

The Stumbling Dance of the Church

Community--part 2

January 11, 2015

We exist to enjoy and share the message of God with everyone.

DAY 1: Do we really need church?

1. To enjoy the trinitarian relationships in "Community #1" is one thing. God is perfect, and loves perfectly. But to enjoy relationships in the church, "community #2," is a far different thing. None of us is perfect, not by a looooooong shot. Though saved, our self-centeredness can still "drive" us in relationships without us even knowing it! Messes follow. The Trinity may dance perfectly, but I stumble and step on a lot of toes when I try to dance.

2. Over the last fifteen years there has been a movement away from being part of a church. There are plenty of terrible assumptions about church life that torpedo many a well-meaning Christian. Place a check next to any of the ones you've dealt with:

I really don't need anyone else to grow as a Christian.

I don't have to go to church to worship God.

I'm just not getting anything out of church.

I just don't like the music.

I don't feel close to God during worship.

Does anybody here really know me?

Does anybody here really care about me?

3. What strikes you about that list? What do each of those items have in common?

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

4. The writer of Hebrews pushes us away from self-centered thinking about church life. Instead, he challenges not only our self-centered thinking about "church" but give us a vision for how we should even approach "church."

a. Underline the three things the writer challenges us to do when we're with God's people.

b. He also identifies the very problem churches have today--people being "in the habit" of "giving up meeting together."

c. How does the writer challenge you to think about church and your role in it?

DAY 2: A church that hungers for truth that sets self-centered people free

I DESIRE TO BE A PART OF A CHURCH THAT TEACHES TRUTH TO SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE, THAT SLOWLY SETS THEM FREE.

1. A church is more what we aspire to be than what we already are. What kind of church do we aspire to be, given our sin nature that still battles within us? We'll look at four things this week.
2. Most people (a) expect "church" to be a finished product (people who have something going good with God), but (b) decry the very idea of people thinking they've got something good going on with God that others don't.
3. Rather than church being a "finished product" we're more like a "work in progress."

4. We aspire to be a church that hungers for truth that sets self-centered people free.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

5. The easy part: we can agree that we need biblical truth.

The hard part: how does truth set people free?

6. Many believers think a verse-by-verse sermon is the "biblical" model of preaching. The irony is that the verse-by-verse method is rarely used by any Old Testament prophet, Paul, Peter, or even Jesus. The overwhelming number of examples is what some Christians decry as "topical" messages, with the assumption that a "topical" message is not the same as a "biblical" message. The closest Jesus came to a "verse-by-verse" model was the Sermon on the Mount. The irony here is that his sermon covered dozens of "topics" all in one sermon.

7. A study of HOW the prophets, apostles and Jesus taught would be in order. They used three categories of teaching. For each category, think how you would need each kind of truth:

- a. Truth that points to hope of what we can become in Christ especially in our battles with sin.
- b. God's truth wrapped up in God's story of life. (Most of the Old Testament, the gospels, Acts and Revelation is truth wrapped up in God's story. It is more story/narrative than systematic theology).
- c. God's truth as signposts. (Think of when you have to use biblical principles to guide you through perplexing problems).

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: A church that understands the radical surgery necessary to make me like Christ.

1. The American church culture, in general, assumes that if I just obey God's word, then everything, or almost everything will turn out peachy. A problem erupts when it seems I am obeying God and my life is anything but peachy! How am I to then think about God? The bible? Myself?

2. If my life isn't peachy, then at least I want to feel a certain way--"spiritual," "close to God," "passionate" for God, like I'm making a difference, etc. We assume that a "mountain top" experience at camp is one thing. We don't really assume that a mountain top experience will *last*, but we do wonder why, most weeks and months, I don't have anything like that in my walk with God. Do you relate to this?

3. Perhaps we're on the wrong trail! Consider this quote from John Owen, written about 350 years ago...

"I pray with all my heart that I may be weary of everything else but... communion with Him."

4. What if John Owen is on the right trail? What if growing in Christlikeness and hungering after God *requires* a growing sense of emptiness and loneliness with the things this world has to offer? Will we really *thirst* for God when other assorted "drinks" are available for our pleasure?

