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## ROMANS 12:13

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Hey I'm glad you're here. It's encouraging to me when we all worship together. I like it when you come and you're part of what's happening here on Sunday. I just really enjoy what we do and what God is doing among us.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I so appreciate Carolyn's introduction to that third song and the ability to rest in you and to trust you. Lord, we need your strength. Many times in life we get so distracted by the oceans around us and the seas and the waves that cause a lot of havoc and the busyness that takes place, so resting in you is something we all need. But teach us what that means in practical ways. Would you? We ask that you would reveal to us how to rest when we have challenges that we face. Lord, each of us, if we look at our lives today, have challenges that we need your grace for. So we ask that you'd provide that grace. We're going to come individually to you in a little bit and seek your face and bring those challenges to you. But we ask that right now in general terms you'd calm our hearts. Prepare our hearts to receive from you this morning. We want you to speak to us. In Jesus' name, amen.

As we study the book of Romans, we're studying how people change. That's part of what we're trying to do here is really understand what that looks like in some practical ways. I want to suggest today that one of the privileges of being a Christian (as we're seeing outlined in Romans 12, all these privileges, the tasks that we have to do and so on) is being part of a community. A community of believers. God calls it a family. God calls it this place where we can enjoy who He is. And so that is really important.

I hope that today you get a greater vision for God's church as more than just a Sunday experience but as a community where you can have a lot of different needs met, and that you can meet other people's needs as well. That's why I'm going to get all this from this verse we're going to look at in Romans 12:13. The verse reads this way. Romans 12:13 says, *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Let's take apart the words that exist there in the verse that we're given.

The word *share* is a fascinating word. Someday I will preach a sermon on the word that it comes from, *koinonia*, which is this other word here. But the word share is *koinonos*, which comes from *koinonia*. It's this idea of fellowship. So you've heard of *koinonia* before. It's the fellowship that we enjoy. But the word actually means to share or to give.

There's this sense in which that giving that we do in the Christian community allows us to have deeper relationships. It's not just surface acquaintances that we have, but we're able to engage with each other. So God is giving a command here in Romans 12 that we are to share with the Lord's people who are in need. We're to participate in other people's lives.

Now certainly it could be money that he's talking about here, but it's much more than that. He's talking about getting involved in people's lives. You might share your talents. You might be able to help someone fix their car or care for someone in some other way. That's what he's talking about here. We're sharing and having deep relationships.

The target in this particular case is people who are in need who are the Lord's people. So he's talking about developing relationships among Christians. We also do this with people outside of the faith. People who are not Christians we share with them as well because we want to share the gospel with them. But this is the focus of this passage – sharing with the Lord's people who are in need. The idea here is that we share life together.

I'd like to share some personal things from my own life today and how God has worked in my own heart in regards to this in hopes that it will be edifying for you.

When I first came to New Jersey I became aware of a group called the Bruderhof. It's a Christian community or a commune that exists in several places in Pennsylvania, different communes, and then in New York State. My wife and I and our children had the privilege of going to live in this commune for a few days to learn more about how they celebrated community. Because their idea is to take this word *koinonia* and make it very practical. They are immersing themselves in this.

It's very different than I had ever seen before. There's no money. Nobody has any money in this commune. They share common meals. I worked in the woodshop on a day. People are appointed to different levels but then moved to other levels. It's not like they're always supervisors. Sometimes the supervisors become the servants and the servants become the supervisors. So everybody learns how to work together in a cooperative way. There's a sense of community that they experience there that was fascinating to me, both in theory and in practice.

Now I don't want to go live in a commune. I'm not opposed to people living in them, but it wasn't for me. However, I left that experience of the Bruderhof touched by something and wanting more than just what I had known in church. Because God has called His church to be this community, this fellowship. These people were living out church every day. They were living together and experiencing that. I knew at that point that I wanted more than I had experienced at that point in my Christian faith.

I was part of a church where Ed and Joanne Miller were a part and they had already been growing in this area of community. They were living in New Brunswick in the inner city and they were bringing other people to live near them so that they could do outreach in the inner city as part of a community. I really appreciated that.

