

## Cornerstones for Cornerstone: Enacting Our Relational Opportunities Hebrews 12:2

We are focusing, these days, on four primary commitments we are making to Christ and to one another as we move forward together as a congregation at this time in this place. Those four commitments we are calling *Cornerstones for Cornerstone*. The commitments we are pursuing are these:

1. Establish our theological identity
2. Engage our educational responsibility
3. Enact our relational opportunities
4. Empower our mission priorities

We are not hammering on these commitments merely to make you aware of them. We come back to them time and time again to encourage you to personally adopt them. Our goal is to have you work together with us to realize the full benefit these commitments offer us Christians, as a Christian congregation in an increasingly secular culture, and as kingdom Christians seeking the realization of God's mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory.

Of the four commitments we are pursuing together, this third one may prove to be the most challenging. Enacting our relational opportunities represents a fundamental, counter-cultural attitude shift from what many of us are familiar and comfortable with. The New Testament command to love one another through hospitality means opening our hearts and homes to one another in face to face, one on one, gracious, purposeful, time-consuming, potentially costly and therefore sacrificial interactions. In another word: Hospitality means love in action.

The kinds of essential, personal interactions of which we speak will seem challenging for people whose culture isolates them behind the miniature screens of their cell phones, separates them from one another at their computer monitors, fragments their lives in front of the television and reduces their interpersonal communication to terse, hard to interpret texts, tweets, instant messages, and Facebook posts about food and cats.

**Enacting our relational opportunities means making a personal commitment to abandoning our world of one and actively participating as an integrated member of the Body over whom Christ is the Head.**

**Hebrews 13** opens with the words, *Let brotherly love continue*, then moves immediately to ideas of how that command can be fulfilled, the first of which is a command to hospitality:

**Hebrews 13:2 (ESV) *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.***

We are admonished, commanded by God, to let brotherly love **CONTINUE**. Love for the brothers must be an ongoing, consistent, continuous feature of our loves together as Christians. Paul reminds us in Ephesians that God has taken down the walls that separate us and has made us

one in Christ. We cannot continue, as believers, as Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, in the individualistic, self-centered pursuits of our old lives.

Listen as Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen the very will and word of God, addresses this very issue:

**1 Corinthians 12:12-26 (ESV)** *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. 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.*

*For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 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. 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. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?*

*As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

God has ordained the church the Body of Christ, to be a single unit none of whom may excuse themselves from full participation or reject the full participation of other legitimate parts. We cannot say to ourselves, “They don’t need me.” Nor can we say, “I don’t need them.” God makes it that we greatly need one another as we walk through this world together for His glory. God ordains a fully integrated, fully functioning, fully participating Body. Hospitality is one means for the members of the Body to live out the life and love fo Jesus.

God ordains that all the genuine members of the Body “have the same care for one another.” The NIV translates that phrase as “have equal concern for one another.” How can you have equal concern for people you don’t know, whose lives and circumstances you know nothing of? How can you have equal concern for those you spend no time with, don’t talk to, share no experiences with? How can you have equal concern for all the others if you dwell in a world of one where only your own self-interests matter to you?

Can you imagine, Christians, if God treated you the way many of you treat your church family? What if God treated you with the same impersonal distance and lack of interest? Where would you be if God had not invited you into His heart, into His joy, into His home, into His eternal glory? Where would you be if Christ had not come into your world of one and opened the door of grace and mercy at His expense for you to enter His world of many?

Please don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with spending time with family or in some singular pursuit that refreshes the soul and body. The challenge is an attitude that willingly settles for rarely or never opening our hearts or homes to fellowship with other members of the Body. The challenge is a heart that sees no need to share life at a deep, personal level with others who have been saved by the same grace and the same Savior. The challenge is a way of thinking that closes us off from others in the Body and thinks that's okay.

So, what are some opportunities we can consider for meeting the challenge of this commitment and enacting our relational opportunities? Here a few ideas.

1. Plan an additional 45 minutes at the end of the Sunday morning worship service for Coffee After. Make hanging out with the church family part of your Sunday routine. Instead of bolting for the door as quickly as you can, get a cookie and a cup of coffee for someone you don't know and invite them to sit and talk with you for a bit. You make have to persuade them. When Paul encountered Lydia outside the city of Philippi one Sabbath morning and led her to Christ, she persuaded them to come and enjoy her hospitality. Sometimes, for the sheer joy of Christ, we may have to persuade others to spend the time with us. Do it. And, before you're done talking, pray for them, pray out loud with them.
2. Invite someone to dinner or into your regular Sunday afternoon routine and enable them to participate.
3. Set aside a room in your home where Christians in need can stay. Mostly, have a plan for you can help if the need arises.
4. Accept the invitations of others. You are not too busy.
5. Support hospitality ministry opportunities at Cornerstone. Help us plan. Plan on participating. Your presence matters. Your absence makes a difference. Your attitude towards being together with your church family has a huge impact.

God's word is unequivocal on this point. Hospitality, opening one's heart and home to the Body of Christ, is required of believers. God not only put it in black and white, He repeated Himself. And you know what it means when God repeats Himself! Romans 12:13 is clear:

**Romans 12:13 (ESV) *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show***

*hospitality.*

Practice hospitality. Elders are required to be hospitable. Christians are required to show hospitality. God has opened His heart to us. He demonstrates His love for us and for His glory in the ultimate act of hospitality by giving Himself, His only Son for our redemption and joy. This is Who God is, and we, who through faith in Christ now bear the image of God in the world, ought to be eager to let others see Christ in us and to see Christ through us, through the way we treat one another just as He has treated us.

An essential means God ordains for our use is hospitality, opening our hearts and homes to one another in love just as God, in love, has opened His heart and home to each of us.

Cornerstone, this is the commitment to which we are calling one another, to enact our relational opportunities by letting God transform our attitudes toward brotherly love through hospitality. And we want to go beyond merely having a change of mind and heart. We long to see a change of practice. May God remind us of the grace He has given us and empower us with renewed grace for the ministry of hospitality to which He has called all the members of the Body of Christ.