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## THE CHURCH BRINGS HEALING

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ  
*Ephesians 2:11-22*

I'd like you to open your Bibles today to Ephesians 2. In Ephesians 2 remember the last time I taught we were looking at the first part of the chapter. In that first part of the chapter we were talking about how this grace of God is so important for each one of our individual lives. God gives grace to everybody, but not everybody receives it. That is the idea. You have to stand under the spigot. You have to position yourself in a way to receive God's grace.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 it says, *For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.* So it is the grace that gives us this salvation that God provides for us. But we have to position ourselves well, position ourselves by faith to receive that grace. The same thing is true in our daily lives. After we become Christians God offers us grace to live every day. If you have a problem with anxiety because of some event going to happen this week in your life and you know about that, if you're feeling anxious about that then God offers grace for that. But that grace comes when you position yourself well.

Sometimes that means the willingness to release the control in your life, to trust in God as something bigger than yourself, to not spend your time going down paths of worry. Sometimes we have to make those personal decisions in order to then receive the grace that God wants to provide.

We spent time talking about the personal grace of God last time I taught, two weeks ago, in the first part of Ephesians 2. Now we're going to look at the second part of Ephesians 2 as we're continuing on through the whole book. We're going to look at some very important theology about how God takes His grace and applies it to the church and how we are the church. We're going to learn some things about what the church should be today.

That grace now is applied to relationships. God not only deals with individuals, but He deals with relationships and people in those relationships. When there's broken relationships God can heal those. God takes His grace then and He applies it to relationships, particularly this whole relationship of the church.

That's what we're going to look at today in Ephesians 2. I want you to look down at verse 14 first of all because in verse 14 we see a verse that talks about where we're going here with the relationships. Then I'll take you back and we'll look at it all in context.

Verse 14 says this: *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.* God is the one who provides that healing in relationships.

Now I'm going to talk about who those people are he's talking about. All those things we'll cover as we go back now into the context of the passage starting at verse 11.

Ephesians 2:11: *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

We're going to look at two groups of people. We're going to look at the Gentiles and the Jews to start out with. We're going to talk about them and the differences and how God brings them together in the church. Then we're going to take the idea of relationships and we're going to see how God brings together people because of His Spirit. He brings people together. That's what He does. He breaks down the walls of hostility and so on.

So we're going to look at the passage where it's talking about Jews and Gentiles and what God does. We're going to make that application to all Christians, all people who come together, and the differences are set aside and we can experience more about who God is. Jews and Gentiles first, though. Let's talk about them, then we'll make the application.

Jews were the people who came from Abraham and God made a promise to Abraham, a covenant in the very beginning and He said to them, *"Through you, Abraham, all of the nations of the earth will be blessed."* The idea is that the Jewish people were chosen, but God was going to use them in some significant ways to bless other people. That's how God designed it.

But there was hostility that developed between the Jewish people and the Gentiles. And that's not how God designed it originally. He designed it so the Jewish people would be the vehicle through who many may be blessed, but then there was this hostility that developed between them.

The Hebrew word for Gentiles is *goyim* which is very similar to the word 'dog' in Hebrew. So they would actually call the Gentiles 'dogs.' They didn't value them, they didn't treat them kindly. The Jews had a whole culture of their own worship that was different than the Gentiles and so they felt a superiority in their thinking about other people. That they dressed differently, they ate differently, that they worshiped differently. The Jews just looked down on these people, other people who were not Jewish.

One of the things that identified the Jewish people was circumcision. Circumcision was a physical act, but it was a sign of something inside of the heart for them. It was a statement of their identity. It meant the difference between someone who was committed to God and someone who wasn't committed to God. So it wasn't just a physical act as it may be in our western culture

today (most babies are circumcised today). It had much more significance and meaning to the people there.

