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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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LET FREEDOM BE LIMITED BY LOVE

Selected Scriptures

**PRAYER:** *Father, we do thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for the incredible gift that you have given to us of the church of your word, of your presence, of your blood. And Father, this morning we come to that part of our worship where we open up your book, we ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that we might look into it, we might understand what it is you have to teach us this morning and that we again would make it a permanent part of our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, I want to look this morning for the last time at the concept of Christian liberty. It's been our summer series, and this is the final installment, as it were. The gospel has much to say about being liberated, first from the kingdom of darkness and then from the effects of that darkness on our lives. Every one of us are sons and daughters of Adam. We were born already enslaved to sin. As David says in Psalm 51: *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* That's why you

never have to teach your children how to bite, kick, scratch, lie, or steal cookies. They come by that naturally. It's mom and dad's job to undo what comes by naturally. You see for us, sin is natural and so is the enslavement of sin. So understanding liberty does not come easily to us.

Last time we looked at the model of Christian liberty that Gary Friesen lays out in his book "Decision-making and the Will of God." We looked at three of the five points that he made about living out what is genuine Christian liberty. First, we learned to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom. What the scripture forbids explicitly or implicitly is clearly forbidden. What the scripture commands is not up for discussion. And we don't have to wonder whether or not Christian freedom includes not paying my taxes or dating a married person. God has made his will clear in his word. We either obey or we rebel against his will.

However, there are gray areas where scripture neither commands nor forbids. In Paul's day, there was a great controversy surrounding the question of meat that had been offered up to idols. See, this meat often found its way to the marketplace afterwards, and there were Christians who were scandalized that anybody would eat it, while other Christians had no problem with it at all. The

scriptures were silent on this specific issue. It was neither commanded nor forbidden. So Paul used it as a working example of how to treat areas where Christians differ. We call those areas "matters of freedom," and we saw them in past messages how Paul identified meat once offered to idols as the premiere example of such a matter of freedom.

The second point that we looked at is that when we get into such an area, we are to cultivate our own convictions. Romans 14:5 says: *Let everyone man be fully convinced in his own mind.* We spoke how in these disputable matters, God fully expects us to individually go to him, to examine our choices in the light of his kingdom; and this is the key to understanding Christian liberty.

God says all of us are going to give an account of our lives and those decisions Before God. Paul Says so directly in Romans 14:12. He says: *Each of us will give an account of himself before God.* Paul is speaking about making these choices in gray areas, and he tells us those choices are not to be made on the basis of what is expedient or what is easy, but on how God is directing us in each matter. Paul summarizes it all in Romans 14:5-7 which says this. He says: *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who*

*does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. What he's saying is every choice you and I make, we make to the Lord.*

The third point that he made is to allow one another the freedom to determine their own choices in disputable matters even when they differ from yours. We said the devil loves to pit home schoolers against public schoolers, he loves to pit charismatics against conservatives, Calvinists versus Arminians, hymn singers versus chorus singers. You name it. There are literally dozens of areas in which the church either allows for a healthy diversity or insists that one size has to fit all. And this happens when we fail to distinguish a principle from a command.

Here's how it happens. God convicts us; we become fully convinced of a principle, and subsequently that principle for us becomes a command. That's a good thing. That's the way this is supposed to work. The problem comes when we assume that what God commands of us with regard to a principle, that he obviously is going to command that of everyone. That's exactly what the Pharisees did, and it creeps up on us effortlessly.

Let me give you an example. Awhile back, I had a conversation with a mother of nine children about a PG-13 movie she wouldn't let her kids go to see. She was extremely strict about movies, and I had seen the movie, and it was perfectly fine, and we were just discussing it. And in the course of the conversation, her daughter came by and she was carrying a book, I said, "Hey, what are you reading?" She said, "Harry Potter." "Oh," I said, "that's interesting." I said to Mom, I said, "You know, some folks have a problem with the occult connections that are in Harry Potter." She said, "Oh, that's ridiculous. That's silly. It's just fantasy. It's completely harmless." Now, at this point -- this is what happens all the time. At this point, I can "absolutize a principle" from Ephesians 5. That scripture says: *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.* And I could make some logical conclusion, I could say, okay, Harry Potter's a wizard. That's not good. I could say "which part of Ephesians 5 don't you understand? I mean wizards are doers of fruitless deeds of darkness, aren't they? You're sinning." But you know what she could say? She could quote Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 where he takes great pains to demonstrate that we are free to eat meat offered to idols and give back to me my very same argument. She could ask "how could Paul say in Ephesians 5, have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, and then go on to say that we are free to eat one of the main ingredients and one of that time's fruitless

deeds of darkness, meat that had been offered up to idols?"

