

Building authentic community relationships within God's family

Introduction

Most significant memories in our life revolve around people. Despite the wide variety of people who make up a Church community, and despite their levels of spirituality, it is relationships that bring the greatest amount of joy to our lives. Today we all hunger for meaningful relationships. We value friendships and people above almost everything else. We all have a deep need to build genuine community in our lives. We all have a need to build healthy relationships and learn to develop and nurture long and lasting community. We also need to recognise the cost of beginning such a journey, and also to find the heartbeat of community. We will in this study look at what it means to move beyond superficial relationships, and find real satisfaction. We all long for closer relationships. We long for bonds so secure that we can be completely honest and vulnerable. But so often we keep our relationships at a safe and shallow level. We avoid the risk of revealing all this is in our hearts. In this study we shall aim to take risks. The reward for doing this is the satisfaction of true deep community. Each session in this study will help us to peel away the disguises that prevent us from being our truest freest self

The adventure of involvement with each other is locked in this study.

Study 1

Secret conversations, which stop us building authentic community

Introduction

We all engage in what is best called as self-talk. This is an ongoing internal conversation so natural that we barely notice it. Sometimes these conversations are quite innocuous, that have little or no effect on the flow of our lives. But there are times when we say things to ourselves that have a profound influence on what we believe and how we act. What we say is extremely important when it comes to highly sensitive matters of the heart. Such private conversations can change the direction of our lives.

The Big picture

1. Describe how you felt when someone in your life took a private conversation you had with them and made it public information
2. What impact did this have on your relationship?

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 8 v 31-32 & 42-47

3. Describe the vivid and contrasting portraits of Jesus and Satan in this passage?
4. How does Jesus challenge the belief system of the religious leaders of his day?
5. How can these challenges speak to 'religious' people today?

Sometimes our private conversations can be corrosive, and ends in defeat, especially when we start to compare ourselves to other people. "Everybody else looks so normal and happy, what's the matter with me?". Other times our private conversations can end in celebration. "I live my life everyday amongst countless people and yet the God of the Universe is thinking of me. He delights in me as I walk with Him"

6. Most of us have secret conversations about our self-worth that covers both sides of the above example. If your fellow small group/ cell members could hear your secret conversations about your self-worth, what is one thing they would learn about you?
7. When you have secret conversations about yourself on self-worth, what are the sources of this positive view of yourself?

We need to understand that when it comes to personal competency matters self talk is critical.

Being in the picture yourself

8. Choose one of the areas listed below and give an example of what a negative secret conversation about personal competency might sound like.
 - a. starting a small business
 - b. being asked to serve in a church ministry
 - c. going back to school for additional education

9. what can you do to fight against the natural tendency to have these kind of debilitating negative secret conversations?

10. Using the same area you choose above, give an example of what a positive secret conversation about personal competency might sound like?

11. How can you develop a more positive internal dialogue about your personal competency?

The importance of spiritual self-talk is an important factor in developing self-worth. A corrosive attitude here can make a great difference to our ability to develop relationships.

When we acknowledge that we are pretty good at making a mess of our own life and the lives of others, and we cry out to God for His help to help us in getting things right both inside ourselves and between other people, then we are on the way to a quality of life and relationships which is enriching and eternal.

12. If you have come to a point where you have told the truth to God and acknowledged your need of His saving power in your life, how has this spiritual truth telling transformed your life?

13. If you have not come to this point, where you have admitted to God that you need a saviour, what is standing in your way?

Study 2

The lies we use to avoid building authentic community

Introduction

In discovering the rewards of authentic relationships with others we need to be alert to a spirit of error as well as a spirit of truth. By that I mean the Dentist will sometimes say to us 'You won't feel a thing'. We immediately think 'I doubt it'. That is the truth detector going bleep in our mind. When someone says 'What I am about to say is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you,' The truth bleeper in our heads goes 'I don't think so, I think I'm being prepared for a confrontation that might hurt me a whole lot more'.

Certain phrases like this, trip our truth sensors, when this happens we need to prepare ourselves for action. We also need to be aware that we can trip the truth sensors in others by what we say to them. We can wreak havoc in other peoples lives by what we say, and induce pain, heartache and disappointment. We also need to be careful what we say to others.

The Big picture

1. what are some of the statements that bleep your truth detector?

The Biblical picture

Read Psalm 15v 1-4

2. The passage paints a picture of a person who can enter God's presence freely. Describe what this person looks like?
3. In verse 2 we are called to speak the truth from the core of our heart. What does it mean to speak the truth within your own heart?

