

LESSON FIVE
NEW COMMUNITY
THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP AND PEACEMAKING

Our survival depended on understanding what the authorities were attempting to do to us, and sharing that understanding with each other. It would be very hard if not impossible for one man alone to resist. I do not know that I could have done it had I been alone. But the authorities' greatest mistake was keeping us together, for together our determination was reinforced. We supported each other and gained strength from each other. Whatever we knew, whatever we learned, we shared, and by sharing we multiplied whatever courage we had individually. That is not to say that we were all alike in our responses to the hardships we suffered. Men have different capacities and react differently to stress. But the stronger ones raised up the weaker ones, and both became stronger in the process. Ultimately, we had to create our own lives in prison. In a way that even the authorities acknowledged, order in prison was preserved not by the warders but by ourselves.

-- Nelson Mandela, Long Road to Freedom, Pg. 625

This lesson will focus on some of the ways we build the life of the local church at Grace. It is important to understand Jesus love of local church.

True or False

1. There are Christians called to have membership in many churches
2. Attending a Christian school or college is the same as church
3. To grow as a Christian we need to study the Bible, pray, and hear the Word taught
4. It does not matter whether we listen to tapes, watch TV, or are part of a local church
5. Fellowship is the opportunity for Christian to be together
6. If I had a major problem in life, I would read my Bible and pray to get help.

Review

1. purpose of God: people of his own
2. redemption in Christ: purchasing his people
3. fruit of redemption: holiness of personal life
4. "we" of redemption: the church, the local church
 - a. Images
 - b. Entry
 - c. Gospel form
 - d. Leadership
 - e. Gifts

Let's turn our attention now to what life looks like at Grace Church

A. “Life together” in a local church

Fellowship is what takes place when believers live out their Gospel relationship with each other. The underlying Gospel truths are these.

1. Ministry in the body of Christ is every member ministering as a “supply” line of grace to others.

from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:16

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

2. Ministry in the body of Christ is every member seeking to encourage others to pursue Christ

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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. Hebrews 10:24-25

3. Ministry in the body of Christ is every member watching for the spiritual well-being of the other members

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12-13

4. Ministry in the body of Christ is the practice of “walking in the light” by mutual confession as sinners in need of the Gospel

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:6-7

[Fellowship is] a sharing with our fellow-believers the things that God has made known to us about himself, in hope that we may thus help them to know him better and so enrich their fellowship with him. ...Fellowship is, secondly, a seeking to share what God has made known of himself to others, as a means to finding strength, refreshment, and instruction for one's own soul. - J I Packer

5. Ministry in the body of Christ is rooted in awareness of the need for others in my life.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him- a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit. Proverbs 16:2

6. Unity in the body of Christ is created by the Spirit and preserved by godly peacemaking

The question is – what does this look like?

B. Practicing Biblical Fellowship

Fellowship must be worked out in practice. It has to “show up” in specific behaviors. The following is a basic list of disciplines that help us live out our common life in Christ.

“Not every small group is intent on this purpose, however. Some put a higher priority on socializing than on sanctification. Others excel in open sharing and sympathetic listening, yet they never confront sin or challenge members to change. . . . This is unacceptable. A group with an unbiblical purpose can do more harm than good. Groups which meet without the biblical purpose of pursuing character development have the tendency to reinforce, rather than confront, the sin and selfishness already present in us. None of us needs such reinforcement. Instead, we need to be provoked and challenged by others so we can change for the glory of God.” - C J Mahaney

1. Conversation in the Gospel
2. Encouragement

“News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” Acts 11:22-23

3. Confession

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” James 5:16

4. Seeking correction

He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. Proverbs 15:31-32

He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored. Proverbs 13:18

5. Correcting

6. Serving/ Spiritual gifts

- a. Encourage faith when God seems to put someone on your heart, or gives a word for encouragement
- b. Invite the Spirit to be present
- c. Create opportunities to serve

7. Practice of Peacemaking in conflict

- a. Key passage:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

- b. Know your own tendency; slippery slope
- c. Review 4 G's

- d. Refer to 7 A's
- e. Refer to four promises of forgiveness

The longer I live the more I feel the importance of adhering to the rules which I have laid down for myself in such matters. First, to hear as little as possible what is to the prejudice of others. Second, to believe nothing of the kind until I am absolutely forced to. Third, never drink into the spirit of one who circulates an ill report. Fourth, always to believe, that if the other side were heard, a very different account would be given of the matter. I consider love as wealth; and as I would resist a man who should come to rob my house, so would I a man who would weaken my regard for any being. -- Charles Simeon

