



lyona bible church

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS – FEBRUARY 7, 2010

Announcements – Please read these to your group!

Please check your bulletin and the website (www.lyona.org) each week for additional information.

- **Join a Life Group:** Our Life Groups are a place of accountability, belonging, and care. We have made it easy for anyone and any couple to join a Life Group. Sunday January 10 marked the date that our current Life Groups will open to new families for 4 weeks. After the 4 weeks, groups will be “closed” for 5 months.

Marks of a Healthy Church: Biblical Community, Part 5 (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Questions

1. What was the most interesting idea or principle about this Sunday’s message?
2. As the speaker talked about his experience with community, what are your experiences with community? Has community been a consistent thing in your life? Why or why not?
3. As the speaker introduced the idea of image management, how is social networking so popular? Why do we portray ourselves differently than we really are?
4. Have someone read Acts 2:42-47. Our relationship with God is to be personal not private. Why do believers have a tendency to keep our relationship with God personal and private? Is this “God-intended” biblical community?
5. Have someone read Hebrews 10:24-25. Why was and is it so important not to neglect meeting together for biblical community? Does experiencing community require us pursuing it? What does it look like to pursue community?
6. Do you, after hearing the sermon this Sunday, need to confess anything or repent of anything? What in your life needs to change?
7. 7 Pastoral Prayers:
 - We would see that the greatest problem in the universe is not moral failure but failure to glorify God.
 - We would see that we live under mercy and not under God’s wrath.
 - We would recognize that God has purposefully placed us here for His glory.
 - We would wholly abandon ourselves to Christ and the Gospel (not to American Evangelicalism).
 - We would become an equipping body not an inward focused family.
 - We would seek unity under our purpose/mission and not preferences.
 - We would believe in the gifts of the Spirit and desire them earnestly.

Spend time together to pray through these prayers together. Imagine the impact that our church could have on our community if we would commit to pray these prayers over the remainder of the series.

Prayer Requests

A place to write out your groups’ prayer requests

SERMON NOTES

MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH, *Biblical Community*, Part 5

© Jeff Geyer, 2009-2010

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago and unbeknownst to us, Jenny and I were involved in a small group. Even though it was accidental it was intentional. At the time, I was serving as an associate pastor in a Baptist church. There was no small group ministry at this church. Adult education happened in the context of ABF (Adult Bible Fellowships—just a new way to say Sunday School). Since I was teaching the Sr. High students during the ABF hour, we were unable to be involved in any ABF. Since Jenny was my wife, it was expected of her to be with me as I taught the Sr. High students. So we both felt that our needs were not being met. It's like no one was tracking with us as a couple.

I shared this frustration with one of the guys serving with me in the youth ministry. Ironically, he felt that he and his wife had to be someone that they weren't. They felt that they were part of fake and surface relationships. They still felt that their needs were not being met. So we would intentionally begin to meet weekly without any time restrictions. We would eat together, confess and pray together. Then other times we would just do life together—yard sales, holidays, etc. This was something that was never done before in our lives as couples.

There was no image management going on when we would meet. We would be ourselves. We didn't hide our problems in our marriage, questions about finances, and thoughts about life. There was a loving accountability happening, something we both had never experienced before. During those many months meeting together, we laughed together and cried together. We rejoiced when after months of infertility, they had a baby boy, who is actually our godchild. We prayed through difficult life-changing decisions like moving to Dallas without any income or promised income.

We learned that it was hard work to have community but we learned that we will have exactly as much community as we work to create. We felt that it was our responsibility to be in community. Looking back it was a time of comfort and warmth and struggling and stretching. As of today, we are still very close to this couple. We still see each other at holidays and talk regularly on the phone for small talk and accountability.

As I was writing out this message, I thought back to the things that I heard in the line of churches that I grew up and served in. It was popular to teach that our relationship with Christ was meant to be personal and private. But that's half right. This myth does two things: first, the Sunday morning experience is biblical community; and second, it promotes image management. The truth is that our relationship with Christ is personal but was not intended to be private.

There is a danger in thinking that a Sunday morning experience is biblical community. That by coming to church and hanging around a bit afterwards can be community. Or that community is giving people a bulletin with a smile. In all reality the Sunday morning experience has very little to do with community and everything to do with communicating Truth. Sure there is coffee and donuts with small talk before and after ABF and worship, but it is surface level.