In fact they had a problem in the early church. As people were coming from the Jewish faith and they were turning into Christians now, they had to make a decision. What do we bring with us into Christianity? There were many of those Jewish people who said, “We’re going to bring circumcision because that’s so important in our commitment to God.” Then some of the Jewish Christians were saying, “We must require all Gentiles to be circumcised if they’re going to be Christians.” That’s a debate in the New Testament, so we’ll see it regularly demonstrated.

In Galatians, the book before the one we’re looking at now, Galatia is that whole region. It’s not a city. Ephesus, the book we’re looking at now, is written to a city. But the city of Ephesus is in Galatia. If you read and study this whole problem that they were experiencing in the early church (what do we bring with us into Christianity), you’ll see that some of them were called Judaizers because they were bringing circumcision or trying to have everybody get circumcised. Because it was just so important. Circumcision was a statement of the heart. It was so important that even Paul himself chose to circumcise his protégé, Timothy, the Bible says, so they could maximize their ministry among the Jewish people.

I just want you to see that this whole idea of circumcision isn’t just a minor thing. It’s a major event, a statement of the heart that says, “We’re committed to God.” It was something important. Paul’s drawing attention to that now in Ephesians 2. He’s really going to describe, not just circumcised versus uncircumcised, but he’s going to talk about Jews versus Gentiles. There’s a way that you used to live before you knew God and now you’ve come to God.

Look what he says in verse 12. We’ve already read these words, but I want to read them again to you. Here he’s describing the old life and some of you can resonate with this because you feel like this in your own heart.

In verse 12 it says, *remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* Separate, excluded, foreigners without hope and without God. Those are words of exclusion. It’s not like you’re being part of the ‘in’ group. You’re being left out. Paul is reminding them do you remember how it felt when you weren’t a Christian, how you just weren’t part of what God is doing? And now something is different.

He’s going to describe that difference in verse 13. So look with me at verse 13 and see the difference between being an outsider, that is, someone without Christ, and what happens when you become a Christian. Verse 13: *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

You’ve been brought near. Those are beautiful words that describe how we’re included now. We have meaning in our lives. We have that purpose that God provides.

Now you’re part of the church. Now we’ve got Jews and Gentiles all brought near - instead of being far away, brought near - but still we have differences. We’re still in the church. But you’ve

still got Jews and Gentiles. You've still got differences that exist and those differences can create some barriers that exist because differences often separate. It's not only those kinds of cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles, but there are other differences that create conflict in relationships, even among Christians.

These are all Christians, remember, but they have differences that are creating these barriers. We see differences, even among Christians, between those who are blacks or whites or Asians or Hispanics. Those are differences. We see differences between urban churches and suburban churches. We see differences between teens and adults. We see differences between men and women. We see differences between husbands and wives. And whenever we see differences they have the potential to create a barrier or a division in life.

But the church is designed to be a place where those barriers fall away and we build relationships instead. That's the beauty of what Paul is going to describe here as we continue on in these verses. He addresses the differences. That's what he said first of all.

There are differences between Jews and Gentiles, but verse 13, again, says this: *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* Remember it's the blood of Christ that brings us together and so now we can experience unity even when there were differences before. With Christ we bridge the gap.

Let's go onto verse 14: *For he himself is our peace.* He Himself is our peace. We're going to talk about peace and peace is going to be mentioned several times here in the passage. Where peace is present then hostility diminishes. Where hostility is present peace is absent. We're going to talk about that as we go through.

Notice verse 14. *For he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.* So He abolishes this cultural barrier, the differences that exist, but he's also talking and referring to this physical barrier that existed in the worship process.

Let me just describe to you what happened on the Temple Mount. When people came to the Temple area there was graduated access to God. If you were a Gentile and you came up on the Temple area you could go so far. That's called the Court of the Gentiles. Then there was a 4-foot wall and that 4-foot wall had a sign on it. Archeologists have found that sign today digging up Herod's Temple. They see the sign and this is what the sign reads: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and the enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." The idea is there is separation between the Gentiles. They could only go so far.

