

**“Spiritual Fitness: Togethering”**

***...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph.***

**4:3**

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**Prayer - Dear God, speak to us in ways that only you can and reveal what it means to be and do church. Amen**

**Message**

**She was tall, thin, and played college volleyball and was good at it. She had always been tall and lean and for that reason, everyone assumed it was easy for her. Assumed she could eat whatever she wanted, barely work out, and confidently take the court in short shorts and a tight top.**

**A different she, on the other hand, was short, stocky, “solid” as they say. She played just about anything involving a ball (or a pool) and was good at it. She had always been short and “stocky” and for that reason, everyone assumed she struggled with weight. Assumed she was heavy because she did eat whatever she wanted and didn’t try hard enough or have the discipline to get the body they thought she should have.**

**Then their paths crossed and they joined forces, realizing like so many others, they were indeed better together. Knowing they, like others, were not defined by body type or metabolism, or by what the world could see on the outside. The group call themselves “Better Together” and the whole purpose of the group is to encourage, support, challenge and hold one another accountable, in sensitive and caring ways, on their physical fitness journey.**

**Better Together. Isn’t that ultimately what we all want? Isn’t that, if we are truly honest, what is at the heart of being human - a desire to be recognized for**

**who we are and a part of something that makes us and those around us better?  
A common cause. A common belief. A common purpose.**

**Some people would disagree. Some people would perpetuate the idea that it is a “dog eat dog world” and it’s everyone for themselves - every man, woman, child, dog, cat and canary. Some people would continue to believe the story that fear and shame tells us by putting us against one another; constantly comparing us to each other in one way or another. Some people would say “I don’t care anymore.” Some people take on the world. Some people hide from the world. CHURCH, WE ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE SOME PEOPLE. Are we?**

#### **Video**

**I am not saying we are better than anyone. I am not saying we have it all together and so “those” people should follow us, trust us, believe us... I am not saying we can “save” anyone, or that our way is the only way. I am not saying we are perfect (in fact last week I told you we weren’t). I am saying that when we said yes to Jesus and began gathering in this place called Grace, we became and are the church - those of us here today who claim to believe in and follow Jesus are not just “some people.” We are God’s people meant / called for God’s purpose.**

**You can tell me you don’t care what others think. You can tell me you don’t need anyone else. You can tell me you are fine with the way things are. However, I would challenge you to lay such things down; let go of pride, ego and fear of the other, and listen to what God, the Holy Spirit, is saying through Paul to the early church in Ephesus. A spiritual coach if you will to those early believers.**

**READ TEXT - Eph. 4:1-6**

**Paul doesn't hold back. He lays it on the line and gives them the piercing truth of who they, as the church, are to be. That is what I want you to remember about this text. It is not written to those outside the church. It is not written to those who don't know or don't follow Jesus. It is written to believers; to those who have said yes to Jesus. It is a spiritual fitness accountability check-ist for the church.**

**If you already know this, great! You can be the team captains. You can empower, lead, equip and instruct the rest of us to do and be church. If you know I know it but haven't practiced in a while or have let other things distract you, then consider me the assistant coach to Paul saying "you heard what coach said, now let's make it happen."**

**Let's see how we do on the spiritual fitness checklist.**

**First, who is writing this letter? The apostle Paul - not a first year seminary student, or someone with no background, experience or foundation in what and who Jesus was about. Not someone with very little experience in all things Jesus and not a rookie church planter. This is Paul we are talking about.**

**Where is he writing it from? Prison - not on the sandy shores of the sea of Galilee, or in some immaculate synagogue or cathedral in the safety and comfort of his own home office or study. He is in prison - could be a house arrest type situation or could be a rock pit.**

**How does he approach us, I mean the church? "I beg you..." Not "I think this is a good idea," or "hey you might want to consider," or "this is your friendly reminder..." He says, "I beg you!" One of the greatest spiritual fitness coaches**

of the church is begging us, I mean the church, those who call themselves Jesus followers to pay attention and get it right.

What exactly does that mean? What does he beg us, I mean the church, to do? To lead a life “worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” Jesus has a call on our lives; a mark, a reason, a love claim, a purpose, and Paul is saying, lead a life worthy of what Jesus has on you. Lead a life that honors Jesus. Lead a life that models Jesus’ teachings, plain and simple.

What does that look like? How are we, I mean the church, to treat each other? “With ALL humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love” (v. 2). I like the NRSV translation here because it emphasizes that all means all. The text doesn’t say, with “some or limited humility”, or “with conditional gentleness.” It doesn’t say, with “measured or calculated patience.” It says “with ALL humility, gentleness and patience” we are to bear with one another in love. WITH one another. Not for one another, in spite of one another, because of one another, in competition with, or against one another. With one another...we are not to bear from the sidelines, at a safe distance, or as someone with more power or authority, but rather, we are to bear WITH one another in love. In LOVE.

Whether that is bearing the pain of loss and grief or the joy of baptisms and babies. Whether it is bearing the weight of heart-ache, tragedy, or broken relationships, or the laughter, celebration and joy of life. Whether it is bearing the challenge of accepting one another when we disagree, choosing to have the hard conversations, and admitting Jesus is bigger than our agenda or ego, or watching the pastors in the dunk tank at the picnic, singing praise chorus instead of hymns, or taking holy communion together. We are to bear with one another as a church, and that means listening to one another, trusting one another, and sharing life with one another. It means recognizing it is Jesus that holds us together and nothing else.

**That's all just verse 1 and 2!!**

**Paul then says, “make EVERY effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Every effort. Not partial effort, not half way effort. Not only when I feel like it, or when it's convenient for me and my schedule effort, and not if I can do it from my comfort zone effort. The text says, “make EVERY effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

**To me, that is the key of this passage. Effort. That is the key to any fitness routine, workout regime, or health plan. It is the key for any athlete at any age or skill level. It takes effort to be strong, qualified, and effective in any job or work environment. Effort. Whether physical or spiritual, it takes effort to make it happen or see results or have an impact. It takes effort to be the church. It takes effort to follow Jesus, to help one another, come alongside one another, promote one another, share the burden or load with one another. It takes effort to respond to or interact with what goes on in our world. It takes effort to keep the main thing the main thing, to get ourselves out of the way so that Jesus' way and will come through. It takes effort to be a spiritually fit individual, let alone a spiritually fit church - to be a body of 500+ Jesus followers and keep hold of that which unites us more than that which divides us.**

**When we can do that church...sigh, something incredible happens. When we can do that, we embody the essence, purpose and character of Jesus. When we do that, we are a togetherness church and there is no telling what God will do with a church like that.**

**Can you imagine what would happen if more churches would exist, pray, teach, lead and maybe even follow out of “all humility, gentleness, and patience,**

**and bear with one another in love? If more churches would put forth the effort to be spiritually fit rather than spiritually right or spiritually superior?**

**What might God do in and through a church like that? How might a people grow, care and be changed? How might a community be shaped? Or even a denomination unified?**

**Paul imagined it, believed in it, built it and begged us, I mean the church, to keep ourselves spiritually fit - to be a togetherring church.**

**What might happen?**

**May we be the church that wants to find out.**

**Amen.**