

Core Values

Devoted to the **Word**

Centered on **Jesus**

Committed to **One Another**

Sent on **Mission**



FOCUS ATTENTION

Today we begin a three-week study of the Four Core Values we apply to every action, event, or process at First Baptist Church Prattville. These intentional, interrelated, and sequential values are at the very heart of the New Testament church.

These Core Values are: **Devoted to the Word**
Centered on Jesus
Committed to One Another
Sent on Mission

What is the most consequential book you have ever read? Who is the most consequential person you have ever encountered? For Christ followers, there can only be one answer to each of these questions: “The Bible is the most impactful book I’ve ever read, and Jesus has impacted my life more than anyone ever!”

We will consider these two Core Values together for two reasons:

1. To be devoted to the Word means we center our lives on the main character of the Bible, which is Jesus.
2. To be centered on Jesus means we accept and apply the message of the Bible, which is God’s perfect plan for mankind’s redemption through Jesus.

Essence of the Text. The Bible is God’s perfect, all-sufficient Word which reveals God’s perfect, all-sufficient Son, Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

For centuries, Bible scholars have written and published books that seek to explain the message and meaning of the Bible, God’s written Word. But as we will do repeatedly during our study of The Unfolding Story in 2023, we will seek to let the Bible itself interpret the Bible for us. We will turn to the Bible to explain the importance and benefits of being **devoted to the Word**, Core Value One.

Human languages and literature are elegant in many ways, but few linguistic or literary styles can take the mind and heart onto a soaring journey of truth equal to the musical poetry of David. With an economy of words and ideas only available through song, David takes the hearer or reader of Psalm 19 on an exploration of the value and validity of God’s Word. Fortunately for us, the beauty of Hebrew, David’s heart language, is not lost in our English translations of Psalm 19. In Psalm 19 we can experience David’s call to the faithful for an unerring devotion to God’s Word.

Psalm 19:7-11. Core Value One: Devoted to the Word

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Scholars, including ancient Jewish commentators, hold that there are two distinct songs of David found both in Hebrew and English translations of Psalm 19. Verses 1-6 extol God’s revelation of Himself by His Creation, while verses 7-14 expose God’s self-revelation through His Holy Word. For our purposes, we will consider the cascading cadences of David’s second song as he unveils the glories of holy words which demand our devotion.

v. 7a. In Psalm 19:1a, David makes a two-part statement about God’s self-revelation in creation. Similarly, David makes a multi-part emphatic statement of the theme he will follow in succeeding verses: Psalm 19:7a could be rendered: *Complete is [the] revelation of YHWH, refreshing [the] spirit* (translation mine). David says God’s Word is:

- **Complete.** There are no missing parts. Unlike a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle with only 998 pieces, abandoned on the shelf of your closet, there are NO missing parts in God’s Word.
- **Revelation.** All we are qualified to know about God is contained in His revelation of Himself. Out of love for us, God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself through His creation, His redemptive acts, and His written Word.
- **Refreshing.** This could also be rendered as “bringing life to life.” God’s Word is invigorating and satisfying. It reveals the source and power of life itself.

vv. 7b-9. Having established the theme that God's Word tells us what we need to know about Him, David "...proceeds to depict the comprehensiveness of YHWH's law and its beneficent effects with a series of five successive terms, each of which expands and complements all the others." (Durham, John I. *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4). With each declaration, David notes the benefits of abiding in and devoting oneself to God's Word.

- **YHWH's testimony is constant, giving wisdom to simple minds.** Devotion to God's Word is grounded on its consistency, its reliability, and its value as a source of wisdom for life.
- **YHWH's orders are straight, making the heart glad.** Soldiers or sailors are confused and at risk when a superior's orders are not clear. David asserts that there is no confusion in God's Word, and clear guidance for life brings joy.
- **YHWH's commandment is genuine, opening our eyes to God's Truth.** God's commands sincerely desire the best for believers, and in these commands, we see God's way is best!
- **YHWH's words are weighty and eternal.** Fearing [respecting the significance] of God's Word opens eternity. God's Word is present and timeless, with impact for now and for eternity.
- **YHWH's judgements (decisions) are accurate and set the standard of rightness and mercy.** God's words are without error, establishing parameters for living while showing mercy.

