

**Series: Christian Community**  
**"Building Christian Community"**  
**Romans 12:3**

**Introduction**

If there's one thing we should know very well, it's that the church is not a building; it's a body of related believers. Crossroads Chapel is not simply an organization; we are a living organism. We are a body of believers. This church is alive because we are connected to the head of the body, Jesus Christ. As the body of Christ, we are here to serve a living Christ.

God wants to transform us from sinners to saints. Becoming a New Testament saint requires transformation and renewal. Romans Chapter 12 points this out for us. Let's read beginning with verse 1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." ([Romans 12: 1-2](#))

As we begin to view life from God's point of view, instead of relying on our own views, we learn to trust God and have faith in Him. The more we grow in faith, the more consistently we are able to view life from God's perspective, which unleashes God's power to change us from the inside out. It is a work that begins when we open our hearts to receive God's love and grace through salvation.

Rituals don't save us. Being blown away by some dramatic experience may get your attention, but it won't save you. Salvation is connecting with Jesus as a real and living person and understanding that Christ's death paid for your sins and that God's love forgives you of your sins. Choosing Jesus and receiving this free gift by faith is what saves us.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:13, "In Him, you also *trusted* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#))

In Chapter 2, he writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#))

In our text, Paul is writing about how our faith in Christ grows once we receive salvation. Paul looks at the renewed mind and transformed life a little differently than we might.

Many believers think that spiritual growth begins with personal Bible study and prayer. But Paul says it begins with our involvement and interaction with other Christians. Our relationship with other Christians is the catalyst God uses to substantially transform our spiritual lives.

Let's take a few moments and talk about the importance of building solid relationships within the Christian community. Let me ask you, "What kind of involvement do you think Christians should have with other Christians?" Is the goal to have fun or be entertained, or should we include small group bible studies or some type of outreach ministry? People usually try to answer this question by coming up with a list of Christian activities. Unfortunately, some of the things we come up with aren't even scriptural, and others, while they may be biblical, aren't the right place to start. Paul begins by affirming our new identity in Christ. New believers need a lot of affirmation, encouragement, and positive reinforcement.

Christian community begins with learning who you are in Christ. And that is related to who Jesus is and who your community of believers is! In verse 3, Paul says, For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." ([Romans 12:3](#))

Building a solid Christian community begins with a healthy understanding of who we are. Paul also warns us against becoming arrogant or conceited. A little humility goes a long way! Paul urges us to think "sanely" and humbly about ourselves. We could use more sane believers in the body of Christ today.

Look at verses 4 and 5. "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." ([Romans 12:4-5](#))

According to Paul, when you receive Christ, you also become a member of Christ's body. Christians are related to one another in the same way the organs of our bodies are related to each other. Each organ in your physical body is unique and individual, yet each organ's identity is essential to every other organ. Each organ functions in relation to all the other organs of the body. Each organ needs the support and contribution of the other organs to fulfill its own unique function.

When an organ begins to function contradictory to its unique purpose, it affects the whole body. If you don't address the situation, sickness or a malfunction is sure to result. What if your big toe decided that it didn't like being covered up and wanted to be something different with more free expression. Or maybe it develops an attitude and says, "I feel like I'm such an unnecessary appendage. No one appreciates me or recognizes me. I think the body would be better off without me." What would your diagnosis be? You'd probably say, "That's insane! You're a big toe, for heaven's sake! You are supposed to provide balance to the body!" Unless the big toe gets back to doing what it's supposed to do, you'll be lying flat on the ground.

But here's the point. We accept that the fact that the individual members of our physical bodies must function together, but we often deny this same truth when applied to our membership in the body of Christ.

So the first step to building a solid Christian community is to accept who we are in the body of Christ and use our unique gifts to enhance the glory of God.

## **I. Accept Your Spiritual Gifts**

How do you use your gifts for the benefit of the body of Christ? Many people think they are either self-sufficient and don't need the church or unneeded or unimportant to the church. They can feel this way for various reasons ranging from biblical ignorance to willful stubbornness and unbelief. These attitudes can stifle building healthy relationships within the body of Christ. Our culture has so glorified autonomous individualism there is little room for community and fellowship these days.