Well, Paul explains how in 1 Corinthians 8:4. This is what he says. He says: *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

Well, it's pretty obvious, Paul's conscience is clear, his principle is obvious, his freedom is secure, he is fully convinced in his own mind. So's my friend about the Harry Potter books. For her, they were not a problem at all. Now, for you and me, they well might be. See, our opinion might be the exact opposite of hers, but scripture doesn't command us about Harry Potter. What God expects is our opinions to be shaped, molded, and guided by biblical principles. And we pointed out last time that the operating principle of a healthy church is not uniformity of opinion but uniformity of relationship. That is where each congregant is living an examined life, where opinions are not established by evangelical or church culture or by whoever has the power in the church, but instead by an individual conscious desire

to please God in everything we do.

So we examine each disputable matter to see if it passes the scriptural test. First, is it permissible? Then, it is beneficial? Does it bless others? Does it build them up? Can we thank God for it? Does it glorify God? My answer may be very different than yours, and yes, both of us could be right. Both of us could be wrong.

But here's where things get interesting. Here's where my freedom and perhaps your spiritual health intersect. Remember, Romans 14, this is where God distinguishes between two different types of faith. We've spoken about that before. This is Romans 14:1-4. He says: *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.*

Now, I mentioned before that Paul is speaking here about weak

faith, and for many, that term itself is a problem. It's because the language seems to connote the thought that God is pleased with one and displeased with the other. That's not so. Verse 3 says *God accepts them both.*

I used the analogy of a Dad giving his sons the key to his sports car to try out. You know, the first son takes the car flat out on to the highway, he grinds through all of the gears, he puts it to the test. He's someone who represents strong faith. I said the other son is so cautious, he just kind of nudges the car out onto the road, he drives around the corner to the car wash, and then he washes off any accumulated road grime because he doesn't want to mess up his Dad's car. He represents weak faith. But you see, the Father finds something good in both attitudes. The stronger brother understands the freedom that he has; the weaker brother respects his dad so much that he doesn't want to risk wrecking his car, and Dad accepts them both. So it is with God. And when it comes to faith, he expects us to accept them both. *One person's faith allows him to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.* One man's faith is fully developed. He knows the depth of the freedom he has in Christ. And another man's faith is not nearly so fully developed. He is far less certain of his position in Christ. He's the one who doesn't want to wreck his Dad's car. He's the one who can be seriously hurt.



And this leads me to the two final points in Gary Friesen's book. Point number 4, "Let your liberty be limited when necessary by love;" and 5, "Follow Christ as model and motivator of servanthood." You see, it's one thing to talk about our differences. It's one thing to understand the differences between a weaker and stronger brother and sister, to allow folks the freedom to determine their own choices when they differ from mine, but it is quite another thing to talk about allowing those choices to actually limit my freedom. Why should my freedom be limited by somebody else? I mean, if you want to drive that car 30 miles an hour only on sunny days, hey, go for it, feel free to do so. But why should I drive that way when I'm perfectly happy going as fast as I can?

Well, here's the problem. What if my flat out driving example causes my cautious brother to see me and start driving too fast, to take chances that he never should have taken? What if a cautious driver mistakes my freedom as his and winds up driving off a cliff?

Gary Friesen has a good analogy that drives home the need to let our freedom be limited, when necessary, by love. He tells the story about when he was a young boy, he was late for supper, he

knew he was in trouble but he also knew where a shortcut was. So he decided to take this shortcut, and it was right through an archery field, and even though he knew it was dangerous and there were people there, he decided to go for it, and he started running across the field. He says he remembered thinking it was a good idea up until the point where he heard the "whoosh" of an arrow and the gasp of the archers. He narrowly missed getting shot, but he made this point. He said: The freedom of the archers was clear: They were on a private course, they had paid their own money, they were going by the rules, they were doing everything that they should have, they had every right in the world to pursue their freedom to shoot their arrows until, until the moment an obviously weaker person in the form of a little boy started streaking across their path. He had no business being there, but it didn't matter. I mean, if that little boy had been shot, all of the freedom that the archers had would have meant nothing, and they might have been guilty of Manslaughter. You see, the stronger clearly have an obligation toward the weaker. The same is true for our freedom in Christ.