In these three verses, David uses many terms to extol the benefits of a life devoted to God's Word. He uses a Hebraic literary device designed to multiply the significance of "something" (God's Word) by adding descriptive and impactful effects attributed to that "something." Much like studying an art masterpiece from different points in a room gives greater insight to the painting, considering God's Word as law, testimony, orders, command, words, and judgement/decisions makes us more willing to submit to God Word.

vv. 10. Using the two human senses of sight and taste, David now turns to the benefits and blessings enjoyed from a devotion to God's Word.

He begins by exploring the unequalled value of God's Word. Though less durable than iron, copper, or bronze, gold was (and is) highly valued by its scarcity and beauty. David bluntly asserts that God's word is "**More to be desired...**" than this standard for wealth and value. David holds that the value of God's Word exceeds that of highly "refined" gold, inferring that the purity of God's Word exceeds the cleansing fires of the jeweler's pot.

David then turns to the unsurpassed desirability of God's Word. One need only look around a room (or in a mirror) to view the appeal of sweets! In David's world, this desire for sugary delights was easiest satisfied by

collecting the work of the honeybee. The Judean shepherd-boy may have once sweetened food or drink with pure, wild honey, but he had come to understand that God's Word was even more desirable, "tastier" than the thick sweetness of the hive's comb.

v. 11. Before some closing stanzas that bind the two songs together (vv. 12-14), David turns from identifying the pure benefits of devotion to God's Word to the advantage gained over sin through God's Word. God's Word records commands to keep, but it also identifies sins to avoid. Like road signs in a highway construction zone or cautions posted on a container of bleach, God's Word defines behaviors and practices that put people at odds with God. Heeding the life guidance gained by faithfulness to God's Word provides boundaries for human behavior toward God and others. David acknowledges there is "**...great reward**" in keeping God's Word. To keep (*nasar*) carries the idea of unswerving faithfulness, which is clearly what we mean when we say we are Devoted to the Word.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What are daily actions or activities we can practice to demonstrate our devotion to God's Word, the Bible?
- As you understand it, what does the Bible tell us about God? Discuss.
- As you understand it, what does the Bible tell us about ourselves? Discuss.

Colossians 1:9-20. Core Value Two: Centered on Jesus

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,
12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.
13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

- 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.
19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We could have selected a wide number of biblical passages when launching a study of Core Value Two, Centered on Jesus. However, Paul's opening words to the Christians at Colossae are some of the most profound words we have in the New Testament concerning the centrality of Jesus. Two simple math sentences (from an unknown Christ follower) might summarize what it means to Center on Jesus:

Jesus + anything = Nothing

Jesus + nothing = Everything

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church at Colossae because their fellowship was plagued by a significant problem commonly called Gnosticism. While there were several versions of this heresy present in the Early Church (and some remain today), the core idea was that to "really" be a follower of Jesus, a person had to have special knowledge (the Greek word to know is *gnosis*) and special behaviors/practices to evidence that knowledge. Paul dives headlong into refuting this twisted way of thinking, proclaiming the all-encompassing, all-sufficient, complete work of Christ.

vv. 9-10. Jesus- Our Example. In Colossians 1:4 and 2:1, Paul reports he has not visited Colossae, but had heard of them and their practices. Based on what he has heard, Paul engaged in a unique season of intercessory prayer for them. As the balance of the letter attests, many in Colossae believed they had special knowledge, understanding, and wisdom where Jesus was concerned. But Paul initially uses the words knowledge, understanding, and wisdom as a "hook", to direct the attention of the Colossian Christians to what he is about to tell them. All three words infer that while many Colossians believe they already have "special" knowledge, Paul seeks to clarify their understanding. Paul uses their errant thirst for information and philosophy to direct their attention to their most telling needs. Believers are called to:

- know and do the will of Jesus;
- walk and work daily as Jesus walked and worked, thereby pleasing Jesus;
- bear good fruit through this faithful walk, which will result in knowing God more fully.

None of these are secrets in Christian living. These principles are evidence of a life that is increasingly focused on Jesus, and not focusing on uncovering hidden information or engaging in 'special' practices. Even today, the ideal way to experience the hope of Jesus is to center ourselves on His will, His example, and maturely bear His fruit (Galatians 5:16-26).

vv. 11-12. Jesus- Our Benefactor. Paul's desire for the Colossians, and all believers, is that we benefit from our walk with Jesus by "...**being strengthened...**" with His power and might. Verse 11 could also read, *"with all power being empowered to give him glory as shown in your endurance and perseverance..."*. Paul stresses that the power we need to endure and live victorious, joyful lives is found in Him [Jesus] and is provided for His glory.

