



'The Church as a Family' - Family Matters!

Text Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35. What a wonderful expression of 'family'. Helping – encouraging – giving and sharing – not an organization but an organism - alive!, interacting, joining and supporting. Was it perfect? No – it couldn't be with the likes of Paul in it! But family nevertheless!

Introduction

- The Bible describes the church as many things:-
- **Jesus described it as belonging to 'The Kingdom of God!' Matthew 16:19**
- **Paul –'The Body of Christ.' –Eph.1:22,23;4:4.**
- **–'The House of God' -1 Tim.3:15/'Household of God' –Eph.2:19**
- **–'The Holy Temple of God' –Eph.2:20; 1 Cor.3:16;6:19.**
- **John – 'The Bride of Christ.' Rev.21:2.**
- But Jesus loves the Church and gave Himself for it -**Eph.5:25;Acts 20:28**. I love the prayer of Jesus in **John 17:21 "I pray that they will be one , just as you and I are Father –that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."** Oneness, unity, relational, not denominational which splits and divides – but one. Loving God and loving each other - A FAMILY. **God loving us, Us loving God and loving each other!**
- **So today, I want to look at 'The Church as a Family!' – not a departmental store where you can pick and mix; not a community centre; but a home – a family – HCC is my home!** You don't choose your family! You can't lose your family! They are your family by blood and relational ties. Praise God.
- **I recently read that a minimum requirement that we all have, in order to stay emotionally and physically healthy - we all require friends!** Not casual acquaintances, (we all have plenty of those) – but an inborn need for deep friendships with other people.
- **Newspaper columnist Marla Paul was brave enough to admit this** " *The loneliness saddens me. How did it happen that I could be 42 years old and not have enough friends? I recently read my daughter's book 'The ugly duckling.' I immediately felt an immediate kinship with this bird who flies from place to place*

looking for the creatures with whom he belongs. He eventually finds them. I hope I do to!" The day after Marla's column appeared, the switchboard of the paper was flooded with calls from people who said they wrestled with the same loneliness. They even stopped her in the streets to say they empathized with her. Letters poured in from all over the country, in fact her friends column generated 7 times more mail than normal. People – boys and girls, old and young alike –hungered for close friends.

- **It is not unique to women!** –men are notorious for having casual surface acquaintances -teammates, business associates, customers, etc all hiding the fact that we too long for close friendships.
- **Jim Conway writes “Men are lonely and friendless, but he tries to maintain his macho image at all costs, even if it means isolation from people.”** Loneliness is becoming a national disease – there are millions of people have never had 1 minute in their whole lifetime to share their deeper feelings with another person. Medically I'm told that 'without deeper relationships, the death rate is twice as high as those who enjoy regular interaction with others.'
- **Fact is our creator did not design us to live relational disconnected lives. Bill Hybels says that God wired us with a desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, to serve and be served. We were created to be in relationship with God and also with people. We are designed for family. “It is not good for man to be alone.”**
- **When Jesus came –He founded a group of people who He specially gifted to meet our relational needs. I AM REFERRING TO ‘THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY!’** Like the one in our text.

The Importance of our Church Family.

- Our church family is vital to us. Members of HCC are a central part of our lives. We see each other several times a week. We laugh together. We cry together. Our closest friends tend to be found in our church family. Many of us found our wives in our church family. Who gathered around you to support you when raising your children was tough? – your church family.
- When our children grew up and marry, it is the church family who comes together to witness their vows and celebrate their union. When we grieve over the death of loved ones, it is our church family who come alongside us to cry with us and help us.
- **It is in a church family that masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited and tenderness grows.** In the church body, where Jesus is honored as head, AGAPE self-sacrificing love abounds – and when it does, people really become brothers and sisters. They walk compassionately with each other through life's problems and pain.
- **NO CHURCH FAMILY IS PERFECT!** – but there is still nothing to compare with it, when it comes to providing us with our inner need for deep relationships with other people. Surely of all the gifts God gave us when He sent His Son to earth that first Christmas –this is the most precious.

