

We All Have a Need for Relationships

Feb. 12, 2012

I. Introduction:

A. Our call:

1. The church is redeemed to be a worshipping community of people.
John 4:23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Ps 29:1-2 Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in holy array.
(see also Ps 22:27; 86:9; 132:7 Rev 15:4).

2. God created us for community. To be healthy, we need relationships
Gen 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them ... God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The word "God" is 'Elohim;' this is the most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament (2,597 times); it is used 26 times alone in Gen 1. It is recognized as the creational name for God, and is always the plural word for God or Gods.

3. God chooses calls and equips us with gifts to be used in community.
1 Pt 4:10 as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

B. The church is:

1. A spiritual **family**; God is our Father and we are brothers and sisters with each other.
2. A spiritual **community**, in which our hearts should be turned towards the Lord and each other. We are to pour out the life in our hearts, into our brothers and sisters, and let them pour their life into us. Many times it is more difficult to receive than to give, however, we are to do both.
The church can only be a spiritual community through the love of God as our source of life. God writes His Laws on our hearts and minds.
Heb 8:10 "for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts.

C. Scriptural principles:

1. The Bible begins and ends with God calling man into relationship with Himself (the Godhead community - ELOHIM; Father, Son and Spirit) and with one another.
2. A study of salvation in the Bible reveals a relational struggle between God and man and man with man (see Gen 3:8-11; 3:9-13; 4:6-8). This is called spiritual warfare (see Eph 6). There is a battle cry, calling mankind away from relational isolation, anarchy and tyranny. And into a dependent relationship with God and interdependent relationships with each other. Salvation restores relationships that are transparent, real and living. Man can only be reconciled as God intervenes on behalf of these relationships. God invites us into relationship with Himself and others.
3. Dysfunctional relationships – all relationships that are not working are called unhealthy or dysfunctional. When believers get together, our relationships can also be impaired, incomplete, abnormal and broken. Every gathering of people can make us feel uneasy. Consequently, we can have suspicions that our hopes will not be fully realized, and we fear that something is deeply wrong with these relationships.

4. As a result of Adam's sin, all relationships exist in a state of brokenness. We can be caught between the rest of God (the seventh day principle (Gen 2:2-3), fulfilled for us in Christ (Heb 4:1, 3-5, 8-11) and the temptation to withdraw into the "darkness" and "chaos" of the first day.

Gen 1:1-4 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

(Look at the following references to see how darkness makes us hide from light. Jn 1:5, 8; 3:16-21; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46; Eph 5:6-10; Col 1:12-13; 1 Th 5:4-6; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 Jn 1:5-7; 2:8-11)
5. How sin affects relationships:
 - Sin is the brokenness of community between God and humanity.
 - Sin is the inability of humanity to enter into community with the God of community.
 - Sin is the disability of human beings to connect with each other.
 - Sin is the poverty of relationship we experience when we try to become intimate with another and fail.
 - Sin is the failure and destruction of human community.
6. People in church are trapped in the "paradox"
 - of hunger for intimacy ("it's not good to be alone");

Gen 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."
 - and fear of intimacy (Gen 3:7-8)
 - a) The unhealthy fear of God ("they sewed fig leaves to cover themselves").

Gen 3:8 They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
 - b) The unhealthy fear of man ("they sewed fig leaves to cover themselves").

Gen 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.
7. God builds face-to-face relational communities of human beings. Humanity builds cities and systems where the drive for productivity may ultimately rob people of their God-intended humanity.
8. Another way to look at community is through the statement in 1 Jn 4:16 "God is love."
 - Love is the action of care toward and for another being.

The very nature of God is to engage in the encounter of valuing another.
 - Love is not possible as a solo activity.
 - Love is only visible in community, where at least one person may feel and act upon love for another.

God's very essence is to act toward another in a helping (serving) and completing (healing) way.
 - Love is mission and ministry.

The intention of love causes us to reach out to others, so that they will encounter and embrace God and be empowered by Him.

9. Only God could say to humanity "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18), because God's essence is not to be alone, but to be in community.
 - God's mission flows out of this essence.
 - God's nature is love.
 - God's being is community.
 - God's mission is to assert love and create community.

God's authority (Gk. = *exousia*) is to empower (give away) His Divine essence of love and establish new communities.

