

## The Power of Covenant Community II

7/18/2010

Pastor Norm has been speaking on the subject of community the last several weeks. This reminded me of my last message I spoke: "The Power of Covenant Community". Today, I would like to follow up that message with a "part two". I'll begin by reviewing some of the things we talked about last time.

- We talked about Psalm 68:4-6 (Read in NIV) (Read in Ampl.)
  - "A father of the fatherless and a judge and protector of the widows is God in His holy habitation. God places the solitary in families and gives the desolate a home in which to dwell; He leads the prisoners out to prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a parched land."

God takes the solitary and puts them in family. Why?

- Verse 5: God is a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows—where? In his Holy Dwelling, or His house (His habitation).
- Father God is both these things, wherever he is, (everywhere)—but he is saying something here about his house *specifically*.
- Then in verse 6 he takes it a little further. He says he places the *lonely* (a **beloved** child alone or solitary and desolate) in *families* (house, temple, palace).
- He goes on to say that he leads those in bondage (those bound with chains) into prosperity, but those who choose rebellion live in a desolate land. (Parched desert)

Why does God bring his people into family? He knows it's the best place for them to be healed, to be trained, and to grow up. And then, to be sent out to bless others, and bring them in to the family. **Most importantly, it is in the context of a family that we get to know FATHER.**

Look at Psalm 84 in the Amplified Bible. It says it so well. (Read) (Notice comm. ref) This is a description of living in covenant community:

1. "How lovely is your residence O Lord"
2. "My soul yearns and is homesick for your fenced in and enclosed yard."
  - A place of safety where I can grow.
3. "I am like a bird that has found a house to raise my young."
4. "I am happy and someone to be envied, because I can dwell in your house where your presence is." Pause and think of *that!*
5. "Happy is the man who knows his strength will be found in the Lord and in his presence."
- 6-7. "No matter what hardships and challenges we face, we will find increasing strength, in the presence of God, in his residence."
10. "Even a day in your house, is better than anywhere else, because there I find rest, enablement for life, abundant blessing."
- 11-12. "In your presence nothing good is withheld, and I have confidence and will have no fear."

This Psalm is not talking about *living* at the church building.

- But, it *is* talking about living in covenant community.
- And the blessing of God on our lives when we do.
- And how God uses community to bless our lives in so many ways!

While there are lots of secular studies and articles written about the benefit of people not being isolated and living in relationship with other people our *culture* seems to encourage just the opposite.

- More and more people live in isolation today than ever before.
- We simply don't need to interact with people to live our daily lives any more.
- I am all for the "social networking" phenomenon, as long as it is used to *enhance* our relationships—not replace them.
- Too many people live in their homes, with their pets, their computers, and their televisions, isolated, and "protected" from their fears of having to interact with people, and maybe get hurt by them.
- All the while, we were created by Father God to need and live in community.
- It is where we will grow up and become mature believers—sons and daughters. And **it is in us** to want that! It is **in us** to want community.
- Dennis Peacocke in *Let's Talk* said: "God designed us to be incomplete. We need community." (We are incomplete w/o Him, and w/o others.)

This is why we see such a continued growth in people joining gangs.

I was reading an article on the phenomenal growth of gangs recently:

"Some of the reasons for joining a gang include:"

- A search for love, structure, and discipline
- A sense of belonging and commitment
- The need for recognition and power
- Companionship, training, excitement, and activities
- A sense of self-worth and status
- A place of acceptance
- It fills the need for physical safety and protection

But God takes the solitary and puts them in family. Why? What does this mean?

- Look at Ephesians 2:11-13, 19-22 Ampl.
- Verse 12: We were once separated from Christ and had no part in His promises (covenants). "You had no hope, you were in the world without God"
- Verse 13: "But now in Christ, you who were once so far away, have been brought near."
- Verse 19: "You are no longer outsiders. You **belong** to God's own household."
- Verse 22: "In Him, and in fellowship with one another, you are being built up to form a dwelling place for God."

Now, what does God want to accomplish in community (in family):

1. Community provides a place to belong. We are created social creatures. We long for companionship. (If we are not that way, it is because we have been hurt in some way and that hurt has not been resolved.)
  - People will search out a place to belong. Where they are known and people care about them. (Gangs, clubs, sports teams, social organizations, etc.)
  - My parents owned neighborhood taverns for years when I was growing up. People came early and stayed late. And for most, it wasn't just to drink. (My dad would complain about them not buying enough.) The folks at the tavern were their "family". If someone wasn't around for a while, people would ask why? There were many close friendships developed there.
  - In the covenant community the things that bind people together are eternal however. I'm not here just because it seemed like a good idea. I'm here because I'm placed here by God. If I get my feelings hurt, I'm not going to leave. You don't just leave family. This is where I belong.
2. Community provides a place to grow. There is a corporate dynamic that encourages this. The covenant community is...
  - A place to grow spiritually; in an atmosphere of faith
  - A place to grow socially—where you learn to walk with people covenantally
  - A place to gain wisdom and knowledge
  - A place to be trained and equipped for life
    - To learn about healthy relationships
    - To learn how to deal with offenses and the importance of forgiveness
    - I've learned how to be a better husband, father, employee
3. Community gives us vision beyond ourselves. (What does *God* get in this?)
  - There is a bigger purpose for me and my family's lives, beyond just ourselves, and our own happiness.
  - The God of the universe has need of me!
  - I have learned to live for Christ, and to be Kingdom first minded—and God provides all I need.
  - Who or what are **you** living for?
  - God is sending us out, every day, with the Good News of His Gospel.

