world. The wrath of God is being poured out on all sinners.

[9 : 04] So, a brief synopsis. I'd like to just read a brief synopsis of the first 11 chapters of Romans. And it would be, In light of the fact that you used to be under the wrath of God in your sin, and

Jesus took your place, and by trusting him, he has given you his righteousness, and his grace, and his peace.

And now you stand, not only free from your sin, but victorious over all sin, for all of eternity, all because of the grace of God. In light of that, you worship God.

In light of that, you love each other. In light of that, you bless your enemies, those who persecute you. So we see all the following commands God gives in chapter 12, and following all of these commands are rooted in the mercy of God.

God has shown mercy. God has shown mercy. God has shown mercy. God has shown mercy to you. God is showing mercy to the world. And this whole text teaches us, this is our first point this morning, teaches us that we are mercy-driven worshipers.

We don't worship God because we are part of a cool religion. We don't worship God because we are demanded to, or commanded to.

[10:29] We don't worship God because we wake up one morning and feel like it. At the very root, you and I should be worshipping God because of all the mercy he's shown us.

His mercy, his grace, what Jesus did for us on the cross of Calvary. So, we are mercy-driven worshipers. As we are here this morning, and as we sing together, as we praise and honor and glory God together, and as we live our lives in worship and live our lives together, it's all motivated by mercy.

Worship used to involve dead animals. That's the way the Old Testament worship was carried out. The animal was brought. It was killed.

It was put on an altar. And the fire was started, and it was consumed. What Paul is saying in Romans chapter 12, verse 2, is that you no longer put dead animals on the altar.

He says you put yourself on the altar. So we, we live to worship. And that's what God has done in our lives.

[11:47] He has placed the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we would be able to live a life that honors Him, pleases Him, and the Holy Spirit is able to be that conduit through which we worship our Heavenly Father.

So it's not just a routine anymore. It's not just something that we do once a year, and we bring our sacrifice, whether it's a dove, or whether it's a lamb, or whatever it is, and let the high priest sacrifice it.

It's not that type of routine, religious routine anymore. It's not just singing. It's not just religious activity. It's our life. And we live to worship.

And as we worship, we are, here we see, we are sacrificing our bodies. Verse number one, we offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, as followers of Jesus Christ.

We put our bodies on the altar, and we say, God, use my body. Display my body. Display me as a, display your holiness.

[12:55] And God, use my body for your pleasure. To use my feet, to use my hands, to use my lips, to use my voice, to share your gospel with others.

Now that's worship. So we're sacrificing our bodies. We sacrifice our bodies to God as we live for Him, as we carry out His mission.

And then next, we surrender our minds. That's verse number two, where He says, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

First of all, we sacrifice our bodies as a living sacrifice, where we continually live for Him every day. Sacrifice our own desires. Sacrifice our own wills.

Sacrifice our own wants. And live for Him. Sacrificing our minds. We surrender our minds to be saturated with the Word of God.

[13:51] Saturated with the will of God so that we would think differently. And then we also, this is tough for many of us, we submit our wills.

He says, we do this. We sacrifice our bodies as a living sacrifice. We submit, or excuse me, we surrender our minds so that we are renewed, but then we submit our wills.

Why? So that we will be able to, according to what verse two says, that we might be able to, be able to please Him and know what His will is in our lives.

To test and to prove what the will of God is. So here's the picture that we need to see about us being mercy-driven worshipers.

And it's this. Worship is not our religious duty. You know, there are many religions that talk about their duty. There are many who say, well, I've got to go do my duty.

[14:53] I've got to go, I've got to go to church, or I've got to go to mass, or I've got to go do whatever. Well, you know what? Got to do it. Well, we don't do it because we got to do it.

We do it because it is our greatest delight, and it ought to be our greatest delight to worship our Heavenly Father, to come to Him, submit our bodies, and to surrender our minds, and to submit our wills to Him.

Worship is not a religious duty, or it shouldn't be a religious duty in here that we do on Sunday mornings. On the contrary, we should be living to worship Him because it's our greatest delight. We're mercy, we ought to be mercy-driven worshipers because we are so driven by the mercy that He's shown to us, knowing we don't deserve His love.

We don't deserve the free gift of eternal life. We don't deserve the forgiveness that Jesus' death on the cross provides. So I want us to see throughout the rest of this passage how God mercy affects the way that we relate to each other, the way that we live with each other, and that we are mercy-driven worshipers, and that secondly, not only are we mercy-driven worshipers, but we are a mercy-molded family.

