

More family responsibilities

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! You know, your relationship to God is very personal...but it's not private. Last week, as we began talking about our responsibilities as part of a family – *God's family* – we learned that we are interconnected and need each other. God wants to bless you and meet your needs through others, and vice versa. In seminary (as in the Word of God), students are encouraged to select a local church body, get involved, and stay there as long as they live in that town. I heard one tired student (wanting to catch up on sleep Sunday mornings) actually argue, “But I attend the invisible church!” That left me wondering, “Did he give an invisible tithe? Did he invisibly minister? Did he have invisible people coming to help him in time of need?” Meanwhile, other students preferred to hop from one church to the next, depending on which was offering a particular sermon or activity to their liking. They were *casually dating* the Bride of Christ...or shall we say...wife swapping every week. Others sat in the back pew, and as soon as the last “Amen” was uttered, they were out the door. They were busy, they explained, having exams to study for, a never-ending list of things to do, and didn't feel a *need* to get involved. They were *living with* the Bride of Christ, without a commitment.



Fellowship

1. Describe the church you attended while growing up. Describe the one you attend now.



Discipleship

Last week we talked about accepting and preferring one another. Today we'll see the importance of *servicing*, being *authentic* and *praying* for one another...fulfilling our responsibilities to our brothers and sisters as we strive for committed fellowship.

The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa, the city of his birth, only on the condition that it *not* be played! Yet, this violin is made of a peculiar wood in that *as long as the violin is used and handled*, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, the wood begins to decay. These days, the exquisite, mellow-toned violin

has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case...valueless except as a relic. The moldering instrument is a reminder that life, withdrawn from all service to others, loses its meaning.

Turn with me to I Peter 4:7-11 and let's read it together. "The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Our service to others is to be done faithfully and seriously. We are Christ's ambassadors. The administrators of His grace! His purpose on earth was to serve, and He's left us in charge of acting like He would. The whole area of service is a very important one in the Christian life and can be seen in the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea in the Holy Land. These two bodies of water are connected by the Jordan River. Clear, sweet water from underground springs flows into the Sea of Galilee. It's a gorgeous, active lake, full of life that has sustained fishermen in the region for millennia. The Dead Sea, however, is a shallow, selfish *basin with no outlet*. It hoards the water that flows into it. Some water evaporates, leaving behind brackish, clouded water so dense that swimmers bob like corks. The whole sea is dead.

When we as Christians have no outlet of service, we too can become spiritually dead and stagnant. Instead of our faith being attractive, life-giving and fruitful, we become as useless as a stagnant pond.

But in addition to service, true fellowship requires *authenticity*. Have you ever had a friend who enjoyed to chit chat...but you never felt like the relationship went deeper than surface-level? Your friendship was doomed to mediocrity, because there must be vulnerability in order for mutual needs to be met and bonding to take place. In many churches it feels like you're breaking an unwritten rule to tell anyone you're having a problem. Families who've sat in the same pew for years will suddenly disappear, because the husband and wife are in turmoil over marriage problems. Yet instead of coming to the church for help, prayer and support, they flee the other way. They don't feel the freedom to say, "We love Jesus, but we're not doing very well. Our lives feel like they're unraveling. We need some help!" They've bought the lie that we shouldn't have problems; and if you do, you'd better not talk about it at church. Yet God created the church to be a hospital for hurting souls! It's pride and Satan's lie that tells us we need to already be perfect and beyond the need of help, care and prayer.

Tito learned that lesson well. When he got old enough to make conversation after church, someone would say, "So, Tito, how are things in high school?" He'd give the response that he thought was expected. "Oh, just fine!" He didn't feel he could tell him that his heart was being ripped to shreds because his girlfriend had dumped him, he was flat-

lining spiritually, or that he had an older brother who was drinking too much and driving too fast...that he was scared about where his life was heading.

Another lady began attending another church. She came for *weeks* all alone to the Sunday morning service. She would come in just as the service began and would be the first one to leave during the closing song. One day she decided to stop going, so after a few weeks the preacher went and visited the woman. She said she didn't come back because she hadn't built any relationships. No one reached out, she complained. Well, is it any wonder? The body of Christ was designed for give **and** take. God has creatively and uniquely gifted you, and there are things only you can do for others. Yet your role **will not** and **should not** always be that of a servant. You must allow others to see the real you...to admit your failings and struggles. Oftentimes it's easier to minister to others than to be the *recipient* of service! One young mother was so used to doing things for others at home and church, that when she received her diagnosis of cancer and was forced to let others serve *her*...it was as difficult as the chemotherapy! Yet her ultimate vulnerability when she allowed others to be family to her forged a bond that could not be broken!

Lastly, we need to **pray** for our family! I once heard the story of an organist who was getting ready to play as the church service began. When she put her hands on the keys there was no sound. Everyone knew something was wrong, so the preacher quickly got up and led in prayer. The janitor was aware of the fact that they hadn't plugged in the organ. So he tip-toed in during the prayer, plugged in the organ, wrote a note and handed it to the organist. The note said, "After the prayer, the power will be on." That is so true isn't it? After the prayer, the power will be on. Samuel Chadwick said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayer-less studies, prayer-less work and prayer-less religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray." Your brothers and sisters have hidden hurts that only God can see, so pray on their behalf. I want to close in prayer for *you* with the words of Paul from Colossians 1:9-12. (**read slowly**) "Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life *worthy* of the Lord and may please him in *every* way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the *inheritance* of the saints in the kingdom of light."

2. Read John 13:1-17. What tasks do you find distasteful? How can Jesus' example encourage us to serve?
3. Is it easier for you to serve or be served?
4. Re-read I Peter 4:7-11 and Romans 12:4-11. What do you think your spiritual gift is?
5. How can your gifts be used in your Christian family?

6. Read I Timothy 3:15. To what is the church compared? Talk about the significance of this comparison.



Ministry

7. Read Acts 2:42-47. How does your small group or house church resemble the church in Acts?

8. What improvements can you make in how you minister to one another?



Evangelism

9. How will your life appear “different” to an unbeliever if you practice the three qualities of service, authenticity and prayer?



Worship

10. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Use this passage as a closing prayer for your group, personalizing it according to individual needs.