

Let's go a little further with the Family Y. Last week, we compared the new Marshall Family Y to church. The Family Y has 6,000 members, but I've noticed that there's never a wait when you go in to work out. That tells me there are a lot more members at the Family Y than users. Of course, if you're not much of a gym person, it can be a little intimidating when you first walk in. There are dozens of machines all lined up, and everyone seems to know exactly what they are doing. It would be tempting to get on the least complicated machine and just stick with that. Even though the Family Y offers all kinds of options. Machines, classes, personal trainers ... all of it geared toward the mission of the Y, which is to promote healthy minds, bodies and spirits.

The job of the manager of the Family Y is to make sure the vision of the fitness center is in line with the mission. I would think an effective manager would have to have a strong commitment to health and fitness, but I also think that person would have long ago figured out that they can't personally see to the fitness program of every member. Because ... what if all 6,000 members of the Family Y decided they would only pursue fitness if they could do it under the direct supervision of the manager? I figure that if one guy works 60 hours a week, it would take almost two years to give 6,000 people just one hour of training. That's why they have classes and personal trainers. Because the Family Y can only fulfill its mission of developing healthy minds, bodies and spirits if they keep developing trainers and group leaders.

And as it is with the Family Y, so it is with church. For us, it's all about developing healthy, committed followers of Jesus Christ. And for us to extend that mission to every person God is calling into relationship with Himself, we need not just a manager who makes sure the vision is in line with the mission ... but also group leaders and personal trainers. We need more doors

... more groups, more spiritual conversations, more experiences that take us into the presence of God where we can encounter Him and learn to live like Jesus.

For us to live out the mission of a church, it has to be all about relationships. That's why community is such a big theme in the Bible. Paul goes so far as to tell us it is the key to fighting evil. Listen to what he says in Romans 12, beginning with verse 9. The first line and the last line of this passage are like two pieces of bread that hold a sandwich together. The top of the sandwich is this (Romans 12:9-21) - *9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* (then he tells us how to practice that ... he says ...) *10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not think you are superior. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."* (and this is the bottom of the sandwich) *21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

I think what Paul is saying to us is this: we have this choice. We can let evil run our lives, or we can overcome it. And Paul says the key is in how we relate to each other. So think of small groups as a fitness course in relationship-building. That's where we learn to develop our relationship to God and to each other. That's why community is such an important theme in the

Bible. We are told over and over again that we're not designed to do this alone. We need others who can people who can be Jesus for us and people who can help us practice being Jesus.

I'm in two small groups right now. One is big and one is smaller. It's a myth that groups have to be big to be good (**The bigger, the better**). The big group meets at our house every Wednesday night. We've been meeting for seven years, and some years it's big and some years its small ... but our average is anywhere from ten to fifteen people. I love it. I love a lot of people in the room and a lot of conversation. Great group, but I have to tell you ... usually the best stuff happens when we break into groups of two or three. My other group is just three people. We've been meeting for four years and except for a very brief time, it has always been just the three of us. What makes this group great is that we know each other now, and we trust each other, so we can be really honest with each other and sometimes we even get in each other's faces ... and every time that happens, we grow a little as a group. I love having that one place where I feel safe and can talk about life and get their perspective on things.

Go back to the Family Y. I suppose you could go in there and get on a stationary bike and plug in your earphones and do your thirty minutes and make some progress. But what if you were part of a cycling team? What if you were training for a relay event? How much good would you be for the team if you never got together with them, or never got out on the course, for that matter ... but did all your training by yourself on your stationary bike? Would that be the best way to train for the team? I don't think so. So ... funny, isn't it? ... that we do sort of the same thing with church. It is a team sport, but we tend to make it all about "me and Jesus."

Maybe we do it to guard our hearts. We figure if we don't get involved, it won't get hard. That's another myth. (**it will never be hard.**) It is a fact that wherever two or more are

gathered together, someone is going to get mad. It happens. Community is hard. But life is hard either way. And at least with a group, we have support and we can practice the “one another” part of the gospel. Do you remember? Paul says (Romans 12:10) - *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.* There are literally dozens of “one another” statements in the New Testament, all pointing to that truth that we are not meant to do this alone. I want to ask you to find your worship insert and let’s rehearse these together. Look for the list of “one anothers”. And that’s not even all of them! There are dozens of these ... think of them like little exercises. Every time we practice one of these we get a little stronger.

Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with **one another**. - Mark 9:50

Wash **one another's** feet. - John 13:14

This I command you, that you love **one another**. - John 15:17

Be encouraged ... each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. - Romans 1:12

We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of **one another**. - Romans 12:5

Be devoted to **one another** in brotherly love. - Romans 12:10

Be of the same mind toward **one another**. - Romans 12:16

Owe nothing to anyone except to love **one another**. - Romans 13:8

Therefore let us not judge **one another** anymore. - Romans 14:13

Build up **one another**. - Romans 14:19

Be of the same mind with **one another** according to Christ Jesus. - Romans 15:5

Accept **one another**. - Romans 15:7

Admonish **one another**. - Romans 15:14

Greet **one another** with a holy kiss. - Romans 16:16 (in our culture that would be a holy hug)

Stop depriving **one another**. - 1 Corinthians 7:5

When you come together to eat, wait for **one another**. - 1 Corinthians 11:33

Care for **one another**. - 1 Corinthians 12:25

Through love serve **one another**. - Galatians 5:13

Bear **one another's** burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, show tolerance for **one another** in love. - Ephesians 4:2

Speak truth to **one another**. - Ephesians 4:25

Be kind to **one another**, tender-hearted, forgiving each other. - Ephesians 4:32

Speak to **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. - Ephesians 5:19

Be subject to **one another** in the fear of Christ. - Ephesians 5:21

Regard **one another** as more important than yourselves. - Philippians 2:3

Do not lie to **one another**. - Colossians 3:9

Bear with **one another**, and forgive each other. - Colossians 3:13

Admonish **one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. - Colossians 3:16

Increase and abound in love for **one another**. - 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Comfort **one another**. - 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Encourage **one another** and build up one another. - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Live in peace with **one another**. - 1 Thessalonians 5:13

Always seek after that which is good for **one another** and for all people. - 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Encourage **one another** day after day. - Hebrews 3:13

Let us consider how to stimulate **one another** to love and good deeds. - Hebrews 10:24

Do not speak against **one another**. - James 4:11

Do not complain against **one another**. - James 5:9

Therefore, confess your sins to **one another**, and pray for **one another** so that you may be healed. - James 5:16

Love **one another** from the heart. - 1 Peter 1:22

Be hospitable to **one another** without complaint. - 1 Peter 4:9

Serve **one another** as good stewards of the grace of God. - 1 Peter 4:10

Clothe yourselves with humility toward **one another**. - 1 Peter 5:5

Have fellowship with **one another**. - 1 John 1:7

Beloved, let us love **one another**, for love is from God. - 1 John 4:7

If we love **one another**, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. -1 John 4:12

Over and over and over ... the Bible reminds us that this is a team sport. Life is a team sport.

One of the benefits of following Jesus is that we're taught how to do it well.

I need a volunteer. Someone who doesn't mind getting on the floor. One person does sit-ups for thirty seconds ... no cheering ... no help. Then does it again with another person helping and us cheering him on.

Do I need to make the point? We need one another! And the real point is this: it isn't about us. It isn't even about the group or about each other. It is about God. It's about living what Jesus taught.

Go back to the Family Y. They have a policy that if you don't show up for six months, they will cancel your membership. They figure, if you're not exercising any more often than that, you are not helping fulfill the mission of building healthy minds, bodies and spirits. You can't exercise once a month or even once a week and expect to get healthier. It's the same with our spiritual fitness. It takes commitment. It is a myth that somehow **I can get something out of it without going deep**. You can hear the frustration in the words of the writer of Hebrews. It

sounds like he's been pouring everything he's got into the people he's writing to, but they aren't making progress. He says (Hebrews 5:12-6:3) - *12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. 6:1 Therefore (listen to this) let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.*

In other words, if you're going to follow Jesus, then make sure you go some place spiritually. Get yourself some spiritual goals and then ... go after them.

Last week, we talked about that. We asked the question: where do you want to be spiritually, six months from now? If you didn't get one of these booklets last week, I hope you'll pick one up before you leave today.

This week, we want to give you some options that will help you get where you want to go. I want to ask you to take out your small group brochure. It's the one with the door on the front. Take it out, but hold on to it for a minute. Before you open it, I want to talk to you about these groups. We said this last week, and I think it bears repeating. As a church, we can only go where God is taking us if each of us steps up and takes responsibility for our spiritual health. I can't make your journey for you. The leaders of this church can't carry it for you. It's an every-person journey. God is calling each one of us to an encounter ... to a journey ... maybe

to something deeper than you've ever experienced. And we can offer the groups and the ministry opportunities but how you respond to that call is *your* responsibility.

They tell me that the best way to get fit is to get a goal. We do better when we know the journey is taking us somewhere. So *where would you like to be on your spiritual journey six months from now? What is standing between you and that point? What will it take for you to move beyond the barriers that are keeping you from achieving your spiritual goals?*