[16:20] How we live together in community is shaped by the mercy God has shown to each one of us. And here's the picture. From verse 3 all the way to verse 21, over and over again, we see commands, words of encouragement.

We see challenges that relate how we are to show mercy to each other, how we are to show mercy to the world. We experience mercy personally so that we might extend mercy corporately.

Let me say that again. We experience the mercy of God personally so He will enable us to extend the mercy of God corporately or to others as we are in community.

Mercy, just like comfort, comfort was provided to us or is provided to us for others' sake so that we might be a conduit of that comfort and give to others.

We receive mercy so that we might in turn be a conduit of God's mercy so that we might be able to extend mercy to others. And we'll see that this morning here in chapter number 12.

[17:32] What we see from verses 3 through verse 21 is how mercy affects that relationship but also how we relate to the world in verses 14 and following.

They talk about how we're together as the family of God. We see over and over again the way God speaks about us as a family, the body of Christ as a family.

We're going to go through these verses rather quickly. If you want to, this week to take this outline and then go back through and look to see how God wants us to relate to one another.

And I want us to see this picture. How does a mercy-molded family or what does a mercy-molded family look like? God's going to show us through the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12.

So what are we supposed to look like? Number one, as we start filling out, first thing that a mercy-molded family looks like is we belong to each other.

[18:36] We belong to each other. No longer are we individuals in a sea of people.

No longer are we, according to the American way of thinking, that we are rugged individualists. In reality, in God's economy, we belong to each other.

Look at verse number five. So we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually, what does Paul say?

You and I are members of one another. Just like the arms and the feet, the legs, the kidneys, the heart.

We're all members of, are all members of one body. You and I are all members of the same body.

So we belong to each other. Just like your right arm belongs to your left arm, they're not opposed to each other.

[19:38] They're part of the same body. And they work together, they ought to be working together, to assist one another. What if your right arm, let's say, was working, got aggravated with your left arm and was working in opposition to it?

Well, let's make it even more absurd. What if your right leg had a little bit of a tiff with your left leg and said, I'm not going to work together with you?

How would you walk? Right? It would actually be kind of funny. But the church does that. The body of Christ does that sometimes. We get upset with one another and all of a sudden we're not, you know, we don't have aisles here, but some churches, one faction sits on this side and one faction sits on that side and they never cross the aisle.

And that's not the way the body of Christ is supposed to respond. This is a profound interconnectedness that happens in the church when we actually belong to each other.

Just like the one body having many parts, we belong to each other. We're going to spend time on verses 3 through 8 next week, so we won't go too far here, but just let us highlight that one body has many parts.

[20 : 58] The body of Christ has many parts. When one part hurts, the rest of the body hurts as well. We're united with each other. Also, God says, since we are a mercy-molded family, we love each other.

We love each other. You get down to verse number 9, and this is where they just start to come, these commands just start to come one right after another.

Look at verse number 9. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. You might want to circle that word love, because it's the word agape in the Greek. It is a word that means a selfless love.

It is a sincere love. It's a love that is without hypocrisy. Literally, selfless love or a self-giving or an unselfish love.

[22 : 04] It was a rare term in Greek culture. It's a rare word in Greek literature. Why? Because it was viewed by the Greeks as a very weak love.

Because to the Greeks, they thought of promoting yourself. Promoting yourself was the way to be because it was thought of as being way more virtuous.

And isn't that the way it is in American culture today? We go into a relationship looking to see what we can get out of the relationship. And why do people divorce most of the time?

Because you're not doing for me what I need. You're not providing me the love that... You're not providing me the security. You're not providing me what I need. Rather than an agape kind of love where you go into the relationship doing for each other what the other needs.

And in so doing, your needs are met, the other person's needs are met, and therefore you have a growing relationship together. So we see it's even counter...

[23 : 14] This agape, this God kind of love, this selfless, unconditional love is countercultural in society today. So we belong to each other.

Love without hypocrisy. And then, we care for one another. We care for each other.

Remember we talked about that last week. We're comforted so that we in turn can comfort others. These are great words in verse number 10. Verse 10 says, Be kindly, affectionate to one another with brotherly love in honor, giving preference to one another.

Really, we only need, verse 10, to have great community. If you stop and think about it. Two main words here in the original language in the New Testament, the first word is a compound word. Be kindly, affectionate to one another. It combines the word friend with the word for love. That refers to family love.

[24 : 20] Greek, in the Greek, there were many words for love. The word for love here, kindly, affectionate, is the Greek word storge, which is kind of a family love. You love your spouse.

