

I. Introduction

- A. Most of us want to grow and be successful. Fulfilling God's call on our life. We want to mature and become more like Christ so that we can influence others to want to know Him and become disciples too.
- B. This journey we are on begins in Faith and ends on Love. We become a follower of Christ through Faith, putting our trust in Him. Then from that point onward, we are to advance through each season, developing in His character and increasing in His love.
- C. God has designed the church to be a Community, a Family of Friends, that grow together and while doing life together, they mature, reflecting His love, and fulfilling their call.**
 - 1. So put your "roots down and grow" here with us. Be a participant, get involved! We are on this journey together!
 - 2. In a Family everyone is involved. Everyone has a job. And everyone is connected. Yes, there is a variety of different people, a variety of personalities who hold a variety of positions, yet they live and grow together under one roof.
 - 3. Growth is progressive not instant, there are no shortcuts and it takes time to mature. We are all in process.
 - 4. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 -The Value of Friends:
 - a) "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor (a joint investment often results in better success [two heads are better than one]).
 - b) For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. (Help each other up.) But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.
 - c) Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm: but how can one be warm alone? (Friendships grow into a bond of unity).
 - d) Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." - Strength in numbers. Others will come to the aide of one another. There is increased faith and courage in numbers.
 - 5. Acts 2: 40-47(NKJV) [*Read] Birth of the NT Church, a Vital/ Vibrant Community of Friends!
 - a) Friends of God - People who experienced God's salvation (loved God) and loved hearing the Word of God, devoted to prayer.
 - b) Friend with Others - both inside and outside the church (loved sharing their faith, and fellowship; there was unity, partnership, participation)
 - 6. I am reminded of a time in college, when I went to visit a friend in the summer, she was working at a camp for disabled adults. What I saw there was: individuals with "mature" bodies, but who had "immature minds." It was tragic.
 - 7. I have seen similar tragedies in the Body of Christ over the years. It is a tragedy!
 - a) People who have never matured. The reasons vary but the result is the same.
 - (1) Some never fully gave themselves to the things of God - distracted by other things
 - (2) Lack of committed to the community: some out of hurt, others out of fear.

- (3) Ignorance, lack of understanding of the value of family and friends
- b) Some have just become a casualty of war. Caught off guard and taken captive by the enemy. It was never their intent to not be part of the community.
- D. I pray that we get a vision today of the importance of community and that we will never again experience tragedy in Our House.

God has designed the church to be a Community, a Family of Friends, that grow together and while doing life together they mature, (grow in spiritual maturity) and fulfill the call that He placed on your life while influencing others around us to do the same.

II. Why Journey Together?

A. Humans were created for fellowship. *Gen 1:26-27; *Acts 2:42

1. God created man and placed him in the garden of Eden for the purpose of fellowship. Fellowship is a natural result of relationship. It often results in a bond of unity if established on the right foundation.
2. In the Garden, God gave Adam a job to do. This relationship went beyond communication (fellowship) to having a job to do. "Fellow Workers."
 - a) Adam became a "Partner in the Mission." He was "serving" in the garden. He took responsibility. He was given a task, to the animals and to take dominion.
 - b) He had a "Heart to Serve." He was not out for his own gain and advantage but for the good of all in the garden.
 - c) He was a participant not an observer.
 - d) He loved being in relationship with God. He loved being in relationship with Eve. They were fellow workers.
3. We are called a "Family of God": the Ecclesia: a family of friends: friend's of God, & Friend with others.
 - a) Family's stick together.
 - b) Paul talked about his friends as "Fellow Soilder's." They had been through the trenches together. Epaphaditus was willing to sacrifice everything to make ministry happen. Even coming to see Paul was a huge risk, he almost lost his life. That is commitment.
 - c) David had his mighty men. Also Johnathan. Johnathan had his armor bearer. Joshua had Caleb and their fellow soldiers. Jesus had his 12 disciples.
4. God created man in His image and likeness.
5. In the NT Paul talks a lot about about his friends and sends letters to his friends and the churches to encourage them in their walk with God. Paul shares a lot about the "Family of God," & he refers to himself as a "Brother" in Christ.
 - a) Family - Eph 5:1-11 "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." Children imitate their parents.
 - b) Brother - it is inclusive; "one that he is connected to" In Phillipians Paul is telling the church that he has a connection with them and to them.
 - c) Phillipians 1:1 Paul and Timothy are doing the work of ministry

d) Timothy & Epaphroditus, & Barnabas, Apollos, etc.

