We began our series on the foundations of faith with this passage in Acts 2:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

And today, we close with the same passage. Over the past few weeks, we have talked about belonging, about the blessing and importance of grace, about the charge and blessing of discipleship. Last wee, we discussed the importance of forgiveness—receiving and giving it. Today, as we conclude our series, we are talking about the responsibility of believers to demonstrate the message and example of Christ in the local church by being committed to common unity and purpose.

Listen, Family, it I the responsibility of every believer to maintain unity and fulfill the mission. Our unity and like-mindedness glorifies God—as we love God, love people, and share the Gospel. Faith and community are essential fundamentals of a healthy church. And, Family, because we are part of a greater Kingdom, we must prioritize His Kingdom above our own. Paul spoke about unity and purpose in Ephesians 4:3\*. We grow together; we mature together, diligently preserving the unity of and in the Spirit. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said, “In the essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” That is, we agree on the main thing and look beyond disagreements on other, far less important things. Like-minded people of the church are continually under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This means that the local church is a Kingdom Outpost

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\*Ephesians 4:3

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

in a lost and dying world. Each local church must look outside of its walls, impacting the community and the world for the Gospel. Put more specifically, our church must look outside of its walls and impact our community and the world for the Gospel, while still caring for those in our charge. A personal, vital relationship with Jesus translates into a personal, vital relationship with one another. Unity pleases the Lord! And God anoints unity (Psalm 133:1-3\*). Unity and purpose are two guiding principles that will cause believers to falter or lose their way (Ephesians 2:20-22\*\*).

In the beginnings of Shepherd Church, the minutes of the May 23, 2012 meeting record that the lyrics from the hymn “Come Build a Church” were read aloud. I’d like to do that now:

Come build a church with soul and spirit,

Come build a church with flesh and bone.

We need no tower rising skyward,

No house of wood or glass or stone.

Come build a church with human frailty,

Come build a church of flesh and blood.

Jesus shall be its sure foundation.

It shall be built by the hand of God.

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\*Psalm 133:1-3

1 How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. 3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

\*\*Ephesians 2:20-22

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

In our Gospel reading, Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gives us the commission: “Go and make disciples . . .” Making disciples speaks to investment—investing in people, reaching out, taking risks, by and with the truth of the Gospel. Guarding unity is an act of worship. Fulfilling mission is an act of worship. However, Church, here’s a truth: Many people are convinced of what the church is to do, but not all are convicted enough to step in and help to do it. In the mission work of unified believers, we must each see ourselves as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread, the Bread of Life. This effort at mission by the unified faithful leaves no room for complaining, no room for criticizing, and no room for comparing. Every individual in the body of Christ has a capacity for ministry. We find energy and motivation in Unity of Purpose—one body, one spirit, one faith, one baptism, under and for one God and Father of all.

And, Church, while we reach out, we diligently minister to the flock with which Jesus has entrusted us. Every member is a minister in our efforts to ensure that no one falls through the cracks and that we meet as many needs as possible. In that spirit, I can tell you that we have taken up an effort to revamp our Shepherd ministry. We want to devote ourselves to our Lord and to each other. Fulfilling this goal means that we intend to launch other, new specific ministries in the near future. In June, our congregation will mark its tenth year. These are exciting times. We are a congregation of contributors, not consumers. We are people of different denominational backgrounds with one goal in mind, together, with hearts personally committed to Jesus. In Acts, Luke records the history of the early church, when the common purpose of the church was to make Jesus known—a unity of purpose, dependent upon the Spirit and upon the Word of the Lord.

Family, Christian community is a gift from God—a precious gift that we must handle with care. However, we must remember that the community of believers is a battleship, not a cruise ship. There is much work to be done for the sake of the Kingdom. And I am grateful that God allows me to be on this journey with you here at Shepherd. While the world around us is almost defined by its divisions and disunity, it is the responsibility of every believer to foster and nurture unity.

May this unity and our shared love of Christ also help us with being at peace (Romans 12:18\*), while together we are being built into a holy temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, a unified community of caring ministers to the world and to each other.

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\*Romans 12:18

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

BIBLE PASSAGES IN SUPPORT OF THIS MESSAGE:

Matthew 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