You love your kids. You love your uncle. You love your aunt. You love your family. And, you know, sometimes, you know, you're dealt your family. You've got to love them, right?

And so, it's that kind of love. You love your family because you're together and you have things in common. So be kindly, affectionate. It's the love you have for a friend.

It's the love you have for your family. And then the second part of that, brotherly love, that's the other term for love. And it's the Greek word Philadelphia, where we have the city of brotherly love. It is that brotherly love where you love others, a brotherly family kind of love. So it's a combination. So we have a picture here that we care for one another, just like a family cares for one another.

[25 : 22] You have a picture here of just like great friends. Care for one another because we are a family. Remember, we're connected. We're members of one another. We are also to honor each other.

We're also to honor each other. As we look in verse number 10, we'll see a little bit of what the Apostle Paul is talking about.

Back to verse 10. We talked about kindly affectionate, that brotherly love, family love, with brotherly love because we're connected together. We care for each other.

He says, in honor, the second part of verse 10, in honor giving preference to one another. He literally says, prefer one another in honor or prefer to honor instead of being honored.

Now, my, how would that change our relationships? How would that change our community? To prefer to honor rather than being honored. You know, we always think about, well, you know what, they didn't treat me like I wanted to.

[26 : 34] You know, they didn't, I wasn't recognized. My name wasn't called out. You know, I wasn't honored. I wasn't recognized. But if we came to it in how many can I honor today and not be

so concerned about our honor, but as Paul says, prefer to honor others than being honored yourself.

That is what, that is the oil and that's the kind of the grease that helps community work together to look out for one another, to care for one another in brotherly love, family kind of love, like you care for your family, to care for the rest of the body of Christ and to prefer to honor others rather than being honored yourself.

Heaping honor upon one another without favoritism. We don't just honor the people we like. Is that a novel idea? We honor everyone.

At least that's what we're supposed to. And we also spur on one another. We spur on one another. We help one another.

We encourage each other to be more Christ-like and to be honoring God of what we do. And here we're going to get some phrases back to back.

[27 : 51] Verse 11. Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.

Let's go back. Continuing steadfastly in prayer. It says, really, literally it says, let your heart and spirit be zealous for the Lord.

So when we're working with the body of Christ, when we are in community with each other, we're actually being diligent and zealous for God.

God. The picture is not being lazy in your walk with Christ. Because sometimes it's easy for us to kind of get overwhelmed with all the issues and the problems and everything that's going on in our life.

And we kind of allow our walk with Christ to lose its luster. And we might get lazy in our walk with Christ, not being slothful in our relationship with Him.

[29 : 00] And when tough times come, to be patient when we're going through affliction. To still be devoted to prayer when we're going through affliction.

Not to slack off, but to be on fire. And that's what Paul is saying. Don't lag behind in diligence. Stay fervent in spirit. Keep serving the Lord no matter what comes in our lives.

He says, Rejoice in hope. When tribulation comes, be patient. And all the while continuing steadfastly in prayer. That's why Hebrews 10, verse 24, says, Don't give up on meeting together.

He says, Because in so doing, he said, You can spur one another toward love and good deeds. So stay fervent. Also, Paul says, As we share with each other.

We're talking about community. We're talking about the body life as we come together. Remember, this doesn't just happen on Sunday mornings looking at the backs of each other's heads. This is when we come together outside of this worship, this corporate worship time.

[30 : 07] We share with each other. Look at verse 13, where Paul says, Distributing to the needs of the saints. Given to hospitality. Some translations translate that first word as share.

The word that Paul used where he says, literally distributing to, you know what that word is in the Greek? Koinonia. Koinonia. What is that word?

Fellowship. What do we have in common? So literally, Paul is saying, Have fellowship with the saints and share with them. Koinonia.

And also, it's sharing life together. It's sharing physical needs. He says, When someone else in the body has a physical need, take care of them.

Share with them your time. Share with them your money. Share with them your talents. And also, Give into hospitality. That's sharing. Someone's passing through. Someone is coming through.

[31 : 07] And you provide hospitality to them. We also rejoice. With each other. And he says, Rejoice when those also are with you who rejoice with those who rejoice.

Jump to verse 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice. And then weep with those who weep. We rejoice with each other.

And then we weep with each other. This is difficult for some. Some people don't like to cry in public. Some people don't like to show emotions with someone else.

And they'll wait till they get alone and cry. Well, Paul says, Don't be afraid to cry with each other. If you've got a brother or sister in Christ who has a need, he says, Be with them.

