

Title: Sharing Life Together  
Date: 3/8/26  
Subject: Christians are to share life together since they are part of the body of Christ  
Scripture: Romans 12:13, 15

In Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous poem "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways", written to her husband to be, she lists a bunch of ways she loved him.

If we were to rewrite the poem, with God being the one who professes his love: "How do I love you? Let me count the ways. Jesus. Need I say more?"

God says much more about his love throughout the Bible, but it's all centered in Jesus. He is the supreme demonstration of his boundless love, mercy, grace, kindness and favor.

We started our series on Romans 12 by looking at the first 11 chapters to get a space station view of God's mercies which form the foundation of who we are and how we're to live in response to the Lord's love. We love him because he loved us in our time of need. We are to love others as he has loved us. Most of chapter 12 is about the expression of love.

Read Romans 12:13, 15.

I skipped v. 14 because it seems to fit the theme of verses 17 through 21.

I. Share with God's people who are in need.

Other versions of the Bible (NAS and ESV) speak of contributing to the needs of the saints. While it's true that we are to love all people, the focus is narrower here. It may not be the best way to express it but it creates a visual image to say the saints are our target. It sounds nefarious, like we're gangsters and want to take them out, or eliminate them.

It's completely the opposite. We target them so that we can show love to them - our brothers and sisters in Christ, who know Jesus Christ as their Savior because they've trusted in him alone to deliver them from their sins, who are God's children, who are part of the family of God, part of the body of Christ, part of the community of believers.

We are to share with God's people who are in need. The main idea is those who have financial needs.

Let's transport ourselves back to the 1st century for the immediate context of the first readers of the book of Romans. Rome was a huge city that attracted people because it was the economic capital, the governmental center, the place to be. Some people brought against their will as they'd been captured and had become slaves and servants.

The Christians at Rome came from all sorts of people groups - the upper end of the socio-economic scale and those who were on the bottom, free citizens and others weren't, those who were cultured and others who were barbarians, those with money rolling out of their ears while others had to squeeze every coin till it hurt. Some had been dispossessed of their lands and families. An added factor was persecution.

It didn't make any difference in the church because the thing that brought them together was trust in Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ knows no economic, ethnic or social barriers.

There were people who had financial needs. They had difficulty in providing food, shelter and the necessities of life.

Today there are Christians who have economic needs. The command is that we are to share with God's people who are in need. Some translations talk about contributing or distributing.

A businessman was invited to a fancy restaurant to interview for a job with a high-powered executive. The waiter brought a basket of crackers and cheeses. The executive quickly grabbed them, put his arms around them and began munching. The interviewee was hungry too but watched as the boss kept shoving food into his mouth and wouldn't share. Finally, the interviewee said he'd like something. The executive slowly took one tiny cracker out of a pack and slid it partway across the table... but kept guarding the rest.

That's not the kind of sharing we are to share. We are to think about what the other person needs and strive to meet that need. It requires coming alongside a person to be able to help. It is a sharing of resources.

The church in Jerusalem that formed after Christ's death and resurrection was marked by caring and sharing. The biblical record tells us: "There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:34, 35).

One of the people who sold a field he owned and donated the proceeds was Barnabas. He lived up to the meaning of his name – Son of Encouragement. A couple sold some property, gave some money but lied about it being the total amount they'd made. They didn't live...

It's not enough to say to a person who has a need: "May God bless you." Scripture tells us "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15, 16). Another place: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). Strong words.

How do we as a church family help fulfill the command to the needy, those who are fellow believers and those who aren't? Part of it is by giving regular offerings to the general fund. This enables the church to keep functioning, fuel its ministries. We have a Benevolent Fund which can provide financial and material resources to members of the church family who have needs. We've held clothing and food drives, free rummage to community.

There've been times when I've been the conduit for anonymous donors who've placed money on my desk for me to give to a needy person. The givers want to bless others without anybody knowing who did the giving.

Our missions giving helps keep international workers overseas and supports their ministries, some of which provide food, clothing, clean water, shelter, safety from traffickers. VBS mission projects – food, water.

There's the support of organizations like Samaritans Purse that provides spiritual and physical aid to “people who are victims of war, poverty, natural disasters, disease, and famine with the purpose of sharing God’s love through His Son, Jesus Christ.”

We have this promise: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done” (Proverbs 19:17).

A second kind of sharing brings the object of sharing into close contact for extended time whereas sharing with the needy could be a quick moment.

## II. Practice hospitality.

The heart of hospitality is making people feel welcome. The first century didn't always have safe accommodations for travelers. Many of the inns were dens of iniquity. Thieves, robbers and other dangerous people were prevalent. It wasn't wise to travel at night or spend the night alongside the road because of robbers and thieves.

There were many travelling preachers and missionaries like the Apostle Paul who were dependent upon the kindness and goodness of fellow Christians and church communities to provide food, lodging, even medical treatment. Hospitality was needed and gratefully accepted.

Sometimes hospitality is thought to mean a seven-course meal with caviar and foie gras served on china, with tea and crumpets, with attendees in black tie and long gowns, string quartet for entertainment, extending long into the night. That's overstating it.

Hospitality is simply sharing what we have – life, food, home, and time - with others. It doesn't have to be a huge feast. It can be a simple meal of hot dogs or few moments of time shared. The point is offering ourselves and opening ourselves to others so we can share life together.

