

The Discipline of Community

I. Introduction

- A. When we began the year, we had a sense that the disciplines (God's means for helping us be WITH Christ and become LIKE Christ) would be powerful, but it has actually far exceeded expectations
 - 1. The conversations and stories I hear about transformation, freedom, and hope are really life-giving and encouraging to my heart
 - 2. Next week, we have a prayer and worship service, and if you would like to share a testimony of what God is doing in your life, please come and chat with me or connect with Jen, and I will connect with you this coming week
- B. What do we do to "keep moving forward?" What disciplines remain?
 - 1. Well, we could talk about a lot more things, to be honest, like biblical meditation, memorization, journaling, learning, etc, but I want to talk today about something that is easy to overlook → the Discipline of Community
- C. Community
 - 1. The word community comes from Latin meaning "Together + Service"
 - 2. It emphasizes the idea of sharing, responsibility, unity, and purpose
 - 3. Closely related to the word Fellowship (koinonia) in the NT meaning sharing → as believers we share faith, purpose, unity, burdens
- D. We were made in God's image and for community
 - 1. In the Bible God forbade from making an image to represent him (a statue to worship, etc) because God already has an image → it's us
 - 2. Genesis 1:27 – We are made as the image of a relational God (Father, Son, and Spirit).
 - a) As the trinity (3 in 1) shares togetherness in purpose and service, we are supposed to share perfect oneness in service and purpose
 - b) This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17 → that his people might be one as he and the Father are one
- E. As God created in Genesis 1 he continued to say. "This is good"
 - 1. But in Genesis 2:18 – "It is not good for man to be alone." From creation itself, God communicates that isolation is contrary to our design.
 - a) How sad, then, that in Genesis 3 sin isolates us
 - (1) From God... From one another... from creation
- F. Unity in purpose, community, fellowship is throughout the Word
 - 1. The NT has numerous commands to "one another."
 - a) Ex: loving one another, bearing one another's burdens, being devoted to one another, praying for one another, etc.
 - 2. When we read the Bible, we see the unity in purpose of God on display → shared faith, sacrificial generosity, fellowship, and prayer.
 - 3. Even the metaphors given to explain the church are communal in nature (a body, a house, living stones, branches on a vine/tree, a family)
 - a) The body works together to accomplish a purpose
- G. It is fitting then to refer to community as a discipline

1. You have to choose to be a part of it. You need to be disciplined for it.
 2. Unity in purpose does not just spontaneously happen but requires effort, humility, and openness
 3. When I consider my most powerful encounters with God they have, far and away, been in community (reading, serving, praying together, etc)
 4. And to be honest, the truth is that few things reveal my own sin like being around others... I get along with myself quite easily. Very few fights.
- II. Let's establish some foundational stones
- A. **#1:** Community reflects our design as Image-Bearers
 1. We are wired for relationships; our souls wither in prolonged isolation.
 - a) Vertically... Horizontally...
 2. We need to have unity in purpose, working together for God's glory
 - B. **#2:** God uses community to help us grow
 1. Proverbs 27:17 – "Iron sharpens iron." → Explain
 2. Growing together into Christlikeness requires contact and often friction; it isn't always comfortable.
 - C. **#3:** Community is often how God gives comfort and support to his people
 1. Life brings struggles—community offers practical help, prayer support, wisdom, and comfort.
- III. So why is it so hard? Why is unity so difficult? Why is unity in purpose so challenging? Why do we tend to isolate when we are depressed? Why do we struggle to share our failings? Why can't we agree on how to do things, when to do things, or even TO do things?

A. Barrier A: Our Differences

1. You know, I don't know why God made everyone so different. It would be a lot easier if you were all more like me
2. Actually, I **DO** know God has made us all so different: *He is a creative God with a plan to make us dependent and interdependent on one another for our own edification and growth so that we might be a witness to the world as we display the manifold glory of God.*
3. In other words, our differences, through the gospel, help us to grow closer to and be like Jesus
4. Now, some of our differences might be wrong or sinful, but there are plenty of cultural, theological, personality, life-stage, and musical preferences that aren't questions of right or wrong
 - a) But they do create opportunities for misunderstanding or discomfort.
5. The church in Corinth was a church divided, and their division was undermining their unity in purpose → stopping the church from fulfilling it's calling
 - a) Divided over leadership personalities (Follow Jesus, not XYZ)
 - b) Divided over sin (what I want vs. you → conflict: James 4, Gen 3)
 - c) Divided over knowledge (We all see & know in part right now)

(1) 1 Cor 8:1 ...while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. 2 Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. 3 But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

d) Divided over gifts

6. Paul's response: Fix your eyes on Jesus and love one another

B. Barrier B: Transparency

1. We talked about this a few weeks back, so I won't spend too much time here. The more I have been processing this, however, the more I realize that a lack of transparency is often rooted in a fear of being known.
 - a) We don't want others to see our weaknesses, sins, or struggles, so we hide like Adam and Eve in the garden
 - b) We don't want others to see our successes b/c rather than celebrating with us (as they should), they might be jealous
2. So a little voice whispers, don't tell anyone. They will reject you. They won't understand. They will judge.
3. Scriptural Response: James 5:16 – “Confess your sins to one another ... that you may be healed.” Healing often begins when we risk vulnerability and bring hidden things to light.
 - a) The enemy doesn't want you to be healed so the enemy doesn't want you to be transparent. He wants you to suffer ALONE.