As Ed and Joanne Miller and Carrie and I became closer as friends we decided to make an intentional decision in our lives. We decided to live in community. Which meant that the Millers would have to move and move down into our neighborhood. That seemed like the logical way for us to get closer together. So my kids and I took a flyer around to our neighborhood, a flyer that said we have some friends that want to move into this neighborhood and we're looking for someone who wants to sell their house without a realtor. Five people responded in our neighborhood. They chose the home five homes down from us. So now they live five homes down from us.

When they moved in we started asking questions about what can we share together. It became clear that if we shared things we could do better financially because we wouldn't all have to have separate things together. So Ed bought a snow blower and I didn't need to buy one. I have a lawn mower and he still borrows my lawn mower because that's how we live together in community. We have a freezer that we jointly share. We each had a car, one car at that time, but we needed one more car, so we got a car together that we shared and that car became a community car.

We live five houses down and it's public land behind our house. So we drove a phone line over the fence, five houses down, back over the fence, through the trees, and back into the house and set up a baby monitor. So we could go down in the evenings and play games or we could go down and talk while our kids were supposed to be sleeping, and we could put a baby monitor down in our house so we could hear what was going on. So in doing those things we began to live in community.

Both of us were homeschooling our kids independently, but on Wednesdays that was a special day when one of the four adults would take all of the children and do a field trip. Field trip day. The kids loved it; the other adults would be able to do their individual things. In the course of that we grew very close as friends but we also became this support system in our neighborhood, support system in our spiritual lives and our personal lives and our physical lives and all the kinds of things that we do. We've shared a tremendous amount in our lives. It's been a real privilege for us to enjoy community.

Out of that God has given me such a burden for community as being the church. So I am very eager for our church to be more than just a Sunday morning experience and look for ways to promote that. I think we want to have and I think we need to have as Christians in order to apply this verse to our lives a bigger picture of what community is than just a Sunday morning experience.

I want you to see how the disciples in the early church lived and I want you to hear community described as the church is being described in Acts 2:42-47.

It says this about them: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (that's our word koinonia), to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes*

*and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

I think that the model that we have in Acts 2 or that description gives us opportunity to live that out in different ways. For some it's going to be joining a commune in the Bruderhof. I think that's fine for those who are called to do that. For others it's going to be living independently in their homes but still having this sense of community. Because I believe we all need to be doing what Romans 12 says. When we're sharing with each other we're developing this relationship that we can have.

Notice where they met. Notice they met together *in the temple courts* but also they *broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts*. What a privilege to join into a fellowship that is very connected to each other where people are actively loved and cared for. They met together. They prayed together. They ate together. They consulted together and advised each other together. They planned together. They witnessed together. They encouraged each other together. They shared what they had together. They strategized together. They handled conflict together. They worked together. They stood against attack together. And the list goes on.

I believe that Christ intends for all of us to be together. Not just one hour a week but a connectedness.

The beauty of technology is that we can often find ourselves connected in the course of a week. I would encourage you to use that. I know that some of the men in the prayer group when one of the men is struggling I get involved in that group text and we're praying for someone. So just a way to use technology to be part of that experience together.

The next part of the verse adds to this idea because it talks about hospitality. *Practice hospitality*. The word *practice* means to pursue. That's the idea there. And really the idea here is to use your home as a ministry center or a place where God can speak and use you and others to grow closer to Him and to build relationship.

I think there are certain people who would be inclined to visit your home before they'd be willing to come on a Sunday morning. Your home becomes this ministry center. I believe that God created a small group program for the church. He calls it the family. The family becomes this place where discipleship and evangelism take place. Your home becomes the base of operations for Jesus in your neighborhood. When you're able to use your home like that I think we're doing what God has called.

But I think sometimes we view our homes as a refuge to get away from everything. I don't think that's necessarily bad. We need to add to that this idea that it's a tool for the gospel. It's a tool for us to share with others who God is.

If you want to do evangelism in your home I would encourage you who have children to do Family Time. Family Time is a program that is developed by the National Center for Biblical

Parenting that encourages families to do active devotions with their kids that are fun and engaging.