Further, this "strengthened living" qualifies believers to "...**share in the inheritance of the saints...**". Those who repent, believe, and trust Jesus become children of God and joint-heirs through the Son (Romans 8:16-17). In sum, centering on Jesus brings divine power to life and assures the believer of an eternal inheritance as God's children. Thank You, Jesus!

vv. 13-14. Jesus- Our Rescue. Again, Paul wrote to the Colossians to correct their errant ideas about a need for 'special knowledge' to be 'true' believers. In verses 13-14, Paul outlines the profound simplicity of God's Work through Christ bringing rescue to all who believe.

- **"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness"**. A life of sin is a life of darkness, separated from the light of God's love. Jesus' completed work delivers the believer from an allegiance to sin.
- **"[He has] transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son"**. Believers are delivered from darkness and transferred to the Son's kingdom. This transfer grants a new citizenship to the believer. (Phil. 3:20)
- **"in whom we have redemption"**. Our redemption is secured as Jesus takes the punishment meant for our sinfulness upon Himself.
- **"the forgiveness of sins."** Best of all, Jesus takes the consequences of our sin (Romans 6:23) upon Himself and secures for believers a solution to their sin problem (Acts 13:28). Jesus paid a debt He did not owe on behalf of those who could not pay.

vv. 15-20. Jesus- Our Complete Look at God. Jesus pointedly said to Philip that to see Him is to see the Father (John 14:9). Paul is a bit more effusive here, saying while no special knowledge or actions are required, seeing the revelation in Jesus is more significant than anything else a human being can do, for centering on Jesus enables us to see God in all His transcendent glory.

- **"He is the image of the invisible God."** While God is not limited

Core Value 1: Devoted to the Word

Core Value 2: Centered on Jesus

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- by time or space, He chose to perfectly show Himself to mankind in Jesus, His Son.
- **“the firstborn of all creation.”** Paul means two things here. (1) Jesus, as an expression of the Triune God, participated in creation; and (2) Jesus, as the sinless sacrifice for man’s sin, overcame death and sin by His resurrection. Paul is not saying the Second Person of the Trinity was “made”, but that even in His earthly birth, Jesus was one-of-a-kind (John 3:16).
- **“...by Him all things were created...through him and for him...”** Jesus was at creation. Jesus was the agent of creation. Jesus was/is the ‘owner’ of creation.
- **“...He is before all things and in him all things hold together.”** Before taking on human form, Jesus was. For this reason, all creation is ordered and sustained by Him. Even while feeding thousands or opening blind eyes, He was keeping the sun ablaze and the tides turning.
- **“He is the head of...the church.”** Even before his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus declared ownership and “headship” of the church (Mt. 26:18). Just as the head is essential to human life, Jesus is essential to church life.
- **“He is the beginning...that...he might be pre-eminent...”** Jesus is protos, the first and only of His kind. There is no implication of origin or beginning- as a Person of the Trinity, Jesus simply is. The idea of pre-eminence is to say that Jesus is so unique, so one-of-a-kind, that He is other. This encapsulates the Old Testament concept of God’s holiness.
- **“...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...”** The word “fullness” here is the word pleroma, meaning God fully revealed Himself in the Son. Paul says it pleased God the Father to show us Himself through the Son (see also Mt. 3:17; Heb. 1:2).
- **“...through him to reconcile to himself all things...”** From the time of Adam’s sin in Eden, creation has been at odds with the Creator and with itself (Gen. 2:17ff). Jesus, the Centerpiece of all things, took it upon Himself to reconcile man [and creation] with God’s perfect plan. Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the cross has reconciled all things to Himself!
- **“...making peace by the blood of his cross.”** Centuries of blood sacrifices at Sinai, Bethel, Gilgal, Samaria, and Jerusalem would never be sufficient. Peace [making relationships right on God’s terms] between creation and Creator could only come by a perfect life shedding perfect blood. Only Jesus could sign that treaty!