A Jew could walk right past that barrier. The Jews could go a little bit further, but there's another barrier there for women. That's the Court of Women and women could not go past that. Men could go further, but they could only go to that part of the temple where the priests were. The priests were the only ones allowed there. In the very most holy place only one priest, the high priest, once a year could go into that most holy place and offer a sacrifice.

All of that demonstrating God's holiness, just having access to God is not something we take for granted. But when Jesus Christ died on the cross the barrier that existed between the most holy place and the holy place, a curtain, was torn. When Jesus died, that was torn in two.

Let me show you a verse. This is from the actual crucifixion of Christ in Luke 23. Notice that the curtain was torn. *It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

God made a significant change in how differences are viewed between believers and nonbelievers. He made a significant change in the access that we have to God. No longer do we have to go to a priest and offer a sacrifice, as they did in the Old Testament, or confess our sins before a priest. Now we can have direct access to God.

That's what the passage is talking about here. Every one of us stands on equal footing before the cross. We all have access to God in that process and then the relationships between us change.

Let's go on and see the next verse, verse 15 there. *His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.*

What God does in this whole process of understanding who He is and what He's designed for life is He's taken the Jews and Gentiles differences; He's brought them together to make one new humanity called the church. He brings them together to have this relationship where the differences now are put aside because of their focus on who God is.

It's a beautiful picture of what God does in the church. Because their identity changes. No longer is our identity defined by our differences. Now our identity is defined by what we have in common, by the Holy Spirit living in us, by this relationship that we have with God.

It's a beautiful thing that takes place because now a brother and a sister are no longer just physical brother and sister. When they come to Jesus Christ and they get saved they are now brother and sister in Christ. A husband and wife are no longer just a husband and wife, but when they get to know God in that personal way they are brother and sister in Christ, which changes the dimension a little bit. Even more interesting is when a child becomes a Christian, that parent and child are now brother and sister in Christ. Very significant dimension change in their relationships.

That's what God does with what He calls the church. The church isn't just a building and the church is certainly not just a place we come and worship on Sunday; the church is a group of people that are gathered together with a new identity.

So really what we're studying this morning is the theology of what a church is about. Paul has a lot to say about this and we're going to see more about the theology about the church in Ephesians 4 and its leadership. But here he's just defining for people. Here's what the church is.

I want you to understand what you're a part of. When we understand it it gives us this greater confidence in order to be the church that God wants us to. That's powerful. One new humanity.

Verse 16: *and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.* Interesting, huh? There was animosity between them, but when Christ died He put to death the hostility and provided a unity as their one new relationship. It's really fascinating, I think, what God did in the church.

When I define church I just want to make sure you understand that I'm not talking about Calvary Chapel church. I'm talking about "the church;" people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. So the neighbor that you have as a Christian is part of the church, God's church. There is this sense that you experience with that person that's different than if the person's not a believer. It's a beautiful thing that God has done.

Their identity is changed. Verse 16: *and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

The Gentiles do not have to go to the Jews anymore. The Jewish people do not have to go to the priest anymore. Now we have all access to the Father is what he's saying. We can come to God freely and we can talk to Him. And then we share because He's the Father. We're brothers and sisters, and we share in that very special relationship.

Notice how the relationships are renewed. Ethnic differences are put aside. Gender differences are put aside. Economic differences are put aside. Color of skin differences are put aside because now we're a part of something new, this one humanity that He's creating. Now the solution to getting along is not so much getting to know each other better, the solution to getting along is getting to know God better.

Once two people who are married, if they want to have a strong marriage relationship, they get to know God better and it changes who they are and it makes them a more attractive person, a more tolerant person, a more patient person, a person who is able to then have a closer relationship with someone else. Having a spiritual foundation to a relationship is strategic. God brings peace and humility into our lives and allows then that hostility that was in relationships to be set aside.

