

Living in Community

As Americans, we value the freedom to choose. We honor the initiative and individuality of each person. We value independence and self-reliance, and this is a good thing to some extent.

Yet our culture is becoming increasingly focused on self, as illustrated by the recent media attention regarding the millennial generation. Cindy Perman, writing for USA Today, observed:

“A recent study shows the “ME ME ME” generation didn’t just spring up overnight. The shift toward “me” has been going on for a couple of centuries as society moved toward an urban setting from a rural one and with the rise of technology and the availability of education.”

So what does the Bible say?

1 Cor 12:12-20

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Leveraging Out Differences

There are many benefits to living in a society that values individuality so highly, but it is also helpful to think of our uniqueness in the context of community. If we use our distinct gifts and talents to serve others, we will be able to leverage our differences to productively help each other.

“God can show Himself as He really is only to real men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another, helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like players in one band, or organs in one body. Consequently, the one really adequate instrument for learning about God is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him together (p. 165).” *Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis*

We cannot truly get close to God and discover the depths of His love in the absence of participating in authentic, vulnerable Christian community. There are aspects of God's grace, power, wisdom, and holiness that I will never draw out in my limited life span and experience.

But when I immerse myself in the lives of others whose life's story reflect distinct aspects of God's grace, power, wisdom, and holiness I come to know more of God. God does not change, but I know more of Him than I could have comprehended in isolation.

Reflect More of His Image in Community

I believe this a key element of humanity's collective mission to reflect the image of God in two ways. First, we can only reflect God's image in community. God exists in community (Trinity), so when we live isolated lives we do not fulfill the first aspect of our creation mandate.

Second, we know more of the God whose image we reflect as we live in community. The question is, "For whose benefit do we reflect God's image?" We reflect God's image for His glory and our benefit. As we know / reflect more of His image through community, we come to know more of who we were created to be.

This extends Lewis' insight after the loss of his friend. We not only know more of others in community; we come to know more of ourselves. We come to know our need for grace and our capacity to love when we live with other people. We come to know our unique gifts / passions and how they can be used to serve God when we live in community.

This both combats and compliments the relative notion that each person has their own truth. The reality is that each Christian has their own experience of the Truth (John 14:6) and is called by God to share that with their community to bring to life the timeless truths of Scripture. Each experience, measured by Scripture, balances the errors and adds depth to the others.

He works on us in all sorts of ways. But above all, he works on us through each other. Men are mirrors, or "carriers" of Christ to other men. Usually it is those who know Him that bring Him to others. That is why the church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another, is so important. It is so easy to think that the church has a lot of different objects – education, buildings, missions, holding services...the Church exists for no other purpose but to draw men to Christ. to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.

– C.S. Lewis

Synergy

Third, there is a synergy that happens when we are together that just can't happen when we are alone.

The definition of synergy is: "The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects."

I am amazed at how I think I have come up with some really great ideas, but when I share them with a group of people, synergy kicks in, and together we come up with more and even better ideas.

It is only in community that we can maximize advancing the kingdom of God. In the old days to get water you had a pump in your kitchen. Every homeowner knew that you kept a bucket full of water next to the pump. Sometimes the pump would dry up and you would need that water to "prime" the pump.

Creativity and innovation is best primed in community. One idea sparks another, which leads to more and better ideas than working on our own.

This body would not be very effective if it was just Jay. It is what we all contribute together that makes us who we are. Think of why you joined JesusChurch, or why you stayed with JesusChurch. It was the fact that we are family. We are a diverse community that we enjoy being a part of. We all feel like we have ownership of it. This is our tribe.

There are ways that we can experience God when we come together that just doesn't happen when we are alone.

Heb 10:24-25

And 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.

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