

Living in Church

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Date: 11 May 2014

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[0 : 0 0] I want today and next Sunday morning to focus a little bit. I'm not going to start a new series in the next few weeks because it's a bit bitty. I'm awake quite a bit and there's various things happening. So maybe start a new series later on in June. But in the next week, today and next Sunday, I want to think a little bit about the church, about ourselves as a church and next Sunday look at leadership in the church, Elders and Deacons because we're going to be nominating Elders and Deacons in the next week while, as I mentioned at the beginning of the service, I want to look at that next Sunday morning. But over the last number of weeks, months, you've had lots of input about Jesus and theology, about Jesus from Hebrew's wonderful book that links, fantastically links the Old Testament with Jesus Christ and the coming of Jesus and why Jesus is far better. So you've had all that teaching and you've had all that theology and thinking about Jesus Christ. What I want to do today is think about what that looks like for ourselves. So sometimes I guess the danger of being Christians is that we get fat on theology, fat on knowledge, that we just keep eating it up, taking it in, drinking it up, knowing more and more about Jesus until we're just about bursting because we're not expending the energy that he expects us to do in living it because we need to exercise our faith in Jesus by living it out. So it's a great thing to learn, but it's really important then to take that learning and say, well, how does that affect the person, me and the person sitting next to me? How does it affect me and city group? How does my life change knowing Jesus within the congregation? How does it change within the workplace, within the lecture hall, within the neighborhood, in the home, within the children, the mind is in the nursery and in the play group? How does knowing Jesus change our lives from the inside out so that we're not just kind of getting fat on knowledge, but that we're putting that great knowledge into practice in our lives? And to have that, you know, we always know, don't we, that we're well when we have an appetite to eat. And so when we're well spiritually, we have this appetite to learn more about Jesus so that we will be able to be energetic in his service and live as disciples.

So what we learn feeds us in order that we will engage with him in our lives and put in our lives Christlikeness. So what we're going to look at today, and I'll do it very quickly. So don't sigh with a great sense, oh my goodness, 12, 12 disciplines of grace. He said, we are the one o'clock. I put a roast in the oven, it will be burnt to a cinder. I promise I'll be very quick in each of these. I'm not going to go into them in detail. I'm just going to look at them. Because what I want us to think about is having the father's good looks. Is that we're children of our father. We've talked about the father a lot as well, haven't we? About how we pray to our father. And as this father, whose will we want to do, your will be done not our own. He's our heavenly father. We trust him. And so we want to have and share, because genetically with grace, through grace, we are in his image and we are being conformed to his image. Young people and old people here, we're being transformed into his image. And so we are to become increasingly like our father. We are to share our heavenly father's good looks in our lives. So that grace and theology is not ephemeral. It's not floating up there in the sky somewhere. It is absolutely earthy. And it is to do with our everyday life from here. Your everyday life and mine from here. Not what we're like when we sit in the pew. We can all sit in the pew in a certain way. But it's how you're, it's like what I was saying to the children, it's about our responsibility under Christ in grace with gratitude to live for him. And nobody else can live like him for you. And nobody else knows where you need to change and be transformed better than yourself. So there's very quickly, there's these qualities in Romans 12 and 9 to 21 of Romans 12. If you keep your Bible open, Romans 12 verses 9 to 21. And we're going to look quickly there at 12 graces. Some you might take more, needing more in your life. I certainly know the ones that I need more in my life. But we'll go through them quickly. Okay. So don't be overwhelmed.

Sincerity is the first one. So just putting into practice who we are as Christians. As a church, primarily as a church, the characteristics that will set us apart as a church. And the next week we'll look at leadership. Look at that. It's nearly quarter to already and I'm saying sincerity. Love must be sincere. Now all of you who were here last week will now know the Latin meaning of that word, don't you? What was it? Can you remember what it was? It was mouth to me there without wax. Sincerity means without wax. And David used that illustration of what sincerity means, means that statue, the stone statue. Sometimes they cut corners by using wax instead of having to mould the stone into the right design.

And so a genuine quality statue that was stone was without wax. Was sincere. Didn't have this added extra to kind of cut corners as it will. Without hypocrisy. Absolutely genuine.