We center ourselves on Jesus because as we focus on Him, we see the eternal God who loves us and desires a restored relationship with us. All of God’s character is revealed in His Son, Jesus the Christ.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Do you agree or disagree with the two “math” sentences that opened our discussion of Colossians 1:3-20? Why or why not?
- What are some of the behaviors, actions, conditions, or requirements we seek to “add” (or take away) from the reality of Jesus in an attempt to make the Gospel more (or less) restrictive? Discuss.
- Jesus is our example; our benefactor; our rescue; our complete look at God. Which of these facts about Jesus best help you “center” on Jesus? Why?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

- Core Value One, Devoted to the Word, and Core Value Two, Centered on Jesus, are uniquely inter-connected.
- The central message of the Bible is Jesus, the Son of God Who became the Son of man that men might become sons of God.
- The church must devote itself to the Word and submit to Jesus as the Center of all.
- When God’s Word and God’s Son are given their proper place in our lives, believers treat one another properly and execute the mission of the church effectively.

John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:18; Romans 12:3-8, 10-18; Ephesians 4:1-3; Galatians 5:13-14

FOCUS ATTENTION

Our third core value stresses our commitment to one another as members of First Baptist Prattville. "One another" is two words in English, but it's only one word in Greek: ἀλλήλων (*ah-LAY-loan*). It's used 100 times in 94 verses in the New Testament. 47 of those verses give instructions to the church, and 60% of those instructions come from Paul. If we combine the repeated references, there are at least 59 different "one another" commands in the New Testament.

To carry out the "one-another's" of Scripture means we must be together, in community. "Attending church doesn't make you a Christian but being a Christian should make you want to attend church." — Shane Pruitt.

Tim Challies states, "The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, have many teachings on the importance of community. By studying two simple phrases that appear time and again in the New Testament, we can learn of the requirements and beauty of true Christian community. The phrases "each other" and "one another" speak to relationships. They do not address a relationship to God or a relationship to oneself. Neither do they speak to a relationship with the universal church. Rather, they address interpersonal relationships within a community of believers." That community of believers is the local church.

As members of First Baptist Church of Prattville, we should be committed to one another.

ASK: Can you name the four core values of First Baptist Prattville?

(We are Devoted to the Word, Centered on Jesus, Committed to One Another, and Sent on Mission.)

Essence of the Text. God intends for His people to serve together in love, in unity, and with humility.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:18 Love One Another

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Roughly one third of the "one another's" in Scripture refer to love. It is foundational to all we do as followers of Christ.

In John 13, Jesus performs a humble act of service for His disciples. They have gathered for the Passover meal, the last supper they will celebrate together before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. The living Son of God stoops down and washes the dirty, smelly feet of the disciples. This was typically the task of the lowliest household servant or slave. Jesus did not do this to shame the disciples, but to set an example of service. Following the Passover meal (and Judas' exit to betray the Lord) Jesus again foretells his death, and that it will glorify the Father who, in turn, will glorify the Son.

The disciples still don't grasp what Jesus is trying to tell them. He then offers them something they both need to hear and can understand: a new commandment.

The word "commandment" is significant. What Jesus is about to say is not a suggestion, not an option, and not merely a nice parting thought to conclude the evening. We can break down vv. 34-35 into three points:

1. **"Love one another."** The command is clear and to the point. This band of 11 men are about to experience the most tumultuous times of their lives. Everything is about to change. Jesus will soon go to the cross, die, rise on the third day, and ascend to the Father. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will come upon them to empower them to carry out the Great Commission. But at this moment, they are far from unified. There are petty jealousies, different agendas, and confusion as to who and what Jesus truly is. Before they can become the hands and feet of Jesus in the months and years ahead, they must love each other.
2. **"Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."** Jesus explains what He means. He's not simply telling them to have warm fuzzies or even brotherly affection. The word used for love in these verses is a form of the Greek ἀγάπη (*ag-ah'-pay*), the highest form of love exemplified by the love of God for man and of man for God. It embraces a deep and profound sacrificial love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance. This is the type of love that Jesus has demonstrated throughout His life and ministry, both to sinful people and to the Father. This is the type of love that His disciples (and all disciples to come) are to have for one another.
3. **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples."** The command to love the Lord and love our neighbors was not new. But Jesus raised the bar through His ministry, even telling His followers to love their enemies. The love that believers have for one another is the best evidence that we are truly followers of Christ. Through humble, sacrificial love, we best imitate the Lord. Love must be our defining trait as we seek to reach the lost in Prattville, our nation, and around the world.

