

I Have A Dream - Community Life

REVIEW: So up to this point in the series we have looked at the basis for our community life with each other. We have seen the need for being in community with each other. The Christian life is not a one man show, no matter how much the culture of Christianity has made it seem as if it is. The Christian life was meant to be lived out with each other - the good the bad and the ugly.

TRAN: But just because we are beginning to see the need to live out life together, does not mean that we have a clear picture of what that would look like. So today is dreaming day. The series is called "I Have A Dream" and this is what we need to do - dream of what that life would look like.

INTRO: So what I want to do today is take you on a tour of what small groups, or in our case Life Groups can be. To do so, I want to start by what those groups are often like.

QUOTE: *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* p. 98

TRAN: Sadly, this has been the experience of many people in life groups. Either this, or life group is just an obligatory experience that seems dry, and does not energize with the life we would like to experience. But what would happen if we re-imagined what these groups were like? Even re-imagining what the purpose of the groups actually are?

I. The purpose of Life Groups

A. If I were to ask people what the purpose of a life group was, you are liable to hear many different answers

1. Perhaps the classic purpose given for life groups is fellowship

a) Fellowship is not a bad thing at all

b) In fact, it is very good - we could use more of it, and of a stronger variety than discussions of the Tigers and sharing health related prayer requests

c) But when we view fellowship as the goal or purpose of a life group, we are inadvertently elevating people over God

d) So what is fellowship?

(1) It is a by-product of the life group

(2) It is like the fruit produced by the group - but it should never be confused with the goal of the group

2. Another reason often cited for a life group is stated in various ways

a) To close the backdoor of the church

b) To retain people in church by making church feel smaller

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- c) Again, we run into the same problem with this as the goal of a life group
 - (1) We wind up communicating that growing the church is the goal
 - (2) We are more interested in growing our church than advancing God's kingdom
 - (3) We lift up church, rather than Jesus
- d) Is retaining people a bad thing - certainly not
 - (1) But it is a by-product of the real purpose
 - (2) It cannot be the goal

B. The real purpose of life groups is to glorify God

1. Community really is a gift from God to display His glory in the fact that we are able to show God's grace as we live life together
2. When we lift up the fruit of ministry (fellowship, retaining people) above the purpose of glorifying God, we turn the fruit into an idol
 - a) The fruit then becomes our focus
 - b) We take our eyes off of God
 - c) And we settle for something far less than what God designed it to be
3. We are like the C.S. Lewis quote, "We are far too easily pleased"
 - a) When we settle for the blessings of God as the goal
 - b) We miss out on the true goal - God Himself
 - c) Humanity has a long sad history of exchanging God for something less than God - even if it is a blessing from God

C. So if community is about receiving this grace of God, and displaying His image to those around us, it can be said that community helps us to develop into disciples

II. How we develop as disciples in community

A. We are image bearers of Christ

1. This is who we are - please do not confuse that with what we do
2. It means, as bearers of the image of God we have value (as does every person because we all bear the image of God)
 - a) As image bearers that have entered a right relationship with God we are to glorify God
 - b) The ways we express and glorify God are through worshiping God, community with the body of Christ, and mission to the world

B. We find our identity in Christ

1. We define ourselves differently after we have received Christ - the same way God does
2. We are defined by what Jesus did for us on the cross
 - a) The sins that characterized our life no longer define us
 - b) We are not even defined by what we do now

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(1) Be that our job, our who we identify ourselves to be

(2) Or even the sin we struggle with today

c) Christ died to redeem us, and make us His own

d) We are characterized by His death and shed blood

(1) When God looks at us, He sees Christ

(2) Because Christ imputed (traded us our sin for His righteousness)
His righteousness to us

(3) That is what God sees when He looks at us

3. As a community this means Jesus is our King and Savior, the Bible is our authority, and the Trinity is our example of how we live in community with one another

C. We worship

1. Humanity was created to worship

a) We all worship something

b) We that have our identity in Christ understand that we were created to worship God

2. Our greatest joy comes when we are doing what God created us to do: worship Him

3. As we do this in community, it means we worship together, and encourage one another to proclaim the excellencies of Christ