[6 : 25] And so as Christians, grace is what makes us absolutely genuine people. That we're without hypocrisy in our lives. So that we never as Christians aim to think or live in such a way where we say that we are one thing, profess one thing and then live differently. Either in church, in community or out of community. Grace is what has exposed us in our hearts and say, Jesus says, I know what you, I know why I'm like. And he says, I have redeemed you and forgiven you and given you newness. And so therefore if Christ knows who we are, we live in such a way that is sincere and without hypocrisy, not trying to be something that we are not in Christ by grace, in humility following him. People on the outside today, probably more than ever need to know that our Christianity is real. It's sincere. It's not something that we're putting on. It's not a show. It's not a ritual. It's not to make us better than other people, but it's a sincere recognition that we are those who have recognized our need for rescue and have come to Christ for salvation and put our trust in him. The cross has happened in our lives. It has transformed and changes anywhere to lives. I think that's what people are looking for more than anything, particularly in the light of the media these days, where there's so much insincerity being exposed, whether it's in the life of famous people or children's entertainers in the 70s and 80s, or whether it's in the church leadership of different denominations who have act insincerely and have used what their position as a mark, a cloak of insincerity to engage in wrong and sinful and awful practices. We are to be sincere. We are also to be discerning 9b, hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Isn't that a great... They are strong words, strong, not lukewarm words, are they? Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. And that means we need to discern what is good and what is evil. And today we're living in days which require of us a defined, strong, Golgotha-based, grace-filled life that is radical and that knows what's wrong and hates what's wrong because God hates it and God is good and clings to what is right. You know, there's real intention there, isn't there? So that I know that this time of year we begin to get tired and weary in all the work and the need for a break and a holiday and all of these things and it can be tough. But he's asking us to intentionally cling to what is good, like something floating on the sea when you're shipwrecked. Cling on to it for your life because it's good and hate, not just avoid because God sees it wrong, but hate because you're the son and daughter of your father and because you want to look like him. Sincerity, discernment, affection, be devoted in ten, be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Now this is just family language. This is not just about how we live individually and in our own Christian lives, in the privacy of our own Christian lives. This is our attitude to one another. This is family words. We talk about devotion

within the family and it's a family word that's being used here that we are devoted with tender affection towards one another. It's what Christ has extended to us as he's brought us into his kingdom. He says, you know, once you were not a people, now you are a people, you belong in my family. Brothers and sisters, children of God, we've been brought into his family and the kind of attitude, well at least sometimes, the kind of attitude we have and the devotion and love we have within our nuclear family is one that we want to broaden to our church family. Sometimes that's not the case, sometimes there's water, nuclear water in the family and therefore we still have to apply these principles within family and within church, but sometimes our family can become our idol. As we have no time for the family of God because all that matters to us is our earthly family and he says, no, show affection within the Christian family and recognise it as an extension to your own family. And fourthly, we're to honour one another above yourselves. Within the church context, within the Christian family, you're to think more highly of other people than you think of yourself. What a wonderful, what a noble distinction that is, what a noble characteristic it is as we live our Christian lives, that we honour people higher than ourselves.

That is a hugely challenging concept for us. Then verse 11, in the fifth place, there is enthusiasm. Never be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord. It's that tremendous quality in our Christian lives, not even so much for ourselves but for the positive effect it has on other people, that we are enthusiastic. What really could be said is that we are a spiritual fervour, could be translated, be a glow with the Spirit.

Let the Spirit who lives in us as Christians radiate from us so that we are enthusiastic. It's not about being a fanatic, it's about being an enthusiast for Jesus Christ because we are joyfully committed to Him because we understand what He's done for us and it matters it is life transforming. It's about keeping in step with that Spirit so we can be a glow with Him. It's moving towards the light as opposed to facing the darkness and that's why so often isn't it that we struggle and it's wonderful as a congregation together when we enthuse one another and we are good at doing that. Be encouraged that you encourage one another. It's a tremendous gift and it's wonderful to see it in the congregation. We will find that enthusiasm through the adrenaline of prayer. I don't believe it's a natural exuberance. I'm not speaking about that. There are some people that are naturally much more exuberant than others. They're much more abulliant, they're much more outgoing, they're much more bubbly. Abulliant, isn't that a great word? That wasn't in my notes.

