

Jumpstarting Your Walk – Through Right Relationships Within Your Church Family – John 13:34-35

Scripture Reading: John 13:31-35

Introduction

What evidence is there that lets people know you are a Christian?

Is it because of your personal testimony – in other words do people know you're a Christian only because you say so?

Or is there some other way that people can tell that you are indeed a Christian?

Would anyone point to your demonstrated love for other Christians as the evidence they rely on to know you are a Christian as Jesus said in **John 13:35**?

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”

In a trial, evidence is only allowed to be presented if it is shown to be admissible under the rule of law

What if the only admissible evidence was the love you show to your fellow Christian brothers and sisters?

Would there be enough evidence to “convict” you?

Jesus didn't say we would be known as Christians because we go to church or which church we attend or how often we attend

He didn't say we would be known as Christians by which version of the Bible we carry or how we dress or how hard we work or how often we pray

Jesus said the primary indicator that you're a follower of his is your love for other Christ-followers

The Bible tells us that God is love – we see this stated clearly in **1John 4:16**

And we know that there was a time before the beginning of time when only God existed which is evidence of the Trinity by the way because for love to exist there has to be an object for that love so God has always existed as multiple persons

So we know that fellowship has always existed in the Godhead and since we have been created in God's image – we are made for meaningful fellowship with other people

Scientific support

Numerous scientific studies have shown this to be true as they demonstrate a clear effect of social isolation on physical and mental health

In fact, it has been discovered that a lack of meaningful social interaction can increase the risk of death by at least 50% and in some cases as much as 90%

Ironically, we live in a culture where people painstakingly keep track of what they eat and how much they exercise but don't give any thought to their relational life

Even though the risk to our health and longevity as a result of isolation is similar to the risk caused by smoking and higher than the risk from obesity or lack of exercise

But God knows how he made us and he designed the church to be a place where people come to have this need met

Local churches are supposed to function sort of like a spa where healthy relationships are nurtured

And Brick Church should be known in the community as a place where fellowship is healthy and strong and where love is the common currency between those who call Brick Church home

Today's message is one of the more important ones in this series and it's also probably the most difficult one to apply

Even though Jesus said our love for one another is the best evidence that we are actually followers of his we struggle with living it because we're self-centered; we hold grudges; we nit-pick; we fail to forgive

But since it's true we know we must if our Christian walk is ever going to be right

So let's take a look at some steps we can take to **jumpstart our walk through getting our relationships right** –

The first thing we must accept is that if we're going to have right relationships we're going to have to –

I. Join with each other

My father-in-law used to say that two things were required for a close relationship to develop: **propensity** and **propinquity**

In other words, you have to desire to have the relationship and you have to be near enough to allow it to thrive

Assuming that we *want* to obey Jesus' command to love one another as he loved us; the next thing we must do is spend time together

Relationships can only thrive in close proximity – we have to come together to have the meaningful, biblical relationships that we see in Scripture are meant for the church

Community has become a buzzword of late – people everywhere are searching for community (which is only natural since God designed us for it)

So the church that shows itself to be a place where burdens are shared; where victories are celebrated; where sorrows are divided and joys are multiplied; where friends who are closer than brothers gather together...

People *will* be attracted – they will want to be a part of what that church has

The evangelist Dwight L. Moody once said – *“Show me a church where there is love, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy attended a Sunday school I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far, and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home. ‘They may be as good for others, but not for me,’ was his reply. ‘Why not?’ she asked. ‘Because they love a fellow over there,’ he replied.”*

Most people who start attending a church do so with the hope of finding meaningful relationships and to be loved

You may well have started attending Brick Church with that exact same hope and because you saw those kinds of relationships among the people here

But somewhere along the line you began attending less frequently and began being involved in fewer activities of the church because you forgot, or perhaps never realized, that relationships need togetherness to continue to thrive

So how can you jumpstart your walk in this area?