4. The community group itself is a testament to Jesus Christ and His ability to save us

a) So the very fact the group exists is an act of worship to Christ

D. We build community

1. Seems like a no brainer for a life group

2. We have talked about how the Trinity is our model for community

a) God is a relational being

b) He created us as relational beings

3. As a community group this means preaching the gospel by our very lives together

a) We love one another

b) We forgive one another as Christ forgave us

c) We call one another to confession and repentance

d) We seek reconciliation rather than the awkward specter of silence

e) We challenge one another to be living our whole life for God's glory

E. We are on mission together

1. When we become followers of Christ, we become missionaries

a) Maybe not to foreign lands

b) But we are sent with the glorious message of Christ to the world

2. We follow the example of God Himself

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- a) God sent His Son on a mission to redeem humanity
 - b) We have taken part in that mission, and are invited, encouraged, and have the privilege to join Christ on His mission
 - 3. God is in the business of gathering more worshippers to Himself
 - a) As His disciples our job is to proclaim the gospel so more people would come to a saving faith in Him
 - b) And thereby join in worshipping Him, and bringing Him glory
 - 4. So in life groups we are called to live with God's mission in mind
 - a) Not just for our brothers and sisters in Christ
 - b) But also engaging and loving our neighbors
- III. So how do we want to respond in our church
- A. We have looked at where our model of living in relational community comes from
 - B. We have looked at how that relationship should affect us as believers
 - 1. Pushing us on toward confession, and repentance
 - C. What would it look like for us as a church to seek community with one another?
 - 1. Before we answer that we need to make sure we establish what ministries are for
 - 2. Church on Sunday morning is really designed for the preaching of truth and conviction that comes by way of the Holy Spirit when we encounter truth
 - a) So we hear God's Word preached by a devilishly good looking preacher on Sunday morning
 - b) As we open our hearts to God, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin
 - (1) This could be a way we failed someone in a relationship by our attitude or our actions
 - (2) This could be not doing something we know God has called us to do
 - (3) This could be overtly denying God's will and doing things we know we should not
 - (4) Whatever it is, the Holy Spirit begins to move in our hearts
 - c) That is what Sunday morning is for, and how it is limited in use
 - 3. A life group is for the purpose of confession and repentance
 - a) When we have experienced conviction from the Holy Spirit over sin in our life on a Sunday morning, we really need to deal with that sin
 - (1) Too often we allow ourselves to experience conviction but we try to deal with it alone
 - (2) This is why we established in the last few weeks that we need a place where we cannot hide - a smaller group that we can talk to

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- b) Our life group gives us a place for confession and repentance
 - (1) Repentance is an active thing
 - (a) The word means to turn around
 - (b) That is an action
 - (c) Repentance by nature requires it to be lived out
 - (2) So the way we can live that out is in community with other believers
 - c) A life group gives us the place where we can deal with what God is doing in our hearts and lives
 - (1) Our brothers and sisters can lovingly care for us, pray for us, and even question us more deeply
- D. Keeping in mind that how we meet these needs are matters of ministry choice, here is the direction I want to see us as a church move in
- 1. Obviously I want to see us start up a life group ministry
 - a) The biblical reasons why should be obvious by now, but allow me to give you some practical reasons
 - (1) As a church, we have always been good at having a strong Sunday ministry
 - (a) Unfortunately that leaves the rest of the week empty of interaction with our brothers and sisters
 - (b) It means that we have had the truth and conviction end of the scale covered, but never covered or made plans for confession and repentance
 - (c) A life group ministry now begins to build that in - which is the starting blocks for discipling
 - (2) Life groups not only meet the need for confession and repentance, it allows for other ministries to be taken care of as well
 - (a) The groups build community (or a stronger family of Christ)
 - (b) The groups help with pastoral care
 - i) The fact is that I am not able to go one on one and help each of you in conviction, confession and repentance, or growing personally in Christ
 - ii) This is a similar problem that Moses faced in the OT in trying to deal with all of Israel's problems by himself
 - (1) His wise father-in-law, Jethro, told him he needed to trust the work to others in groups of various size
 - (2) Moses was wearing himself out
 - iii) While I won't say I feel worn out, to really accomplish the responsibility that God gave me of presenting everyone

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mature in Christ, a structure that involves you ministering to one another has to be put in place

(1) And BTW, ministering to “one another” is overwhelmingly biblical

(2) I dare you to go look up all of the “one anothers” in the NT

(c) The groups help with the mission of Christ

i) “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” - Luke 19:10

ii) That was Christ’s mission - to seek and save the lost

iii) When a group is glorifying Christ by loving, forgiving, truth telling, and serving we join Christ on His mission to seek and save the lost

