

Series: Core 2011

Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2011

Scripture: 1Pet. 2:5, 1Cor

12:12, 1John 3:1

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## INTRODUCTION

Today we are going to talk about the kind of community that the gospel should create. But I want to intro what I'm going today by having a look at the pattern of life that the world thinks is normal, accepts without question.

The overly individualistic nature of 21<sup>st</sup> Century society railroads us into lonely disconnected lives:

- People are really busy and don't have time (or make as much time) for relationships. How many times have you said, 'we really must get together... I'll give you a call' and that call never happened. 'We must do this again soon' or 'I will see you soon'. But 'soon' never comes!
- New trends in architecture replace large dining and living rooms, designed for human contact, with walk-in closets, home offices, personal entertainment rooms, or rooms orientated around a large flat screen TV.
- Here lonely people can watch sitcoms about other people who have friendships and relationships; or reality-based TV shows where characters pretend to have the lives that are apparently satisfying, fulfilling and amazing.
- People don't sit and eat and converse over meal as much – they rather watch TV, BBM a person who is not there. And what is with the fast-food concept – like meal times are something to get out the way so that you can get back to real living. People eat lunch in their cars, so they can be more productive, so that they can buy a bigger flat screen TV so that they can get a better view of the sitcom 'Friends' where people have the kinds of relationships they really want!

Some of you may think that's a bit over-exaggerated, but that is probably the influence of Christ in your life – just have a look over your neighbours wall.

## A PART OR APART?

The idea of a community of believers is deeply embedded in Biblical revelation. In the OT God chooses to deal with families. And in fact he chose one family, Abraham's, and promised that this family would father many – more than the stars of the sky. God chose a people-group, the nation of Israel with 12 tribes and clans and families.

In the NT, when God speaks about the redeemed, he uses pictures like

1. flock (Hebrews 13:20b ...our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep),

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2. building (1Peter 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house)
3. body (1Corinthians 12:12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.)
4. family (1John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! Gal 6:10b ...those who belong to the family of believers).

So your identity is a sheep in the flock, a stone in the building, a part of the body, a member of the family. Consider the implication of these pictures: sheep apart are lost, stones apart are just rocks, parts of a body apart are dismembered, and family members apart are just people.

Now I know, because I preach it passionately, that the gift of salvation is about a personal response of an individual to Christ. You, personally, need to put your faith into Christ and receive the forgiveness of sins. But the Bible is by no means individualistic. In fact our individualistic society has emphasised the personal element to the detriment of the community aspect of Christianity.

TO WHOM DO YOU BELONG?

When I become a Christian I belong to God AND I belong to my brothers and sisters. It is not: I belong to God and then I choose or decide to join a local church.<sup>1</sup> The Bible has no dispensation like this, it has not space, no category, it is a *non sequitur* – it simply doesn't follow. And perhaps this is why, from so many pulpits, you hear continued appeals for involvement, participation and commitment – because Christians just don't understand their identity. Here is the thing about status: you are brothers and sisters, you are a building, a body, a family. The question is do you act out your status/identity that IS yours. It is not a level that you reach in spirituality; either you accept it and live it or you reject part of what God has made you to be!

THE GOSPEL CREATES REAL COMMUNITY

The Gospel creates a kind of community that is unique. The Gospel message is: Jesus lived the life that I should have lived and died the death that I should have died; that I am more wicked and sinful than I dared admit but at the same time more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. And all this is because of Christ.

Again: think of the individualistic nature of the world. People see themselves as individuals apart from the whole, not as a member of community. *The first questions that most people ask*

<sup>1</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, Total Church, pg 39

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*when they meet someone new is 'what do you do?' or 'where do you stay?' or 'where do you come from?' They are basically asking the question: 'who are you?' with the implication that who you are is defined by what you do (which also probably tells the guy what you earn), where you live.*

What happens if you answered the question: what do you do? I'm a father, husband, Christian!

In the world people are trying to earn their identity, trying to prove their worth, putting others down to bolster their own self-perception, and carving out a niche for themselves that defines their value. BUT when you understand grace, you realise that you are a humble recipient; that you come with nothing of value at all – as if you could barter with God; that we are spiritually bankrupt before God; that your identity is not something that you can achieve – it is given by God. Then it does not matter how rich you are, how brilliant you are, how powerful you are, how accomplished you are, how influential you are – you're still a bankrupt sinner dependent on the mercy of God. CEO, rubbish collector, lecturer, or actuary – it doesn't matter. Rather the gospel pattern is a reversal of the world's pattern. The weak are strong, the humble are powerful servants, and the lowly are great!