If two Christians were having trouble in a marriage relationship the greatest thing they could do is to come closer to God. The closer you get to God the easier it is for you to relate to someone who's obnoxious or different than you are. I want you to see that unity here is not achieved at the expense of purity, that purity being righteousness. We don't say to someone, "Oh, you're living with your girlfriend. That's okay. We'll just be united together." No, if someone's doing the wrong thing then we can call attention to that. We're not saying the goal in life is that we're all just going to love each other. That love takes place because of Christ. It's Christ in the life that He's called us to that allows us to experience the unity together. The cross is what provides that unity.

It's very interesting to me to see what salvation does to a person. It releases the hostility. It fades away. Sometimes a person needs to do something, as we've already talked about, to position yourself in that grace. Because *God gives grace*, James says, *to the humble*. In other words, you position yourself rightly to receive the grace that God wants to give you.

Sometimes we have to position ourselves in ways that are challenging. We have to feed our enemy, Jesus says. Bless those who persecute you. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. We do things to try to break that down. But God is the one who does something in our hearts that allows us to experience a greater peace with other.

Notice Paul's application to all of this is to the church. Look at verse 19. *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but* (and he's going to give two illustrations to help us understand what it means to be in the church, to be the church of God) *fellow citizens* (that's number one) *with God's people and also members of his household*.

Let's talk about fellow citizens for a moment. When I was in Indonesia in November at that conference, I was with people from all over the world. They weren't fellow citizens in the sense of an earthly picture. There were people from Africa and Australia and China and India and Pakistan and Indonesia. We were all there together. There was a beautiful thing that happened because we were all worshipping the Lord together and God just drew us together. It's an illustration of this kind of thing.

But on an earthly level there were a lot of differences because in Indonesia the food is different and the language, the vocabulary, even in English, is different. And frankly even the toilets are different. There are strange toilets there. So there were times when the U.S. guys would get together and we'd hang out and kind of talk about some of these differences. At that moment there was a comfort level I felt with the other U.S. people. We're going, "Yes, isn't this kind of weird being over here? But it's kind of cool that we're all in fellowship. But it sure is different." And so we would talk about that. We were fellow citizens, you see, on an earthly level, but we were part of God's kingdom, fellow citizens with all of these others.

There is a comfort level that we experience when we are Christians when we meet another Christian. Isn't that true for you? You find that someone's a Christian in your neighborhood, you find out that somebody's a Christian at work, and you already feel this sense of comfort with them.

I was on a plane a couple weeks ago and the guy sitting next to me was a Christian. We started talking and I just felt this closeness with him. That's what he's talking about here. We're fellow citizens together. He's describing that way of illustrating what the church is like. There's this comfort level that we enjoy because we have this in common, that we're citizens of the kingdom.

The other illustration, notice that he says, is the illustration of a household. Members of the same household. That is the word 'family.' You have to understand the difference between the kind of family they're talking about there and our family. In western society, particularly America, when we think family we think dad, mom, two kids. Or we think single mom and her kids. Or we think blended family bringing two together and all the children. That's what we think of as family. But

that's not exactly what they were thinking about here when they use the word 'household.' The word 'household' is bigger. Extended family and including the people, the household servants, they're all part of your household.

When I lived in Kenya (our whole family - five kids, my wife, and I - lived in Kenya), we had household servants that worked with us. And you know why? Because we didn't have the mechanical servants that we have here in the United States. In Kenya you don't have a dishwasher, a food processor. You don't even have a water purifier. You don't have a lawn mower. You don't have any of those things, so these household servants serve in that role to accomplish some of those same things. There's a sense in which when you bring them in they become part of your household.

I didn't really understand that until our gardener came to us and asked for money because he had a family member who had to go the hospital. I asked one of the other missionaries, "I already pay this guy to do his work, but he's asking me for more money. Tell me about this," because there were a lot of things I didn't understand culturally. What the missionary said is, "He has that right to come to you because he's part of your household, he's part of your extended family. And so you have an obligation to him to help take care of him, so you should give him some money to contribute to that."

