

Finding Community

September 10th 2006

Introduction:

One of the main purposes of our L.I.F.E. groups is to help people have a sense of belonging and community at Northwest. Being the body of Christ requires connection. Connection requires time of sharing and encouraging as we try to grow closer to God as his community.

Our culture has not fostered community very well. We have learned to disengage from others, to be independent, and to play by our own rules. The result has been community breakdown. Most people don't even realize they lack one of the most fundamental aspects of our identity, who we are in community. This is reflected in a 2005 Newsweek Poll that asked, "Why do you practice religion?" Here is the breakdown:

To forge a personal relationship with God – 39%
To help you be a better person and live a moral life – 30%
To find peace and happiness – 17%
To connect with something larger than yourself – 10%
To give your life meaning and structure – 8%
To be part of a community – 3%
Other – 13 percent

What are some groups where you have a real sense of belonging?
- Church, Family, Social groups, etc.

What is it about those groups that helps you feel connected?

- There is probably some level of investment.
- There is probably some level of sharing or interaction with others

Church as Community:

The church is the most important community we can be connected to. It helps us form relationships that will last forever. Scripture offers us insights into forming deep communities of faith. In fact, the first century church was able to reach nearly the entire world at the time without the aid of all the technological advances we have today. One of the reasons they were able to do this was through connecting people to meaningful communities of faith.

Text:

Just after Peter's sermon at Pentecost, 3000 people were baptized into the first Christian community (Acts 2:38-41). In the very next verse there is a word that is the key to community:

Acts 2:42-47

They **devoted** themselves.

How important is devotion when it comes to the most important things in life?

- It is essential.

What happens to the things we are not very devoted to?

- We tend to drop them as the time requirements of our lives put other things we are devoted to in their place.

Devotion to the right things:

How long would you last if you devoted every waking moment to cheese-cake and hotdogs?

- Probably not long!

It is important to look at *what* they devoted themselves to:

- Apostle's teaching (Bible study)
- Breaking of bread (Fellowship)
- Prayer
- Sharing things in common (Giving)
- Time together
- Praising God (Singing)

When these are shared we develop deeper relationships with each other and with God. We form communities of faith people can identify with and feel welcomed into.

Text:

John 15:1, 4-5

How do the vine and branches symbolize a Christ-centered community?

- Christ is the vine and Christians are united in their identity because we are all connected to the same vine.

What is produced by our being in community with each other and with him? Can we do this alone?

- We produce fruit.
- No. We cannot do this alone but only produce fruit when we are attached to the vine.

John 15:6-8

What happens to unfaithful branches that rebel and do not remain in the vine?

- They are thrown away and wither and die.

What does Jesus say shows we are his disciples?

- When we bear fruit

What does it mean to bear fruit as a Christian?

- To serve as Jesus served.
- To grow spiritually
- To help others become part of the vine

John 15:9-17

What did Jesus urge his disciples (and us) to do?

- Remain in his love.

How does loving each other model what Christ has done for us?

- Christ loved us so much he laid down his life for us and he asks us to do the same for each other (vs. 13)

What does Jesus mean in verse 16 when he says we will bear fruit that will last when we remain in him?

- Being a part of his community has eternal rewards.
- We do things that have eternal significance.
- When you serve others, reach the lost, or love your brother you are doing something that has effects that will last throughout eternity.

Application:

What steps can you take to develop and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus?

What steps can you take to develop and maintain a personal relationship with other Christians?

Put it into Practice:

Find a visitor at church this week and invite them to be a part of your L.I.F.E. group for next week. When we see the need for Christian community, we will want other Christians to be a part of it as well!



Note to leaders:

If you have not discussed the Group Covenant idea that is something that should be in place soon. If you need help with it just let me know and we can work it out. If you want to encourage people to invite others, try to always have an extra chair in the room. You can use that as a reminder on a weekly basis that there is always room for more people and to try to fill each chair next week. Thank you for your dedication. It cannot happen without you. God bless.