

Better Than One - Devotions

Monday, January 16

Opening thought - *what can happen to our lives if we were to be alone for long periods of time?*

Read - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:18

- what do you notice that is similar within each of these verses? What connections do you see between Ecclesiastes and Genesis?

Pastor Jerry spoke about the fact that to be created in the image and likeness of God means that we are "hard wired" for community (since God himself is always in community). This means that to be alone is "not good" and contrary to our created nature.

- why is being "in community" such a struggle or at times uncomfortable to do?

Pastor Jerry also spoke about the practical aspects to Ecclesiastes in that we all: Fall, Falter and Fight. Each one of us as believers is engaged or experiences these realities. We all sin (fall); we all have highs and lows (falter); we all experience inner and outer conflict (fight). What do the following scriptures have to say about each of these areas?

- Romans 7:15-18, 1 Peter 2:11, 2 Timothy 3:12

Reflect - God has made us in such a way that we need community - both for our own good and strengthening as well as a means for being able to stand in the midst of all the battles we face. When we resist being in community or hide our own struggles we act like Adam and Eve in the garden after they sinned. We do our best to make life work, but we are alone, hiding from God and making excuses for our behavior.

- Take time to speak with the Lord about where you are with being in biblical community. Thank him for what He has given you and ask for more willingness to love one another.

Tuesday, January 17

Opening thought - what makes it especially challenging to open up about our failures, struggles or sins in a covenant group?

Read - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Galatians 6:1-2, 1 Thess. 5:14

- How do these passages describe what biblical community is to be?

Pastor Jerry said that sharing one another's burdens, like: divorce, medical problems, children struggles, job loss, end of life issues, depression, family stress - is key to having biblical community. But also our sin issues too (this is just as critical as the above).

- What can happen to our times of gathering as a covenant group if we avoid these kinds of topics or refuse to talk about them?

Pastor Jerry challenged us to think about the state of our Covenant Groups and to ask the question if we feel they are a safe place of mutual support and grace.

- How would you answer this?

Reflect - It's fun getting to know each other in our groups, but it is a lot harder to offer correction, lovingly rebuke or even hold someone accountable. Paul models this in Romans 7 & 8. When a church is characterized by being a safe place for people who fall, then those same people can be led to repentance and not feel rejection.

In what ways are you willing or unwilling to be vulnerable with your life in your covenant group? What is holding you back? Talk with the Lord about this in prayer.

Wednesday, January 18

Opening thought - how has this covenant group been a help to you? In what ways would you like to see this group change (become more transparent or more mutually supportive)?

Read - Hebrews 3:12-15, Hebrews 10:23-25

- What specific commands are given here that can only be fulfilled by being in biblical community?

- What is challenging about these verses in terms of living them out with other believers?

Pastor Jerry spoke about the fact that at one time, because of some foolishness on his part, he needed to huddle close together with another pastor friend of his in order to keep warm and not freeze to death. Although quite awkward, this action perfectly reflects what we have been learning in Ecclesiastes this week - that when we are in trouble, others are there for us. Living alone is not wise nor smart.

- When have you been specifically helped by another brother or sister in Christ that was a part of your biblical community?
- What would have been the outcome if this person had not helped or you didn't share your needs?

Reflect - how have your thoughts on biblical community been challenged this week? How was the example of the three pieces of yarn a helpful one for this sermon?

CPC - Better Than One sermon

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Our Church Vision

We exist to develop followers of Christ who worship God passionately, connect with God's people, and impact God's kingdom.

Takeaway Truth

Connecting into authentic Biblical Community is indispensable for each of us.

MOVIE: Castaway; Wilson volleyball scene; manufactured community

- core truth for CPC: Community / Connect with God's people
- DNA of our church and forms the backbone of who we are as a church
- Ecclesiastes passage points towards this need for true biblical community

Theological dimension to this truth about community:

- God is 3 in 1; this passage points to this
- Genesis 1:26 (us, our) - pointers to this plurality in some sense of the Godhead
 - Teaching us that humans are hard wired for community because we are made in God's likeness
 - To know and be known by others is hard wired in us (love, submit, support)
 - To be alone or disconnected is contrary to how we have been made by God
 - See verse 10 in Ecclesiastes ("Woe to him who is alone")
 - Aloneness is not good (Gen. 2:18); thus aloneness is not how we are to live as believers in Christ; community is indispensable.

Practical aspect to this truth in Ecclesiastes

"For when they fall, one will lift the other up"

I. You Will Fall

Romans 7:15 - this is Paul's testimony about his own fallenness; he falls; this is reality!

- we are a church who believes that we all are sinners; true of everyone of us at CPC
- Fundamental reality we must see ourselves in this way

II. You Will Falter

We will have highs and lows in your life

See verse 11; we need others in our lives to keep us warm in troubled times

- Revelation 3:15-17

III. You will Fight

There is opposition that you will face - see verse 12

Following Christ is a life of opposition (Internal and External)

- 1 Peter 2:11 (internal; fight for holiness); 1 Timothy 6:12 (internal war)
 - In this fight we need biblical community
- 2 Timothy 3:12; Ephesians 6:12 - External fight (worldly system opposed to the KofG)

And in this war we need one another and the encouragement that being in community brings.

What biblical community is to be...

(more than fellowship / meals / companionship)

- Lift Up - safe place of mutual support and grace
 - Gal. 6:1-2 (NLT)
 - Sharing one another's burdens (divorce, medical, children, job loss, end of life issues, depression, family stress)
 - But also sin issues too (this is just as critical as the above)
 - It's fun getting to know each other, but it is a lot harder to correct, lovingly rebuke or hold someone accountable for an addiction

- Paul models this in Romans 7, 8
- When a church is characterized by being a safe place for people who fall can be led to repentance and not rejected.
 - There are real consequences to sin, yet there is real hope, grace and forgiveness in Christ and for his people (the church). We ought never to turn our backs on these sinful brothers or sisters in Christ.
- Keep Warm - Encouragement & Transparency
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 - willingness to be vulnerable and transparent with one another
 - Is there one thing that you can identify that is weighing you down or holding you back? What is this? Can you be transparent like this in your group? Is there that freedom in your Covenant Group? How can we move forward in this area?
 - A place of equipping and mutual place of service (Eph. 6:13)
 - Being in the Word (Acts 2:42-47)

You have a choice....

(1) be by yourself, alone, separated from the pack -- slim pickings by our real enemy
 (2) be in community (3 cord strand) - this image is extremely important because it points us to the Godhead; Christ becomes incarnate and enters into biblical community; he remains into perfect community with his Father and the Spirit
 -- and yet Christ endured horrible separation for us that we could be restored to God and to one another (1 John 1:7)