First, make joining together a priority – because without it being a priority it likely won't happen

Why do you show up for work every day? – Because it's a priority

You sit down to watch your favorite show or a movie or a sporting event because you make them a priority

If you're like me you make sure to be in place early and are in no hurry to leave from those things and you set aside thinking about your to-do list because you don't want to miss a thing – because it's a priority

Second, stop making excuses for not coming –

My father-in-law also used to say, “There are always two reasons for what we do; the good reason and the real reason”

That saying used to come out whenever someone would try to justify some behavior that was suspect – he was a smart man; exasperating at times but smart

I would venture to say that when one family member is sick the whole family doesn't stay home from work and school in most of our households

I would say that most of us don't cancel out on coffee or lunch with a friend because we're tired and want to sleep in or “I only have one morning a week that I don't have to get up and get going so no thanks”

I also imagine we seldom, if ever, tell people we can't come to their get-together because we just have too many things to get done at home

I've also noticed that many of us who claim we're just too tired to go out in the evening to attend church events don't miss many chances to go out to dinner or to a movie or a play or whatever when someone suggests it or invites us

I know we all have full schedules but we need to admit they are filled with things that we have made our priorities

If you truly want to jumpstart your Christian walk having good relationships with your church family is vital and good relationships require being together –**So we need to stop making excuses and make spending time together a priority**

Next, if we are going to jumpstart our walk through our relationships with each other we are going to have to –

II. Serve each other

I want you to notice the context of our verses this morning and see what' had just happened prior to the command

Jesus gave the command to love one another immediately after having washed the disciples feet

In other words, Jesus gave them a living example of what the love he is talking about looks like

Jesus was talking about *agape* which is sacrificial love which we show by serving each other – often in very simple, even menial ways

A man went to hear the pastor of Moody Church, a man named Dr. Alan Redpath, speak

The man arrived early and watched as two men went about setting up chairs before the meeting

One of those men was obviously the janitor but he only realized the other was Dr. Redpath when he got up to speak

Had he not arrived early as he did he would have been like all the other attendees and never known what Dr. Redpath had done

God-honoring service takes all manner of forms and quite often is performed without anyone taking notice

We can serve each other in the simplest of ways – for instance if you see something that is out of order, straighten it up

Pick up that stray scrap of paper from the floor or wipe up that spill

Yes, we have folks whose job it is to do those things but they would appreciate your help and it makes the church more attractive to each other and our guests

Another way to serve is to show hospitality to others – invite them to join you for a meal

After all, we're commanded to do just that in **1Peter 4:9-11** which says:

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It doesn't have to be elaborate or even home-cooked – ask them to join you at Culvers (and here's a pro-tip for you: you can get free ice cream at Culvers just by completing the survey on your receipt – bonus!)

Also, be sure you occasionally step outside the comfort zone of your social circle and invite someone else – that's real service

When you know someone is ill or going through a difficult time –call them up just to see how they're doing

Check in on them and let them know you care

From time to time we have opportunities to take meals in to folks who have had surgery or are going through a time of need – sign up to make a meal

Get on the list to deliver a dessert to guests after they have visited here with us make a new connection in doing so – there are all manner of ways to serve one another

Lastly, admit when you need help – we hate to do that don't we

But swallowing your pride and letting your needs be known allows others to exercise their gift of service by serving you

And in order to jumpstart our relationships with each other we need to serve each other

We also need to:

III. Pray for each other

We see this as one of the “one another” commands of the New Testament in **James 5:16** –

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another **and pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

Paul also demonstrated his commitment to pray for other believers regularly as he does in **Philippians 1:3-5** –

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Paul was in chains in a Roman prison when he wrote those words and still he prayed for his fellow believers whenever they came to mind simply because they were fellow believers

Hopefully, we genuinely like one another but our thoughts and considerations of other believers shouldn't end with warm regards toward each other – we need to be lifting our fellow believers up before the throne

When we looked at prayer as a means of jumpstarting our walk we looked at **1Thessalonians 5:17** which tells us to “*pray without ceasing*”

And while I didn't take the time to mention it then, the word translated “without ceasing” was used to describe a hacking cough – and many of us have been experiencing the continual return of the hacking cough lately

That's the image Paul was using for prayer – believers should be engaged in frequent prayer as we spontaneously engage in conversation with God and the subject of our prayers should be other believers and their walk with God

When we engage in prayer for others like this we may find there are times when we can't honestly pray for a brother or sister in Christ because our hearts aren't right toward them and so we can't honestly bring our requests before God

Theologian and author James Boice wrote the following wise words:

“I think that ninety percent of all the divisions between true believers in this world would disappear entirely if Christians would learn to pray specifically and constantly for one another.”