[14:13] I love that word though, it's just such an onomatopoeic kind of word, abulliant, it's kind of bubbly. But we're not all like that. We're not all like that naturally. Some of us are very reserved. Some of us are private, some of us are quiet people. But that doesn't negate the responsibility that we have to be zealous, enthusiastic, serving the Lord with joy. It's terrible, isn't it, when we serve because we have to or because we feel we're forced to or because the minister or someone else is on your back or a guilt. The Bible says that you're no longer slaves to sin, you're slaves to righteousness, but the difference is radical because we're slaves because we want him to be our Lord and Master. You know that Psalm which talks about mine ears, you have bored, which simply means that there was times in the Old Testament when a slave would willingly go to his master and have his ear bored, that is have a kind of mark of ownership in an earring because he wanted to serve that master because it was a gracious, loving master. And that is why enthusiasm is so significant for us as we serve our Lord and God. But then certainly there's also patience. Be joyful and hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. I'm taking all that as under patience. That is the hardest of all characteristics, is it not? Because it's the characteristic that says you or will be done, not mine. Out in patience says Lord I want it now and I hate this affliction and I don't want this and I don't know why you're doing this. But patience goes against every natural atom of our being and he says I want you in suffering to be patient because it will not overwhelm you and grace turns your world and my world upside down at that point. Not when we're just about to get a first class honours, not just about when we're going to get married, not just when we're going to have a child, not just when things are going great in our relationships. The point that our life has transformed is when we are patient in affliction and when we're able to say Lord you will be done, not mine. That is what we're to show as a congregation. Do you get impatient with me? I'm sure you do. Do you get impatient with the leadership? I doubt this. Are you impatient with people in your city group? Are you impatient with other Christians for the way they're acting or for the way they haven't treated you? I'm sure you are. That's where the spiritual rubber hits the road as we want to look like Jesus, as we look like our Father. Patience. And secondly, there's generosity. Share with God's people who are in need. Why do we do that? Why would you? Well, you need to know who's in need for a start, I guess. But we share with them. Why? Because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit shared His nature with us. Amazingly. Amazingly, He gave His life to us freely and fully. So it's an oxymoron. You know what an oxymoron is? Contradiction. To have a stingy Christian. A stingy Christian is an oxymoron because God has given us everything. A Christian that holds everything to ourselves. It's an oxymoron because God has said, I've given you everything. So we should be, as people, outward looking in our gifts and in our graces and in our thinking because of what Jesus has done for us. We have to be generous with our time, generous with our resources, generous with our love, generous with our forgiveness, generous with all that God has given to us. Who could have imagined that the deep, meaningful, mysterious, powerful theology of Romans 1 to 11 is outworked in these simple ways like generosity. But until we understand the generosity of theology, the generosity of Christ in theology, we will never have generous hearts. Eighth, hospitality. Practice hospitality. I think we're great at hospitality here in St. Thomas. Brilliant. And you need to be encouraged. You should do so many things so well. It's a great thing to do.

Keep it going as you serve the living God. Technically means love of strangers. But it goes beyond that, although it must include that. You know, God has welcomed us as prodigals. We are the prodigals. You know, look, are people to see the prodigal son? We're the prodigals. We're the ones that have abandoned

God. We're the ones that have gone and spent our life on right is living. But he's the one who's brought us back by his grace and by his favour and by his love with his open arms. He's run from the top of the house and he's come out in his long robe and he's welcomed us with open arms. He welcomes us as prodigals. So we open our hearts and we open our homes. It's so reflective, isn't it, of our understanding of grace when we open our hearts and we open our homes because we recognise he opened his home and his heart to us. I know for some it's very difficult to open your home. And I know for some it's very difficult to open your heart. In fact, I know for all of us it's very difficult to open our hearts. But in this society of loneliness, of the anti-social media, of the independence and isolation that so many people face, hospitality is the key to evangelism today. It's the key to evangelism. It's the key to opening people's hearts because you open yours and you open your home and they see your Christianity and they see you living with your other Christians and they see you working through that. That is the gospel. We're looking for an evangelistic people today. That is it, I believe, with all my heart. It's not the only one, but it is key, crucial, important.

[21 : 00] Ninth, we have forgiveness in terms of looking like Jesus imitating our Father. Isn't it in verse 14? We have these words, bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.

And then in verses 17 to 21 you've got that whole. Outworking of forgiveness, do not repay evil for evil, do what's right. If it's possible, live at peace. Do not take revenge, but leave revenge for God. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good. And this huge, massive, important element of Christianity within the community and within our lives is that we are forgiving people because we have been forgiven. Christ on the cross with one of his seven great final words says, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.

In the very heart of his work to redeem you and me, because we died on the cross then, he says, Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. And you need forgiveness, don't you, in your life? I need forgiveness and we love forgiveness. We'll lap forgiveness up, but sometimes we keep it like a hedgehog and we can't possibly give it to anybody else. But he wants us to share that forgiveness so that when you walk from here this week, you'll go into a world where you'll be hurt, where you will be cheated, where you'll be rejected. Sometimes you don't even need to go into the world for that day.

