

Valley Bible Church - Transcript

Behold 23
January 18-20

Edify the Body

Introduction

It has been an extraordinary two nights. Personally I have enjoyed immersing myself among people who love God and love each other. And we have been grounded in some primary truths. On Wednesday evening, Chris reminded us that we are to think and act in a way that puts on display the greatness of God. And he reminded us of the biblical truth that we are to do *everything* to the glory of God. And we are to do this because this is why we have been created in the first place, and because God's ultimate goal is to bring glory to Himself. And deservedly so.

The way to do this, as Chris reminded us, is to look to the Scriptures. There we will discover all that we need to apply this truth personally in each and every situation we face. And then, corporately, Valley Bible Church can glorify God by proclaiming the truth as we evangelize the lost, and edify one another. Wonderful truths.

Then, last night, Randy reminded us of the importance of proclaiming the word in evangelizing the lost. Believers have been entrusted with the gospel. And we have a responsibility to do our part in God's plan of bringing life to His elect. Randy showed us that when Paul saw unbelievers doing unbelieving things, he was *compelled* to evangelize. He reminded us that, for Paul, evangelism was not a list to be checked off, but a lifestyle to be lived.

Randy showed us that Paul's evangelistic pattern was personal, active, proclaiming, Christ-focused, dependent on the Holy Spirit, and properly motivated. And we must never lose sight of the fact that it was the gospel that was of first importance. Not political views, not educational philosophies, and not social programs. Last night we were presented with a very wise, and biblical, example to follow.

So, tonight, we will continue to look at the core values of Valley Bible Church by exploring what Scripture says about edifying the body. I realize that for most of us, when we think of being edifying, we think of language, that is, how and what we speak. In other words, most of us default to defining edification as *speaking* things that are uplifting. And that is true, and we certainly will spend time tonight looking at what Scripture says about that. But I think Scripture is broader in its definition than that. Tonight, I hope to see, along with you, some other ways in which each of us can edify the body here at Valley. And by the end of our evening, I hope and pray that *you* will have committed to considering what you have heard tonight, and to practicing ways to edify the body here at Valley.

The Command

Let's begin by understanding that being edifying is a command. We all know that there are many commands in Scripture. While believers are saved by grace through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, there are still things *to do* as a part of the Christian faith.

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Doing these things neither saves believers, nor does it secure their salvation, that is entirely and exclusively the work of God. Nevertheless, believers have things that they are commanded to do as a part of partnering with the Holy Spirit in their sanctification and staying bowed before the God Who saved them.

Let's briefly consider a few examples of some of these very well-known commands. Believers are commanded to always be prepared to share the gospel. Peter wrote, reminding his audience to

“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

This is not an option for a believer. Regardless of your personality, that is how extroverted or introverted you are, regardless of your “comfort zone” with regards to having conversations with perfect strangers, regardless of how much Bible you think you know, each of us is commanded to be prepared to make a defense of the hope that is in us to anyone who asks. For a more thorough explanation of this, I refer you to Randy's talk last night.

Believers are also commanded to place the Kingdom of God before their own personal interests or concerns. Matthew recorded Jesus telling His disciples to

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

Scripture informs us that we are to prioritize our time, energy, and resources into those activities that further the cause of Christ. *Our* agendas are always secondary to what Christ would have us to do.

Believers are also commanded to align their thinking with what God desires, and to put off any way of thinking that is contradictory to honoring the Savior. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, telling them to

“Not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

This world is not our home, truly, and we would do well to avoid being caught up in *its* ways of thinking and *its* value systems. Ours is a duty to find and conform to God's will for our lives. The command for believers is to discover, and practice, those things that are good and acceptable in the sight of God. As Chris reminded us, to do *everything* to display the greatness of God.

