

Ephesians

Week Eight: Biblical Community A Recipe for Authentic Spiritual Growth

Problem & Solution: (for leaders)

**We tend to move away from other people or convince ourselves we're doing fine with God on our own. We act like our walk with God is personal and thus we're not convinced we truly need others, or we think they aren't worth it. This perspective results in hyper-individualism and disunity. We do not give or receive spiritual gifts to others in the church. – We can only become who God has called us to be through significant involvement in the lives of other believers. If we are to live a life worthy of the gospel and attaining fullness of Christ, it's to be in community--united with others.*

Introduction:

Who has had the greatest impact on your life? Why was their influence so important?

or

Agree/Disagree: Your walk with God is dependent upon others. Why?

[Note that this can be answered either way depending on the explanation. See note "Community: Privilege or Prerequisite" in the Going Deeper section.]

The Biblical Text:

Ephesians 4:1-16

Paul's Prayer to the Father

**Paul has just finished describing all God has done for us in c1-3. How does he exhort us to respond to what God has done for us in v.1? [The central idea is "living worthy of our calling." "Calling" sums up all Paul has said in the first half of the letter about our new life in Christ. He is exhorting us to live in a manner that reflects our new identity in Christ.]*

**According to vv.2-6, how are we to "walk worthy of our calling"? [vv.2-3 describe how we are to walk worthy: being humble/gentle, being patient, bearing in love and protecting unity. Notice that all these commands are relational. The very first area Paul discusses is how they relate to other believers.]*

**Why do you think that Paul starts by addressing our relationships with others? What implications does that have for what Paul means by "walking worthy"? What does that suggest about the role of Christian community for our spiritual growth? [Christian community plays a foundational role in our spiritual growth. Let them wrestle with this, however; don't give them the answer. They will see it as you continue to move through the passage.]*

Conclusion:

If we were to ask Paul, "Why is Christian community so important for our spiritual growth?" what would he say? Summary statement: *You cannot become the person God called has called you to be apart from significant involvement in the lives of other believers. Other believers cannot become who God has called them to be apart from your involvement in their lives. Therefore, we must protect Christian unity and use our gifts to build the body of Christ.

**What would it look like for you to live out Christian community in the way Paul describes? What might change in your life?*

G o i n g D e e p e r

Structural Note: The Transition of Ephesians 4:

*Ephesians is divided into two sections (c1-3 and c4-6). In the first section, Paul describes what God has done for us for us in Christ. We should have experienced God's wrath, but instead God extended his love. We should have remained dead but God made us alive. We should have remained separate but instead God gave us every spiritual blessing in Christ. In the second half of Ephesians (c4-6), Paul describes what it looks like to live our lives in light of all that God has done for us. Our passage introduces this part of the book. In 4:1-16 Paul outlines a process by which we move to maturity in Christ.

Additional Discussion Questions

*Paul invites us to know and experience Christ more deeply through significant involvement in the lives of other believers. What heart attitudes or sin tendencies in your life produce resistance to embracing other believers, thereby missing out on Christ's provision for your spiritual growth?

*How does it feel to know that the risen Christ has uniquely gifted you to contribute to the growth of others? How do you think God might want to use you in the lives of others to help them move toward maturity in Christ?

Community: Privilege or Prerequisite?

*Is community a necessity for the Christian or simply a privilege that some have and some do not? Is our growth dependent upon others?

There is a sense in which community is an essential part of a Christian's life and growth. Community is essential in that it allows you to experience and manifest the love of God in the gospel. Every Christian is saved, not just individually, but into a community--the church. However, our growth is not dependent on others in the sense that it is dependent on their actions. Rather, our growth is dependent upon God and his gracious provision in our lives. That gracious provision, however, often comes in the forms of relationship and community. There are exceptions to this call to community (the missionary couple on the mission frontier), but you're probably not one of them.

Developing Authenticity instead of Pretension in Community

*One of the most critical components of healthy biblical community is authenticity. Authenticity stands in opposition to pretension, which is more concerned with looking good than being honest. Authenticity means more than simply a willingness to acknowledge oneself a sinner or share basic updates regarding life. It means sharing the parts of your heart, your mind, your life, that you'd probably prefer remain hidden. It means being vulnerable, opening yourself to judgment and condemnation.

How?

Consider spending time as a group describing what you're most afraid of. Perhaps share something that your ashamed of or afraid people will judge you for. As with all such activities, your group will only open up to the degree that you as the leader display a willingness to be vulnerable. Remember, you're supposed to be the one who has it all together--and if you don't, others might feel free to open up.

Ministering Out of Your Giftings

*One of the specific applications of this passage comes from discerning your giftings to know how you might best serve the church. Verses 12-13 give some examples of the types of spiritual gifts given to believers. Sometimes we can be tempted to believe that what defines "doing ministry" is something so narrow as leading a Bible study or sharing our faith. There are certain responsibilities that extend to all believers. However, there are also amazing ways in which God has gifted each believer uniquely to serve the body of Christ. We are called to discern those gifts and utilize them to serve others so as to build up the church. We are a body with many parts, but one head--Christ Jesus.