Decades later, the Apostle John would challenge growing believers to not just talk the talk, but to walk the walk. In I John 3:8, he challenges Christians to live out their love for others through action. Such love moves beyond feelings; it is sacrificial and strives for truth. Agape love manifests itself through service. Such love begins with action. Action then begins to affect our attitude. Finally, our feelings line up with our attitudes and actions.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What are some practical ways we can demonstrate love for one another as members of First Baptist Prattville?
- When we speak of Christian love, which is more important – doing or feeling?

Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:1-3
As Believers, Be United with One Another

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members] and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

The Greek term, *Koinonia* (Koinonia) describes the desired state of fellowship and unity within the Body of Christ. In the Christian context, it means doing life together. The first occurrence of koinonia is Acts 2:42, *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* It is a divinely intimate, holy unity among believers.

Biblical unity is not uniformity. The body of Christ encompasses people with different languages, cultures, the rich, the poor, young old, different personality types, and differing opinions about everything from politics to worship styles and favorite paint colors. Revelation 7:9 reminds us that this is part of God's beautiful mosaic of the church: *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.*

Thus, our unity as believers is not based on everyone thinking the same about worldly matters. We have our opinions, but those opinions must take a back seat to the commands of God we find in Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12 that the church is like a body; we are all part of the Body of Christ with different gifts. Like a healthy human body, we as a church function best when our members are exercising our spiritual gifts in a way that complements and serves the rest of the members. Some may preach or teach, some may sing, some may rock babies and change diapers. All members are important, and, as we function together as a body, unity is the natural result.

But we must avoid thinking that some members and gifts are more important than others. Spiritual pride leads to conflict, not unity. *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4:1-3. Once more, Paul stresses the importance of unity among believers. Here, he provides several key challenges that can help us, as members of First Baptist Prattville, maintain unity within the body:

- Walk worthy – focusing on using your gifts to benefit others.
- Humility – think of others before thinking of yourself.
- Gentleness – a fruit of the spirit, meaning strength under control, such as a strong horse submitting to its rider, or we as believers submitting to the Spirit.
- Patience/bearing with one another - The Holy Spirit empowers believers to withstand challenging situations with perseverance and endurance.
- Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – This comes through prayer that our attitude would be in line with the Spirit's desire that we remain at peace with one another.

Consider this: there will be many people in Heaven and the New Earth that you probably don't currently like. Eternity is a long time; it's literally endless. Perhaps learning to get along (if possible) with those with whom you currently disagree/dislike, will strengthen the church in the long run. There is a real opportunity to grow in Christ-likeness as we treat adversaries with love and kindness. No, we don't compromise on important principles. We do allow the Spirit to exhibit the fruit of gentleness and patience (not to mention, self-control) through us.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why do you think churches experience conflict?
- What are some practical things we can do to maintain unity within our church?

Romans 12:10-18; Galatians 5:13-14 In Humility, Serve One Another

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

You will notice how the "one-another's" overlap and blend. Loving one another and striving to be united with one another undergird our ability to serve one another with an attitude of humility. Note that both the Romans 10 passage and Galatians 5 verses emphasize love as the foundation upon which we serve. Serving one another also requires humility. In our carnal nature, there is a tendency to want to be served, to have our way. That's fine if you're going through the drive-thru at a fast-food restaurant. But when it comes to our church family, we should strive, as Paul states, to "outdo one another in showing honor." The Apostle challenges us to transform our thinking through a series of short exhortations. For those not familiar with the Bible, it is important to understand that Scripture is more about positive commands to act in obedience toward the Lord and others, rather than a list of "don'ts." Once again, these exhortations by Paul cannot be carried out in isolation.

As we look at Romans 12:10-18, Paul reminds the church that we are one family, and we should love and honor one another deeply as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Holy Spirit is our motivator and strength, Jesus is our source of hope that brings us joy, even during hard times. The believers at the time of Paul's writings were indeed facing persecution for their faith. Paul urged both patience (because of their deep trust in the Lord) and to remain faithful in prayer.

The idea of sharing is central to Paul's teaching. We share what we have with other believers, we share in times of joy and in times of sorrow. That's what families do. We support one another spiritually through prayer and encouragement. We also step up to provide for physical needs. And sometimes, we put an arm around a fellow believer and cry with them.

