

Sunday, July 26, 2026 - PM Service - Jesse Diaz
Overcoming Individualism - Part 2
Accountability Over Comfort

A couple of weeks ago I began a little series on overcoming individualism, and we started talking about how the individualistic, self-focused mindset of our culture can impact the church if we aren't careful. The message of our culture is one that is in direct opposition to that of the Bible - our culture encourages us to focus on ourselves first and foremost, and to do what feels best for us in any given situation. An individualistic lifestyle can manifest itself in a variety of different ways within the life of a Christian, and so last time we looked at how it can impact our witness and our heart towards the lost. We examined the great commission, and saw how Jesus himself beautifully demonstrated what it means to go and seek the lost with a compassionate heart.

And it's right there that I want to pause quickly before we continue with tonight's message. It's not often we stop up here from the pulpit and allow for a bit of reflection time on a previous week's message. So I wanted to stop and ask: what have you done in the last couple of weeks to be a light, and to spread the gospel to those who do not yet know Jesus? What situations have you intentionally stepped into - how have you responded to the call to "go"? Who have you been praying for? Have you shown compassion towards others both externally and internally, especially to those who are different from you?

Now, if you're anything like me, there are times when I hear a message and I genuinely want to apply it to my life. I might agree with what has been said, I might have taken notes, I even make a plan in my head of what steps are next. And then, for whatever reason, life gets busy and a few days later I have forgotten about what I internally committed to. It can sometimes be easy to come to church, download some information, and leave without any life change. Why is that? Why is it that good intentions don't always become faithful actions?

I'm sure the answer changes from situation to situation: some people get too "busy," some let too many things distract them, others may simply lack discipline. But no matter what the reasoning is, I'm sure you've noticed that this is more likely to happen when you are simply left to your own devices. When there's no one checking in on you, you are much more likely to allow things that should be a priority slip into the background.

Imagine instead if you had someone from church, a close brother or sister in Christ, ask you on Tuesday "hey, you said you wanted to share the gospel with that person at work - how did that go? I've been praying for you!" Wouldn't that make a difference? Wouldn't

knowing that someone is going to hold you up to a standard push you in the right direction? I think it would. And so tonight I want to take some time to look at one of the most amazing gifts that God has given us through the church, and that is community, and more specifically, the accountability that comes along within that community.

PRAY

One of the main ways individualism creeps into our lives is by the way in which we view our faith as a personal choice. Since my faith is a personal choice, it must mean that my walk with God should be a private matter. And yes, the Bible clearly teaches personal responsibility and the need for a personal relationship with Jesus - I'm not saying otherwise. Romans 10:9 (CSB) is a perfect example: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Look again at the use of the words "you" and "your."

So clearly your faith is a personal decision - no one else can make that choice for you. Not your parents, not your friends, not your grandparents, not even your church - at some point, the decision to follow Jesus must be made by you. But we can take this idea of a "personal faith" too far when we falsely believe that spiritual independence automatically equals spiritual maturity. Our world loves and strives for independence: financial freedom, working for yourself rather than for a boss, freedom to think and do what we please. Our culture glorifies this idea of being able to totally rely on yourself, of being fully self-sufficient. And again, I think we would be foolish as the body of Christ to not pause and think about how this way of thinking could influence, or even is actively influencing, ourselves and our church.

Point 1: God's design of community. This idea of living an independent life is contrary to what the New Testament teaches. Look at Paul's words regarding the church in 1 Corinthians 12:12-19 - "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

Oftentimes these verses are used when we talk about how different people in the body of Christ have different strengths and giftings and rolls to play, but I am simply pointing out here that God has a specific plan for people who call themselves Christians. He intends for individual members of the body not to be independent of one another, but rather to be so connected to each other that He uses the imagery of your own body. No one part of your body operates within a vacuum. Every individual part of your body is connected to another member. This is how we are to approach the church - with a desire to live in connection with other brothers and sisters. I don't know how to say it any clearer than this: if you reject the idea that God has called you as a believer to live in true community with other Christians, you are rejecting the way that He has created things to work in this world.

I was listening to a podcast recently where they were talking about how God has, in His wisdom, created things with intentional order. Why couldn't God have just placed food in our stomachs every time we get hungry? Most of us are more removed from the food industry - we just get to go to the grocery store and there it all is - but someone has to labour over that food. Let's take a vegetable for example: someone has to make sure the soil is good enough, then they have to plan the seed, then they need to water it regularly, then they need to make sure no weeds are choking it out, then they have to check and see if it's ready to be harvested yet, then they have to harvest it, then it's gotta be packaged and shipped to your grocery store. Why all the difficult work? Why doesn't God just snap His fingers and make us full? Why did God make the world to work like this?

And while I may not know the exact answer, I can recognize that God has created the world to function in particular ways. This is true for the physical matters of this world, but also for spiritual matters. He has established certain processes for particular reasons. If you struggle with an addiction to your phone, it's probably a bad idea to allow yourself endless, free-flowing time on it each and every day. Instead, you're going to put time limits, you'll fill your time with other things, you'll use different tools to monitor your usage. Generally speaking, no amount of prayer that is not accompanied with any action is going to work. True, God does miracles sometimes, but generally speaking, it takes a few steps on our end as well. There is an order: prayer must be accompanied by action on our part, and that's when God will meet us.

God has established ways in which our spiritual lives should work, and one of those things is that when you become a Christian, that you get involved with a church, a local group of other Christians. I love the description of the early church in Acts 2:42 - it gives us a picture of what church includes. It says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Church

doesn't ONLY involve teaching, although they did that. Church is a place where community amongst believers is fostered.