For example, Daniel 3. I think I may have told you this story. I'm going to tell it again. In Daniel 3 this is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. You know that story about the three brave friends that were thrown into the fiery furnace because the king wanted to execute them because they wouldn't bow down to the image. The Bible tells us that God miraculously rescued them out of there and their hair was not singed, their clothes were not scorched, and there was no smell of smoke. Amazing thing.

Now every time you tell a Bible story to your kids you want to energize them and excite them about the gospel. Whether it's little children to older kids. You're probably not going to do this particular activity, you might choose something else, but engaging people actively with the Bible. But here's an activity that you can do with your kids if you're trying to teach them about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

You take three cardboard cutouts, gingerbread men made out of corrugated cardboard, the thick stuff. Soak all three of them in a solution of alcohol mixed with water according to the recipe in the book, hang them on a hanger and light them on fire.

Now first of all, let me tell you. If you're having trouble getting dads into devotions, this is a great way to do it. Because dads love activity and they love engaging with their kids. So "Honey, would you just start devotions. Light it up, would you?"

Well here's what happens. The alcohol burns up dramatically, but the water in your recipe protects the cardboard so it's not singed, it's not scorched, and there's not smell of smoke. It is so cool. Your son says, "Oh Dad, do it again!"

The next day, "Dad, this is my friend Sam. Would you do the fire activity again?"  
"Okay son. You tell him the Bible story. You tell him the lesson learned and we'll do it again."

Now if you want to turn your home into an evangelism center, all you need to do is say, "Go tell all your friends we're going to blow something up," or "we're going to a race around the house or a treasure hunt," all tied into some story in the Bible. Now the kids are coming because they love the activity and they're seeing that they are illustrating Bible truths like Jesus illustrated truths with parables. You're doing it at home just like Jesus did. And now you're sending your kids out and they're bringing everybody in. They want to know who is this Jesus, what is this Bible, tell me more about your church and your exciting people about the Bible in really fun ways. Just a way to help your family be this place of evangelism, this place where we're sharing the gospel, where we're passing the message on to others.

The big idea of this verse is that we want to share our lives together. That's the idea here. Share lives together with other believers.

There's several ways you can do that. Some people make this part of their life. Some people adopt people into their home, either formally or just start caring for them. There are others that

invite people over for dinner or they host a small group in their home. There are some who care for refugees. I'm sure that especially those refugees that are leaving Syria and moving into Turkey and Europe, there are Christians who are looking out for ways that they can reach out. It's surprising to me how many Christians are involved in adoption. Why? Because they are using their home as a ministry, sharing life together.

Maybe you know Steve and Debbie Costanza in our area. They either attend the 217 Church or the Princeton Alliance Church. I don't know which one. But they have an email list of people and I'm on that list. Every couple weeks or whenever they feel like they have something, they'll send out an email that contains resources in the Christian community. So if you want to give away a bedroom set, it gets pictures on the email and they go out. Debbie and Steve send that out and so anybody who wants this can have it for free. Just come and get it.

I needed a bike for someone. I was giving a bike to them and so I put the note up – hey, I'm just looking for a bike. Within a day, two people offered a bike. I got one. Fifteen-speed mountain bike that I gave to someone in need.

We needed a bed in our home temporarily and someone loaned us the bed through this network. Steve and Debbie are an example of people who are helping achieve this verse – sharing with people who are in need.

Now we have a warm church. This is very warm. People come in here and they are greeted. People find this to be a very nice place to visit. But I think we can all grow in this area of community more. I just want to inspire you, I hope, and encourage you because people choose a church not only because it's close. I think that's one good reason, but here's a quote I saw this week – "People go to the church that is dearest to them, not the church that is nearest to them." I know that some of you drive a ways to get here and we're grateful for that.

Hospitality is making people feel comfortable. When we show hospitality and we invite people into our homes, they get to see that we're real people. They get to see that there are people like they are. The Christian life was meant to be a community experience, but I think we have a tendency to build walls, at least protective walls around us.