Pride is the enemy of humility, and pride can lead to sin. There is no social class structure in the body of Christ. There's an old saying, "the ground is level at the foot of the cross." No one in the church should look down on another believer. Even if there are disagreements (and they will come), we should be quick to forgive and seek reconciliation, never seeking revenge. Circumstances are often out of our control, but we should strive to be peacemakers to the degree we are able.

Some Christians have the mistaken idea that a title or position is required to serve in the church. It is true that we need people to serve in specific roles – deacons, Sunday School teachers, choir members, greeters, childcare volunteers, the list goes on and on. But all believers can serve other believers, though that service may vary from day to day and week to week. We can meet specific needs, encourage others, pray for others. Ask yourself the question, "how can I love my neighbor today?"

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What are some practical ways that we can serve one another as the Body of Christ?
- What did Paul challenge the believers to do during times of persecution?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

It is evident from Scripture that followers of Christ should love one another, be united with one another, and serve one another. It is impossible to be an obedient Christian and not do these things. We are not meant to live out our lives in isolation, apart from the body of Christ.

Granted, there will be circumstances and people within the context of the church that may frustrate, anger, or even hurt you. The church is made up of sinful people . . . redeemed by Christ, but still sinful. Ultimately, it is HIS church, and we are the members. Keep your eyes on the Lord and not on flawed people.

To grow as a believer means that we grow in our love and devotion for the Lord and love for His church and the members thereof. Keep in mind that a significant portion of New Testament principles and commands cannot be obeyed apart from the church. As Pastor Peyton says, "There is no 'me and Jesus' in the New Testament." The idea that a person can be a faithful follower of Christ yet exclude themselves from the church is ridiculous and wrong. Such an idea would have been unheard of during the early church period. How are you serving the body? Has God gifted you to volunteer for a specific area of ministry?

- How do you respond to someone who claims to love Jesus but says, "I don't need the church?"
- What can you do this week to love and serve someone in our church family?

The “One Another” Passages

The phrase “one another” is derived from the Greek word *allelon* which means “one another, each other; mutually, reciprocally.” It occurs 100 times in the New Testament. Approximately 59 of those occurrences are specific commands teaching us how (and how not) to relate to one another. Obedience to those commands is imperative. It forms the basis for all true, Christian community, and has a direct impact on our witness to the world (John 13:35). In addition to *allelon*, the Bible uses other words and phrases to instruct us how to relate to others. With that in mind, the following list is not exhaustive, and primarily focuses on the use of *allelon*.

POSITIVE COMMANDS

Love one another (John 13:34 - This command occurs at least 16 times)

Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)

Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)

Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Be like minded towards one another (Romans 15:5)

Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

Admonish one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)

Greet one another (Romans 16:16)

Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25)

Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)

Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:13)

Be patient with one another (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13)

Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15, 25)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19)

Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 5:5)

Consider others better than yourselves (Philippians 2:3)

Look to the interests of one another (Philippians 2:4)

Bear with one another (Colossians 3:13)

Teach one another (Colossians 3:16)

Comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13)

Stir up [provoke, stimulate] one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)

Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)

Employ the gifts that God has given us for the benefit of one another (1 Peter 4:10)

Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Peter 5:5)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

NEGATIVE COMMANDS (how not to treat one another)

Do not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9)

Stop passing judgment on one another (Romans 14:13)

If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you'll be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:15)

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:26)

Do not slander one another (James 4:11)

Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

We do all this because we are in a real sense “members of one another” (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25).

FOCUS ATTENTION

Devoted to the Word
Centered on Jesus
Committed to One Another
Sent on Mission

Finally, we consider Core Value Four: Sent on Mission. As we have already established, we are determined to apply these Core Values to every action, event, or process at First Baptist Prattville. As we have seen, God's written Word points to Jesus. Jesus saves people who repent and believe, creating a committed community. This community, the church, is sent to share the Good News found in God's Word about the Living Word.