Praying for another believer is a sure way to maintain a proper attitude toward them – it's hard to remain estranged from someone you're regularly praying for

Another way we can jumpstart our walk is by:

IV. Encourage each other

Chuck Swindoll re-wrote the old campfire song “Home on the Range” to go:

“Oh give me a church; where folks in the lurch; are encouraged then healed from above; where seldom is heard; a discouraging word; and the truth there is modeled in love”

That's how church **should** be but oh, how we love to criticize and find fault with one another and how prone we are to kick each other when we're down

It's been said that the Christian army is the only army that shoots their own wounded – and sadly that saying rings true

We need to recognize that the world already provides enough criticism those who are Christ-followers and instead seek to be an encourager –especially when things are going badly for someone

Everyone loves the person for whom things are going well but it's a bit more difficult to root for the one who is struggling or who has disappointed us

It's been said that “A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success.”

And any of us who have tried and failed know that to be true

And God never commands us to criticize and tear one another down – in fact he does just the opposite

Look with me at **1Thessalonians 5:11** where we see the command –

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

And again in **1Thessalonians 5:14** we are to “*encourage the fainthearted*” not revile them or kick them or mock them

And in **Hebrews 3:13** we see that we are to continue to offer encouragement until the Lord returns

You may remember when we were going through the book of Acts how we met a man in chapter 4 named Joseph who was nicknamed Barnabas by the apostles which means “son of encouragement”

At that time we considered how great it would be to be thought of in that way – to have as your legacy that you were an encourager

Well, as Stephen Covey points out in his Seven Habits of Highly Effective People the only way to be thought of in a certain way is to actually live accordingly

So, how can you grow at being an encourager?

It’s really pretty simple – just ask God to make you an encourager

Ask him to give you a heart that loves others, eyes that see opportunities to lift someone up, creativity to know how best to show it, and the commitment to do so

Some of us are natural “Barnabases” and we find it easy to notice and act on opportunities to encourage

Others may need to find ways to establish ways to remember to encourage like a calendar reminder that prompts them to send our encouraging notes on a weekly basis

It’s easy to be a critic but criticism only breaks down relationships – instead of looking for opportunities to be critical, look for ways to encourage and build one another up

If we are going to jumpstart our relationship with one another we also need to:

V. Unify with each other

While Brick Church is largely made up of people who are similar in many ways, no one would deny we are also quite different from one another

We have different interest, different tastes, different perspectives, different priorities – we are a diverse bunch even though we are very much the same

Scientists who study the human genome, or the DNA which every living creature consists of, tell us that we share 99.9% of our DNA with any other person who we might encounter which means all the variation we see and experience between individuals is contained in just 1/10 of 1% of our DNA

So, it’s not difficult to see how we can be the same in many ways while still being quite different

And our diversity is actually a feature and not a bug as a software developer might say because the church thrives on diversity

Paul writes about our diversity in **1Corinthians 12** as he compares the members of the church to the various members of the human body – each with its own gift and function that make the body act as it is designed to do

But just as our body parts are made to be joined to a body for a purpose so are we as members of the Body of Christ

God intends for us to be attached to a body of believers and a rogue Christian living out on his or her own refusing to join with other believers to form a church body should be as strange an idea as eyes, ears, and feet existing out on their own –

Membership in a local assembly is very important to God – it’s how he designed us and how he designed his church

We are meant to be united but unity doesn't mean uniformity and no one expects us all to be clones of one another
Oh, to be sure there are those who think all Christ-followers should walk, talk, look, dress, and think alike but that simply isn't the case – God designed us to be individuals

But we do need to be united in our purpose and get along with each other

Romans 12:16 tells us to “*live in harmony with one another*”

Musically, to be in harmony doesn't mean that all the instruments sound the same note but that a right combination of notes is played at the same time to produce a pleasing sound