We could go on like this all night, but our goal this evening is to look at one particular command. Tonight I would like us to consider the command to edify the body. And this is commanded in Scripture more than once. Paul told the Ephesian church to

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

In this *threefold* command, we can see that when speaking, believers are commanded *not to say* anything that might cause another to stumble. And, they are likewise commanded *to say* only those words that build up others. Finally, believers are commanded to speak only those things that are appropriate to the occasion. That is a great deal to consider when we open our mouths to speak.

But, as I said, building up the body is much more than simply how we speak. Consider this example from Paul's letter to the Romans.

“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19).

Believers are commanded not only to speak, but to *do* only those things that bring peace and unity to the body of Christ. And, Scripture declares that we are to do it vigorously. The idea of pursuing something does not allow one to think about a casual trot, but rather a sprint to nab your quarry. If we want peace with one another, we will need to go after it with a certain degree of intensity. We cannot expect it to simply just happen. Edification is as much a matter of doing, as it is of speaking.

And one last point I would make about this command is that the command to edify one another is inextricably linked to the fact that we *are* one body.

“¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

This is the command to grow in Christ. This is the command to be sanctified. We are to “grow up in every way” into Him. And the environment of this growth is the local body of Christ. This is us here at Valley. We are a body, a body that is “joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.” But in order for the body to grow and build itself up in love, Scripture says that each part must work properly. And that proper working is achieved through edification.

The Example

There are many places we could turn to in Scripture for examples, but I chose three from the life of Christ. After all, I suppose that we can do no better than to emulate our Savior. The first is the feeding of the five thousand, as recorded in the gospel of Luke.

“¹²Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, ‘send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.’ ¹³But he said to them, ‘you give them something to eat.’ They said, ‘we have no more than five loaves and two fish - unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.’ ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, ‘have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’ ¹⁵And they did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd” (Luke 9:12-16).

This is a narrative we know well. It was late in the day, and the crowd was growing hungry. They required food to eat and places to sleep that night. His disciples, recognizing the needs of the masses (a good thing), encouraged Jesus to cut His teaching short so the people had time to walk to the surrounding villages and find food and shelter. But Jesus had other plans.

Jesus told His disciples to meet the needs of the crowds themselves. This was an impossible task, for them at least, and doing their best, they produced a meal for, at most, two people. Stating their case that this was the best they could come up with, they floated the idea that they could go and buy food, though they did make the point that there were a lot of people and it would be expensive.

It is the response of Jesus to all this that I would like to focus on here. Consider, if you will, what He could have said. Jesus could have rebuked them for their lack of faith. Or, He could have mocked them for thinking that the five loaves and two fish was even worth mentioning. But He did neither. Instead, Jesus told His disciples to have the people sit down, and He used the food the disciples had given Him to feed the people.

One lesson I think that we can take from this is that we can edify others by not belittling their gifts. We can sometimes find ourselves in a place where the gifts God has given *us* are sufficient to meet the needs of ministry. But even so, it is important to consider whether or not God would have us use the gifts of others as well. Simply because we *can* do it ourselves does not mean that we *should* do it ourselves. We must remember that others can be blessed by a sense of fulfillment that God is using them for His Kingdom, and His glory, as well.

Another example is, again, a familiar passage. It is recorded for us in Matthew's gospel.

“²³And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵And they went and woke him, saying, ‘save us, Lord; we are perishing.’ ²⁶And he said to them, ‘why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’ Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷And the men marveled, saying, ‘what sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’” (Matthew 8:23-27).

The disciples had been with Jesus for some time by this point in His ministry. They had seen Him perform countless miracles, healings, exorcisms, and other such marvelous works. They had heard Him teach. They had shared quiet intimate times with Him as well. And now they were traveling, as they had done before, across the Sea of Galilee.

Some of these men were accustomed to such travel. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen and had spent their lives on the open water. Others, likely, had not. In any event, as they were traveling a storm broke out. We do not know if it was one of the less experienced seafarers who first raised the alarm, but soon all of them, it seemed, were concerned for their safety.