Again, I want to repeat Martin Luther's treatise on the freedom of a Christian man, the statement that he made. He said, "A Christian man is a most free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Paul put it

simply in Romans 15:1, he said: *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

So Paul goes on to say, our personal freedoms can sometimes be a deadly weapon the enemy uses to destroy our weaker brothers and sisters. In that same section of 1 Corinthians 8, right after vigorously defending his right to eat meat that had been offered to idols, we find Paul completely switching gears. After explaining that idols are nothing at all, he goes on to say this, in 1 Corinthians 8, he says: *Some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their consciences when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

Now, Paul here at first seems to contradict himself, I mean, he starts out defending the right to eat this meat and then he ends up saying I will never eat this meat. To make matters apparently worse, if you go to 1 Corinthians 10:25, there's more instruction there about this same topic. This is what Paul says. He says: *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience -- I don't mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?*

See, what Paul is saying here is, in the light of the principle for limiting my freedom for the sake of a weaker brother and sister, in the light of that, what he's saying is very simple. He's saying use your head. Use common sense. Use your freedom with discretion, conditioned by circumstance.

1 Corinthians 8, verse 10 says: *For if anyone sees you who have*

*knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?* Paul is saying if anyone with a weak conscience says to you "this has been offered in sacrifice," he says that changes everything. What Paul was referring to here is the affect that my freedom can have on someone outside of my ability to enlighten or explain. Someone perhaps who sees my actions without really knowing or understanding what is behind them.

Let me put this in the context of alcohol. That might make it a little more obvious. Paul is saying here the stronger brothers and sisters, you might have the freedom to enjoy a cocktail or a glass of beer or something like that at home, but it's not really the same as having it at a VFW picnic. You see, someone who doesn't have a strong conscience in this area, someone perhaps who has a problem with alcohol might see you enjoying your freedom, and not having the benefit of knowing your fully convinced mind, he might conclude against his own conscience that what's acceptable for you after all must be acceptable for him, and thus he is potentially "destroyed by your knowledge."

To further the analogy, let's say you're sitting at the same VFW and you're enjoying a steak, and the guy next to you gets up and he announces: "This steak comes to you courtesy of the new age

metaphysical society. They had this great big convention and they offered up first to the spirit of the earth." Well, you may know that that's absolute nonsense. You may know it's baloney. You may be perfectly free to participate in this, but now, once again, something has changed. Now a little kid is suddenly streaking across your archery range. Now it's up to you to begin to hold your arrows. Paul says: *Then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience -- I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?*

I think what Paul is trying to communicate here is that this is serious stuff. What Paul is doing here is he's putting feet under a verse that we quote all of the time, 1 Corinthians 10:31: *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.* See, if I'm eating or drinking or doing anything in a public setting, I should be consciously thinking about the glory of God, and consequently, a thoughtless display of Christian liberty can produce in this weaker brother a stumbling block, a stumbling block that produces a defiled conscience. My actions can cause a weaker conscience to be wounded and a weaker brother to be destroyed. It can cause my brother to sin; it can cause my sister to fall. And when that happens, Paul says to the stronger brother or sister, you sin against Christ. That's pretty serious.

You see, Gary Friesen points out that our conscience acts as though it is God's moral law for the individual even when it is wrong. When we sin against our conscience, we sin directly against God. We choose self over what we think are God's promptings even if they're not. Now, Paul says: *"I am completely free to eat meat offered to idols."* But he also says, *"If my eating causes someone to stumble, I will never eat meat again."* It's that serious.