Hospitality builds relationships and community. It encourages the receiver and giver. Hospitality is to be practiced. Other translations speak a little bit more forcefully by saying it's to be pursued. The difference would be that practice can be viewed as occasional. Pursue means it's sought after. It should be a regular, normal activity.

A man walked into the building Thursday carrying an American flag. I thought that was interesting. He was on a walk from Fond du Lac to Campbellsport because it was National Peace Corps Week. He had served in Ghana, West Africa for several years. He said he'd driven by previously and since he was out walking, he figured he had opportunity to stop in and ask about the church.

I shared our core belief that Jesus is the one and only Savior and the only way to get to heaven is by placing personal trust in him. He was curious about our service style, if it had lots of ritual, if we had children. I talked to him about Awana and youth group. I offered him some water or cookies or something. He declined, stayed for a few minutes and went on his way.

Hospitality is service to Jesus as he said that whatever we did for one of the least of these brothers of his was done for him (Matthew 25:40).

Our sharing with the needs of others and practicing hospitality is to be done without complaint (1 Peter 4:9). Nor are we to be stingy, miserly, possessive, uncaring and desiring to keep what God has given us to be his stewards as our own.

Sharing isn't to be done to bring attention to ourselves or what we might get. We are to take the focus off ourselves and look beyond ourselves, which can be hard to do. We can be thrown off our schedule. We're to think about the family connections and the solidarity we are to have as followers of Jesus Christ.

Sharing with God's people who are in need was chiefly financial and somewhat relational. Hospitality begins to expand the sharing to other areas like need for community. The next two ways of sharing continue to broaden the scope by getting into emotional needs.

### III. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

A parallel passage compares those who've placed their trust in Jesus Christ to a body and has a slightly different reading: "if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). The interconnection of the body, the family of God, is stressed.

Rejoice means to be cheerful, be happy, celebrate with others. Some of us might be thinking that rejoicing with others isn't that hard - the other person is in a good mood, which is great. All we have to do is smile, say "That's great" and nod our heads.

The 4th century Christian leader Chrysostom thought Paul put the command to "rejoice with those who rejoice" first because it's more difficult than the accompanying command. He felt we naturally weep with those who weep, but we don't rejoice with those who rejoice because of envy, pride, and a spirit of competition.

Those are some of the obstacles to rejoicing with those who rejoice. We can be envious and jealous thinking, "I could have done better." Sometimes believers are covetous, begrudging and wish that something would bring the person back down to earth because they don't have anything to rejoice over so why should the other person? "What did they do to deserve whatever causes them to rejoice? I should have had that."

Doesn't it seem weird that sometimes people in the family of God get mad or upset because somebody else got a blessing or had a good day? It's one of those situations where we need to battle that old foe – self. We need to get over ourselves, take the focus off ourselves and put it on somebody else and rejoice with them, no matter what we've experienced, no matter if it's been a long time since we've had something to rejoice over or it seems like we've never ever had anything to rejoice over.

Rejoicing with someone doesn't mean we recall the times when we rejoiced and drone on and on and on about the great blessings we've received and how fantastic and wonderful it was and how everybody thought it was just the greatest thing in the world. Just leave the spotlight on somebody else and rejoice with them.

### IV. Mourn with those who mourn.

This is also translated "weep with those who weep." That parallel passage also spoke of this aspect: "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). It's sharing another's griefs and sorrows. This sharing is very relational because of the connectedness of the family of God.

400 years ago, John Donne wrote a poem that has reverberated through the centuries with the reminder of the interconnectedness of people. “No man is an island, Entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent. A part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. As well as if a promontory were. As well as if a manor of thine own Or of thine friend's were. Each man's death diminishes me, For I am involved in mankind. Therefore, send not to know For whom the bell tolls, It tolls for thee.”

The opposite of mourning with those who mourn would be laughing or rejoicing that the other person had difficulty. Definitely not proper to do and we'll get to more on that subject in a few weeks.

Mourning with somebody who's mourning isn't about giving counsel or advice or even sharing what we went through or how we handled it or what they're going through isn't so bad. We don't need to say “I understand” because we probably don't know exactly what the person is going through. We don't need to rehearse our trials and difficulties. We are to enter the other person's pain, sorrow and loss.

Dr. Paul Brand wrote about the capacity to be sympathetic in his book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. He writes: “When I ask patients and their families, ‘Who helped you in your suffering?’ I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers and a winsome, effervescent personality. It is someone quiet, understanding, who listens more than talks, who does not judge or even offer much advice. ‘A sense of patience.’ ‘Someone there when I needed him.’ A hand to hold. An understanding, bewildered hug. A shared lump in the throat.”

Joseph Bayly and his wife lost three of their seven children in death. He wrote (*The Last Thing We Talk About* [David C. Cook], pp. 55-56): *I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God's dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly. He said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he'd go away. He finally did.*

*Another came and sat beside me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask me leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.*

A story is told about a little boy with a big heart. His next-door neighbor was an older gentleman whose wife had recently died. When the youngster saw the elderly man crying, he climbed up onto his lap and simply sat there. Later, his mother asked the boy what he had said to their saddened neighbor. “Nothing,” the child replied. “I just helped him cry.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). This isn't because the things that cause us to mourn and sorrow are pleasant or that mourning and sorrow in and of themselves are pleasant. It's because they open our hearts to God to work in our pain. Jesus promises that God will comfort and lets us know we aren't alone. Sometimes he uses people as his hands and feet through ears that listen, arms that hug, hands that bring food, shoulders to cry on.

These are some of the ways we are to share life together as brothers and sisters in the family of God.