When new believers begin to do the Christian life by themselves, they will have a tendency to drop out. There is a high turn over rate for Christians. It's not that they have or had a problem with God it's because they choose to journey with Christ by themselves. Our journey with Christ was and is intended to be done together with other believers. We see it all the time.

When we think that our relationship with Christ is personal and private, we begin to ask ourselves this question a lot: *What will they think of me?* This question has image management written all over it. Even though we don't have a problem with being *known for something*, we fight against being *known by someone*. Whether you've been hurt in a relationship in the past or you don't want to take the chance at being hurt, you begin to lie and exaggerate about who you and your family are.

You may portray yourselves at church as the happy couple but you have been constantly fighting. Words like separation and divorce are now the issues when you talk to each other. You don't allow people to know that your middle child is a prodigal and your youngest has been experimenting with drugs. You keep all of things secrets because you don't want to be known as "that couple" who allowed their kids to get away with murder.

Perhaps you're like me and made yourself look to be someone who could make amazing meals to impress your date. I told Jenny that I could cook, but what I didn't tell her was that everything I made was bland. Even though you cannot cook you wanted to do everything you could to impress him or her. You exaggerated about a job you had so that a company would hire you.

Social networking is definitely image management driven. Just because you have 8,000 "friends" does not mean that they are your friends. The reason why you have 8,000 "friends" is because you are building and managing your image. The number of friends you have is important to you because you care about what others (actually, strangers) think of you.

You portray yourself as the person who is financially stable. Yet you are running from the IRS, living paycheck to paycheck, and are drowning in a sea of debt. Additionally you may portray yourself as someone who would never be addicted to drugs and alcohol. But you find yourself having a hard time pulling yourself away from the computer while your wife and kids are sleeping in the other rooms. Whether for work or pleasure, you try to cover up your addiction so that you will never be "that guy."

Others of us are fearful of getting into a biblical community because there will be hurt. You feel that in a few short months something will happen and you will be hurt again. The last time you were in a small group you only heard gossip and slandering. So you find yourself being the person who shows up late for the service and the first one to leave so that you don't get into anyone's business and no one can get into your business. Every relationship you have is surface level because you do not want to be hurt.

We all have our reasons for not getting into biblical community and we all have our idea of what community is. But are we right? Where do we find biblical community? Let's take a look through the Scriptures to see why our relationship with Christ must not be kept private.

Let's first start with the foundation passage of this series and where we find believers growing deep in Christ together. Acts 2:42-47 is our starting point and this passage takes place during the holiday, Pentecost, which is a Jewish festival that occurs 50 days after Passover in commemoration of harvests. Jews from all over the world would come to this festival, which meant that there were many cultures/nationalities represented. This passage is the result of Peter's sermon and the salvation and baptism of 3,000 people.

⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.¹

¹ All Scripture referred in this sermon, unless otherwise noted, is taken from: The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

This group of over 3,000 (120 prior to Pentecost) devoted² themselves to several things. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.³ These believers studied and read Scripture together, hung out/did life together, ate together, celebrated Christ together, and prayed together.

What is interesting to me is that they did these things together. Anyone can study the Scripture (you can pick up a *Daily Bread* and have personal devotions) by themselves, eat by themselves, take communion by themselves, and pray by themselves. But they cannot fellowship by themselves. It is very possible that many of these disciples did this personally, but they committed to doing these things together.

Even through our Life Groups here, we are beginning to do these things. But from the context it seems that there was urgency to do these things. It was something that they pursued. In all honesty, too many of us do not involve ourselves in community because of fear and a bad experience. If that were the reason—a bad experience—for not involving myself in biblical community, I would not go back to the grocery store. I have had a horrible experience in a grocery store, but I find myself going back for whatever reason (deals, coupons, perks, etc.). We all have had bad experiences but it doesn't seem to stop us with other things (restaurants, stores, marriages, relationships, etc.). Particularly when it comes to something relationally, like marriage. When you go into that second marriage, you expect it to work and to last a lifetime by pursuing each other and the happy ending.

⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Now this verse is amazing to me. I respect all the authors and commentaries I read and use, but almost all of them took this passage as this "awe" came upon these believers because of the apostles doing miracles. It seems that this reverential fear and wonder came on these believers not only because of the miracles but also because of the biblical community that was taking place in verse 42. This unprecedented way of life for these believers was the result of people submitting to God. The miracles done by the apostles definitely can get people talking with both fear and wonder.

⁴⁴And all who believed were together⁴ and had all things in common.⁵ ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

These verses blow how we "do church" out of the water. We may have seen glimpses of this type of sacrifice. There may be a story or two like this but it rarely happens. Since many of us haven't seen this occur much, we have a hard time grasping the concept of these two verses.

We need to look through the lens first century Christianity, not 2010 American Evangelicalism. These believers are selling off their acquisitions, landed property, possessions and taking the funds and spreading it to those in need. These believers are living in a society where taxes are out of control to support a massive ruthless Roman army and to support a religion that had just plotted the execution of their Founder. Unlike 21st century America,

² The word "devoted" means to adhere firmly to something. It was much more than just a routine it was life.

³ The early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, which was the teaching of Jesus including the teachings post-resurrection. These believers would fellowship, which meant that sharing acquisitions, possessions, and material goods. Breaking bread, which included both the Lord's Supper and a larger meal, was also important to their lifestyle. Finally, prayer was vitally important to them and their relationship to each other.

⁴ It is very likely that these 3,000+ believers were "together" in groups according to languages, nations, or other associations. It would really be hard to do life together with 3,000 people. It seems that small groups was the better venue to do life "together."

⁵ There is some speculation that this community was a form of communism. However it was no way a form of communism because everything was done voluntarily and people still own possessions ("in their homes" verse 45). Communism demands abolition of personal property, acquisitions, and possessions.

it is not like these people have a lot to begin with. Their attics are not full of stuff that hasn't been touched in 20 years.

This is much different than taking \$200 out of savings to go pay for someone's utility bill. This isn't forsaking a TV for the bathroom and dealing with four already in the house and taking that money and giving to someone in need. That's not much sacrifice in the context of this passage. Even though those things are good to do, this is not what is happening in this passage. These believers are not taking out of their wealth and spreading that out to the needy. They are selling what they need, placing on the market something that will affect their comfort, safety, and lifestyle in order to meet the need of others.

I've heard the objection that these believers were expecting Christ to return with the Kingdom, so they were willing to share their resources, sell off their property and give the proceeds to those in need. So this really doesn't apply to us. Really? Christ taught us to pray for the Kingdom to come, which meant His Second Coming (Matthew 6). We should be expectant for Christ's return, which implies that we should live as those believers in Acts 2. Think about it ten to twenty years from now, most of the things you own will either be in the landfill, destroyed, or someone's treasure. So are we really pursuing the right things?

⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple⁶ together and breaking bread in their homes⁷, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This is the second time that we see the phrase "day by day" and the word "together" in this passage. It reminds us again that daily these believers were doing life together. It shows their commitment to Christ and each other. To attend the temple, these believers would walk and talk together. While at the temple, they may have prayed together and worshipped together. Then afterwards, they would have shared a meal followed by celebrating the Lord's Supper together. These believers could have chosen to do this by themselves, but it is very clear that they pursued doing life together. They were clearly motivated to grow deep in Christ together.

Let's build on this foundation by also looking at Hebrews 10:24-25. Quickly, the letter of Hebrews was written for the purpose of encouraging suffering Jewish believers, who were walking away from Christ and returning to Judaism so that the persecution would end.

²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Many of us have been taught that this passage is about church attendance and being faithful to be at church every time the doors are opened. But the author seems to be very specific with the context of the venue these believers are not to neglect. The Greek word for "meet" is *episunagoge*, which is the assembling or gathering of believers for biblical community.⁸ The author does not use the words *sunagoge*, which suggests the Jewish synagogue meetings, and *ecclesia*, which denotes the public assembly of believers or "church." These early believers would meet in homes, especially when there was persecution from Jewish and Roman forces.

The author encourages them to continue meeting together, which allows opportunity for encouragement. Due to the context of this letter, believers who were in the habit of neglecting biblical community would be on the verge of apostasy. The author believed that believers needed to meet all the more as they expected Christ's return. There was an urgency to stay committed to biblical community. A venue where there was mutual help

⁶ The early church looked like a reformed sect of Judaism, noting their daily involvement in the temple. All of the first converts were Jews.

