

10/13/08

Reaching Across – Doing Life Together

When it comes to *reaching across*, there are certain aspects of the Christian life that are better done together. This week, consider how you might develop a stronger walk by doing life together with others. We will look at four aspects of life together: Prayer, Worship, Learning, and Fellowship. All are necessary components of a strong and vibrant walk with Christ. May God give you opportunities this week to walk this life together with others. –Pastor Mike

Day 1: Reaching Across – Looking Back

Last weekend was the Fall Conference – a time of reaching across to those in our Family of God. If you attended, or even if you didn't attend, what are ways you reached across this week, and how did it go? Did someone reach across to you last week? How did you respond?

Day 2: Praying Together

Read Philippians 1:3-8.

If you've ever prayed with others, you know that prayer is not something people merely do together, it also brings people together. Prayer is the glue that helps hold a group together. If a group did nothing else but pray together, that group would be stronger than any group that had every other aspect of community without prayer. Why is that so? Because prayer for one another is ultimately an act of great love. Look at Jesus' prayers, and you will find one of his longest to be for the disciples and even us (John 17:6-26). Nearly all of Paul's letters contain words of thanks and prayer for their respective churches. The prayers are meaningful because they are wrought in love for the glory of God.

Why is prayer a loving act? Because prayer takes someone's needs before the One who can do something about it. True prayer is not flippant ("Oh, I'll pray for you."), but a real and faith-filled response to a need. When we pray for someone, we are doing the best thing we can do.* So, when a group of people come together in prayer, love fills the place! If you've ever participated in one our House of Prayer nights, you can't help but leave with greater hope, greater unity, greater anticipation for the work of God, and greater love for one another.

To consider:

How often do you pray with others? How have you seen the "glue" of prayer when you pray with others? If you are married, how often do you pray with your spouse? If you struggle in this area, what are some ways you can improve? What are some factors that make it difficult for you to pray with others? Consider why this may be so.

*Of course, there are many times when we can both pray and act (like helping the hungry, James 2:15-17), and in those times we must do both.

Day 3: Worshiping Together

Read Luke 24:50-52 (the closing words to Luke's gospel); Acts 2:46-47.

In a bigger sense, worship is our life. But in today's passages, worship is about expressing praise and thankfulness to God. This aspect of worship was common in the early church. It centered around what God was doing. Remember that – it was all about what God was doing. These early church members were experiencing persecution, turmoil, and rejection. They experienced pain and suffering in some cases. They experienced the fear of the loss of lives – people that were important and dear to them (e.g. Stephen, Peter). And yet despite all the negative they were experiencing, they seemed to never fail to worship God. How could they worship Him despite all that was happening to them? They could worship because they knew God was working. He was doing something that made their hardship worthwhile.

And as they came together, you can imagine the stories they told. What God was doing. Not what they were doing, but what God was doing.

In our Home Group questions provided with these devotions each week, the first question is always: *How have you seen God work this week?* By focusing on the work of God, it helps a group place their focus on God and the wonderful mystery of His work. There is something that strengthens the spirit when we see God's ever-present and intervening work in people's lives. It brings hope. It brings perspective.

"Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together." (Psalm 34:3)

To consider:

How have you seen God work this week? Make some time this week to share with someone how God is working around you. And then praise him with a full and thankful heart.

Day 4: Learning Together

Read Acts 5:17-21; 25-41. (A longer passage today, but necessary to provide the full context.)

In the early church, everyone didn't have a Bible like we have today. There weren't bookstores or Amazon; there weren't even pews let alone Bibles in every pocket. There wasn't even paper! So the early church gathered (daily, v. 42) to learn from the Apostles' teaching. Today, while teaching is not limited to the local church, the importance of gathering for group learning is still important. It ensures that we are not learning things on our own that could lead us astray. Along with good books and other important publications, there is a lot out there that is simply not true. Meeting together provides much needed protection from the "wolves in sheep's clothing". Paul's closing words in 1Timothy are fitting: "...Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith." (1Tim. 6:20-21)

Personal Thoughts:

The importance of teaching and preaching are seen in the apostles' willingness to continue despite threats of imprisonment and even death. Reading through the letters of the apostles also shows a strong emphasis on the people understanding truth, and not being drawn away by false teaching. So important was this that the early church in the coming centuries created a hierarchical form of government (the Catholic Church) whose leaders became the keepers of the truth. With the Scriptures now readily available in the form of the canonized Bible, the truth is now in the hands of all. But that does not mean we no longer need others to teach us. In fact, the need may be greater since it is now readily available to misinterpret. Gathering to learn from the Scriptures is as important today as it was in the early church.

To consider:

Where do you gather with others to learn? Where did you learn what you know today about truth? Are you continuing to learn? Are you learning from those who have an accurate understanding of the Bible? How do you know?

Day 5: Fellowshiping Together

Read Isaiah 25:6-8.

A day is coming, yes, a day is coming when we will feast on the best God has to offer for all peoples. It will be a day of feasting on fine food with all of God's people in one place. I like to think we can have a little taste of that experience in a gathering of God's people... with good food, of course!

Craig shared (by accident) last Sunday that we can't have food without fellowship (he meant to say we can't have fellowship without food). But he was right in this regard: we *shouldn't* have food without fellowship. A meal forces us to slow down, and it is the perfect opportunity to share conversation with others.

Several nights ago we had a number of families at our house. The girls were in the kitchen preparing dinner, the kids were in another room playing together, and the guys... (where were the guys?) During the course of preparations, one of the girls mentioned that she liked doing this more than meeting for Home Group. Can you believe that?! Well, I was not totally surprised because when people get together to enjoy a good meal together with family and friends, it doesn't get much better than that.

That same evening I visited the Akamine's where a small group practiced a few songs for the Fall Conference. I was running a little late, but we managed to run through the songs in about 15 minutes. But instead of everyone heading home, for the next hour to hour and a half we all sat around the table snacking and gabbing about life. The music may have been why we came, but the fellowship is why we stayed. When I look at the early church, that was one of the reasons the church continued to grow (Acts 2:47).

A church that reaches across and enjoys fellowshiping together is truly a Family of God.

To consider:

How are you enjoying the fellowship of believers? When was the last time you "sat down around the table" and enjoyed the fellowship of others? Take a moment and thank God for those times and the Family He has brought you into.

Day 6: Review

Look over your notes from the past week. What one or two things did God impress upon you this week?

Home Group Questions

Week of October 13, 2008

Opening: How have you seen God work this week?

If you've ever prayed with others, you know that prayer is not something people merely do together, it also brings people together. Prayer is the glue that helps hold a group together. How often do you pray with others? How have you seen the "glue" of prayer when you pray with others? If you are married, how often do you pray with your spouse? If you struggle in this area, what are some ways you can improve? What are some factors that make it difficult for you to pray with others? Consider why this may be so.

Today, while teaching is not limited to the local church, the importance of gathering for group learning is still important. It ensures that we are not learning things on our own that could lead us astray. Where do you gather with others to learn? Where did you learn what you know today about truth? Are you continuing to learn? Are you learning from those who have an accurate understanding of the Bible? How do you know?

In Day 5's devotional, Mike relates a practice session at the Akamine's home: "The music may have been why we came, but the fellowship is why we stayed. When I look at the early church, that was one of the reasons the church continued to grow (Acts 2:47)." How important do you feel fellowshiping is to the health of a community of believers? How has it helped you in your own spiritual growth? Do you think you have ample opportunities for fellowship? If not, how can that be improved?

As you go into your prayer time, consider the following questions:

- How have you struggled this week?
- How can the others in the group help you?