B. There is Strength in Numbers.

1. "Two are better than one," Ecc 4:9-12 Two individuals in relationship and submitted to God and His purpose.
2. "One can put a thousand to flight, and two ten-thousand," Deut 32:30 - There is greater impact in numbers; greater faith, and greater strength.
3. Lev 26:8 - "Five of you chase 100, & 100 of you chase 10,000 and your enemies shall fall before your sword." Now that is a good day, when the enemy is defeated.
4. Deut 3:22 "You shall not fear them, for it is the Lord who fights for you."
5. I Sam 14:12-16 Jonathan; Josh 23:3

C. There is Wisdom in the Counsel.

1. Proverbs is full of scriptures on wisdom and receiving counsel from others who are wise.
 - a) Prov 27:9
 - b) Prov 31:33

D. Growth Happens in Family.

1. Growth in faith, gifting, spiritual impartation occurs.

I don't like being alone, and life is better when we are with others. Fellowship results in a Bond of Unity. It is a natural result of relationship. The Brotherhood of Covenant and Commitment. It brings a Sense of Belonging and Purpose.

III. How Do I Journey with You?

A. **You Make a Choice. You commit.** This becomes "Your Church" not "My Church." You are committed to the cause. To the Vision and Mission of the Family.

B. **You Participate.** You can't be on the team and not participate. Otherwise you are an observer. You are in the stands not on the field.

1. Exercise your spiritual gift. (Lend a Hand where help is needed)
 - a) If hospitality, then join the social team.
 - b) If teaching, join children's ministry or start a small group.
 - c) If you don't know what to do, just find a need and fill it.
 - d) ill: Signing Boys up for Football - they were going to see it through. No quitting.

C. **Be Intentional in Making Friends and Meeting People.**

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Remember their name.
3. Get connected.
4. Invite someone to eat with you. Take someone out to eat. relationships are built around eating food.
5. The next time you see them, go up and talk to them.
6. Growing in Relationship with Others in the Family takes time and effort. Work at it.

- D. **Requires sacrifice.** Be willing to use your Gift. Being in a family means there are times that you have to sacrifice your time to help someone else, or sacrifice your talent by using your gift to meet a need which will require something from you.
- E. **Don't Give Up.** You are always up or getting up! Quitting is never an option.
 - 1. The saying "quitters never prosper" has a lot of truth to it.
 - 2. Just as physical strength is built through exertion straining and resistance, so spiritual growth (strength) is developed in hard times of life. "No Pain, No Gain."
- F. **Have to have a "Servant's Heart".**
Involvement in the local church and the exercise of our spiritual gifts are invaluable to the development of maturity. Eph 4:11-16 (Get involved and stay committed)

IV. What Does Successful Community Look Like?

A. **Our Lives are Changed...Transformed.**

- 1. *Col 3:12-17; *Eph 4:11-16. It is God's will that we grow to become more like Jesus, mature in our faith and relationship with Him and with His Body, the Church. The journey is the training process (Heb 5:14) Our Spiritual Growth is the process of becoming mature in one's relationship with Jesus Christ and walking with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. In Hebrews 6:1, The church was being exhorted to leave the elementary things (doctrines of Christ) and go on to maturity. We do not want to stay in elementary school, or still be on milk when we should be eating meat. As we grow in the knowledge of the Word of God our lives are transformed and we begin to reflect the qualities in Christ in and through our relationships.