## GOSPEL COMMUNITY CREATES GROWTH

Here is the amazing character about community: it creates the very opportunities that we need for growth – although we strive for 'personal spiritual growth' alone as individuals. How so?

### 1. WE GROW WITH ONE ANOTHER

The process of Christian growth is internal to external. The Holy Spirit convicts us in our hearts about wrong attitudes, wrong patterns of thinking and wrong desires. And as he helps to reform us, it produces fruit on the outside.

But, the most important Christian characteristics are worked out in relationship. The Bible has about 27 'one another' statements that address the nature of the way in which we should work out the Christian character. I wish, for the sake of impact I could read them all to you. But here is the list: serve, love, be devoted, honour, live in harmony, be gracious, accept, teach, worship together with, forgive, encourage, offer hospitality.

Think about those characteristics – they are all practiced in relationship with other people. The characteristics that God wants us to have are other-orientated. *It's easy to love myself, to be devoted to myself, to worship myself, to teach myself all that I know, to live in harmony with myself, to be hospitable to myself...*

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In other words God is saying – in a gentle way – it is not easy to live together; or more accurately it's not really easy to live you... or me. And THAT gives you the perfect opportunity to grow in love, service, humility, devotion, grace, teaching, encouragement, forgiveness. [You grow by living in close proximity in community]

## 2. WE GROW AS WE GIVE

When I teach the Church Membership class I tell them that part of growing as a Christian is learning the Bible and growing in spiritual depth and maturity. But that is only half the picture. We need to 'get' but you also grow by 'giving'. In fact the times that you grow most as a Christian is when you are extended and stretched and challenged as the teacher, leader, or guide.

*At schools nowadays the teachers who struggle with oversized classes sometime employ the method of getting a stronger student to co-teach a weaker student. And of course there is benefit for both – you think you know something until you have to articulate it so that someone else can understand what you understand. If you can do that you know you really know it! In fact I was having this exact conversation with a couple of people in our church on Tuesday.*

The same is true on the athletics: you push yourself and you get stronger and fitter; in the business environment: you get an assignment that is new and challenging and you grow as you complete it; ... [You grow by serving and giving in community]

## 3. WE GROW THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is the third element of community. We need to hold one another accountable by asking hard questions, and encouraging people to be gospel centred. We need to give people the right to speak the truth in love as we see areas of sin, correcting and rebuking with God's Word when necessary.

This kind of relationship doesn't happen automatically, but needs to come out of natural friendships. What I mean is: you can't say to two people, 'you two – be accountable to each other'; but at the same time two friends will not automatically ask each other the hard questions. So, be intentional. Find someone, make sure it is mutual and then grow together. [You grow by sharing in community]

## CONCLUSION

You can't do without me and I can't do without you. I need you in a way foundational way.

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### Serve

**Joh 13:14** Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash **one another's** feet.

**Gal 5:13** You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve **one another** in love.

### Love

**Joh 13:34** "A new command I give you: Love **one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love **one another**.

**1Pe 1:22** Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love **one another** deeply, from the heart.

**1Jo 3:11** This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love **one another**.

**1Jo 3:23** And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love **one another** as he commanded us.

**1Jo 4:7** Dear friends, let us love **one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

**1Jo 4:11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love **one another**.

### Be devoted

**Rom 12:10a** Be devoted to **one another** in brotherly love.

### Honour

**Rom 12:10b** Honor **one another** above yourselves.

### Live in harmony

**Rom 12:16** Live in harmony with **one another**. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

**1Co 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with **one another** so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

**Eph 4:2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with **one another** in love.

**Eph 5:21** Submit to **one another** out of reverence for Christ.

**1Pe 3:8** Finally, all of you, live in harmony with **one another**; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

**1Pe 5:5** Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward **one another**, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

### Be gracious

**Rom 14:13** Therefore let us stop passing judgment on **one another**. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

### Accept

**Rom 15:7** Accept **one another**, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

### Teach

**Rom 15:14** I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct **one another**.

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**Col 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish **one another** with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

### Forgive

**Eph 4:32** Be kind and compassionate to **one another**, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Col 3:13** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against **one another**. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

### Worship with

**Eph 5:19** Speak to **one another** with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

### Encourage

**1Th 5:11** Therefore encourage **one another** and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

**Heb 3:13** But encourage **one another** daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

**Heb 10:24** And let us consider how we may spur **one another** on toward love and good deeds.

**Heb 10:25** Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage **one another**--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### Offer hospitality

**1Pe 4:9** Offer hospitality to **one another** without grumbling.