

**MAPPING FBC DNA:  
Authentic Relationships  
Romans 12:9-21**

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**WATCH/LISTEN:** <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/mapping-fbc-dna-authentic-relationships/>

During this series, we are working our way through the five initiatives which surfaced from multiple congregational conversations: God-centered worship; life-changing faith; authentic relationships, community transformation and global partners. This morning, we focus on authentic relationships. We love each other.

Our text announces that a church with authentic relationships brings about AN ENDING TO PRETENDING. Romans 12:9: love is not hypocritical. Hypocrite was a word which literally meant play-acting. Authentic relationships begin when we take off our masks. So, an ending to pretending. IN his book, *Paul—A Biography*, N.T. Wright reminds us that in New Testament times, common people had no privacy. No windows or doors. Thin walls. Imagine someone standing up in a gathering and pretending that life with Jesus was problem-free. Another person interrupts and says, “Why don’t you get real? I know about your problems and heartaches. We live next door and can hear your family discussions. Take off your mask.”

How often I hear from new members: “There is something about this place that loves me as I am.” I remind them that Jesus always begins with us where we are, not where we ought to be. Bill Wilson wrote a recent column and reminded us healthy churches acknowledge spiritual failure and wandering. Healthy churches don’t try to shame and blame, but love and patiently restore [*Baptist News Global*, Jan. 30, 2019].

A church with authentic relationships seeks to HONOR ONE ANOTHER (v. 10). This is a good time to remember that the church in Rome may have been a bit different from the other, smaller congregations to whom Paul wrote and ministered [Wright, pp. 321-323]. The Roman church was much bigger, more diverse ethnically, culturally, racially and theologically. More house churches met separately, with their own settled views and opinions. Different dialects, worship songs, ways of doing things. It would have been easy to fuss, disagree and be suspicious of each other. Instead, they were to honor one another. Paul takes a Roman value and turns it on its head. To the average pagan in Rome, honor, like our modern credit rating, was something to be acquired for yourself. Paul flips that. Honor is what we give others. Life isn’t about competition and isolation, but about honoring each other above self.

Many of us have visited EPCOT at Disney World. Do you know what EPCOT stands for? It’s an acronym: Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Isn’t that the church? An experiment to show off to the world. This is what relationships can be and can do.

Our text announces that a church with authentic relationships PURSUES HOSPITALITY (v. (v. 13). This truly is a part of our DNA here at FBC; we welcome warmly. And scripture commands us to not just practice hospitality; pursue it. That is, seek out new ways, be creative and take the initiative. Frankly, I see times when our DNA shines through and we do this so well, I nearly pop

with pride. Other times, we could do better. Really. Better. Remember: Hospitality does not mean being friendly with people we've known for 40 years.

Our text announces that a church with authentic relationships KNOWS HOW TO LAUGH AND CRY WITH OTHERS (v. 15). "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." Think about the transparency and honesty this encourages in the church. Rejoicing—that eliminates jealousy. Weeping—that eliminates smugness. We don't judge others in their pain, and think to ourselves, "That would never happen to me." We come alongside them.

Someone once asked Eugene Peterson what he loved about pastoring. He replied, "The mess." He was once meeting with a small group of seminarians who were preparing for the pastorate. After listening for a long time, Irene, one of the students, spoke up: "I want to be a patient pastor. I want to be a witness to what God is doing in their lives, not a schoolmistress handing out grades for how well they are doing something for God. I think...the pastor is the one person in the community who is free to take men and women seriously just as they are, appreciate them and give them the dignity that derives from being the image of God, a God-created being who has eternal worth without having to prove usefulness or be good for anything." [*The Pastor*, pp. 282-285].

Amen.