That's the idea of household here. When we talk about family as the family of God, we're talking about an extended family, that family that we can relate to, all of those people that are connected.

You know that I write and teach about the family. I do a lot of that, we do it here at Calvary Chapel, but one of the most important things I'm going to say or I can say about the family is what I'm about to say right now. I think it's very important for us to have a balanced picture of family ministry and what that looks like. Because the most important thing I want to say is this: Sometimes something that's even more important than the earthly family is the family of God. I want you to get that.

The earthly family is important and we're going to help marriages be strong here, we're going to help children relate to their parents and parents relate to their children. But the most important thing to realize is that there's a family that we all belong to and that is the most important thing.

I think sometimes the earthly family can become an idol. We spend so much time investing in our family that we end up not considering what God has for us. The family is not the most important thing; God is the most important thing. We need to keep that balance in mind because we can allow our earthly family sometimes to capitalize our lives so much that it hinders our spiritual growth. We don't want to do that. We want to grow in Christ, we want to be part of what God is doing and He calls us to be a part of. We want to be careful about overemphasizing the earthly family.

Let me give you some examples from scripture. I want you to just get an idea of the importance of the church and how it ties into the earthly family here using this word 'household.'



Matthew 12:46-50 reads this way: *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."* Jesus isn't disowning the family here. We know that Jesus really cares for His family and He values the family.

When Jesus was on the cross He spoke to John, saw His mom there and He says these words. *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.* Jesus knew how to balance this commitment He had with family to His mom and His relationship to God as Heavenly Father. He knew how to balance that. We must also learn how to balance that, each one of us in our own lives.

When Jesus was lost in the Temple at twelve years old, do you remember what He said to His mom and dad? *"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* Jesus is saying that there's something more important than just hanging around with family. That something more important is serving God first in our lives.

Let me show you another verse. I just think it's important for us to catch all of this if we're doing family ministry like we're doing here at Calvary. We want to keep it in perspective. Verse 37 of Matthew 10 says this: *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."*

The person who misses this very important concept, I think, can become imbalanced very quickly in their lives. Love for Jesus is the most important thing. God designed us so that we are part of a heavenly family. That's how He designed it. That means that single people fellowship with married people. It means that those who are divorced or single parents find some healing within the family of God. Because Christ died on the cross He opens the door so that we can be a bigger family. We care for people. There are some people who experience terrible childhoods and in the midst of God's family experience healing in that process. We must keep the balance in mind as we move in our whole ministry toward family ministry. It's really God's family that brings the maximum healing.

In fact, I think the best way to look at this is this: The earthly family is a subset of the heavenly family. It's important for us to build into our earthly family, to learn how to be husbands and wives that are honoring God, to learn how to be parents that are passing the faith onto children. We're doing all those things. Those are important, but we're doing it in the context of the family of God. We're teaching our kids how to live their lives in the earthly family so that they can live effectively in God's family.

We have a mission as an earthly family. I think every family should have some kind of a vision statement or mission statement for their family. Here's why we exist, here's what we do. I think

the most successful families are the ones who create that mission statement around their understanding that the family's important, yes, but we're also called to use our family to serve other people, particularly God. We call that being a missional family. The missional family is one that values its relationships together, but then uses that family to extend God's grace to others serving, sharing, and caring about others.

The best way to view this, I think, it's not a competition between earthly family and the heavenly family, but it's a cooperation that we're doing in order to serve the Lord most effectively. People who are in families are serving God in their families. They're doing that in a way that's extending the kingdom to others. It's important, though, to recognize that the goal of a family is not to be a happy family. That is not the goal. We might want to be a happier, close family, but the goal is to take that then and to share it with others. We're part of the household of God.

It's just like if we were to stand around in a circle and hold hands and then some new folks come in who are Christians. We open the door and we welcome them in. Because we're all part of this family together. That's what we're doing.

