

Family Business

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! I trust you had a great week, upholding each other in prayer as you saw the thousands of opportunities to pass your daily tests! Did knowing you had someone from your group daily praying for you make a difference? Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” God created us to live in community; a cord of three strands comprised of us, God, and our Christian brothers and sisters. In fact, that’s your second life’s purpose: *fellowship*.



Fellowship

1. Describe a past crisis that made you grateful for your Christian community.



Discipleship

Selwin was the youngest child, born into a family with 12 kids. They were very poor. In fact, Selwin never remembered his father eating a meal with the rest of the family because he was always working long hours to feed his family. One day his father ran off with another woman, leaving his mother to care for all 12 children. At age 6, his mother tearfully told him that she had no choice; she was going to put him up for adoption along with 3 of his sisters. In fact, if she didn’t take this step, they would likely starve.

She placed an ad in a newspaper of a nearby town and within 3 days a couple responded. When the day finally came for Selwin to leave, he said it was the worst day of his life. They were at the train station, ready to say their last good-byes, when the conductor reached down to take him from his mother’s arms. He felt something die inside

His new family was very loving and kind, but it wasn’t the same. Selwin lived with the constant fear that one day they, too, would give him away. He grew into adulthood and finally went out on his own. He spent year after year absorbed in his work, trying to bury the deep hurt in his soul.

But one day something beautiful happened. In a moment of great discouragement, he visited a church, hoping he would hear a word that would boost his spirits. Little did he

know that his life would be changed forever. The preacher talked about how God loves to adopt people into his forever family, and at the end of the sermon he asked if anyone would like to join this family. Selwin raised his hand and went to the altar. At last, the ache in his heart was healed. Jesus told him He would never abandon him...never send him away. After years of turmoil and hate, he felt loved and accepted. He now had a security he never dreamed possible. He felt the Lord saying to him, "Selwin, I know about that day at the train station. I know how you felt, and I've been waiting all these years to adopt you into *my* family."

The news that changed Selwin's life can also change yours: God created you for fellowship and to be part of His family! He wants to adopt *you*! Maybe you can relate to Selwin, spending your life immersed in your career, creating you own family, or going from one destructive relationship to the next...trying to bury the deep hurt in your soul. God will never send you away, and along with His steadfast love is a ready-made family of other brothers and sisters in Christ.

There's a saying, "Blood is thicker than water." We understand that to mean that anytime we share familial ties and common blood, that bond is stronger than with those outside the family. I will agree with that...as long as the blood ties we are referring to are those of Christ! If you have accepted His blood sacrifice for your sins, you now have an instant and unshakable bond with millions of brothers and sisters around the world!

Turn with me to Romans 12:1-8 and let's read it together. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Healthy Christians do not live in isolation. Each member belongs to all the others! This fact should both comfort and challenge us. You haven't been left alone to drift through life, without a support system. At the same time, you have family responsibilities to *be* that support system for *your* spiritual family, which we'll talk more about next week. Notice the key principles that Paul lays out: our bodies and very lives are at the disposal of both God and others.

Two men watched from one end of the boat as those at the other end bailed frantically to

keep their sinking craft afloat. The one said to the other, “Thank heaven, the hole is not on *our* end of the boat!” (*chuckle*) We belong to each other; we are interconnected. If one member of the body and family is suffering, the rest suffers with it.

In fact, we can't claim to love God if we don't love His kids! Imagine my friend says to me, “I sure love *you*...I just can't stand your kids!” I'd be pretty offended! Jesus feels the same way.

Let's turn to John 21:15-17. “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep.’”

Are we getting the message? To truly love God, we must love others. Imagine you were leaving town to go on a trip with your spouse. You entrusted your most precious possessions, your children, to your friends to take care of while you were gone. You left them a list of their needs and instructions on how you'd like them treated while you were away. Well, how they carried out your wishes regarding your kids would be a great test of how much they cared about *you*! What a great picture of God's interest in each of His children and our responsibility to carry out His wishes.

The Bible says that *true* fellowship has the power to revolutionize lives. Masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, and tenderness flows. People really do become like brothers and sisters. They shoulder each other's burdens. It's the picture of an ideal family.

2. Re-read Romans 12:1-7. Based on verse 1, how much of our lives are at our disposal? How much of your life have you been thinking was at your disposal?
3. What does the pattern of the world look like in relation to loving? Sacrifice? Inter-connectedness? Service? Encouragement?
4. Read John 15:12-17. What criteria exists to be called a friend of God?
5. Read I Corinthians 12:12-27. Describe what your life would look like if those in your Christian community worked in harmony as a body. How would things have to change?
6. Discuss the quote by Dr. Larry Crabb: “We've made a terrible mistake! For most of this century we have wrongly defined soul wounds as psychological disorders and

delegated their treatment to trained specialists. Damaged psyches aren't the problem. The problem is disconnected souls. What we need is connection. What we need is a healing community."



Ministry

7. How difficult is it for you to let down your guard and let your spiritual family minister to your needs?



Evangelism

8. Read John 13:34-35. Who do you know who is hurting or in need of acceptance into God's family? Write down their name on a piece of paper and place it in a prominent place when you get home.

9. What can you do to show a God-like love to that person this week?



Worship

10. As you take turns reading Psalm 17, praise God for your special part in His plan and family, as well as your individual victories this past week.

11. Close in prayer for those hurting within your group, along with the names of those who will be the recipient of your concentrated attention this week.