5. What would it be like to be part of a church that thought that way? I'm afraid we have dramatically minimized our sinful nature in all its many forms.

I WANT TO BE PART OF A CHURCH THAT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE GARGANTUAN EFFORT GOD UNDERTAKES TO GET ME TO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR HIM MORE THAN ANYTHING OR ANYONE ELSE.

6. I want to be part of a church true to its real theology regarding sin and growing in Christ. Underline any parts of the five theological truths below, with which you identify:

a. I am born with an addiction to pleasure. I will live to feel better as highest priority, every day. Saying "no" to pleasure is the last thing I *naturally* want to do. I cannot change this on my own.

b. The more I'm addicted to feeling better now, the less I'll be driven to hunger and thirst for God as the primary motivation in my life. I'd *naturally* rather feel better now.

c. On occasion, God "hides" Himself from me. He leaves me feeling empty and/or lonely. Why? To deepen my hunger for Him, and thirst for Him as I thirst for nothing else.

d. When I feel confused about life, it becomes God's opportunity to draw me to Himself in humble trust. I naturally hate both humility and trusting anyone other than myself.

e. I shouldn't be surprised by my bad moods. They reveal the raw material of my heart that still needs changing. I am naturally "entitled," "deserving," etc. I'm a mess; only God can change me.

7. Which of the above hit you the most? Talk to God about the one you chose.

DAY 4: A church where relationships matter

1. The real world of church is too often the real world of the real world. For instance:
 - a. It's much easier to serve the world than it is to serve together.
 - b. It's much easier to be kingdom minded than get along with our fellow kingdom citizens.
 - c. It's much easier to attend a bible study than to share what's really going on inside of me with at least one other person.
 - d. It's much easier to sing worship songs than participate together on a worship team.

2. It's one thing to agree that we are sinners by nature. It is quite another to agree to any specifics when confronted with my self-centeredness, or to even be willing to take a look at my self-centeredness.

I WANT TO BE A PART OF A CHURCH WHERE THIS IS NOT SURPRISING. I EXPECT TO SEE MY SELF-CENTEREDNESS SURFACE AND WANT TO BE BROKEN BY IT.

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

3. This is a prayer of Jesus that we looked at last week.

4. A certain kind of community will have a certain kind of missional impact.
 - a. What is the "certain kind of community" Jesus describes in John 17:23?

 - b. What is the missional impact we should expect?

5. In our American culture, I am astounded at the kinds of relational issues that become "deal-breakers" whether it be in a marriage, at work, with extended family, or even at church.
6. In church life, the following kinds of things happen:
 - a. Hurt feelings,
 - b. Misunderstandings,
 - c. Miscommunications,
 - d. Wrongly held assumptions,
 - e. Misunderstood motives,
 - f. Drawing the worst of conclusions about why someone did something or said something.
7. In church life, are these "deal-breakers" or opportunities for brokenness where deepening intimacy can occur?

DAY 5: A church focused on God's big story, while appreciating the little things we can do

*Matthew 28:19 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Mark 9:41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

1. These verses provide the "scope" of what it means to be involved in missions.

2. In Matthew 28, we find the big picture!
 - a. What are we supposed to be "making" in Matt. 28:19?

 - b. Where should this be taking place?

 - c. What activities are involved in Matt. 28:19-20?

3. In Mark 9:41 Jesus puts the cookies on the bottom shelf. Being "missional" can involve what seems like the smallest of tasks, a small favor.

4. You might think, but couldn't anyone give someone a cup of cold water? Certainly. But Jesus adds two elements that a non-Christian cannot pull off as he gives a cup of cold water. What are they?

5. What would it mean for you to do this? Put the following items in your own words.
 - a. Give a cup of cold water *in Jesus' name*.

 - b. "...because you belong to Christ..."

I WANT TO BELONG TO A CHURCH THAT IS FOCUSED ON GOD'S GREAT BIG STORY, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME BE ENGAGED AT ANY LEVEL, NO MATTER HOW SEEMINGLY SMALL, KNOWING EVEN THAT CAN ADVANCE HIS STORY.

6. Do you have God's big story in mind? (Matt. 28:19-20)

7. Are you looking for ways to make a difference in the seemingly "small" ways during your day?