

HOW WE HELP EACH OTHER GROW

Friendship First 5

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Roger Miller

Romans 8:29 *“From the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him - and all along He knew who would - should become like His Son...”* The third purpose of life is to become like Jesus Christ. While you’re here on earth God wants to get you ready for heaven and He wants you to grow in character. He wants you to grow spiritually. That’s what we’re going to look at today – How do I grow spiritually? More than that, how do we help each other grow. The Bible teaches you cannot grow spiritually on your own. You have to have other people in your life. That’s why we talk so much about small groups in this church. You have to have other people to help you grow.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *“Encourage each other and build each other up.”* This is this week’s memory verse. That’s what we’re going to talk about how to do today.

I’m very excited about this message. Because when we talk about how we help each other grow you can apply this – like last week’s message – in so many different ways. You can use it to help your boyfriend grow, your girlfriend grow, your husband, your wife. You can use it to help your kids grow, the people you work with. You can use it in your small group. How we help each other grow.

The goal of Friendship First Series is simply learning how to love – learning how to love each other. One of the ways we do that is when we decide to help each other grow. There’s a lot of ways we can do that but I think this first one may be one of the most powerful choices you and I can make during each week. That is the decision to love other people, help them grow...

1. By affirming each other’s worth.

Here’s a little secret if you haven’t figured this out in life, everybody is looking for affirmation. Have you noticed that? Everybody is looking for affirmation. People will do almost anything to get it. If you don’t believe that, just watch some of the reality shows. Look at what people do to

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get on TV, to get affirmed – eat worms, air their deepest and darkest secrets or whatever. Just so people will applaud you. It's pretty ridiculous.

When you and I affirm other people we're doing some incredible things in this world. We are showing love. We're ministering like Jesus ministered. He affirmed people as He ministered. Here's the question: How? How do I do this? How do I make the choice to affirm people in everyday life? There's four ways you can do that.

1. You do it by showing acceptance.

With acceptance, by doing what the Bible says in Romans 15:7 *“Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you...”* Instead of choosing to snub people and belittle people and demean people, which is an easy choice to make. Especially if you're having a bad day. If I'm having a bad day it's great to put other people down and you have a bad day too. That kind of a feeling. But when you make the choice instead to lift people up, you are making an incredible impact in their lives. It's easy to look down on people. It's easy to act like you're better than people.

2. By showing attention.

Not just acceptance but attention. That takes more time than acceptance. You can accept somebody and still ignore them. “I accept you just stay out of my life.” So you can disregard people. You can overlook them.

The Bible says in Galatians 6:10 *“Give special attention [circle “give special attention”] to those who are in the family of believers.”* Why do they get special attention? It's one of the benefits of being in the family of God. It's one of the benefits of being a part of a church. You get special attention. Why?

Here's the general principle. Whatever you pay attention to is going to grow. If I pay attention to my garden it's going to grow. If I pay attention to my kids they're going to grow. If I pay attention to my marriage it's going to grow and get better. If I pay attention to my work that's

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going to grow.

What is the greatest gift of love? It's not diamonds. And it's not flowers. It's not chocolate.

The greatest gift of love you can give is focused attention. You can affirm people just by looking them in the eye. And just by looking them in the eye you're saying, "I value you. What you have to say is important to me because you matter to me." What people want more than anything else is focused attention. They want to know that their thoughts matter, that their lives matter, that they are valuable. You're not just watching the TV or reading the paper while you're listening to them. You are focusing on them.

Here's the third practical way that you could help people grow – your husband, your wife, your boyfriend, anybody...

3. You help them grow by showing affection.

I'm talking about physical touch. We've all read about babies and the failure-to-thrive syndrome. That means that little infants, if they are not stroked, if they're not caressed, if they're not touched as they grow up, they don't develop. They don't grow the way that God intended for them to grow. Babies have to be touched. I think that's why He made them so soft. You want to touch them. You want to nuzzle them. You want to hold them close. And they need that stimulation of skin in order to grow and develop.

