

The relationship Factor

How to help build Community

Introduction

John Donne a famous 17th century poet wrote, ' No man is an island.' We have all been made for community. This need is built into the very fabric of our being. How do we build a strong healthy Christian community? The whole idea of this study is to help us see that Christian community can be dynamic and transformational. It doesn't grow out of exchanging doctrinal affirmations, rather it builds out of getting into each others lives. The trust is that Christian community comes out of the reality of being family, for better or for worse, and as such, we need to connect with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Community is not built by sitting in the same room, singing the same songs, rather it is forged in the fires of life. When we know each other deeply, the good the bad, and the ugly, then community is experienced. Roots grow deep when we know that we are loved by others and are free to extend love to them as well. Finally community deepens and is built when we commit to serve each other and let others serve us. This process of doing and receiving ministry is critical to healthy community life.

Study 1 The heartbeat of Community

Introduction.

The Journalist Marla Paul once wrote an article about her sadness and frustration of not being able to build and sustain friendships. She received hundreds of letters from others experiencing the same frustration and isolation. She ended her column by saying " so I will persevere. " She is going to keep longing, searching, trying and hoping that someday she will be able to discover and develop community.

The Big picture

1. Can you describe a time when you experienced real community and connectedness with other people?
2. How do you experience community today?

The Biblical picture

Read Genesis Ch 2 v 15-25

3. What do you learn about loneliness and the human need for community from this passage?
4. What are some of the things that keep us from opening our hearts and lives on a deeper level so we can be known by others?
5. Suppose you made the following commitment. " I'm going to open my life in a way that allows others to know me deeply. I will share my deepest joys, needs, struggles, and victories. I'm going to invite them to open their lives to me on this same deep level."
What are some of the possible risks you would be taking?
What are some of the possible joys you might experience?
6. Who, in your life, has poured out consistent and deep levels of love on you, and how have you expressed this love?
- 7 How has someone's Christ like service helped you to build friendships with others?

Being in the picture yourself.

8. Can you identify a person who has freely poured out deep levels of love on you, then take time this week to express your thankfulness. Call them, text them, e-mail them, write to them, communicate how much you appreciate the friendship you have with them

9. Make a list of people you know who are not in your group, let them know what you would miss about them if you are no longer in community with them. Tell them why you appreciate being in community with them.

10. Take time as a group to work in pairs or triplets, and finish the following statement; if you were suddenly taken out of my life, I would miss your.....

Study 2.
The Cost of Community

The early church relied upon a three-fold witness as a means of reaching out and impressing a cynical, unbelieving and word-proof world. Proclamation, which was direct, uncomplicated and authoritative, demonstration, which was irrefutable, life transforming, and impressive, and fellowship, which was spontaneous, warm and natural. Here were people who had learnt the reality of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The combination of these three made their witness powerful and effective. Everyone knows that every now and again we just have to go back to the basics.

The big picture

1. Take a moment in pairs, to think about how you would define each of the following words, try to be as basic and clear as possible. Then take it in turns to describe to your partner, how you understand the word.

Relationship

Friendship

Community

The Biblical picture

Read Philippians Ch 2 v 1-11

2. When you think about being in relationships and community with others, what does it mean to be

Like minded

Have the same love

Be on in spirit and purpose

Humbly consider others better than yourself

3. Why do you think the above are all critical for a deep and lasting community?

4. In verses 5-8 of Philippians Ch 2 we read of the attitudes and actions of Jesus. How is Jesus' life an example of counting the cost of community?

5. What do you learn from the example of Jesus that will help you develop deeper relationships?

Being in the picture yourself

6. What do you consider to be some of the possible consequences and problems a person might face if they enter a friendship with the following attitudes

a. 'I'm looking for a friend who is just like me. We need to see things eye to eye'

b. 'I want a friend who will make me feel better about myself when I'm with them'

c. 'I want a friend who is ready and willing to meet my needs and care for me.'

7. How would you respond to the following statement;

'Building a strong friendship involves blood, sweat and tears. My closest friends are people who have walked with me through the good times and the bad times.'

8. Picture a relationship you treasure. What makes it so valuable to you?

9. Why do you think it takes a long period of time to build a strong and lasting relationship?

10. In pairs share about a relationship you are investing yourself in at this time. What can your partner suggest as a way to encourage you in your commitment to build a strong and lasting relationship?

Study 3.
Moving beyond the superficial

Sometimes we can be just one relationship away from a whole new chapter in the story of our life. Sometimes we could just be one friendship away from some new experience of that which will be dynamic in our life. It's just a risk away, but sometimes we're just not prepared to take that risk.

The big picture

1 In pairs tell your partner about a time you took a risk and pushed beyond a superficial relationship into a deeper level of friendship.

2. How might your life be different today if you had not taken such a risk?

[Allow about 10 minutes for this, if need be, take it in turn to answer both questions.]

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 4 v 4-26

3. What does the Samaritan woman say to move beyond superficial conversation to a deeper level of communication and relationship?

4. What does Jesus say to move the relationship forward?

5. What keeps us relating on a superficial level and hinders us from going deeper in relationship with others?

6. What has helped us take risks and push beyond the wall of superficiality to a deeper level of friendship and community?