Jesus, however, was not concerned. After a day of teaching and other ministry, He had found a place to curl up and sleep. After some discussion, the decision was made to awaken Him.

Scripture does not reveal who it was that finally determined to rouse the sleeping Savior, but my guess is that it was Peter. Peter had a tendency to take the initiative, even if it was unwise or unnecessary.

So, they woke Jesus. Rubbing the sleep from His eyes, He took a look at the storm and the terrified faces of His disciples. He listened to their frantic pleas for help. He wondered aloud why they had so little faith. Then, Jesus told the wind and sea to be still, and peace was immediately restored. I think it is worth noting that, while Jesus *did* call the disciples out for their lack of faith, it was the winds and the sea that He *rebuked*.

Jesus was patient with His disciples. There are dozens of other accounts in Scripture that support this. Indeed, the gospel narratives seem to go from one episode to another where His disciples did not understand either what Jesus was saying or what Jesus was doing. And, I think, this is something we can learn from Jesus. We can learn to be edifying with those of lesser faith by being patient with them. Not all of us are equally far along the path of sanctification. And we would do well to remember that we can edify others by supporting and encouraging them as they grow in their faith. After all, we would want that from those of greater faith than us.

My final example will also be familiar to you.

“¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘feed my lambs.’ ¹⁶He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘tend my sheep.’ ¹⁷He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘feed my sheep’” (John 21:15-17).

The context of this account is, of course, Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus. Peter had been bold, as he usually was. And Peter had failed, and he had failed miserably. He had been broken. He had wept. He had never gotten the opportunity to apologize to Jesus for his sin, think of that. Instead, he had watched Jesus die.

But God had been gracious. He had allowed Peter to see the resurrected Christ. He allowed him to talk with Him. He allowed Peter to receive the forgiveness he desperately needed. And here, in this passage, we see Jesus restoring Peter to a position of ministry and service in the Kingdom of God.

If you spend any time at all among other believers, you will inevitably be disappointed. I am absolutely certain that I have proved a disappointment to some people at some point. That is because I am a fallen, sinful person. And so are you. And so each of us will invariably fail in our walk. And, often, that failure will impact others.

But we can be forgiven. I do not mean by God, because of course, we have His forgiveness. I mean we can be forgiven by those individuals we have offended. This is what I take from Jesus’

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example here. He did not rebuke Peter. He did not tell him that he had had his chance and blown it. In fact, there is no record in Scripture that Jesus ever again mentioned Peter's threefold denial of Him again. He did not need to. Peter never forgot that night. What Jesus did was forgive and restore. By handling the failure of others graciously, by restoring them to relationship and a place of service alongside us, we can edify one another. Again, we would hope for that from those we have offended.

The Motive

All of this will be easier to do, if we have a good motive. And what I mean, is that there is a greater motive to follow this command than the fact that it is simply a command. The motive we have is stated clearly by Paul in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica.

“⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

Each of us was worthy of experiencing the full force of God's wrath. Each of us was born in rebellion, and each of us fostered and nourished that rebellious spirit until God called us to Himself. And even now, there are times when we forget who we are as children of God and return to our fleshly ways.

But God has chosen us to receive the gift of faith. In His sovereign grace He removed our sins and declared us righteous. And one of the reasons He did so was that we might be of service to Him in moving forward His Kingdom here on earth. He did this, as Paul puts it, “that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (1 Thessalonians 5:10). Believers were saved so that they might live with Christ intimately, and eternally.

And a key element of that life with Christ is that we edify other believers. Again, to read the words of Paul. Since believers have obtained that great blessing of “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,” we are to “encourage one another and build one another up.” In other words, edifying others in the faith is something we are to do in response to God's giving us the gift of faith. We are to use our energies to build up the body of Christ to which we have been called. This is our motive, and I cannot think of a better one.

