

The Heartbeat of Community

Many people, if they are honest, are sad and frustrated about their inability to build and sustain friendships. They feel as though they are on the outside looking in. They fear being old and lonely and dying alone. They sometimes feel it is easier to just give up and accept being disconnected rather than longing, searching, and trying to discover and develop community. Community is built. Our loneliness can be met and filled with wonderful companionship.

Jesus said: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John 13)

Knowing and Being Known: In the hearts of most people is a longing to know others deeply and be known fully by them. We would all love it if there were some people in our lives who trusted us enough to disclose the deep and tender parts of themselves. We would love to be able to unlock some of the feelings we carry to people who really cared. We would love to share our deepest joys, needs, struggles, and victories and then to invite them to open their hearts and lives to us on the same level. Many of us move towards friendships, dating, marriage, clubs, and meetings because somewhere inside us is a yearning to know and be known by others. And yet there often seem to be some things that keep us from opening our hearts and lives on this deep level so we can be known. There are some risks, some fears, some past experiences that make us cautious.

- What risks are there to knowing and being known?
- What joys might we experience if we took the risk in a safe environment?

Loving and Being Loved: Unless we are exchanging deeply committed levels of love with a few people, we slowly die on the inside. This is precisely why so many people feel almost nothing at all. Through the whole course of their lives, they have never exchanged deep levels of love with anybody. It hasn't happened with their parents. It hasn't happened with a spouse. And sadly, it hasn't happened with friends. By this point in life they have become completely numb to the possibility that they might experience a passionate, loving relationship. This is not God's plan for us. God hungers for us to be loved and to give love to others. As a matter of fact, God wants this for us even more than we hunger for it ourselves.

- How would I finish these statements?
-- I experience love most from others when they
-- I am most comfortable expressing love by
-- It's hard to receive love from others because ...

Serving and Being Served: Community is also about serving and being served. A stirring example of serving is recorded in the Bible in John 13. Jesus takes the position of the lowest servant and washes the feet of his followers. He gives them a powerful example and then calls them to fol-

low. Servanthood is at the very core of community. To sustain deep relationships over a long period of time, there must be humility and a willingness to serve each other. There also must be a willingness to be served. When Jesus took a towel and a bowl of water and washed the feet of His followers, He established once and for all the absolute centrality of serving for all who desire to live in community.

Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

(Taken from John 13)

- How have we been served by others and how has their service helped to build community ?
- With whom would we want to move toward a deeper level of community? What act of service will we render to help develop a deeper relationship and sense of community?

Celebrating and Being Celebrated: In the Bible book called Song of Songs there is a record of a bride and bridegroom writing poetic and romantic notes to each other. They are freely celebrating every conceivable aspect of each other's personality, character, and physical characteristics. At one point the groom says, "You have made my heart beat fast with a single glance from your eyes. How beautiful is your love, my bride. How much better it is than the finest of wines." Near the end of the book they both agree that a loving community in the context of a marriage is just about as good as it gets. They refer to the wealth and fortunes of a hugely successful man they know, and they say to each other, "We wouldn't think of trading what we have for all his riches. We have community." The couple enhanced their community and the quality of their relationship by creatively celebrating each other. They did what many of us fail to do. They noticed each other. They observed each other carefully. Then they decided to highlight what they found attractive and desirable and praiseworthy about each other and took the time to express it. We have the ability to delight each other's hearts when we celebrate one another.

- Look around the room at each person and finish this statement: If you were suddenly taken out of my life, I would miss you ...

We can use phone calls, notes, a lunch together, a compliment, a word of thanks to tell someone how much their love, their service, their expression of community means to us.

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