- **What is it about the church that makes it such a wonderful Christmas gift from God?** How does the church family satisfy our relational needs? **4 ways!**

1. We give each other unconditional LOVE and ACCEPTANCE.

- In the world acceptance is mainly based on performance –what we do or don't do! **But the church family is different! Not what we do, but who we are- priceless people for whom Christ has died. Romans 15:7 *Accept one another, just as Christ has accepted you!*"**
- How did He do that? Unconditionally! With open arms, even when we were unlovely! Church family members do the same!
- *Some parents on the eastern coast got a telephone call from their son during the Korean war. He said he was on his way home and was in San Francisco. They were thrilled because they had not heard from him in many months. He asked if he could bring his mate home with him who was hurt pretty bad –one eye ,one arm and one leg. He asked if he could live with them! His mother agreed "He sounds like a brave man. We can find room for him for a while." "Mum, you don't understand, I want him to come and live with us!" "Well okay, we'll try it for 6 months or so!" "No Mum, He needs us, he has only 1 eye, 1 arm and 1 leg – he is in a terrible state. Now his mother lost patience –"You're being totally unreasonable, you're emotional because you have been to war! When she said this the phone went dead. The next day the parents got a telegraph telling them their son had committed suicide –apparently shortly after he hung up the phone. When his body arrived, his parents looked down with unspeakable sorrow on the corpse of their son –who had 1 arm , 1 leg, 1 eye! He was the one who had been horribly wounded and disfigured in battle and he yearned to know that he was unconditionally loved in spite of it!*
- **All of us long to be accepted as we are, in spite of our character flaws! We need to know that someone accepts us because they want to, not because they have to. We require unconditional love.** We don't ignore sinful actions, but we need to love the sinner before we can help and restore them. **David Smith** *"Friendship is one who knows you as you are, understands where you've been, accepts who you've become and STILL gently invites you to grow."*
- **The Bible teaches that Jesus was scandalously generous in distributing love.** Wherever He went people sensed the unconditional love of God. When we obey Christ, it is the same in the church. **Patrick Morley** *"The height of our love for God, will never exceed the depths of our love for one another."*

2. We make each other's PAIN our own.

- **Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ!"**
- I have many testimonies where the members of this church have helped me endure hardship. Financially. Tragedy. Sickness. **Why do they do this?**

- Because we have the same Lord who has laid down His life for us and this inspires us to do the same for each other!
- **First we share some thing with someone.** Something tangible! We help each other with concrete needs just like the early church –sold their possessions and gave to anyone as they had need! Like the food folk prepared for Anne Spicer because she was unable to walk! Like the baby-sitting folk have done for some of our single mums so they could go to home group. And so much more!
- **Secondly we share** something with someone. When fellow Christians go through tough times, we hurt with them. **‘We rejoice with those who rejoice and we weep with those who weep!’** Phil Yancy writes **“The church is a place where we can bring our pain, for it was founded by the one Whose body was broken for us, in order to give us life.”** Remember Jesus’ invitation in **Matthew 11:28** **“Come to me all who are weary and overburdened and I will give you rest.”** The Church is the place where people find this kind of rest because they share their life’s burdens with other Christians who love them. A church family can be a place where burdens are divided and joys multiplied.

3. We strengthen each other by ENCOURAGEMENT and ADMONISHMENT!

- **ENCOURAGEMENT** – Hebrews 10:24 **“Let us think of one another and how we can encourage one another to love and do good deeds.”** The GK word for ‘encouragement’ is *paraklesis* – and is used more than 100 times in the NT. It’s vital to understand this, it literally means to be called alongside someone. The church are like those ‘cloud of witnesses’ in Hebrews 12 at the roman games –urging us on to victory in the divine race – we root for each other, we spur each other on to love and good deeds by encouragement. In the church family we find people who are for us, people who believe in our God-given potential. We celebrate each other’s victories, and mourn our setbacks.
- **Now encouraging each other, believing in each others potential, often involves correcting a brother or sister in the Lord when they sin and stray from that potential!**
- **ADMONISHMENT** – **this is a part of helping someone to be their best!** It is not loving a person, if we just give them just what they would like! Try it with your 3 years old and they will not make it to four! If I am really for that person, then I am willing to say painful things, if pain is the only way to bring growth. True love is being able to warn, reprove, confront, when it is needed. So the kind of friends you find in a church family keep you on the cutting edge of personal growth by encouraging your progress and being willing to speak the truth in love even when it means confrontation. **Who He loves –He chastens!”**
- **We cannot see all of ourselves by ourselves, we need the perspective of others in our lives. (Linda’s Dad and baldness)** The way our eyes are positioned, we can only see about 70% of our bodies. We need some outside reflector, such as a mirror, to see what our faces and the back of our heads look like. We need each other to help us become all that we can be for Jesus. We need the perspective that a loving church family gives. **I’m not saying that we**

should take it on ourselves to tell everyone their faults! Real love never desires to inflict pain for pain's sake! I'm simply saying that when we see a fellow Christian heading down the wrong road, we should – in love- and this is the key –tell them and help them to get back on the right road.