We need to "see" Covenant community. (Get the vision for it)

- It's the place where Father plants his children to grow and to be trained.
- It's where He brings people into spiritual adoption and healing, and gives them identity, and purpose.
- It's where He trains and equips his people to be the sons that the world is so eagerly waiting to see revealed. (Romans 8:19)
- **WE are** the covenant community.

I want a couple people to come and share right now about their experience here at CCK in the covenant community. (Mark and Dawn Cundy and Christy Lawson)

So what does it take to build, and then maintain, covenant community?

1. VISION: that's what I have been talking about so far. And this is what Pastor Norm has been addressing in his sermons lately as well.
  - a. He shared the four cornerstones of covenant community:
    - 1) **Trust**: Community is developed over time and only develops in an atmosphere of trust.
    - 2) **Forgiveness**: In a fallen world where trust is often broken, community is sustained by forgiveness.
    - 3) **Love**: Community is all about loving and being loved.
    - 4) **Service**: Community must be both Communion and Mission. We exist for Him.
2. INVESTMENT: What **IS** your role here? What part does Father have for you?
  - a. Are you helping to build? Or are you just here to get?
  - b. Is this **your** church community...or "theirs"? (Pastors, Elders, leaders)
  - c. Do you see yourself as a vital part of this covenant community?
  - d. Have you jumped in, or are you just looking in the window?
  - e. How are you investing?
  - f. We have 25 years of people investing their hearts into the vision:
    - i. You have an amazing commitment to Christ and to each other
    - ii. Your level of involvement in what goes on here is amazing.
    - iii. People are discipled and discipling others
    - iv. You embrace spiritual authority individually, and in your families and the community
    - v. WE have an awesome church! What we have is not common.
  - g. But...beware of entitlement. Make sure the beautiful reward and blessing of community does not become a demand.
    - i. A "You owe me" or "I deserve this or that" mentality
    - ii. Our community is not our right or our possession
    - iii. Remember always—we belong to Him and so does our community. What does HE want to do with His community?
    - iv. Ultimately, we are investing in community for HIM—not us.
3. COMITTMENT: The covenant community is a powerful expression of the heart of Father God on the earth, and therefore, the devil hates it.
  - a. He does whatever he can to try and destroy it, or at least discredit it.
  - b. Offenses will come. We are all imperfect people who need Jesus.
    - i. How will you respond when the offense comes?
    - ii. Will you run from it—or will you be committed to stay and work it out?
    - iii. Will you give in to negativity—or accept people's imperfections; and give grace, forgiveness, and love?

- iv. Community means being with people. There is potential to be offended. How will you deal with that? Perhaps it is God's way to deal with our character?
- v. What is your view of life in community? Do you focus on what isn't—or what is? We have a lot to be thankful for. A lot more than to be offended by.
- vi. We are not a people who are perfect and have it all together, but people who are on a journey together.
- c. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*: "Just as Christians should not be constantly feeling the pulse of their spiritual life, so too the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be continually taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more assuredly and consistently will community increase and grow from day to day as God pleases"
- d. Let's remain grateful for what God has given us, and see what He can, and will do, through us.

Now, I want to talk about what I think the most important factor to a solid, lasting, and affective community is. And that is our own *personal* relationship with the Lord.

John 17:20-23 (Read) One of the great community scriptures in the Bible

- This underscores the need to have our relationship with Father right.
- It takes oneness with God to have oneness with each other.
- It is out of our relationship with HIM that we find our identity, our worth, our life purpose, our security, etc.
  - If we look to our horizontal people relationships for these things, we will be disappointed in *them*.
  - We will even get offended with them for not meeting our needs.
  - We CAN NOT put people in the place of God.
  - This is NOT conducive to community.

Our vertical relationship is the key to our horizontal relationships.

- Look at 1 John 4:7-21 (Read) "We love, because He first loved us."
  - The love of God is the foundation of our faith.
  - The love of God also makes it possible to have relationships with one another.
  - Without God's love we wouldn't know how to love each other.
  - Too often, we rely more on people than God for our worth and then we end up disappointed in both.
- Brennan Manning in *The Rabbi's Heartbeat*, referring to verse 16: "Being the beloved is our identity, and the core of our existence."
  - He also says: "Define yourself *radically* as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is an illusion."
  - Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

- Our identity (who we are) is not found in what we perceive people think about us. Or even what they *really do* think about us. (No matter who it is—spouse, authority, friends)
- Our identity is not found in what we do. (Our career, our serving, our being sinless and perfect)
- **We are His beloved!**
- If we get this straight, then and only then, will God use us in a radical way to serve His purposes.

Let's be those who look to Father God for our fulfillment in life, for our self-worth, for our life purpose, for our security, and for our identity.

Then we will build a covenant community that will stand the trials and tests that inevitably come, and we will be faithful to serve God's purposes for us here.