Essence of the Text. All believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent by Jesus to share the good news of salvation in Jesus with the world.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

John 20:19-22

- 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."
20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.
21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."
22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:19-22 records events on the evening of Resurrection Sunday. Earlier in the day, Mary Magdalene, then Peter, then another disciple [thought to be John] had come to Jesus' tomb only to find it empty! Inexplicably, the two disciples left the tomb and returned home, while Mary Magdalene lingered in her grief. Mary's grief turns to unbelievable joy when the person she presumed was the gardener speaks her name. Jesus instructs Mary to alert His disciples of what she knows, and she gladly announces, **"I have seen the Lord"** (Jn. 20:18).

v. 19. We can safely presume that the gathering of the disciples that first Easter night was a direct result of Mary's news from earlier in the day. Word had traveled fast among Jesus' disciples, and all but Thomas was present (Jn. 20:24). While there was confusion in the room, there was also **"...fear..."**. Given the events of the preceding week, the confusion over the empty tomb, a broken Roman seal upon the tomb, and Mary's report,

the disciples were justified in their fears. Currently, they only had enough evidence to know that something unexplainable had happened at the tomb that morning. Then Jesus appears with words that can comfort any troubled heart: **"Peace be with you."** Jesus is not announcing an absence of conflict, nor is He promising an easy road ahead. This greeting speaks to a calming assurance that He is near, and because He is near, all is well.

It is noteworthy that earlier in the day, the disciples had retreated to their own homes, possibly in hopes of blending into the swelling crowds that were still in Jerusalem for the recent Passover. But now, with the confusing but promising news from Mary, Peter, and John, the disciples had chosen to be together. In three-plus years with Jesus, they had learned the value of community found in being with one another, and so together they would now experience first-hand evidence of Jesus' resurrection. The resurrected Christ could have gone door-to-door, re-enlisting His scattered band. But now, together, they would see evidence of the risen Christ and be sent on mission with a Holy power that only Jesus could provide.

v. 20. Before Jesus can move forward with a commissioning and an empowering that would change these learners into "doers", He must demonstrate that He is Who they believe Him to be. **"...he showed them his hands and his side"** is John's way of validating the message and the messenger. It is said that "seeing is believing", so Jesus invites the room's occupants to view His hands and His side, wounded by spikes and spear. In this way, Jesus validates His death, His resurrection, and His mission for these people. In effect Jesus is saying, "The time of instruction is over. My work is finished, and it is time for you to join in my mission!"

What the disciples see does not disgust or discourage them. In fact, seeing Resurrection power before their very eyes changes their grief and confusion to gladness. **"Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord."** Gladness is not a transient emotion like happiness; gladness is a state of being based on confidence in good news. Certainly, these men and women now had Good News to share, and they were **glad** at this news. We have seen the Lord! Jesus is alive! Death and sin are defeated!

vv. 21-22. More often than not, we turn to Matthew 28 or Acts 1 to consider the commissioning of Jesus' followers to Gospel proclamation. But John wants us to know that Jesus did not wait almost 40 days to send the disciples out with the Good News. It is Resurrection Sunday, and Jesus says, **"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."**

"Earlier, the disciples had been commanded to *love one another* [Italics added, see Core Value Three] as he had loved them (13:34; 15:12); now they were commissioned to be sent to others as he had been sent to them."

(Hull, William E. Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol. 9). The Gospel is news that must not be delayed!

In their discipleship classic, Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God, Authors Henry Blackaby and Claude King say, "You cannot stay where you are and go with God." (Blackaby and King. Experiencing God. Multiple editions). The disciples could not live in fear and tell what they now knew. The disciples could not stay in that locked room with the news they had to share. Jesus sends His followers to "go and tell" just as the Father had commissioned Jesus. Jesus opening message in the earliest gospel (Mark 1:15 ESV) was one of urgency: "...**The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel.**" On Resurrection Sunday night, Jesus extended the missional call to include all who repent and believe. There was no time to waste; no delay would be acceptable.

Not only does John accelerate the timing of the commissioning of the disciples, but John reports also that Jesus energizes missional enterprise: "...**he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."**" Note this is not a 'first blessing' to be followed by a subsequent coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2); the verb receive carries the idea of a future event, which was fulfilled at Pentecost. Jesus had already promised that His followers would have a Helper (John 14:26; 16:7ff), and now that help is on the way in the person of the Holy Spirit.

In a crowded room with a secured door, fear had become gladness, and gladness had become a mission. A mission with a message for the ages, across the ages, and designed to impact the entire world with the Good News of Jesus! This is our message, as believers are sent on mission!

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Why do we fear sharing what we know about Jesus with others?
- What are some disciplines we can practice or steps we can take to move from fear to gladness when sharing the Good News of Jesus?
- How does the presence of the Holy Spirit support the mission of believers?