Being in the picture

Sometimes an opportunity of challenge faces us, and without ever thinking, we say 'I could never do that.' We think about losing weight and we say 'I could never do that.' Another speaks of using their gifts in ministry and we say 'I could never do that.' What's worse is not just thinking or saying this but actually believing it.

4. We all have dreams and desires in our lives that get stomped down by the lie 'I could never do that'. What is one area of your life in which you have battled this lie or are presently battling it?

5. What can your group/ cell members do to help you fulfil your dream or desire?

We can sometimes either paralyse ourselves or others by the statement, 'Oh that would be terrible' where there is an exaggeration of the consequences of a minor slip up. At the root of this, is an intense pressure to please all the people all the time, it's an expectation that we need to give up and liberate ourselves from. When we are anxious about what might happen, what others will think, how bad the results will be, we are buying into a deadly lie.

6. What is an area of your life in which you are avoiding doing something because of the lie 'That would be terrible'?

7. If you can tell of a time you overcame your fear of this statement, and found out it was not so terrible after all.

The truth is that our needs and wants are easily confused. The statement 'I need this, or that'. We can easily fall into the error of saying, 'I need the newest piece of technology, latest phone, a bigger house'

8. What one thing are you seeking right now with an "I need it" mentality'?

9. What will it take for you to be honest and move this item from your 'need' to your 'want ' list?

One of the most deadly errors is the statement 'God will never forgive me for that'. When we believe this a dark cloud hangs over our head, our outlook on life is changed, we feel defeated, discouraged, we can feel tortured by it.

10. What would you say to a follower of Christ who said, 'I've lied to my boss, neglected my children, cheated on my spouse. There is no way God could ever forgive me. I'm too bad to experience God's love and cleansing'

One subtle error statement to consider is 'God probably could not do much through someone like me'. The truth is that there is no one else with your S.H.A.P.E. Your **S**piritual gifts, your **H**eart for things, your natural or learnt **A**bilities, your **P**ersonality, your life **E**xperiences

11. What is one thing God is doing in your life today that you once believed was impossible?

12. Here are a few verses, which you can commit to memory to help you be more sensitive to overcoming the challenges of a spirit of error.

Isaiah Ch 1 v 18

Jeremiah Ch 31 v 34

Psalms 103 v 12

Ephesians Ch 1 v 7

1 John Ch 1 v 9

13. Can you identify one thing you have been avoiding because you have been listening to the deadly lie 'I could never do that'?

Study 3

Honest conversations build authentic community

Introduction.

We all yearn for relationships in which we can be completely honest, open and vulnerable, in which we can share failures as well as successes, shortcomings as well as strengths. In which we can reveal doubts and fears and find empathy and confidentiality. These intimate, authentic relationships are exactly what God has in mind for us. He created us for relationships, and He wants us to experience them at their best. To move from pseudo-community we need to move from the safety of peace keeping all the time into the area of truth telling, but most of us will do anything to avoid a conflict.

The Big picture

1. Describe in vivid details a time you were burning to tell the truth but decided not to?
2. What were some of the results of that decision?

The Biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 4 c 14-16, 25

3. How can speaking the truth, even when it is hard or painful, be an expression of love?

4. In this passage we are called to 'put off falsehood and speak truthfully'. What are some of the common falsehoods spoken in the following places

The workplace

The home

The church

The political arena

Being in the picture

Honesty is essential for human relationships, yet too often we are quick to solve a problem rather than addressing what it is. We pretend that everything is OK, when the truth is that there are battle scars that need to be healed.

5. How do you respond when you are in a situation where you want to tell the truth, but you know that truth telling will stir up problems, and 'rock the relationship boat'?

6. Tell about an instance when you risked telling a truth and found that, with time, it deepened the relationship?

The reality is that a relationship preserved through a consistent commitment to avoid telling the truth is counterfeit peace. It results in a pseudocommunity, in such a community feelings beg to be shared but never are.

7. Describe what a pseudocommunal relationship would look like to you in these areas

Daily conversations

Handling a difference of opinion

Expressing appreciation.

8. Identify one relationship you have right now that is in pseudocommunity because it lacks the transparency of truth telling. What is keeping you from telling the truth in this relationship?