a) **We Look After One Another and We Watch out for One Another.**

- (1) Help one another. Helping one another often means work. We work along side of each other to accomplish a task. This is what a family does.
- (2) Support one another.
- (3) Teach one another and learn from one another.
- (4) Find out where they are when they are missing.
- (5) Restore one another. ***Gal 6:1; James 5:19-20**

b) **We Build One Another Up.** *1 Thes 5:11

- (1) Encourage One Another in our faith- as a fellow soldier - we fight the good fight of faith. Through words of encouragement, prophetic words, or sharing scriptures.
- (2) In Prayer - "steaking ourselves up along side of our Brother" like a tomato plant and stake. We stand with them and they know they are not alone.
- (3) Admonish and Exhort each other - Col 3:16; Heb 3:13
- (4) Stir one another on to love and good deeds - Heb 10:24-25

c) **We Serve Beside One Another.**

- (1) Fellow workers - all serving not just 20% of the people, but all. (not the 80/20 rule)
- (2) Partner's in the Mission.
- (3) Willing to submit to one another. Eph 5:21
 - (a) Prefer others over ourselves.

- (b) Not taking the best seat and being asked to move by the host
- (4) Willing to sacrifice for the common good. Sacrifice our time, talents, finances, and goods.

d) We Bear One Another's Burden. Col 3:13

- (1) Two or three people or families cannot bear the burden of more than 1 other person or family.
- (2) But if we all are looking out for one another, the Holy Spirit will direct us to the one(s) who are "Ours" to look after.

e) We Live at Peace with Others. Ro 12:8, II Tim 2:22

- (1) Good to each other - Gal 6:10
- (2) Forgive one another - Col 3:13
- (3) Pursue Peace and mutual build up others - ***Ro 14:19**

B. Others Lives are Changed...Transformed.

- 1. Our growth and spiritual maturity affects those around us. Both inside our "family" and outside of this community.
- 2. We are seeing others in our community - growing. They are also doing the same things we are doing, and often times, they are provoking us "on to good works and deeds."
- 3. Testimonies of Breakthrough and Increase. God answering prayers.
- 4. Increased prayer.
- 5. Spiritual Life, growth and increase of God's presence.
- 6. Mathew 15: 30 " Great commission: "Go and make disciples..." - when ever you go, however you go, where ever you go in the course of your life, make disciples.

C. We Grow Spiritually Together! - an inner work. (Not religiously)

- 1. ***Colossians 4:6-** "Let your words be seasoned with salt that you would know how to answer."
- 2. We measure our improvement by the "Fruit of the Spirit" we are producing - Gal 5:22-23
 - a) Are you increasing in Love? In Joy? In Patience?
 - b) If so we are growing spiritually.

D. To Journey means we travel from place to place for a length of time. (Gen 12 :9)"Abram journeyed, going on towards the south." Paul journeyed with His companions - "Brother's of Christ"; Jesus journeyed with his disciples.

- 1. Through relationship there are character qualities that we develop by being together.
- 2. Fellowship results in a Bond of Unity. It is a natural result of relationship.
- 3. It brings a Sense of Belonging and Purpose.

V. Closing - Ephesians 2:10

You have to be intentional in your pursuit of God and in Community. No one can do it for you. It will take time to get connected, time to grow in maturity, and time to reach your call. Spiritual Growth is an ongoing process. There is no shortcuts. Being connected to a Community of Friends is essential in your success. The Apostle Paul is always encouraging us to take the time and trouble to keep your self spiritually fit and to stay connected! (Stay committed) It is worth it.

- A. Phil 1:6 **"He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion,"** If you do not quit. The Lord wants us to come to maturity and He will oversee our growth and bring us to maturity if we will allow His process and His people to walk along side of us and help us to grow in His likeness.
- B. Where are you on your journey? Are you connected? or Have you been disconnected?
- C. Some of you, Fear has kept you in a "safe place", a comfortable place. You have stopped growing in community, or possibly your walk with God. It is time to put your fears in the past, and surrender them to Jesus.
 - 1. Step out and kink arms with God and with your family of Friends, God wants to reinforce the call on your life and get you connected.