C. Barrier C: Isolation (Often Fueled by Rejection and Fear)

1. *Proverbs 18:1, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.”*
2. American Individualism: From John McClane to Rambo to Santa... we think everyone should do it on their own
 - a) Self-sufficiency, living off the land, be an expert at everything, don't ask for help, why borrow your neighbor's 40-foot ladder when you could own your own. Heck, why learn his name?
3. Rooted in experiences of rejection—past hurts or betrayals—arrogance, self-centeredness, and a score of other emotions, we are driven to withdraw.
 - a) Sometimes this can be a vicious cycle: feeling rejected → pulling away → deeper loneliness → more fear of rejection.
4. Scriptural Response: Hebrews 10:24–25 *24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

IV. The Common Root: Pride

A. Pride Distorts Our Perspective

1. To those who fear transparency, Pride says, “I shouldn't be weak. I shouldn't struggle with this,” so I will hide my sin and struggle instead of asking for help.

- a) Why shouldn't you be weak? Aren't we all weak? Don't you realize only your pride convinces you you shouldn't struggle?
 - 2. To those who are torn apart by differences, Pride says, "Others should be more like me. Why don't they ask ME what to do. Don't they realize I know what I am talking about. I am right, they are wrong," so we grow impatient when people differ or fail.
 - 3. To those who isolate, Pride says, "I can handle my burdens alone. I can handle life alone. I am sufficient. I don't need anyone else," denying your God-given need for others and your responsibility to help others
- B. When we cling to pride, we prevent grace
 - 1. Toward Ourselves: Instead of embracing God's mercy, we condemn ourselves, believing "I should be better by now," so we stay stuck, ashamed, and silent.
 - 2. Toward Others: We adopt a judgmental spirit, withholding patience, forgiveness, or empathy because we feel superior or exasperated.
- C. Biblical Remedy for Pride: Humility
 - 1. *1 Peter 5:5 – "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."* Our pride puts us in opposition to God's redemptive work, but humility prepares us for it (He must increase, I must decrease)
 - 2. Consider Christ in *Phil 2:5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.*
 - a) In other words, he didn't leverage his divinity like a club. I am right (he was). I don't need you, Peter (he didn't). I will get more done on this journey if I do it myself.
 - 3. *7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.*
 - a) Ah... so Jesus chose to be born as someone who needed someone else. He needed a mother to nurture. He needed a father to protect and provide.
 - 4. *When he appeared in human form,8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*
 - a) Jesus lowered himself beneath us in order to reach us
- D. So often we find humility after we find shame.
 - 1. We get caught red-handed in our sin and THEN I am humbled.
 - 2. What if we pursued humility prior to humiliation?
 - 3. What if we pursued service, love, affection, and patience as we pursue humility?
 - 4. What if we pursued his glory and let the weight (lit: meaning) push us to decrease that he might increase and we might serve others more readily?
- V. Conclusion: I believe that God wants us to pursue the discipline of community, but it is very contrary to our modern, isolated, technological culture
 - A. So here are some practical challenges to embrace:L
 - 1. Commit to a local body of believers.

- a) Church membership or consistent fellowship provides the “context of commitment” necessary for real relationships.
 - b) Many (not all) dabble b/c they can hide. Nobody really knows them, they don't need to be accountable, don't need to give back
 - c) Push beyond Sunday attendance: find a serve team or discipleship group where deeper connections can form.
2. Practice Transparency
- a) We don't have enough DGs. I know we don't. Maybe start by grabbing three people from Revolve and establishing a peer accountability group
 - b) Share your joys, your struggles, pray for one another, and encourage one another in the Word (ex: Breakfast Club)
3. Pursue forgiveness and reconciliation
- a) Where differences or offenses occur, address them quickly.
 - (1) Matthew 5:23–24 encourages reconciliation before coming to worship.
 - b) Have a learner's heart to ask questions and grow together rather than to debate. Maybe God wants to teach you something too
 - c) Maybe God has gifted that other person differently b/c you are supposed to sharpen them, and they are supposed to sharpen you
 - d) Conflict is normal, and humility and grace are the answer.
- B. C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity, “Christ works on us in all sorts of ways ... but above all, He works on us through each other.”
- 1. The enemy wants you to isolate yourself
 - 2. The enemy wants you to be alone
 - 3. The enemy wants to whisper in your ear to divide you
 - 4. The enemy wants you to hold grudges
 - 5. The enemy wants you to not use your gifts b/c “nobody appreciates you”
 - 6. The enemy wants you to run from your church wounds instead of addressing them with maturity
 - 7. The enemy wants you to bury your problems so they haunt you in ten years
 - 8. The enemy wants you to not pray together, not read together, not serve together, not live life together
 - 9. The enemy wants to get you alone, separate from the flock, lost
 - 10. Why? Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)
- C. Picture of Roman shield wall
- 1. Shield of Faith is great, but not by yourself
 - 2. It only really works in community
 - 3. Someone has to have your back → it's supposed to be the church
 - 4. But not if you won't let them
 - 5. Today: embrace the discipline of community. Stop running. Stop hiding behind your ability to connect digitally. Embrace the mess of community.