I want to draw one more idea out of this verse. Go back to verse 19. Let me read it again and I want to share one more idea before we go on to verse 20. *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.*

When he says you are members of his household, who is he talking to? Is he just talking to adults because the church is made of adults? No. He's not. The book is not just written to adults. Look at chapter 6. Chapter 6 verse 1 says, *Children*, because he's giving his attention to children. He's giving instructions to them. They are part of the church as well. That's why we value kids. When a child comes to know Jesus Christ that child is your brother or sister in Christ. We want to treat them that way. We want to value them. That becomes part of what it means to be the family of God.

Let's go to verse 20. *Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* That's what he's talking about there; that's the chief cornerstone, God Himself. Jesus is number one in our lives.

When Hollywood creates a movie you don't hear in a romantic movie, usually, the hero say to the heroine, "I love you so much. You're the second most important thing in my life." And she says in response, "I'm so glad you told me that. You're number two in my life too." You just don't hear that, right? But that's how it should be. Because we're saying God is number one; Jesus is number one and my family is second.

Verse 21: *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* As we understand the church and how God designed us, notice the words there. He brings us together to be this building. He's not talking about a building like an edifice of a church; he's talking about the people. He brings us together.

Notice it says He's building us together *to become a dwelling where God lives by His Spirit*. We know that when someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior God comes into their lives and lives in them. But there's a way in which when we all worship together and we all serve together that the Holy Spirit comes into the midst with us and allows us to be more effective as we become this lighthouse in the community.

There are some people who believe they can exercise their spirituality independent of the church. Certainly it is possible for you to be a Christian and not go to church. But you're missing out on some of the tremendous blessings that God offers because He created the church to be this group of imperfect people that experience God's grace and are growing together. As we grow together we have this mission and ministry that we share to others. This church then becomes this powerful change agent in the world.

In the Old Testament God used a family, Abraham, and it's through that family all the nations of the earth will be blessed. God has a role for Israel that will continue on through the ages. However, in the New Testament there's a switch from who's passing on the message, who has the responsibility now to pass on the message. It is now God's church. He's chosen the church to be the vehicle through whom which the message of salvation is proclaimed. We have a strategic job as we're passing that on to others.

Go back to verse 14. That's where I started. I just want you to see that one more time. It says, *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*. It's a beautiful thing when we allow that unity that God wants us to have to draw us together.

There may be a time when you're experiencing some pressure in a relationship and the challenge needs to be go to God. Go to God; get to know Him better. Because the closer we become to God, the closer we are to being Christians, little Christs, the easier it is for us to relate to other people because we're being the people that God wants us to be. That's the power that God has to then break down barriers in relationships.

It's a beautiful thing and I am grateful to be part of God's church. I love it. I enjoy being part of this particular manifestation, Calvary Chapel Living Hope, and grateful for what God is doing among us. I trust that God is going to bring more people, I hope a lot of different people than we are, to demonstrate His grace in us and draw us together as a body to break down any barriers that may exist because we draw closer to the Lord.

The unity that we experience with God as our Heavenly Father is the primary thing that we focus on that allows all the differences to fade away and for us to enjoy serving the Lord together. God then takes those differences and uses them in powerful ways as we are uniquely gifted to serve the Lord, but He still brings us back to that unity that draws us together. Amen?

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your church. I am grateful to be a part of this fellowship where I have a lot of friends and I experience a lot of blessings from people who care

for me and love me. I thank you for the personal benefits I gain from this church. Lord, I ask that you'd help me as a leader in this church to encourage others in that direction; that the decisions that we make and the choices that we make are ones that would foster that sense of unity, that would encourage us to be missionaries for you, and that our church itself would be a place where your Spirit can just empower us to serve you in great ways. Lord, we ask that you'd expand our borders, you'd give us more opportunities to serve you. Bring more people that we might be the people of God and we might serve you in great ways. Thank you for your word and the power that it has to change us. In Jesus' name, amen.