There's no place in the Bible where that seems clearer than what James has to say in James 5:13-20. To provide some context, James has just finished a section where he is talking about being patient until the second coming of Jesus, especially in times of suffering. He begins this section in the first half of verse 7 by saying "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord..." Then he moves from patience in suffering to the final section in his book. James 5:13-20 say "¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. ¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

James' instruction here, when we look at what he has just finished discussing about being patient in suffering until the day of the Lord, suggests that there is a way in which we are to be patient until the coming of Jesus. James first tells us of the need to keep our hope in the second coming of Jesus, and then he shows us that the means of doing so is through community within the body of Christ.

Look at the community focus in these verses: calling for the elders of the church, confessing sins to one another, praying for one another (he uses the example of Elijah to show the power in prayer), and bringing back someone who is wandering. Each of these things involve you and someone else. Within this community that God has established for us is a place for confession. Now, I hope you'll notice the transition that James makes between verses 14 and 16. In verse 14 he says "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." So there are times when the elders, or the pastors, of the church should be brought into the picture.

In the first half of verse 16 James says "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." This confession of sins and prayer is to

be done amongst all of us. James moves from conversation between someone with their pastor to a conversation between someone and another christian. It is supposed to be a regular part of our spiritual lives and our meeting together. Church isn't ONLY about the teaching and worship - it is supposed to involve community with other believers. It's about genuine relationships. It's about Hebrews 10:24-25 - "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not 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." In order to encourage others and to stir them up, you need to build relationships with them! It's about Proverbs 27:17 - "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." We are supposed to help each other, to lift one another up, to encourage each other, to sharpen each other, and to pray with each other. I know I have laboured this point but I really hope you see that seeking out community really isn't an option - it is the means by which God has chosen to strengthen and sharpen us until the return of Jesus.

Point number 2: the barriers of true community. Oftentimes building a community isn't easy. It requires a lot of work. It requires time and energy. It requires vulnerability and honesty and transparency. Community, and the accountability that should come with it, can be uncomfortable at times. It requires us pulling off that mask if we come to church with a smile on our faces week after week. And if being vulnerable and honest with others is hard for you, that's not unusual. Most people want to hide their weaknesses. The question is if you'll allow those instincts and feelings to rule your life. We can't allow comfort to rule our lives. Now, I'm sure there are a number of reasons why people shy away from a true, deep community - the type where you get personal and real and allow others to get to know you.

I'm sure for some, it's the fear of rejection that holds them back. They think that if people knew what they were really struggling with, they wouldn't be welcomed or accepted at church anymore. For others maybe it's shame - it's that urge to just hide away because of the guilt of what you've done. For some, it's a lingering hurt they've experienced from having people abuse their vulnerability in the past. They've been hurt by others before and so it's scary to consider trying it again.

Maybe I'm projecting my life here, but I think the most common reason why people tend to not pursue true community is because of pride. Being vulnerable would show that you maybe don't have it together as much as you'd like for others to think you do. Maybe you aren't as self-sufficient as you'd like to project. Maybe life isn't always sunshine and good times.

It still amazes me when I catch myself in moments of pride like this. When you take step back, it's almost comical how a fallen being tries to conceal his fallenness. In reality, everyone here tonight is a sinner. Romans 3:23 makes it clear: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" - not one person here is without sin in their life, so why do we pretend to be something that we aren't. If we get real about who we are, I believe that God has something very special in store for us.

So we have discussed how an individualistic mindset causes us to tend to want to venture on this journey of faith by ourselves. We've seen how the Bible tells us that God desires for Christians to live within community. This community includes more than just attending church to listen to a message and sing some worship songs, but it also includes real, transparent relationships with one another. We've discussed some common things that keep us from living in community. And so lastly, point 3, I want to talk about the reward of living in true community.

Like I have touched on, I think one of the reasons confession to one another is so difficult is because we are told that weakness is something that we should hide in this world. The apostle Paul, however, found something different about his own weaknesses. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul is talking about this "thorn in his flesh." Paul doesn't say exactly what this was, but look at how God responds to Paul's request to remove it. "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Notice Paul doesn't say "God was able to use me when I got strong enough." Instead, he says, "when I stopped pretending to be stronger than I really was, that's when I found the strength of Jesus shining through my life." We all have weaknesses, but rather than keeping it hidden, it's an opportunity for God to work powerfully in your life. The beautiful thing about the gospel is that it frees us from needing to pretend. We don't need to hide because Jesus already knows us completely. We don't have to earn acceptance because we have already been adopted as sons and daughters. We don't have to convince everyone that we are always strong and always have it together because our hope is not built on our own strength. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Something else happens when we choose to invest in real community with other believers - I've seen it in my own life. James tells us in James 5:16 that healing comes when we confess our sins to each other and pray for one another. God uses community

to bring healing, to bring encouragement in dark times, to keep us going in the right direction when it gets hard.

Tonight, I pray that you would take some time to ask yourself: who really knows you? Who knows what you are celebrating in your life? Who knows what you are grieving? Who knows where God has been working on you? Who knows what areas you are prone to temptation in? Who have you asked to pray for you recently? Unfortunately, community doesn't always just fall into your lap. True community requires intentional conversation and vulnerability. It requires work. It requires us to put our pride aside. But when we do, we open the door for God to work in powerful ways, and we allow our weakness to bring glory to His name as we share with others.