Most people know that. It's called the Failure-to-Thrive syndrome. What most people don't know is adults need it too. UCLA did a study a while back and discovered that to be a healthy fulfilled, satisfied adult you need eight to ten meaningful touches everyday. Handshakes, hugs, a pat on the back, a little squeeze. You were made for being touched. Whether you ever marry or not. Whether you ever have sex or not, you need touches in your life in order to grow and be all that God wants you to be.

Yet I talk to people who say, The only physical affection I get all week is at church when you

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say turn around and hug somebody or turn around and shake hands with somebody or give somebody a pat on the back. That's all I get all week. That is why I am always in the back on Sundays greeting, shaking hands and hugging-because some have not had enough physical affirmation for the week. Have you ever wondered how long a hug will have to last for a person? Romans 12:10 *"Love one another with brotherly affection as members of one family."* We're family. We're all in the family of God. Just ask Thirston: You're my sister. You're my brothers. Brothers and sisters show affection to each other. You've got to show it not just say it.

Here's the fourth way... Showing acceptance, showing attention, showing affection and....

4. Showing appreciation

We affirm each other's worth with appreciation. Appreciation means to raise in value. If you've bought a home in Colorado you know the meaning of the word "appreciation." It goes up in value. If you've ever bought a car you know the meaning of "depreciation." You lose in value. The moment you drive it off the lot it's not worth as much as you paid for it.

Every time you appreciate somebody you raise their value to you and to others. When you appreciate your wife, you raise her value. When you appreciate your husband or your boyfriend or girlfriend or a friend, you raise their value. When you appreciate your kids, you raise their value. When you appreciate your small group, you raise its value to you. Everything you appreciate increases in value.

The Bible says *"Brothers and sisters... appreciate those who work hard among you, who led you in the Lord and teach you."* When was the last time you thanked a Sunday school teacher, if you have children? Today when this service is over before you leave find three people to appreciate.

Another way we can help each other grow and that's by...

2. Praying for each other's growth.

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By doing what this guy name Epaphras did in Colossians 4:12. Paul wrote, “*Epaphras ... always prays for you that you will grow to be spiritually mature.*” That guy is a hero to me. I don't know about you but prayer is hard for me. You'd think it should come naturally. But it doesn't for me. I have to make time, I have to set aside time. I think it's that way for most people. So he impresses me that he took the time, he had the discipline to always take time to pray for people.

But I also love the fact that he prayed for peoples' spiritual growth. We usually pray for peoples' needs – health needs and financial needs. And we should but we don't spend nearly as much time praying for peoples' spiritual growth. That our character will change. Because that's going to last. I think one of the reasons probably is, we don't know what to pray about. How would I pray for somebody's spiritual growth?

Fortunately the Bible is filled with verses about how to pray for somebody to grow spiritually. Spend a few minutes just doing what these verses say. There's people in your life, you'd like to pray for their spiritual growth – your group, your family, your friends. Let me share these verses with you and as I do so let's pray for them right now.

The first verse from Ephesians 3:18-19 – who could you pray this verse for? “*I pray ... you'll be able to feel and understand how long, wide, deep, and high Christ's love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves.*” Who do you know that needs God's love in their life right now? That may be struggling a little bit? Bring them to mind and say, “God, show them Your love. Let them know today how much you really love them.” I have a feeling that these prayers we're praying right now will have a lot more impact than anything I say today. That's the power of prayer to make difference in people's lives.

Hebrews 13:21 “*I pray... that you will always be eager to do what is right.*” Parents, wouldn't you like to pray that for your kids? That they not only do what is right but that they be

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eager to do the right thing. Pray for them right now. Or for some friend, somebody at work.

“God, give them integrity.” Bring their name to mind. God I pray for them.