In Romans 14:14, he says: *"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil."*

And so to boil down what he is saying, it's actually very simple, he says, if I can not control a false or incorrect impression a weaker brother might get from my action, then I won't do it. I will limit my freedom when necessary by love. You know, if I'm a young man, I would think long and hard about that movie that I'm standing in line for, or perhaps that music that is pouring out of my car. If I'm a young woman, I would think long and hard about how I dress, not only about the affect that it might have on guys

but about the affect that it might have on a weaker sister in the Lord. Romans 15:1 says: *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, and build him up.*

Of course, the same is true for us adults as we evaluate what we do with our language, our leisure, and our liberty. We have to ask ourselves, how many times have youngsters come on our archery range? How many have taken our arrows because we didn't know or really didn't care who got hurt. Galatians 5:13 says: *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* I will limit my freedom when necessary by love.

That leads to our fifth point which brings the whole series on Christian liberty full circle. The fifth point is: Follow Christ as model and motivator of servanthood. You know, we live in a time when personal rights reign supreme, and the idea that someone would give those rights up even as a Christian, that idea stands in stark contrast to the spirit of this age. But, you know, the fact is, we have no rights in the first place. We have nothing to give up. Every one of us is a condemned prisoner who was pardoned by God's



mercy and grace alone. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says: *You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God in your body.* That price was the spotless blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He loved us so much that while we were yet sinners, he died for us. He is our model of freedom and liberty offered up for our sakes.

Jesus Christ spoke the universe into existence. Colossians 1:16 says: *For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him, and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

There's the definition of freedom for you. Just try to imagine the freedom that Christ enjoyed. Now try to imagine all of that power and strength and might and majesty helplessly pinned to a manger in the body of a little boy. That's the freedom that he gave up for you and for me.

You know, Philippians 2 tells us that even though he was in the very nature God himself, he didn't cling to that. Instead, he made himself nothing, taking the very form of what? A servant. That's who our model is. From baby to adult, he lived out his life flawlessly. So much so that he made an astounding challenge to the Jewish leaders in John 8:46. He said this: he said, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* That's an incredible statement to

make. Can you imagine anybody saying that? I mean, the only one who could say that is either a flawless person or an insane person. There's nobody else who could say that. I mean, could a Gandhi, a Buddha, or Mohammed ever make such a challenge? Well, they wouldn't because they couldn't, and they never even claimed perfection. But Jesus did. And he was free to make that claim because he was perfect. But he used his freedom to serve. And it was there for him any time he wanted it, but he chose not to choose it.

When he was arrested in the garden, if you remember, Peter cut off the ear of one of the arresting officers. In Matthew 26:50, he describes what happened. It says this: *Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels?*

I just want to speak for a second about these angels. Most of the folks who saw those angels never lived to tell about what they saw. When wicked Sennacherib attacked God's people with the force

of 185,000 soldiers, God sent one angel to deal with it. 2

Corinthians 32 says: *And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. One angel, one night, 185,000 dead.*

Now, do you remember what Jesus just said? Jesus said I have 72,000 of those angels, the likes of which you and I have never even imagined, and there's 72,000, and they are just itching for a wink or a nod from Jesus or the Father to unleash their fury.

Jesus said, *"Do you not think I can call on my Father and he will not at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels?"*

These creatures were quite capable of getting Jesus all the freedom he wanted, any moment he wanted it. But he didn't cling to that freedom. And had he done so, you and I wouldn't be here today.

Instead, Jesus said in verse 54: *"But how then would the scripture be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"*

Jesus gave up that freedom in order to serve. He also used it to save. You know, just as he started out life as a baby without the freedom even to move, so he ended his life once again without the freedom to move. He was nailed hands and feet to the cross that purchased our freedom. And so he used his freedom to save and to sacrifice. He is our model of what servanthood and Christian liberty is all about, and he asks us to limit our freedom in love.

And so my question for us this morning is, is he asking too much of us? You know, we started this series talking about families moving back to Montana -- the Montana of 1883 -- in order to find significance in their lives. I said, you know, you don't need to go to Montana to find meaning. All you have to find is people. They will provide all the opportunity and challenge you need to find meaning in life.

One of the critical components of what it means to be the bride of Christ, the church that Christ laid down his life for is community, and everything we've spoken about believers interacting with other believers over these last five messages and almost all of Romans 14 and 15 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, they're all essentially meaningless if your church is not really a community, if you don't have other people to deal with.