2 Pet 1:3-4 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

10. The love the Father has for Jesus creates new communities. 1 John describes this mission of love:

1 Jn 1:1-3 We declare to you what was from the beginning, ... what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship (Gk. = *koinonia*) with us; and truly our fellowship (Gk. = *koinonia*) is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. (NRSV)

II. Theological foundations for community:

1. From the beginning, God has existed as a community of being. In human history God has revealed this community of being as Father, Son and Spirit, an eternal small group, a Trinity of Being and relationship.
2. From the beginning of creation, the eternal God in community with Himself (Father, Son and Spirit), created humanity to be a community. Humanity was created to reflect God, man and woman, husband and wife, in relationship with God.

The minimum group of two, together with the community of God, is called to live in intimate, reciprocal, dialogical and growing relationship. Around this prototype of the first divine-human community, God has gathered the greater human community of history.

3. From the beginning, mankind has struggled with maintaining relationship with God and each other. As we choose to develop ourselves outside of intimacy with God and fellow-believers, our relationship with God and individuals break and die. Without the continuing intervention of the beckoning and gracious community of God, human community would be self-possessed, broken and lost permanently.

The microcosm of divine-human community continues in a state of brokenness. But there is hope. From the beginning of the fragmentation of divine-human community, God works to restore and complete us, to be a community of believers, experiencing intimacy, authentic knowing each other and mutual working together for the Kingdom of God.

4. Cut off from God, the human community can choose to receive or reject God's gracious offering to restore divine-human community. In rejecting intimacy with God, the human community continues in a state of sin and broken relationships. Thus the fragmented human community will reflect a shallow form of fellowship, immersed in addictive and abusive behavior and continuing in a struggle for control, identity, intimacy and meaning. Humanity tries to approach one another, but the approach is stifled in avoidance because God is not present to define, empower and complete the face-to-face meeting.

5. If the broken human community chooses to accept God's gracious and personal embrace of restored divine-human community, God works in the redemptive process of restoring and completing the human community through His covenant of grace. As humanity is willing to respond to this gracious invitation to embrace the presence of God and each other, they become the family of God. The microcosm of this covenantal community becomes the family of God, the covenantal redeemed.
6. The ultimate and focused demonstration of God's reconciling movement toward humanity comes in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ, who, in his own being as both God and human, enters the human arena as a man who does the work of restoring community between God and humanity. The man Jesus, himself, is the divine act of intervention and restoration between God and humanity. Jesus surrounded himself with a small group of men and women who looked to him as the Lord and model of the One who builds divine-human community. This small community lived and walked with Jesus. They discovered how humanity can live with God and live with one another. Jesus restores, reconciles and completes the purpose of every community, of children and adults, male and female, Jew and Gentile. Even though the human, political and religious systems are built on the sins of broken relationships, addiction and abuse, God demonstrates His love towards us (Rom 5:6-8).

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly, for one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

In his death and resurrection, he shows that the divine-human community will not be destroyed.

In his ascension, Jesus, the incarnate God, has continuing and growing community with humanity in the presence of Abba God.

7. Through Jesus, we respond to, live with and experience God's love, and we come together as a new community with the resurrected Christ and other believers. We share in his ongoing intimacy with Abba and learn the freedom of intimacy with one another. We come to understand and experience the community of the Spirit, in whom the relationship of Jesus and Abba becomes the relationship of human community sharing with Jesus and Abba. The Spirit of the man Jesus in intimate community with Abba God becomes the Spirit of the human community in intimate community with Jesus and Abba God. In this ongoing experience of sharing in the Spirit the new community comes to realize that wherever two or three or more human beings meet with Jesus, they are a microcosm of divine-human community, an ecclesia (church).

Mat 18:18-21 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Mat 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it".

Eph 1:22-23 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

8. Wherever the person of Jesus calls together two or more other persons, male or female, young or old, Jew or Gentile, there is the divine-human community in microcosm, the ecclesia. The Spirit of God as the community of God in Christ is shared wherever two or more are gathered

together. The Spirit shares the ministry of Jesus with the ecclesia, those called together by Jesus. The ongoing ministry of Jesus through the Spirit is the ministry of building divine-human community, reconciling men and women to God and to one another. We meet together in the name of Jesus and become a community of reconciliation.