Now many of our emotional needs are designed to be met in a family, an earthly family. But what do you do when your child is making bad decisions or you find out that your mates decide to leave you or you're having challenges in that family? What are you going to do? See, the family that God created, the church family, is this overarching family He calls it that is a safety net where we experience the power of God's grace. It's really special. When we show hospitality we're providing a structure, an opportunity to learn more about people and provide opportunities to connect with them.

Could it be that your place of residence is attached to some will of God for you? That God has some great thing He wants to offer you and it's tied to where you live. That's what he's saying here when he talks about practicing or pursuing hospitality.

I'm going to read you a Bible story. So sit back and listen. It's a long Bible story. It's a story that's taken from the book of Kings. I want to share with you and as I read this story to you, I want you to see how hospitality resulted in connections and what this did in the midst of the family that was participating in this.

*One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."*

*One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"*

*She replied, "I have a home among my own people." In other words she's saying, "I'm satisfied."*

*"What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.*

*Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."*

*Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."*

*"No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!"*

*But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.*

*The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. He said to his father, "My head! My head!"*

*His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.*

*She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return."*

*"Why go to him today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath."*

*"That's all right," she said.*

*She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.*

*When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'"*

*"Everything is all right," she said. I find that fascinating that sometimes when you say, "Is everything okay?" someone says, "Oh I'm fine," when really there's turmoil going on inside. She didn't feel comfortable sharing it with this guy, Gehazi. She had to talk to Elisha. I want to be that kind of person (I'm sure you do too) where people can come and share the real needs that they have.*

*When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why."*

*"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'"*

*Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don't greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."*

*But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.*

*Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."*

*When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.*

*Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.*

Wow. What an amazing story. And it started with hospitality. You never know what will happen when you open your home.

I will tell you this: it requires sacrifice. You will get hurt. Things will get damaged. Property will be damaged in your home when you open your home. Things will happen. That's why we have to have our mind set on Jesus, not on earthly things if we do this.



I would not recommend in your life that you go into business with a friend. It's dangerous. There are so many stories, and you probably know some, where you go into business with a friend and you become enemies. You end up in court or something like that.

So when Ed Miller and I had an idea to start working together on a project, that is he was flipping houses and I wanted to buy one, we went into an agreement together. Knowing that this was dangerous, but determined that we would do it and really be careful because we valued our relationship.

He bought the house in the springtime and I already had renters ready to move in in September. So he was going to flip that house, turn it around, and I would have it ready to go. It became clear as the summer came close that he was not going to make the deadline. We were in trouble. We had a crisis in our hands at that point.

Now when you have a crisis like that, that is the time when enemies are made, lawsuits are created, and you have significant problems that take place. So Ed and I sat down and we determined at that moment that we would value our relationship more than whatever was going to happen in this particular problem that we were experiencing. And we said this. We are writing a story right now. We are writing a story that we will tell for the rest of our lives. The story of the fireside house. We determined that we were going to write the script of this story and that our relationship would be more important.

I took time off of work and helped Ed get the house ready. He sacrificed some of the profits he would've made by hiring more people in order to meet the deadline. We didn't meet the deadline. We were two weeks late, but it all worked out well and in the end we told all the people who were working with us what we were doing. We even did an all-nighter to try to meet the inspection for the electrical guy to get everything done the way it needed to be. We worked long hours. People were surprised that we were able to accomplish the job and we now are pleased. We have a story. It's a story that brought us together instead of moving us apart.

I would suggest that's what happens when we engage in community. That relationship is more important than anything else that we're doing. We're drawing that together in a beautiful way.

It takes small steps to build community. Some of you may sometime have the privilege to have friends like Carrie and I have in Ed and Joanne Miller, but you also might find ways to connect in other venues. I want Calvary Chapel to be that kind of place. So we set up some structures. That's all they are. Structures. You can see on your bulletin that there's a 20 Minute Club I call it. By coming twenty minutes early to church you're able to talk to people and get to know them a little bit better.