Summary

- God works primarily through others, in relationship
- You cannot make it alone – blind spots are many
- You are needed by others
- Importance of some how know me

Reproof is unavoidable. God's Word demands it when a brother falls into open sin. The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the sever rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

[They are] like spiritual deep-sea divers, each with his or her own air line up to God through "the means of grace." Each one intent on private spiritual goals viewed others only dimly through clouded faceplates. . . . [yet] Among the most vital means of grace are other Christians. Neither the Bible nor the sacraments will leave the shelf to rescue a Christian who is too discouraged to pray. But a concerned brother or sister will do this again and again. -Richard Lovelace, Renewal as a Way of Life

GRACE CHURCH SAN DIEGO
NEW LIFE, NEW COMMUNITY, NEW PURPOSE

OUR PURPOSE
BUILDING NEW LIVES AND NEW COMMUNITIES IN THE GOSPEL

APPENDIX
Home Group ideas

Some Ideas for Your Times Together

1. Get to know each other and have fun!
2. Share areas of sin that you see in your life or that others have pointed out.
3. Ask for observations (be specific when asking – “Have you seen this_____?”)
4. Hold each other accountable for:
 - Quiet times
 - Memory Verses
 - Participation at care group, men’s/women’s meetings, and corporate meetings.
 - Application from messages
5. Encourage each other and share evidences of grace regularly.
6. Pray for one another.

Possible Questions for Men’s and Women’s Group Discussion

Grace questions are always encouraging. Try to begin with something that directs us toward God and our awareness of his work in our lives:

1. What area of growth in your spouse’s character (in the last 3-6 months) would you be most encouraged about?
2. What specific evidences of God’s grace have you observed in your children in the last week?
3. What would you be most encouraged about in your walk with God?
4. What has been the most life giving conviction you have experienced in the last month?
5. How have you seen the Lord at work through you or your spouse in ways that are not explainable by human effort, in the past several weeks?
6. What things are you most thankful for in your spouse?

Diagnostic questions aim at opening up issues of godliness, always in a context of grace in the cross. Many of these are best done in a same gender group. For example, in a couples group, in order to help each other, we might ask:

1. What have you been doing in your quiet times? In what ways are you aware of growth in your knowledge of God and affection for Him in your life? What Scriptures has the Holy Spirit recently illuminated to you?
2. What sins have you committed since we last met? Have you engaged in any activity that Scripture would disapprove of?
3. Have you been diligently mortifying your sin? What have you been doing to put it to death? Are you seeing change? What ways have you seen it weakened in your life?
4. Have you been memorizing scripture to help you overcome this sin? If not, why not? What scriptures have you memorized?
5. What one sin would be the hardest for you to confess and that you would be tempted not to let anyone know about it?
6. Where have your thoughts been lately? What do you think about the most?
7. Would you have any concerns for me or observations that you would like to share?
8. What area are you most concerned about in your walk with God?
9. Are you as aware of grace in your life as you are aware of your sin and visa versa (are you taking 10 looks at the Cross for every 1 look at your sin)?

The Correction Process

A. Be gentle and gracious

(NASB) “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of truth.”

2 Timothy 2:24

B. Observe patterns of behavior.

“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.” Proverbs 19:11

C. If you have a concern, ask for permission to speak to it.

1. “May I share with you a couple of concerns I would have for you in this matter?”
2. “Would you be open to hearing from the group on this?”
3. “I have not come to a conclusion on this, but I have some concerns about what you have shared. Would you be open to hearing my perspective on this situation? And I would be very interested in hearing your thoughts in response.”
4. Do this privately before bringing to the group.

D. Share concerns without drawing conclusions.

1. “I could be wrong here, but when you raised your voice and said, ‘I don’t want you doing that,’ it seemed like you were angry.”
2. “What concerns me is that you don’t seem to be changing in this area, and that leads me to wonder, ‘are you concerned about the seriousness of this sin and its potential consequences in your life?’ Do you agree?”
3. “I am not sure about this, but it does not seem like you are hearing what I am saying. Can you summarize what you think I am saying?”

E. Allow others to explain their actions in a different way than you perceived.

F. Allow people time to consider observations.

1. The Holy Spirit convicts.
2. Don’t expect people to respond completely, sufficiently, or immediately.
3. This frees you to share observations faithfully and peacefully without feeling the pressure to make people respond immediately.
4. People are aware of our attitude toward them.
5. Remember time and truth serve the purpose of God.
6. The fact that a person is hearing our concerns is a sign of grace.
7. Bring serious concerns to your pastor (invite them to do this first).

G. Encourage the participation of others.