

The Transformation Series: “It Takes a Village”

Selected Text, Preached at Harambee Church by Pastor Mike Gunn on October 21st, 2007

“Rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with those that weep. Be of the same mind toward one another, do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”

Romans 12:15-16

Intro

In the first week we saw that transformation doesn't come from changing our circumstances and behaviors; it comes from a change of the heart, and that we need to see our lives as being transformed by God through our circumstances. Last week we took a look at our identity, and the benefits of being “Married” to Christ. We also saw that our relationship to Christ is like a marriage, and that infidelity will hurt the relationship. It is imperative that we see ourselves in Christ as His bride who is pure and righteous because of our relationship to Him. It's the same thing that happens when a person marries into money, who previously wasn't wealthy. Overnight, the person becomes wealthy, and can enjoy the benefits of that wealth.

Today we are taking a look at how God has saved us into a community called the church, or the “Body of Christ,” and more importantly what the benefits of that community is for your transformation process. While the west is becoming more and more individualistic, people are becoming more and more fragmented, and lonely. We are literally lonely in a sea of humanity. Why is this so? Why do I feel disconnected to others? What's wrong with me? There a few things that we need to understand about community. **First**, “*God's work of personal transformation is intended to take place within a community of God's people.*”¹ **Secondly**, We “*Need to be committed to as lifestyle of mutually helpful relationships,*”² and **lastly**, we need to “*Help others pursue relationships that promote biblical growth and change.*”³ We see this clearly in Paul's writing, and also in **Hebrews 10:24-25**. Many of us struggle because we are not involved in the church as a family. We view church in a utilitarian way, and do not see it as a lifestyle that promotes the values and mission of the group by belonging to its head (Jesus Christ) and being an active part in the body. Tripp and Lane write, “*Many believers latch onto the hope of personal change while clinging to the individualism of our society. They have a ‘Jesus and me’ mentality as they battle sin and seek to become more like Christ.*”⁴ The fact is, Christ created the church so that in a committed family, the group would grow spiritually and numerically. Before we get started let's remember the 5 gospel perspectives that guide this study, and then launch into what it means to be a community that cares about personal growth.

5 Gospel perspectives

1. Our sin is worse than we can imagine, but God's grace is greater than our sin!
2. God is concerned about transformation at the heart level, not the behavior level.
3. We should benefit from our relationship with Christ here and now, and in eternity.
4. God calls us to grow and change.
5. Our Christian life is a lifestyle of Repentance and Faith

From the Head...

All too often we approach our faith with a western, individualistic mindset. So we interpret passage to mean that they are to be carried out be me, and me alone. Passages like Ephesians 6:10ff tell us to put on the “Full armor of God,” so we think this means that we are to do this separate of the body of Christ, but in reality a good Roman soldier would have put on the armor to battle closely with a group of men, never by himself. But God's plan is that we “Change” together. It is in the messiness of relationship and context with one another that we can work out our salvation with “*fear and trembling*” (See **Philippians 2:12**).

God Lives in Community

(Ephesians 4:4-6)

If we are going to be more like Christ (Which we have seen is God's goal for us), then we too must learn to live in community. It is living in community that we are truly human. The body of Christ, along with marriage is mirrors to who God is. We are created with personality and the need for community because God Himself lives in perfect, loving community. Whereas eastern thinking blurs the lines between the individual (Collectivism), and the western thought champions' distinctions (Individualism), the church

¹ Workbook; 3.2

² IBID

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

champions the many as one (Unity). It is by working in dirtiness and inconvenience of community that we can truly love one another, and help one another.

Belonging in Community

(Ephesians 2:14-22; 5:29-30)

God has “*destroyed the barrier,*” and He does that so we can be “*Built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives.*” We are made “*Members of His body.*” Clearly we are created to live in community, and clearly God has designed the church to be the community we are called to. This is why it is imperative for the church to be on mission; otherwise (As is the case in many church situations) you grow in fellowship, but do not reach out and serve the culture. It is impossible to see our own issues unless it is done in the messiness of a close community. The problem is that’s when people usually leave the community or the church, which hinders their growth, and the growth of the people around them. We need the messiness so we can identify the rough edges in ourselves.

Being Loved in Community

(Ephesians 3:14-21)

Paul’s prayer is that we’d be, “*Strengthened with power*” (v. 16), that “*Christ may dwell in your hearts*” (v. 17), and that we’d “*Comprehend with all the saints*” (v. 18), and to “*Know the Love of Christ*” (v. 19). It literally “*Takes a village*” of common minded believers to help us fully comprehend love, and its depths. We have allusions to what love is, and we don’t know its depths. We are afraid to speak the truth in love, because we know that people do not want to hear the truth, or know love in that way. It is when we see, experience, and finally love someone else that we begin to understand its depths, and God’s love for us. This can only happen in a loving community that is striving to love God and love others.

Being Purified in Community

(Titus 2:11-14)

In this passage we are saved in order to, to deny ungodliness, live sensibly, righteously and godly, looking for the blessed hope found in Christ’s coming, because He has redeemed us as a “*People for His own possession...*” It is hard to escape the idea that when Christ saved us, He saved us to benefit here on earth, in a community that He has created; His body, the church! We can’t be married to Christ, and hate His family. We are best loved, nurtured, grown, taught, admonished, exhorted and trained in the body of Christ who loves God, and loves people.

...to the Heart

According to Romans 12, we were to “*Rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with those that weep*” and we are to be of the “*same mind toward one another.*” As a family, we ought to hurt when those around us hurt, and be filled with joy, when those around us are filled with joy. When we are struggling with our sins, it is the family of God who can come around that person and help them grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus and His great love for us. Galatians 6 commands us to “**Bear one another’s burdens,**” which means that as we are strong in an area, we need to be part of a body in order to use that strength to God’s glory.

We are not calling people to programs in the church, we are calling people to live in such a proximity to one another that they are able to use their gifts to encourage and spur on the body of Christ. So remember three things:

1. God’s work of personal transformation is intended to take place within a community of God’s people.
2. We “Need to be committed to as lifestyle of mutually helpful relationships,
3. We need to “Help others pursue relationships that promote biblical growth and change.

Books for further study: Most of this material is taken from “How People Change” and “Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands” by Paul Tripp and Tim Lane, as well as their accompanying workbooks

Next Weeks Verses: 1 Corinthians 10:1-14

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