The DeLisis provide for us nutritious snacks so that you can stay afterwards and enjoy fellowship together. We have several small groups that take place here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. One for men; two for women. You've got the Take Jesus Home group. The newest group is for young adults that started at the DeLisi home. But it's opportunities where friendships can be forged, relationships can develop. You know if you're in those groups that there's an opportunity for caring and for community to take place.

God designed us for community, but here's the weird truth about all of this. We have a tendency to isolate ourselves. So technology can be used both for good and for bad. Technology can be used to pull ourselves away because we don't even have to go to the grocery store anymore. You can order your groceries online. You can have everything delivered by Amazon at your house. You can take care of all kinds of things by putting yourself in front of a computer. But God has called us to community, so you could use technology to connect with other people and to grow closer to them. Those things become parts of ways that we can use this ability to connect better.

So we may have a tendency to isolate ourselves and that's dangerous. I would encourage you to use the structures that exist to get in touch with others and communicate with them.

As our children were growing up, we wanted to solidify our relationship so people could understand that, so we called ourselves the Turmillerskys. Combining our names together, Turansky and Miller – the Turmillerskys. We enjoyed sharing that with people just to describe the relationships that we enjoyed together.

You know it scares me when someone says this: "My best friend is not a Christian." I think that person might be making a mistake. And here's why. Now it's not wrong to be Christians who have friends who are not Christians. Jesus was known as a person who was a friend of sinners. So I'm not saying it's wrong to have friends who are not Christians. But when you say your best friend is not a Christian, you're in danger, I believe.

Here's why. As soon as you are with that person and that person starts to affect you and you start asking the wrong questions about life, here's the question you ask. The question you ask is "what's wrong with it?" That's the question that leads to compromise. What's wrong with going to that movie? Oh nothing. What's wrong with listening to that kind of music? Well nothing. What's wrong with that line of thinking? Well nothing. But you start putting those nothings together and they start forming things that move you so you start to drift away from what God has designed for you. It's very important for us to understand that friendships help guide the direction of our life.

I say to young people as they're forming friends, "You choose friends based on something inside of you that you want brought out."

So if you want to laugh a lot, you want the funny side of you to be brought out, you'll want to be a friend with someone who is funny, who likes to laugh a lot.

But be careful when you're attracted to someone who's mischievous because what that's doing is drawing something out of your own heart. If you have a tendency to want to be mischievous then you want to be very careful about the friends you choose because if you choose friends that are mischievous they're going to draw that right out of your heart. If you have a tendency to want to be with someone who is wild, that's because there's something that's going on inside your heart. If you want to party all the time and so you choose someone, you'll choose friends like that if you're not careful.

So it's very important that we choose friends that will help draw out of us the things that God wants drawn out of us. So choosing your friends wisely is so important and it comes within the community that God has designed for us.

I would encourage you to take advantage of what God has designed. He calls it the church. It's not an organization so much as an organism. It's a living place where community is developed and relationships take place, where we grow spiritually, we're cared for, where we enjoy what God wants to do deeply in our hearts.

I encourage you to think about ways that you might be able to foster that sense of community by applying this verse that we share with God's people who are in need. *Practice hospitality*. You see, the structures can be there, but every person has to make their own decision. The structures are only structures. We all make decisions independently about how we're going to embrace that or not.

One of the things that we like to do at Calvary Chapel is pray and pray for each other because we know that there's power in prayer. So again today as we sing this next song, the volume is going to be a little bit lower, and I've asked prayer counselors to be up here and I want to invite you to come and pray.

In fact I've asked Kylie to be one of those prayers. Kylie is a young person. How old are you, Kylie? She's seventeen years old. When Kylie prayed for me I was so touched. She has a gift of prayer.

So I want to invite you this morning as we have several prayer counselors up here, but go to one of the prayer counselors with a small need or a large need, whatever need you have. Some challenge that you're faced with today. Let's pray together that God will do something powerful this week in our lives as result of even the small things that are going on. Would you stand with me as we sing this next song then I'm going to ask you to come up and pray with one of our prayer counselors as we have some time together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we ask for your blessing right now. Work on our hearts. We want you to minister to us now through prayer. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.