2. So let me give you a snapshot of what these groups could look like

a) Because the groups are well suited for confession and repentance I envision them as following the sermon series

(1) Questions for discussion will be written up to help the group apply the sermon to life and seek where God may be pressing on people’s hearts

(2) This gives the group a structure that compliments the sermon and what the whole church is learning

(3) This is a ministry that I would love to have someone step forward to take on - the task of writing the questions for discussion for the life groups

b) I envision the groups to grow together to the point they truly enjoy being with each other

(1) If you have ever studied how a relationship works you know that relationships ebb and flow

(a) By that I mean you have times of deep, meaningful conversation

i) You do not live in that time period however

ii) You do not only have deep meaningful conversations

(b) You also have times of casual conversation where you are just shooting the breeze

(c) You have times of just having fun together

(d) You have times of silence - and that does not mean something is wrong

(e) The point is, you relate on many levels and in many ways

(2) Translate that to a life group, you should not just have times of deep conversation over what the sermon was

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- (a) You should also just shoot the breeze
 - (b) Or enjoy a meal together
 - (c) Or just hang out and have fun
 - (d) It really means you learn to do life together
- c) I also envision groups that will seek to serve the community around them
- (1) The groups will know their neighbors
 - (2) They will learn needs in the neighborhood
 - (3) They will look for ways to serve people around them, and even invite and include them in their community group
3. I can hear some people already thinking, "Gee Pastor, that sounds like a lot of time to commit to."
- a) My answer, "Yes, yes it is."
- (1) But being involved in the mission of Christ to seek and save the lost is a high calling
 - (2) We have already talked about giving God our first fruits
 - (3) But more than that, I envision the groups to be a place where you grow together and you desire to be together
 - (a) Ever fallen in with a group of people that you love to spend time with?
 - (b) I promise you, if you didn't understand that before you were a parent, you understand it after you are a parent - you love your kids and want to spend as much time as possible with them
- b) That is the way the youth ministry of this church has become
- (1) It does not matter if they are having a deep conversation, or hanging out, or serving the church or the community
 - (2) The kids love to be together - and, like a parent, I love to be with them
 - (3) They love to be together so much that I have to make them go home
 - (a) I can't hardly kick them out
 - (b) In fact, there have been nights where they want to hang out later so I have had to break my rule and leave them there - I count out and make sure everyone has a ride and then the old guy goes home
 - (c) I want you to understand this, so I have asked one of the kids to come and give a brief testimony as to why they enjoy being with the group so much - Drita Martini
- c) So is this a time commitment - yes
- (1) Is it worth finding the time to make it work?

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(2) Absolutely!

IV. Where do we go from here?

A. Our goal is to have a life group leaders training

1. We want especially the leaders of life groups to feel equipped for their task

B. Today, we have sign up sheets in your bulletin which are simple

1. You are signing up to be in a group

2. After you turn in your form, you will be contacted by a group leader about being in a life group

3. And what this step involves are a few things

a) It involves commitment

(1) That is the dirty word for a modern age

(2) But if we are to take seriously our faith, we must make Christ central to all we do

b) It also involves a change of mindset that you are ministers for Christ

(1) You have been given everything you need for godly life through Christ

(2) That means you're brothers and sisters in Christ and that you can engage in pastoral care, and discipling and the mission of Christ

(3) If we do not see ourselves called by God for this (which we all are) and capable (which God does not call the qualified, he qualifies the called), we run the risk of stagnation in our walk with Christ

C. To me, this is an exciting time

1. A time to see our church arise in a way that we never have before

2. We have changed our paradigm in the past

3. We have risen to the occasion in new ministries in the community Sundays

a) To the point that we have been asked to be involved in projects - which means we are seeing fruit from our efforts

4. What I am asking you to do in the vain of making Christ central in your schedule is to step out in faith once again as we seek to shift the paradigm

a) One thing I can promise you is that as we adjust to a new paradigm things will get messy

(1) We will have to learn as we go through some of this

b) But as I have learned from the process of planning Baccalaureate over the years, sooner or later you get it down to a science

(1) Dale Rinke and I have looked at each other the last three or so years and said, "It can't be this easy. We're missing something."

(2) But all the years of learning from things has helped us get things right

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c) The same will be true here

(1) It may get a little messy as we work through new areas of ministry

(2) But as we learn and grow together, we will grow, become stronger,
and get things to a place where they honor God in all we do