I recently spoke with a person who left the evangelical church for another denomination, and he told me quite frankly why. He said, "I don't like people." I sympathize with that a great deal. He said, "I don't like people," he said, "I want to go to church, I want to worship, and I want to go home." Very blunt. Very honest. Problem is, that's not church. That's not what God called the church. In 1 John 4:19, God says this: *We love because he*

*first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."*

Now, Christian liberty is incredibly easy to accomplish in a vacuum, where you don't have to rub shoulders with icky people, people you don't like, people who get on your nerves. It gets hard when we have to work it out in the real world, but that's where it counts. *Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.* That's not a suggestion from God, it is a command.

You know, all of us like to think that we're going to someday have these gigantic tests of faith, and if they come, then we'll pass them, if the government collapses, if the atheists take over, and they come in and they demand we renounce Christ, we like to think, "Oh, I'll stick up for Christ, I won't refuse." You know, for us here, that kind of test is not really likely to happen. But the real test, the real test of real Christian liberty is going to happen to all of us, and it happens almost every day. The question is this: Can we distinguish between matters of biblical command and biblical freedom? Can we cultivate or own God-centered convictions? Can we allow others the freedom to determine their

own convictions even when they differ from ours? And can we limit our freedoms when necessary by love?

See, if the Lord Jesus Christ is our model, our focus, and our goal, then we don't need to look to Montana for significance, because the real test, the test that all of us are going to go through, it's sitting right next to you. However, if the Lord Jesus Christ is only our model, our focus, and our goal, we will be crushed under the example of his ability. We will be crushed under the burden of his example, because we can't love like he loves. We just don't have that ability. We can't love like that, but he can. And Colossians 2:9-10 tells us that we have Christ himself living inside us. *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.* You know, that changes everything.

I recently met with another man who told me he had a familiar problem. He said, "I just don't like people." There's a lot of those folks walking around. A lot of them, I suspect, are in this room as well. He said, "I just don't like people. I don't like how they let you down, I don't like how they betray you, how they lie," and all of this kind of stuff. I get it. I understand that the church is filled with hypocrites and sinners, and you feel justified in minimizing your contact with it, but I also said, you

know, if Jesus who had every right to that sentiment responded that way, all of us would have been doomed. We would have had no hope. And it is this Jesus who says in John 15:12: *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

Now, I give my friend one thing, he was one of the first to admit he's rebelling against that commandment. He's suffering from a malfunctioning heart. That's what I told him. I said, "You got a heart malfunction." I said, "But David also suffered from a malfunctioning heart," and this is the solution that he found in Psalm 51. He asked this of God. He said, *Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

You see, I can tell you flat out, you and I will never, never be able to love our brothers and sisters the way Christ did, but the Christ who now lives in me is more than able to love that way, and he is anxious to give us the very power to love. All you have to do is ask.

So the question is, are we willing to do that? Are you willing to ask God for the grace, the strength, the wisdom, and the power to obey his command that we love one another as he has loved us? You know, God takes people from every tribe and nation and tongue,

people with nothing whatsoever in common other than Jesus Christ and him crucified, and he challenges us before the worlds, the powers, and principalities in the air as well as the earthly powers right here in Port Jervis, New York, he challenges us to love one another for his sake. Are you willing to pray for the power to do that? It's a prayer that God absolutely delights to answer. Let's pray.

**Prayer:** *Father, I just -- again, I just want to pray for us as a congregation, that we would have that power, that grace, that strength, that wisdom, that ability to love one another as you would have us love one another. Lord, for your glory, we stand here in different stages of sanctification, in different stages of being transformed into your very image, facing the challenge of loving brothers and sisters that many of us don't even like. Lord, you're not asking us to like one another. You're asking us to love one another, and that's different. Father, I pray that you would give us the ability to turn towards the sense of community that church is supposed to be, to make us the type of example to the world, both the spirit world and the physical world in Port Jervis, of the transforming power of the love of Christ himself who indwells us, and give us the ability to seek out, to be willing to hear, to be willing to bear the burdens of weaker brothers and sisters. Give us the ability to walk through circumstances that*



*might get us upset or angry or desirous of just taking off, give us the ability to see a much bigger picture of what it is we're doing, and give us the understanding that to love one another is not a suggestion; it is a command. And I pray this in Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*