The Perspective

But there is another element to consider here. Motivated as we might be, this will also be easier to do if we have a proper perspective. Can I state it bluntly? Do not think too much of yourself. As Paul reminded the church in Corinth.

“²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 14:26-29).

Now make no mistake, this is as true for me as it is for you. None of us brought much to the table when God gave us the gift of faith. Sure, perhaps we had some skill, or talent, or material resources that He could make use of. But God did not *need* any of us. And that skill, or talent, was immeasurably enhanced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who took our natural ability and transformed it into a *spiritual* gift.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. And humility is a key to edifying others. When we put ourselves first, when we consult only our own desires and interests, we *cannot* be edifying to others. We cannot lift others up if we are trying to stay above them. We must keep at all times a proper perspective of who we are. Yes, we are children of the King and heirs with Christ, but we are that by God's grace and not our own achievement.

If we keep before us the truth that we are fallen, sinful people, we will better be able to build up the other fallen, sinful people around us. We will be better able to build others up if we have less concern that it might elevate them above ourselves. We will be better able to seek the good of others if we remember that another's blessing is not our loss. God's blessings are infinite. His is not a zero sum game where if one person is blessed another must suffer. We can go forward with the knowledge that there need be no limit to how much we edify others. It will cost us nothing. Indeed, quite the reverse, I am certain. God will honor and bless our efforts to build up His body.

The Challenges

I will not pretend and tell you that doing this will be easy. It will be difficult to put ourselves aside and edify another person. And, I think the area in which this is most challenging has to do with what are called our Christian liberties. I am quite certain that each of us possess areas of liberty that others do not. It may be in the use of alcohol. It may be in the subject matter of mainstream television and movies. It may be anything. But I am also quite certain that there will be someone who can take offense at the exercise of our liberties. The words of Paul can be helpful here.

“²³‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. ²⁴Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor”
(1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

There are certain things that God clearly forbids in Scripture. But there are a great number of things He does not. The challenge in exercising your liberty in these areas concerns the impact it will have on another believer. Remember, simply because we *can*, does not mean that we *should*. Again Paul,

“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13).

Our liberties are ours. They are not, necessarily, another's. We cannot judge the grace God has given to other people. It is His grace and He may bestow it as He wishes. Our task is to be grateful for the grace He has given us, and leave it at that. So, one way we can edify others is by not causing them to stumble in areas of Christian liberty. We can build them up by not placing before them something that might cause them to sin. It is

our duty to refrain from exercising our liberty if it proves a stumbling block to another believer. It is our *God-commanded* obligation to build up the body in this way. As Gerry talked about a few weeks ago, believers are commanded to put aside their own personal preferences and serve others by deferring to them. Believers are not to insist upon their liberties if it causes another to stumble.

Again, consider Paul's exhortation to the church in Rome.

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Rom. 15:1-2).

Putting others first is the key to edification. And we should not quibble about who is strong and who is weak. Such talk does not lead to edification. Each of us ought to seek to please his neighbor, in this case, any fellow brother or sister in Christ. Each of us ought never to seek merely to please ourselves. Remember that we are not our own; we belong to Christ. This is the command, and challenging as it may be, we must obey it.

The Opportunities

Finally, let me conclude this evening by offering some thoughts about *how* we might do this. In other words, I would like us to consider not only to *refrain* from doing things in order to build up the body, but of this we *can* do to edify one another. And, I hope, you will find these to be everyday, practical opportunities that each of us has for building up the body here at Valley.

First let's start with words. What I am talking about here is what I like to call general politeness. Again the words of Paul, another command, by the way,

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:16, 18).

Living in harmony, living peaceably, can often be achieved by simply being gracious. I am not certain that all of you are aware that at Valley Bible Church, we have about 200 or so adults who attend on a regular basis. And then there are the youth, children, and babies. Of those 200 adults, only a very few actually get paid. The great majority of the ministry that takes place here on any given Sunday morning is done by volunteers. And then there is AWANA. And Growth Group leaders. And Youth ministry during the week. And summer activities. And music ministry. And, and, and. The video we saw earlier this evening is *overwhelming* in its catalog of different ministries that took place at Valley last year.