In sociological terms, harmony is when people are peaceable and living in agreement with each other

Each member of the body must play their part according to the way God has wired and gifted them but we must be working together as we do so

We must recognize that we're all on the same team and pull together in pursuit of our common goal of fulfilling our mission

Even so, there may well be times when all we can do is –

VI. Tolerate each other

Our differences may occasionally lead to friction – closeness often leads to friction and friction always causes heat

So we may well find that there are occasions when our differences combined with our closeness causes us to knock sparks off of each other like flint against steel

And that's when we need to ask God to manifest the fruit of the Spirit within us as we exercise peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control toward each other

Our natural tendency is to fight for our own way but we need to determine, in advance, to forebear with one another rather than go to war with each other

As **Romans 12:10** tells us we are to - *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Look at the warning that Paul wrote to the church in Galatia – in **Galatians 5:15** Paul writes:

But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Then Paul gives the antidote to such behavior in **Ephesians 4:1-3** –

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Our goal should be to always maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

And we do that by being humble, gentle, patient, and tolerant with each other

And the reason is the same once again, because we love each other

We must set aside minor differences, be willing to yield, strive to live at peace, and focus on what is important because division or disharmony within the body only leads to the debilitation and dissolution of the body

The church that is divided against itself will lose its effectiveness eventually come to a sad end as it closes its doors

Also with those outside the church

But we also need to be sure we focus on what's important with those outside the church

Far too often we erect barriers between us and those we are supposed to be reaching over relatively minor issues

It's distressing to see what some believers post on Facebook and other social media about those with whom they disagree

I want to be clear that it's fine to have opinions on matters outside the church – I certainly do

But we need to be careful how and where we express those opinions

I was challenged about this very issue when I was ordained some years back when I was asked how I was going to be able to minister to those who held political views that differed from mine

And I decided at that time to stop sharing my views quite so publically so as to not harm the cause of Christ

I no longer put campaign signs in my yard for instance because they might well be the thing that keeps me from witnessing to my neighbor

Many of the things we care about are important – but they should pale in importance to our loyalty to God and our mission to reach others for him

Strive to keep first things first and be tolerant on more minor issues with your brothers and sisters in Christ and those you are trying to reach for Christ

Conclusion

We have just looked at six ways to jumpstart your walk through right relationships with your church family

Jesus made it very clear how we are to relate to one another in [John 13:34](#) when he said:

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.

And the steps that I outlined for you today are a good way to be obedient to that command

The only question is will you take the necessary steps to insure that you are showing love to those around you?

Will you commit to joining together and spending more time together?

This may well mean getting out of the rut of your routine and getting to some church activities that you've been missing

And you should want to do that because after all, a rut is nothing more than a grave with the ends kicked out

You can't have a true, biblical relationship with your spiritual family if you are seldom with them so you must make the commitment to gather together whenever possible

Will you commit to serving others in the Body?

Every believer has at least one gift for service and a member of the Body without a ministry is a mystery

Rather than being focused on yourself and what you're getting out of church; focus on others and what you can do for them

You'll be surprised how much your outlook improves when you begin to serve rather than being concerned about whether you are being served

Will you commit to praying for each other?

I would begin with those who you have a hard time loving because it will pay the greatest immediate dividends

Remember, it's very hard to be at odds with people who you're praying for

Will you commit to encouraging others?

Pray and ask God to give you eyes with which to see, and a heart to understand, and opportunity to be a blessing to someone every time you come to a church function

Will you commit to unity with the others in the church?

Determine to look for points of agreement and capitalize on them as you downplay any differences you might encounter

Decide to lend your voice to the voices of all those around you in beautiful harmony as we sing the same song

Will you commit to tolerating those who are different from you?

Ask God to help you remember what is important and to put a guard on your words and deeds as you set aside minor differences for the sake of the cause of Christ

We have the tendency to think of love as a feeling or an emotion but in reality love is action

If you will commit to doing those six things you will soon find that you have jumpstarted your love for your spiritual family and your spiritual walk

And what Jesus said in [John 13:35](#) will be true of you and true of Brick Church

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Let's pray that this might be said of Brick Church and commit to helping it be true