7. Break into pairs, and take five minutes to ask each other one of the following questions. After asking, take time to listen.

How are you doing really?

a. At home?

b. At work?

8. As a group, describe what you learned about each other

Being in the picture yourself

9. What barriers could stand in our way of developing a deeper relationship with God?

10. If we feel that our relationship with God is deep and strong, how is that going to impact our relationship with others?

Session 4

Healing relational tensions

There used to be a television programme called 'The Waltons'. It was an idyllic family life in a cosy home. It seemed that every problem this family had was solved in a sixty-minute episode. Today we don't see as many such programmes on the television quite like the Waltons. In fact what is going on in our family homes is very different today from what was going on in the family home that the Waltons sought to capture. Today within a short walk of an average town church in the UK there are likely to be the following. Bread-winning, family orientated dads snuggling up to homemaking, family-orientated moms, but also two career orientated parents, who are stressed out. Their marriage isn't working that well, and they're not very close to their children. Single-parent scenarios that have challenges all over them. There's also a high probability that there could be substance abuse going on and financial pressures undermining the sense of security of the home. There is even the distinct possibility of verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Today many people are growing up with curious and diverse behaviour patterns that were acquired to desperately cope with the chaos they encountered in their homes while growing up.

The big picture

1. What changes have you seen in your lifetime towards the following areas

Attitudes and lifestyles of teenagers

Focus and message of the media

Role parents play in raising their children.

People's attitudes towards deep, committed relationships

The Biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 12- 9-13

2. In pairs describe the difference between a 'sincere love' and an 'insincere love' in one of the following relationships. What does sincere love look like and what does insincere love look like

A friendship

A marriage

A professional relationship

A parenting relationship

3. In pairs choose one of the following challenges given by the apostle Paul and describe how it will help you build strong, healthy relationships

'hate what is evil cling to what is good'

'be devoted to one another in brotherly [sisterly] love'

'honour one another above yourselves'

'keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord'

'be joyful in hope'

'be patient in affliction'

'be faithful in prayer'

'practice hospitality'

4, describe some of the relational viruses that you are aware of which are operating in people's relationships today?

Being in the picture yourself

5. How have you protected yourself from relational viruses you have been exposed to in the past?

6. What if any, impact are those viruses having on your life and relationships at this time?

7. What can you do to restore some of the brokenness in your relationships from the past?

8. What can your group members do to help you find healing in these areas?

Session 5
Setting healthy relationship boundaries

How do you respond to people who have deep relational problems in your family, at work, in Church, and in your neighbourhood? We all live in a world filled with people who have relational problems. The big question is what can we do to remain healthy and balanced in how we respond to these people when we meet them? How do we draw healthy boundaries?

The big picture

1. How do you tend to respond when people in your life are needy and demanding of you?
2. How do you respond to those who unload their anger on you?
3. Can you offer a time when you said no to someone who came to you with an expressed need? How did it make you feel?

The Biblical picture

Read Exodus Ch 18 v13-27

4. How would you summarise the advice of Moses' father in law Jethro?
5. In what ways would Jethro's wisdom speak to you today?

Being in the picture yourself

6. What are some of the consequences you have experienced when you have lived without relational boundaries?
7. If the consequences are painful, why do so many people continue to live without relational boundaries?
8. If you have tried to get close to a person who has built a wall around their heart, can you explain how it felt to you?
9. What would you say to people who seek to protect themselves from relational hurt by erecting a stone wall around their hearts?
10. If you have ever built a stone wall around your heart, what caused you to build it, and what helped you tear it down?
11. How do you know when to activate your invisible force field to stop a person who has a relational virus from hurting you?

Session 6
How to extend community to others

All across the world there is conflict, which seems to reveal a high level of division and hatred between people groups. If we also look at our own nation there seems to be a simmering level of resentment, hostility and conflict between different groups of people. The call of the Church is to provide and model a heart-warming, intimately- relating, society-changing, life-transforming fellowship. But fellowship as far as God is concerned is for a purpose, Its purpose is to reach out, invite , include and enfold into the life of a local community all those who wish to respond to God's invitation of salvation in Jesus Christ. All those who wish to belong to a group of people who are allowing the presence of Jesus Christ to be lived out amongst them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The big picture

1. Where do you see the need for a dramatic change in the condition of the human heart
On an international level
National level
Our community level
In our church

The Biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 15

2. What common threads run through the three stories?
3. What is the significance of each common thread?
4. If you had to summarise the teaching of these three parables into one basic message, what would it be?
5. How does this central message speak to the followers of Christ today?

Being in the picture yourself.

In pairs, take it in turns to deal with the following questions [take a good 10 minutes]

- 6A. Tell of a time you lost something that really mattered to you?
- 6B. If you eventually found it, tell about the process of searching and how you felt when you finally found the thing that you had lost?
- 6C. If you never found it, tell about how this made you feel

7. How does God feel about people who are lost and don't know His love?

8 How does this impact the way you relate to those who are lost?

9. Who do you know that is lost and does not know the love of Jesus? Is there some way you can be an active part of the search process to bring that person to God? Share your ideas together.

10 What can you do as a cell/ small group in this search process?