⁷ Table fellowship denotes intimacy. Think about your kitchen for a moment. When we have company over, our most intense and intimate conversations take place at the kitchen table.

⁸ This word is only found in here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

in motivating each other to love and good works. One of the early church fathers, Ignatius, said, "When you frequently, and in numbers meet together, the powers of Satan are overthrown, and his mischief is neutralized by your like-mindedness in the faith."

Putting this idea of meeting together for biblical community requires that we see that our relationship with Christ was not intended to be private but shared together. The author explicitly implies that from this text. For these believers and for us, our relationship with Christ is a journey and needs to be taken with like-minded friends who are on the same journey. The focus of our journey together is to grow in the knowledge and faith of Christ. This results in us growing deep in Christ together through reading/studying the Scriptures together, eating together, celebrating Christ together, and praying together.

Even though small groups and biblical community are not synonymous, small groups offer an excellent venue for biblical community when done with a Hebrews 10:25 purpose. We had someone in our Life Group go to the hospital for an extended stay. As a pastor I probably would not have found out until later on in the week or when he was discharged (this normally happens), but I was e-mailed, along with all those in our group so care could take place. So I went to see this person the next morning because of the friendship and deep care for each other. After we shot the breeze for 40 minutes, we prayed together for healing and recovery. There was no image management or pretenses...it was raw biblical community.

Pursuing and committing to biblical community allows us mutual help and encourage each other to love and good works. Thus there is accountability, belonging, and care happening when believers meet together. But for some reason keeping our relationship with God is kept private even when other things in our lives are made public.

Ironically enough, every other area of our life is not kept private. It is amazing to me that people, even church people, would go on social networking sites and make private things public. Whether your settings are set to private does not change the fact that not all 8,000 "friends" actually care about you. Several weeks ago, there was a message on a social networking site for breast cancer awareness and asked girls and women to post the color of their bra. Within moments women naively posted the color of their bra. For something to be so private, it was made public to the world. For whatever reason, how does that help you become more aware for breast cancer?

But when it comes to our relationship with God we make it private. We shut everyone out. We don't want to be offended. We try to take this journey by ourselves. When there is no accountability, encouragement, love, and support, the journey will get very lonely because it was never intended to be private. Our relationship with God is to be personal but He never intended for us to go on a journey alone.

You and I don't just fall into biblical community. We just don't sign up for a small group, a women's class, or men's basketball and when we get there we immediately have community. We have to pursue biblical community. If you are lonely, you have to begin taking some steps to pursue biblical community. Maybe it starts in a Life Group, maybe it starts with getting plugged into one of our ministry teams. If it is a small group, we've made child care something more manageable with childcare reimbursement. We also made a small group available in each of our townships so that there is not a lot of traveling.

I can tell you that in my life nothing beats small group. Jenny and I meet with several other couples in a home and just do life together. We normally shoot the breeze for a good 40 minutes while eating good food. Open the Scriptures together and at times asking each other hard questions. Then we take plenty of time to pray for each other with our specific needs. When we think it is time to go home, we normally stay for another hour just talking. We'll talk about our kids, football, food, or hunting and fishing. We enjoy being around each other. We

also know that if any of us were in need everyone would drop everything to help. One thing about biblical community is that there is sacrifice on everyone's part because we all work for biblical community.

It just comes down to how much you want biblical community. Once you pursue it, you will find it because God intends for us to be in community with each other.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bromiley, Geoffrey, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008.

Carson, D.A. and Douglas Moo, eds. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Chandler, Matt. The Path: Gospel Community. The Village Church, 2009.

_____. Core Values: What is Community? The Village Church, 2008.

Enns, Paul. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. electronic version, 1989.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961.

Keener, Craig and InterVarsity Press. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

MacDonald, William. *Believer's Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990.

Pond, Gene. "BE106 Class Notes."

Radmacher, Earl, ed. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

Smith, Jason. G4: Growth. Harvest Pointe Community Church, 2008.

Stanley, Andy. Q³: Doing Life. North Point Community Church, 2007.

Swindoll, Charles and Roy Zuck, eds. *Understanding Christian Theology*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.

Walvoord, John and Roy Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1983.

Willits, Bill and Andy Stanley. *Creating Community*. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2004.

Wuest, Kenneth. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980.