- **It works both ways –when lovingly admonished by a fellow Christian, we not get defensive or angry or run to the Pastor, but accept that admonishment in love it was given, and thank that person for caring enough about us to tell us.** To summarize – in the church family we find people who love us unconditionally, friends who make our burdens their own, and fellow Christians who work to help us be our best, by encouragement and admonishment.
- **However, the characteristic of a church family that makes it most ideal for satisfying our inner loneliness is the fact that....**

4.. In our church family –We are given people with whom we have something very fundamental in COMMON!

- **The main thing on which any friendship is founded is something known as AFFINITY!** - which is just another word for common ground. Chemists use the term affinity to describe the attraction that causes atoms to bond with each other. And in friendships, affinity at it's most basic level is an attraction between 2 people. It refers to those things that attract us to each other so that friendship grows.
- **Think of affinity as friendship seeds –** the seeds that led you to your relationship with another person was your mutual love of golf or rugby or crafts. Our lives are full of people with whom we have that kind of affinity! However we have a DEEPER level of affinity, because these surface level friendships don't hold up under stresses of life.
- **Solomon's wise words in Prov.18:24 "Friends come and go, but a true friend sticks by you like family!"** This is deep level affinity. Not just common ground, but common values. We share agreement on our core values! We don't just talk about a task we are doing together, we share emotions and personal experiences. **A good example of this is David and Jonathan – they had this quality of affinity. They were so together because they based their lives on a deeply held love for God. This was the foundation of their friendship! A guy called Gary Inrig "The quality of friendship is nearly always determined by the quality of that which unites us!"`**
- **So our need for deep relationships is best met by the church family – because we find people who like us, have experienced the grace of God.** This is where we find our soul mates in every sense of the word!
- **A story by Max Lucado.** *"There were 2 twins –Ruth and Verena Cady. Since their birth in 1984 they shared so much. Meals – stories – t.v.shows – birthdays. They shared the same womb before they were born and the same room after they were born! But the bond between them went even further. You see their bodies are fused together from sternum to waist. Though they had separate nervous systems, and distinct personalities, they are sustained by the same, singular three-chambered heart. Neither can survive without the other. Since separation is not an*

*option, cooperation becomes an obligation. So, they have learned to work together. Take walking for example, their mother assumed they would take turns in walking forward or backwards. It made sense to her that they would alternate; one facing the front and the other the back. But the girls had a better idea, they learned to walk sideways, almost like dancing. And they dance in the same direction! When one had to sit in the corner, then so did the other! The innocent party doesn't complain, both learned early on that they are stuck together for good or bad!" It reminds me what Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:26** "Each part depends on the other part, when one part hurts , every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the celebration!"*

- **Like these Cady twins , we share the same body, but we have the same Father!** We really do! **Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4,5 that we are part of the same one body, serving the same one Lord, children of the same one Father.** As Christians in the church family, we have a depth of affinity you cannot find anywhere else. Our closest friends are found in the local church where there are Christians who follow Jesus as Lord of their lives.
- **Now I now this is the IDEAL today –** no church, not even HCC is perfect in each of these qualities of relationships – but I hope you see today the value – the importance of relating to each other in these ways and not just because of our relational needs. **Jesus commanded us to relate in this way John 13:34,35. "A new commandment love one another –as I loved you- this is how others will know you are my disciples.!"** In other words , the way we relate has a direct impact on whether or not lost people recognize us as God's children. This means our behavior towards each other can affect whether or not an individual comes into a relationship with God. They look to see if our walk with God makes any difference. And because this is true, you can count on satan attacking us at this point. **Experience has taught me that his favorite tactic is to divide believers, to set them against each other, often over trivial issues, because the more he can do this, the more people he can keep from Jesus.**
- **Today I'd like us to covenant together at HCC that we will not allow the enemies attacks to succeed and that we will do all we can to deepen our relationship with God so that we can be the kind of church family that loves unconditionally;** that bears each others burdens; that both encourages and admonishes in love. Let HCC be a place where folk can come and benefit from true family as God intended.



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