Cry with them. Be willing to weep with them. And then he says, We accept each other. We accept each other.

[32 : 13] He says, Verse 16, Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Or otherwise, Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position, is what Paul is really saying.

Remember, it's the mercy of God that connects us together, which is deeper than anything else in this world that could bind us together. The mercy of God that he's shown to us, the grace of God that he's shown to us through Jesus Christ, is the strongest cement that could bind the family of God together.

This whole thing is designed so that the gladness of the family, when we rejoice together, when we enjoy our time together with each other, the gladness of the family of God reflects the glory of the Father.

When we relate to one another, like Romans chapter 12 is teaching us to relate to one another, it reflects on our Heavenly Father. Because remember, the world looks to us, and the world sees how much God loves them by how we love one another.

[33 : 33] When we show that community, what this community is like together, it brings honor, it brings glory to God. The gladness of the family reflects the glory of God.

So we are mercy-molded, we are mercy-driven worshipers, we are a mercy-molded family, and then very quickly, as we wind this down to a close, we are on a mercy-giving mission.

We really don't have time to get into it, but we're going to look at these next three things and see how God, and look at the verse, the verse that we skipped, and look to see, not only is God providing His mercy to us so that we would show mercy to others in the body of Christ, but also so that we can show mercy to the world.

Let's look at verse 14, where Paul says, Bless those who persecute you, and bless and do not curse.

What is this? This is extending mercy to the world. Bless those who persecute you. God showed you mercy when you were alienated from Him.

[34 : 47] God says, As a follower of Christ, show mercy to the world when they persecute you. Because I showed mercy on you when you were alienated from me. You show the world mercy while they are alienated from you and from me.

And we don't just extend mercy to the family of God, we extend mercy to the rest of the world. He says in verse 17, Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine.

I will repay, says the Lord. And then he winds it down by saying, If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing, you will heap coals of fire on his head.

The early church was under severe persecution. So how do you respond to that? Paul said, Show them mercy. Don't fight back.

[35 : 59] Don't repay evil for evil. Don't be angry at them and don't lash back out at them. He says, Show them mercy.

Matter of fact, if your enemy, those who's persecuted you, is hungry, if their house gets flooded, what does he say? Show them mercy and help them. If he's thirsty, give him a drink.

He says, For in so doing, you will heap coals of fire on his head. And it's not for the wrong reasons. God shows his mercy, the Bible says, so that because the world, so the world experiences his mercy, the world experiences his love, so that it would cause them to be convicted about it and in order to turn back to him.

God's mercy we dispense on the world could have the same effect. If not, they just missed out on turning to God. And they missed out on a blessing. And we can trust the justice of God at that point. So very quickly, we trust in God's justice. That's what he tells us to do here on planet Earth. Just trust in God's justice.

[37 : 14] Someone does you wrong, don't get even. Let God take care of it. Trust in God's justice. Then, we triumph with God's love.

You know how to triumph when someone does you evil? When someone hurts you and wants to hurt you? You triumph with God's love. And in so doing, Paul says, it's just like heaping hot coals on their head.

Kind of an interesting analogy. But he says, it will cause them probably to, in the beginning, burn with anger. But then all of a sudden, why do they do that? Why are they doing it? And then it maybe caused them to think about why we are doing it. And then, we follow the one who died for his enemies. We follow Jesus who died for his enemies.

And as we close it out, so now what? So this week, if we will pray continually that God will make us a community with great mercy for each other, great mercy for the people in Lake Charles and surrounding communities, and great love for the world, let's become a Romans chapter 12 community where we love without hypocrisy.

[38 : 33] We prefer to honor each other rather than receiving the honor. We show mercy to one another. Don't jump to conclusions. Don't judge one another's motives.

But honor one another. Forgive one another. Show mercy to one another. Because we belong to each other. We love each other. We're to care for each other.

We're to honor each other. Spur each other on to love and to good works. Share with each other. Rejoice with each other. Weep with one another. And accept one another.

just the way they are. Because it's God's job to change them into who He wants them and us to be. Let's allow that to be our prayer this week.

Let's pray. Father, this morning, as we have come together and looking at mercy in your church, in the body of Christ, may we be mercy showers.

[39 : 29] may we show mercy to one another, not holding it, not begrudgingly, not holding a grudge over anyone or for anyone, but that we would in all humility care for one another and extend the same mercy to others that was given to us.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's all stand. Amen. Let's all stand. Amen. Let's all stand.