Or Romans 15:13 *“I pray God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in Him.”* Who wouldn’t like some hope in their lives. Or who doesn’t need more joy or more peace in their lives. You see the foundation of it all is that you trust in Him. Say, “God, I know somebody who needs some hope. Help them to trust in You during this difficult time. I know somebody who needs some joy. Help them to trust in You so that their heart can be lifted up.” Just bring their name to mind right now.

Or *“I pray God... would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation....”* Who do you know that’s facing a decision? Ask God to give them His wisdom right now. He says He’ll give it if we ask. Pray on their behalf. Pray for their growth.

Or 2 Thessalonians 3:5 *“I pray the Lord will guide you to be as loving as God and as patient as Christ.”* Has anyone got that one down yet? Is anyone here as loving as God? Anyone here as patient as Christ? We’re just not there yet. But we can pray for each other that we will grow the rest of our lives to get closer to that. Who needs some of God’s love? Who needs some patience in their lives right now. Pray that verse for them. Bring their name to mind right now.

Or who do you know that’s feeling pretty overwhelmed by life? Who do you know that maybe doesn’t feel like they’re going to make it or feels like they’re having to do everything on their own energy, their own power? Pray this for them, Ephesians 3:16 *“I pray... that God may strengthen you with power through His Spirit.”* Bring their name to mind and say, God, help them to know they’re not alone today. That You’ll give them strength and power.

We just prayed individually for a lot of people and there is power in that. But there’s even more power when we pray together, when you get in a group of other people and pray. I want to encourage you to do that in your group. Pray for each other’s spiritual growth.

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There's a secret ingredient that builds community faster than anything else. It is this...

3. By admitting our mistakes

By admitting our mistakes we build community, intimacy, relationships faster than any other

way. Ephesians 4:25 says this *"Tell each other the truth because we all belong to each other."*

Tell the truth about yourself. Your fears, your doubts, your hang-ups. Confession does not mean

just confessing your deep, dark sins. Confession just means admitting what's going on in your

life. "I'm having some doubts today." You admit it. That's a confession. "I'm worried

about..." such and such. That's a confession. "I'm feeling a little lonely." That's a confession.

"I'm having a hard time forgiving that persons." That's a confession. "I just don't know why

but I feel depressed. I feel discouraged today." That is a confession.

When you are honest about what's going on in your life and you're not blaming anybody else for

it, it draws you closer to them, and them closer to you.

Why in the world would anybody do that?

1. Emotional healing

Emotional healing comes from being honest with other people about what's going on in your

life. James 5:16 says *"Admit your faults to one another...."* Circle that. Notice it doesn't say,

admit them to a priest. It doesn't say, admit them to a pastor. It doesn't say, admit them to God.

It doesn't say, admit them to counselor. It says *"Admit them to each other and pray for each*

other so that you may be healed."

This is extremely important. There is big difference between forgiveness and emotional healing.

They are not the same. They are not. Forgiveness, if you need forgiveness for something in

your life, all you need to do is confess it to God. You don't have to tell anybody else. Confess it

to God and you are forgiven. But a lot of people after they've confessed to God, they still feel

guilty. They still feel hung up. They still can't let it go. They still feel emotionally scared.

Why? They haven't done this part, telling it to somebody else.

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God has wired the universe in such a way that emotional healing comes not from telling God. He already knows it. But from telling somebody else who doesn't know it. That's where emotional healing comes from.

I'm not making this up. This is what God says. "*Confess your faults to one another.* [Not to God. To one another.] *and you will be healed.*" You want forgiveness? You confess it to God. You want healing, you want to let go of that pain, you want to get it behind you, you want to stop having to think about it, you need to tell it to somebody else. That thing you kept as a secret your entire life.

You don't have to tell everybody. In fact, I don't recommend that. Don't tell everybody. But you need to tell somebody. A small group of trusted individuals or a spiritual partner who can pray with you. God has wired us that way that we need to tell others.

The second thing you get when you do this is...