Romans 10: 9, 12-17

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

+++++

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

- 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?
And how are they to hear without someone preaching?
15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written,
"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Decades had passed since seeing the hands and side of Jesus turned fear into gladness. Propelled by both the persecutor's sword and intentional travels, the message that Jesus lives and provides forgiveness of sins has been carried across the known world. Yet there is often confusion about both the mission and the message. God commissions a Jewish theologian, who once murdered Christ followers, to travel the world. He will start churches, train disciples, and correct doctrine as he goes. His Jewish name was Saul, but now he answers to Paul. In Romans 10:9 and following, Paul makes one truth crystal clear: every person who confesses Jesus as Lord and repents of sin is empowered and sent to share the Good News with their world.

v. 9. Nothing in scripture is more straightforward than this: "...**if you confess...that Jesus is Lord and believe...that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**" To confess is to make a public, affirmative statement about something or someone. Our mission from Jesus is not a secret one; our confession of His Lordship is a continuing action, evidenced in our thoughts, words, and actions. Further, our confession of Jesus as Lord is based on a belief and acceptance as fact that God raised Him from the dead. Many people in many cultures believe many different things about the Nazarene named Jesus, but only Christians confess and believe that God completed destiny-altering work in Jesus. Jesus paid our sin-debt by His death, and by His resurrection He grants eternal deliverance to those who believe! As we are sent on mission, this is the message that we are to share; we are to share what we confess and believe.

vv. 12-13. In the Old Testament, God chose Israel as His special people, charging them with representing His rule and reign to the world. God's plan has always included all the nations, but Israel's sin caused them to decide that God belonged to them rather than them belonging to God. Israel failed, but God's mission and message would not be stopped, because both "...**Jew and Greek...**" answer to the same sovereign God and can "...**call on Him.**" Two ideas are at work here: (1) both Jews and Greeks can call on Him and be saved; and (2) both Jews and Greeks, once saved, are 'on mission' to share what they have confessed and believed. How do we know God expects us (all of us) to share what we have confessed and believed?

vv. 14-15. Paul uses a first-century teaching formula of posing questions that will lead his readers to a desired conclusion and response to drive home his teaching on the shared mission of believers. He uses a series of four questions to identify the divine obligation of every believer to share the Gospel news.

QUESTION: But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?

ANSWER/FACT: People cannot call upon someone in whom they have not believed.

QUESTION: And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

ANSWER/FACT: People cannot believe in someone of whom they have never heard.

QUESTION: And how are they to hear without a preacher?

ANSWER/FACT: People cannot hear without someone telling them this good news.

QUESTION: And how can men preach unless they are sent?

ANSWER/FACT: Only those who have received the news are qualified to share the news.

For too long, Christians have looked at these two verses, read the English words “preaching” (10:14) and “preach” (10:15) and dismissed both verses as being scriptural expectations of church officers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, simple yet wise words from Blackaby and King:

“You cannot be in a relationship with Jesus and not be on mission.”
-Blackaby, H. and King, C. Experiencing God... Multiple Editions

The root word for “preaching” and “preach” is kerusso, which means to announce or proclaim widely. The obligation to announce or widely proclaim the Good News of new life in Jesus is not limited to religious leaders or church officers. The wide proclamation that Jesus came to save sinners is a message for all people, in all times and nations. Sharing that message is the mission of every believer, in every age.

The infant church in the Book of Acts grew as those who had confessed and believed were sharing what they had experienced about Jesus with others. The church grew as they took what they experienced and shared it with those around them.

Paul closes this challenge to be “on mission” with an encouraging word from Isaiah 52:7, where the prophet praises even “...**the feet of those who preach [proclaim, broadcast] the good news!**” Those who bring good news do so because of the nature of the news, not because of their desire for praise or gain. We are sent on Mission- the task of every believer until Jesus returns!

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Teachers, share your own story of your personal encounter with Jesus when you repented, confessed, and believed. Share how this decision impacts your life today.
- Why is some “good news” easier to share than other good news?
- How can believers encourage one another to be proactive in our mission?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

Invite every class member to repent of sin, confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in His resurrection which brings salvation to those who believe.

Challenge members to publicly declaring Jesus to be their Savior, living out the mission of proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus.

Challenge members to be sensitive to everyday ‘moments’ when they might share the good news of Jesus, giving people around them the opportunity to “call on the name of the Lord.”