Developing a lasting relationship takes time. You can't build a healthy relationship entirely through text messaging! Building a healthy relationship requires personal contact with people. (Eye contact, body language, verbal communication!)

So how do we do this? The first step is to identify and accept that you are a gift from God. You are a "one of a kind" person to God, and he has equipped you with unique spiritual gifts. Your gifts and abilities may be so natural to you that you don't even recognize just how special they are. But when you're around people who don't have your spiritual gifts, you'll catch a little glimpse of just how blessed you are!

When it comes to church and Christian community, many American Christians talk about "going to church,"--which is really a profound misconception. The church is not a building; it is a body of related believers. The church is a community of people who belong to Christ.

The New Testament teaches that when you accept Jesus as your Savior, you automatically become a member of His body. As members of Christ's body, we are related and joined to one another. To progress spiritually beyond a superficial level, you must embrace this truth.

Watchman NEE puts it this way, "...in Christ, I have died to that old life of independence . . . and I have become not just an individual believer but a member of his Body. There is a vast difference between the two. When I see this, I shall at once be done with independence and shall seek fellowship. The life of Christ in me will gravitate to the life of Christ in others."

Many of us know this from personal experience. When we repent of our sin and pride and take our place as a member of his Body, that decision unleashes God's transforming power in our life. Throughout your Christian life, there is a direct correlation between your involvement with other Christians and your spiritual

vitality and effectiveness. So much of what Christ has given us has come through his Body. (LOVE; DIRECTION; ENCOURAGEMENT; CORRECTION; INSIGHT INTO HIS WILL) Have you ever considered that the struggle in your relationship with God could be the result of a struggle in your relationship with other believers? Your brothers and sisters in Christ?

If you want to develop a profound relationship with Christ, you must accept and agree with Him that you are a valuable member of his Body with unique spiritual gifts. But you must also acknowledge that you need the other members in the body of Christ to be complete. Christian community requires that we act consistently with who we are in relationship to others in the body of Christ. We call this "body-life" or "being in fellowship," and the more you relate to others in the body of Christ, the more significant the development and impact of your spiritual gifts will be.

## II. Develop Your Spiritual Gifts

Paul also says that we need to regularly exercise our spiritual gifts. He describes this in verse 6, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:6-8)

Just as the organs of our physical bodies work together for the benefit of the whole body, God has designed each of us to build up his body by working together. Spiritual gifts are special spiritual abilities like the ones Paul mentioned in these verses. The church needs you to invest and use your gift ministry. That is the only way the church can become a strong, healthy body. When we use our gifts to serve others, it becomes evident to the whole world that we belong to Christ.

When you share with others your gifted areas, you build up the body of Christ in a powerful way. And You also experience a realization and satisfaction that God is working through you!

How do you discover your spiritual gifts? Amazingly, the New Testament gives no direct answer to this question. It's like finding your area of expertise in team sports; you try some things and eventually settle on what appeals most to you and what you are able to do. Paul seems to assume that our gifts emerge over time as we learn some fundamental skills.

He says in verse 9, "*Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:9-15)

Paul is describing the kind of Christ-centered friendships all Christians ought to have with other Christians.

### III. Share Your Gifts

Are you involved enough with some Christian friends that encouragement and affection between you is normal and natural (12:10)? Are you involved enough with some Christian friends that you know each other's practical needs and respond to meet them (12:13)?

Paul is echoing the command of Jesus in Jn. 13, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

(John 13:34-35)

So how involved with one another should we be? Involved enough to give and receive the way Jesus loved his disciples. This authentic kind of love causes us to grow spiritually and draws non-Christians to Christ, especially in a culture that doesn't know how to succeed in close relationships.

The disciples purposefully followed Jesus' command to love one another through several "one another" imperatives. Here are some examples:

- Encourage one another
- Admonish one another
- Confess your faults to one another
- Forgive one another
- Accept one another

### Conclusion

Building a Christian Community requires us to learn how to love one another the way Jesus loved his disciples. Don't settle for being a church attender. Get involved and make some Christian friends. And remember, it's essential to learn how to give and how to receive. Relationship is a two-way street. Over the next few weeks, we're going to examine what it means to be a part of a Christian community and take a look in-depth at several "one another" imperatives that help us achieve this goal. So next week, we'll look at how the Lord wants us to "serve one another."