The simple reality is that most of the ministry done here at Valley is done by people who are simply serving the local body of Christ and, I might add, often using their own money to do it. Most of the summer activities, the different studios, Winterfest, the new Christmas decorations, were all donated. Donated by people who wish to remain anonymous so that God will get the glory, but donated nonetheless. And while all the glory goes to God for moving in the hearts of these people, it does not diminish His glory one bit to appreciate them for their service.

Why am I saying this? To return to the words of Paul, while I do not think that any of you consider those serving here to be beneath you, there can be a sense of entitlement. Remember that those who serve do so *to build up* this body, and you have the responsibility to *build them up* in return. It is something I actually think we do very well, but I would exhort us all to excel still more in this. And please, this is not about me. Because of the more public nature of my ministry, I get plenty of appreciation, and thank you.

I am talking about the others, the behind-the-scenes servant here. I would encourage you to build up the body here by saying “thank you” to those who watch your kids in the nursery, or serve in leading worship, or teach your kids in Sunday school, or host a Growth Group or anywhere else where *you* are served here. I would encourage you to build up the body here by simply expressing your appreciation for the service of others.

A second opportunity for building up the body here at Valley is engagement. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, in a passage that has become the theme of our Growth Group ministry this year, to

“²⁴Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

It is difficult to build up the local body if you do not participate in it. It is difficult to know how to pray for people if you do not talk to them and, more importantly, listen to them. I would encourage you to join a Growth Group, if you are not already involved in one. And if you are already in a Growth Group, then I would encourage you to attend regularly and participate enthusiastically. I have been a believer for decades, and I can personally affirm that my times of deep and meaningful spiritual growth correlate precisely with the times I have been *actively* involved in a small body of believers, meeting regularly, for mutual edification.

Also, I would encourage you to participate in other activities besides Growth Groups and Sunday mornings. We are blessed here at Valley with opportunities for every age. There are ministries devoted to youth, men, women, and seniors. The video reminded us that from little children to Sojourners, there is something going on here at Valley every week. Now I realize people have jobs, and families, and other obligations, but might I ask you to consider if there are not opportunities for being involved here at Valley that you are not taking advantage of.

The simple fact is, that building up another person is something that requires connection. It is like getting a haircut; you really cannot do that over the phone. Edification is personal, and it requires many points of contact over a period of time. And that can only be done through engagement.

A final thought about opportunities to edify the local body is service. If you are a child of God, then He has given you a spiritual gift. And He has given you that gift for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

“⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who

empowers them all in everyone. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

If there are some two hundred adults here at Valley, then there are at least some two hundred spiritual gifts given by God, for the building up of this local church. I would encourage you to consider whether or not you are using your spiritual gifts for the edification of your brothers and sisters here at Valley. As I mentioned a minute ago, we are largely a volunteer-run church. We cannot afford to pay everyone who serves in every ministry here at Valley. We need people to serve. And, quite frankly, those who serve regularly need a break from time-to-time.

So, what is your spiritual gift? How can you use it here at Valley? Where is your place in moving forward the Kingdom of God in *this* local body? Take some time around your tables to have a conversation about these things, and I will return with some closing thoughts in a few minutes.

Takeaways

As I reflect on our talk this evening, I am concerned that I may have seemed harsh. I did not mean to. This is simply something I believe in passionately, and I may have allowed too much of that passion to come through.

But I do stand by the content of what I shared. This is a church where people genuinely love God and love each other. And this week we have been challenged to consider our core values, *biblical* values, of exalting the Lord, evangelizing the lost and edifying one another. And so, let us remember that this can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me close with the words of Paul, as he departed from the elders in Ephesus.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).