

A Dysfunctional Family

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! A friend related what happened to him one unbearably hot and humid Sunday morning. He said, “The church parking lot was quickly filling up before the service. As I got out of my car, I noticed that as my fellow church members approached the front door, they huddled into groups, whispering among themselves. As I drew closer, I saw a man leaned up against the wall outside the church. He was almost lying down, as if he were asleep. He wore worn and torn clothes which were almost in shreds and had a hat pulled down, almost covering his sweating face. His shoes looked to be 30 years old, were too small for his feet, and showed his toes sticking out of several holes. I assumed this man was homeless, and had adopted our church as his temporary residence. I sidestepped around him and fellowshipped with the others inside the doors until the music started playing. Someone brought up the subject of the man outside, and a few people snickered and gossiped, but no one bothered to ask him in...including me. A few moments later as we took our seats and waited for our pastor to take his place up front, the doors to the church opened. In came the homeless man, walking down the aisle with his head down. People gasped, whispered and made faces. Undaunted, he continued right up to the front and up to the pulpit where he took off his hat and coat. My heart sank. There stood our pastor...*he* was the “homeless man.” No one said a word as he took his Bible and laid it on the pulpit. ‘Folks, I don’t think I have to tell you what I’m preaching about today.’”



Fellowship

1. How can you relate to these church members?
2. Have you ever been on the receiving end of rejection?



Discipleship

We’ve been talking about how our fellowship with other believers is one way we worship God; how it brings a smile to His face when He sees His kids treating each other well. Yet, just as in your human family, there are times we hit bumps in the road and it’s not easy to love each other like Christ loves us! Unfortunately, we are oftentimes a *dysfunctional* family.

Turn with me to our passage for today found in James 2:1-13 and let's read it together. "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"

I can still hear myself saying to my kids, "Can't you just get along?" Another phrase I inherited from *my* mom was, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all!" I know how painful it is for *me* to see *my* kids disrespecting each other and failing to appreciate the other's value. How must it grieve the heart of a perfect and loving God to see His precious kids hurting...or hurting each other?

A tragic headline came out in 1999. It read, "100 years of Christian fellowship, unity, and community outreach ended last Tuesday in an act of congregational discord. Holy Creek Baptist Church was split into multiple factions. The source of dissension is a *piano bench* which sits behind the piano to the left of the pulpit. Members and friends at Holy Creek Baptist say that the old bench was *always* a source of hostility. People should have seen this coming. From now on, the congregation will be having four services each Sunday. There has been an agreement mediated by an outside pastor so that each faction will have its own separate service with its own separate pastor. Since the head pastor is not speaking to the associate pastors, each will have their own service, which will be attended by factioned members. The services are far enough apart that neither group will come into contact with the other. An outside party will be moving the piano bench to different locations and appropriate positions, between services, in order to please both sides, and avoid any further conflict that could result in *violence*."

It almost seems that Paul had read this article 2,000 years ago! Turn with me to I Corinthians 6:1-8 as we read it together.

"If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And

if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another – and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.”

The difference between spiritual and unspiritual community is not whether conflict exists, but rather our attitude toward it and our approach to handling it. When conflict is seen as an opportunity to draw more fully on spiritual resources, we have the makings of spiritual community. It’s been said, “Discord and division flatter no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another...this is unnatural and monstrous.”

Our Good Shepherd’s great desire is to see His flock united in love. We each have enough conflict in our lives fending off Satan and his attacks. The last thing we need is to spend precious time, energy and spiritual strength fighting each other.

An elderly man had serious hearing problems for a number of years. His family tried again and again to convince him to get a hearing aid. Finally, he relented, went to the doctor and was fitted for a hearing aid that allowed him to hear 100 percent. A month later he went back to the doctor. The doctor said with a smile, “Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again.” The old man replied, “Oh, I haven’t told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to their conversations. I’ve changed my will three times!” (*chuckle*)

Thankfully, that is not our Father’s response to **His** dysfunctional family! Yet it does sadden His heart and prohibit us from fulfilling the purpose for which He created us. And, as Francis Schaeffer said, “Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful—Christian community is the final apologetic (note to translator: an apologetic is an explanation or defense of the faith).” How is your community of believers doing at representing Christ?

3. Read Hebrews 2:11. Who do you find it difficult to accept as *your* brothers?
4. Read Matthew 25:31-46. What criteria do you usually use to determine how you will treat those around you?
5. How would you treat them differently if you knew they were Jesus in disguise?
6. What is your initial reaction to both the blessings and punishments listed in this passage?

7. What surprises do you think you will have when God talks with you about your life?

8. Read Galatians 6:10. Does it surprise you that God places special emphasis on how we treat believers? Why or why not?



Ministry

9. Next week is our Celebration Session, so make plans for what you would like to contribute for a shared meal. Feel free to bring a game...and *friends* or *anyone* in need of the benefits of this small group!



Evangelism

10. Who are those in your circle of influence who others see as unworthy, unlovable, or unacceptable? Write down as many names as you can. Take a few minutes to silently pray for ways you think God would like to use *you* to demonstrate His love for them.



Worship

11. Since acting like a healthy family is a form of worship to God, pray with and for each other and the challenges each member faces with unity and conflict resolution.