Sometimes we experience it even more hurtfully within the church. You'll be rejected, you'll be abused, you'll be lied about, you'll face enemies. And Jesus says, Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. They're blind. And so we need to share that same forgiveness. We play our part as much as is possible with us. Now we know there are situations where that will not make a difference. We know that other people are responsible for living their lives. We know that other people are morally responsible before God, but our duty, our responsibility is not to repay evil by evil. It's to overcome it. It's not to avenge because that's God's place. Our thing, our, what we're to do is to feed our enemy. How radical is that? We find that in the front of the daily record or the guardian or the, or the times, we find any motive like that in the workplace, in the manual of employee behavior. Will we find it anywhere? If your enemy is hungry, feed him. That is what makes us so radically different from those who don't know God as their father by grace. See, it's so easy for us to have Christianity on our own terms, isn't it? It's so easy for us so often to do it in our own strength because we are not taking these characteristics and saying, this is how I should live. I am a servant of the living God and he wants to mold and transform me. You know, the beginning of that chapter, isn't it? Romans 12 is my favorite chapter in the whole Bible. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices. So you can, with the trans transforming the renewing of your mind and will so that you will serve

God very briefly and quickly. Being like our father also means that we are going to have sympathy or empathy. Verse 15, rejoice with those who rejoice more with those who mourn.

[25 : 02] Sympathy, empathy, rejoice and mourn with who, those. Who is it? Well, whoever it is, whether it's in the church or in your home or in your neighborhood, who you know, the people you come and contact, those who you see, rejoice with them. You know, Christ went to weddings. Christ stood at gravesides. Christ took drink from the women at the well. He listened. He shared in people's lives and their joys and in their pains. He wept with them and I am sure he laughed with

them because he had empathy and he had sympathy and he knew that it wasn't just about him. And so life must be more about how we live in relation to others, not just about seeing everyone coming in our needs and we will find that when we do so, they will come in our needs and when we weep and when we laugh. And then there is harmony, you know, live in harmony. Verse 16, I'm just going through that section as we finish, live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate people with low-pitched. So harmony is another great word. Why is that so important? Because this world is so dysfunctional and so out of harmony. And because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in a union of perfect harmony and we are to be like our God. And so we are to move from that position of dysfunction and disharmony and pettiness and division, which just wells up within us all times and in every way and in every situation and reflect the Godhead. And in our community, what are we? We are children of one Father. We have something hugely significant and big in common, that is the grace of God. You may look around the church and say, well, I honestly see the way they act or see what they do or don't do.

I've got nothing in common that we do. And the great thing about this church, the great thing about church is we're to be united because of what Christ has done for us with all our different shapes and sizes spiritually, with all our different backgrounds, with our temperaments.

We're not going to be the same and we don't need to control one another. We don't all need to be the same. We need to bear one another and live in harmony with one another and take our life-changing convictions into every decision in every relationship. Deal with the pettiness that so often marks the communities of the world in which we face. And lastly, very briefly, humility. Jesus was at home in every company, whether it was rich or poor, whether it was those who were leaders or those who were in a low position. Jesus was a great standard against snobbery. And the last thing the church should be, should be a place that's snobbish, place that looks down on people because of who they are or of their position in life or their work or their lack of work or anything about them. We're to be those who are humbly loving and who have time for all of us as much as we can in the lives that we live and the communities that we're seeking to build. So there are some, there are 12 very briefly expounded characteristics. The core being, I think, forgiveness and our need for forgiveness.

And none of these things are, this is not, I'm not preaching a moral gospel. I'm not saying this is how we should live in God, O please. If we are not Christians today, our deepest need is to be touched by His grace and to understand our need for forgiveness so that we will come to Him for the transforming power to live the way He wants. Can't do this on our own. We will fail miserably. We need His grace. So if you can go into this week without prayer, and if we can go into our lives without prayer and without this dependence on Him, then we need to realign ourselves to Him. Come to the foot of the cross for the first time if we haven't and give our lives to Christ. I would ask you if you're not a Christian, do that today. Don't wait. If you've been coming here for many years, you must know that gospel. You must come to Jesus Christ. Leave it not one day longer because all you know, you will be accountable even more so to Him. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father, help us to know. Help us to understand. Help us to grasp spiritual realities and enable us to live and to sing your praises for Jesus' sake.

[30 : 24] Amen.