2 Cor 5:18-20 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The church is to be a community, where people can experience forgiveness, healing and growth. Our human relationships can take on the character of Jesus with the Twelve and with Abba God. It is in this community of love and trust that broken persons and relationships experience the freedom to share failure, pain, hurt and addiction. They have the freedom to self-disclose, to confess and to listen to each other and respond with truth and love.

9. The church is groups of Christians, scattered around the world, bound together by a common Spirit, meeting in various ways, in multiple groupings of numbers and configurations. We form strong bonds that enable and empower us to be flexible, to respond to human need and the voice of the Spirit. The church (Christian community) is the agent of God's continuing transformation and reformation of human relationships, organizations and institutions.
10. All communities and groups, who come together in the name of Jesus, are the church of God. We are being drawn and beckoned into eternal community with Father, Son and Spirit, and each other. The ultimate expression of human community is the eternal community between God and humanity, focused in Jesus Christ.

This relational life of fellowship with God and His church is an anticipation of the eternal community of eternity which will last forever and ever. For wherever two or three gather together in the name of Jesus, they anticipate the reality of God in the age to come. God desires to be with humanity in community forever and ever.

III. Notes and Quotes:

A. Spiritual gifts are developed and exercised in relationships:

- The Early Church met in house-groups, in meetings that were primarily for themselves but were not closed to outsiders. These meetings reflected the temple in that the living community of believers was now the place where God was present and revealed to his people (1 Cor. 14:25).
1 Cor. 14:24-26 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
- From **Ernest Gentile** (The Prophetic Ministry)
We must realize that all who prophesy in the local church will not be inerrant. Our local church prophecy (for comfort, exhortation and edification, I Corinthians 14:2) is not to be equated with the Old Testament Scriptures given by prophets who spoke the words unerringly (I Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1; II Peter 1:20-21). During that Old Testament time there were a comparatively few select men and women giving highly significant prophecies; now, all God's people exist as a community of prophetic people. God, risking the problems of putting the prophetic anointing on all His people, safeguards prophecy in the New Testament by requiring that all utterances be judged.

B. The result of humanism is isolation, individualism, pain and addiction.

- From **Dick Iverson**; Building Churches That Last
Western culture focuses on individual identity, individual rights, etc.
The 1990s have taken secular humanism to its logical conclusion. Every person is looking for himself, trying to find his identity. A fully autonomous individual is the goal of modern psychology. As a result, society is characterized by the absence of a sense of community. No one thinks about his corporate identity these days. Defining a person in terms of a group - even if it is the body of Christ - is cultural heresy. Covenant relationships have disappeared.
- From **Frank Damazio**; The First Day Principle
The spirit of humanism is the spirit of solitariness.
It is the desire to live for oneself, to isolate one's actions and energies from the community of God, as Satan did. Problems such as isolated, apathetic individuals and fragmented families often result. Families and individuals relocate frequently, detaching themselves out of restlessness and causing a lack of roots. This mobility brings a sense of detachment from their neighborhoods, cities, churches, extended families-everyone but their own private existences. This same restlessness is seen in church hopping where people change church families without biblical mandate or Holy Spirit guidance.

C. Corporate worship leads to revival

- From **J. Edwin Orr**; Times of Refreshing
"To be in the presence of the Lord is to be revived. When a community of believers is brought low before the presence of the Lord, when the very air that they breathe appears to be supercharged with a sense of His presence -- this is the beginning of revival. It is revival!"

D. We all have a need to be included. Failure to bond leads to more pain, further isolation and detachment, resulting in attachment to things, business and addictions.

- From The Seven Desires of every heart; by **Mark & Debbie Lasser**
The Seven Desires of every heart
 1. To be Heard and Understood.
 2. To be Affirmed (for what we do).
 3. To be Blessed (for who we are).
 4. To be Safe (to be free of all fears and anxieties).
 5. To be Touched (nonsexual and both nonsexual and sexual in marriage).
 6. To be Chosen (to be selected by someone to be in a special relationship).
 7. To be Included (to be in community with God and others, to be part of something larger than ourselves).
- From Life Guide, by **Mark Lasser**
Being connected with the family of God provides the fellowship of healthy community. That's why I insist no one can ever recover alone. God made us for relationship, which we obviously can't experience in isolation. We need each other. It's partially through intimacy with others that we come to grow in intimacy with God.