2. A fresh start.

Not only emotional healing but you get a fresh start. Proverbs 28:13. The Bible says "*Anyone who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them he gets another chance.*"

One of the most helpful things you can do in your small group is help people forgive themselves. A lot of people have confessed to God and God has forgiven them but they just don't feel it. They need somebody to say, You are forgiven. Have you admitted it to God? Yeah? Then you are forgiven. Have you confessed it? Then you are forgiven. Let it go." In a small group you don't rub it in. You rub it out. That's why we get together, to help each other to feel forgiven. Sometimes you just need somebody to say that to you.

Another thing you can do in your small group is to remind people that God loves to give second chance, and a third, and a fiftieth, and a three hundredth! God never ever gives up on you. Never. He never gives up on you. And He's not finished with you. And He wants to use other

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people in your life to take that pain, heal it, then turn you into a leader and a person of influence to help others. There's a third thing, benefit of honesty.

3. You get God's power to change.

God's power to change when we admit our mistakes to others. James 4:10 says this "*When you bow down before the Lord* [that means you humble yourself, you humble yourself before God] *and you admit your dependence upon Him, God will lift you up,* [Notice He doesn't scold you. He doesn't shame you. He doesn't put you down. He lifts you up] *and gives you honor.*"

How does this work? God wants you to learn to be like Him and God is humble. So the Bible says "*God resists the proud* [that means when you're prideful you're on the opposite side of God, you're fighting God] *but He gives grace to the humble.*" So that means this when I'm honest about my weaknesses, then I'm humble. When I'm humble, I get God's grace. God's grace is the power to change. When I get God's grace, I can change the things I've always wanted to change in my life. But it only comes through humility and humility comes through honesty.

I'm not perfect. You're not perfect. Nobody's perfect. So who are we kidding? We just need to be honest about it. Everybody blows it. Nothing shocks me anymore. There is no sin that you could name that I haven't heard in this church. Not one. Nothing shocks me anymore because I have heard it all. We're all imperfect.

The fourth way Friends help each other grow.

4. By encouraging each other's commitment.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 4:7 "*Keep yourselves in training for a godly life.*" How do you do that? How do you stay in training for a godly life? You stay in a small group and you get a spiritual partner. You get a training partner. It's always easier to work out when you're working with somebody else. You get a spiritual training partner.

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Nothing effects your life more than your commitments. Tell me what you're committed to and I'll tell you what you're going to be in twenty years. Because you are becoming whatever you are committed to. Your commitments shape your life. And if you're not committed to anything other people are shaping your life. I'm sorry to tell you this but other people are running your life if you don't have any commitments.

Conclusions: Not only do your commitments effect here and now. They effect eternity because every choice you make has eternal consequences. That's why the Bible says in Romans 1 "*I want us to help each other with the faith we have. Your faith will help me and my faith will help you.*" That's why you need a church family. And that's why you need a small group. We help each other out. Who do you need to not give up on? You've invited them to church, you've invited them to a group. They've said no. Do you know That's not the end of the story. Who do you need to invite to church to a service? To your group? The very person you invite or pray for may be in heaven tomorrow! What about you have you committed your life to Christ?

The fact is spiritual maturity is a choice. As I've said many times you're as close to God as you choose to be. One day you're going to stand before God and give an account of your life and He's going to ask, Did you ever make these commitments? Did you ever fulfill the purposes I put you on earth to fulfill? So my question to you is what's your next step? Do you need to invite Christ into your life? Do you need to be baptized? Join the church? Get in a small group? Find a ministry? Do It Now!

Prayer:

Dear God, I want to grow up spiritually. I don't want to stay a spiritual baby any more. Today I'm choosing to make some serious commitments. First, I commit all of my life to You, Jesus. I want to follow Your purpose and plan. Then I commit to publicly confessing my faith At my baptism. I want to join this church and I want to get in a group. I want to grow and be the

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person You want me to be. I commit to the journey. I want You to make Your home in my heart. In Your name I pray. Amen.