To enjoy the skiing of Vail in Colorado, from the town of Denver, one has to travel through the Eisenhower tunnel. There is no other route to follow. In order to move from pseudocommunity to authentic community you have to travel the tunnel of turmoil. In this tunnel hurts are unburied, hostilities revealed, tough questions asked, it takes and involves risk. But to go through this tunnel of turmoil move us from pseudocommunity to real authentic community.

9. Entering the tunnel of turmoil is a choice each of us must make to enter into communal relationships. What are the possible

A, risks of entering the tunnel of turmoil?

b. The potential benefits of entering the tunnel of turmoil?

10. Who is one person in your life right now with whom you need to enter the tunnel of turmoil with if you are going to discover real community?

11. How can you group/ cell support and pray for you as you undertake this challenge?

Study 4

The shortcuts to identify and avoid in building authentic community

Introduction

The Tunnel of Turmoil is not an easy journey to make, and so we often try to find shortcuts, and look for other methods of communication. Rather than speaking the truth in a clear and loving manner, we use subtle tactics and sneak attacks. The problem is that all of these shortcuts are really dead ends. We just need to identify the shortcuts, and avoid using them. We just need to learn how to begin communicating with honesty and authenticity. We need to avoid the games of Sarah the stonewaller, who when she is hurt, pouts till someone notices, Ivan the Intimidator, who uses pressure tactics to get what he wants, Gary the Guilt tripper, who uses coercion to get his way, Henry the Hint- dropper, he wants real relationships, but just hints at it, and Mary the Manipulator, she knows what she wants, but nags others to conform to what she wants.

The Big picture

1. What are some of the shortcuts you have seen people using to communicate what they are feeling without really telling to truth?

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 4 v 7-26

2. We are all familiar with the games people play to avoid telling the truth. Jesus never played games, he always spoke the truth. In this passage how does Jesus tell the truth in the following areas.

How did he speak the truth about Himself?

How did he speak the truth about the Samaritan woman's past?

How did he speak the truth about the Samaritan woman's spiritual condition and need?

How did he speak the truth about worship?

How did he speak the truth about the spiritual needs of all people?

3. How does the example of Jesus ' truth telling stand in stark contrast to the shortcuts people use today?

Being in the picture

4. Do you see anything of the hint- dropping tactics to building authentic community in yourself?

5. How do you see hint-dropping tactics as others relate to you?
6. What are some of the results you have seen in your relationships when hint dropping replaces truth-telling?
7. Do you see anything of the manipulating tactics in your relationships?
8. What are the results in a relationship when a person resorts to manipulation instead of truth-telling?
9. How have you experienced the guilt-trip approach to communication in one of the following areas?
Work setting
In your home growing up
In friendship
In church
10. What were the consequences of this approach to communication?

Tips on how to build transparency into a relationship

1. Identify the real issue.
2. Arrange to meet the person face-to-face as soon as possible.
3. When you meet, affirm the relationship before you open up the agenda
4. Make observations rather than accusations

Study 5

The skill of using positive expressions in building authentic community

Introduction

The Bible speaks of 'encouraging one another', about 'building one another up', the challenge we need to keep facing daily is learning the skill of expressing positive emotions. We often use the excuses for not using positive emotions, by saying, 'I just don't know how to express myself that way. 'It's not British to do that'. We can all be like the Father who was sharing quite openly with his friend just how pleased he was with his son and the business he had started up. He was full of praise for his son. A week later the friend met the son, and told him all that his father had said. The son replied, 'Why would he tell you and not tell me?' The pain in the young man's face was clear to see.

The big picture

1. Why do you think this father would freely tell others about his admiration and respect for his son, but not tell the son himself?
2. Why do you think the son was hurt and angry when he heard his father's praise from another person?

The Biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 17 v 11-19

3. What impresses you about the Samaritan leper in this story?
4. How can his actions and words function as an example in your relationship with Jesus?
5. Ten lepers were healed, but only one came back to express gratitude and appreciation. What do you think stood in the way of the other nine coming back to respond to Jesus?
6. What stands in the way of your expressing appreciation and positive emotions?

Being in the picture

It has been said that the eyes are the window of the soul. A look of encouragement, a look of love, a look of praise, can make all the difference. We seek out those who will acknowledge us with a look of love and affirmation.

7. Describe a picture you hold in your heart of a time when someone gave you a look of love. Why does this picture mean so much to you?

8. What is it in a person's look that builds you up and affirms you?

9. What is it in a person's look that can tear you down or bring pain to your heart?

It was Mark Twain who said 'I can live two months on one good compliment'.

10. We all carry around in our memories an 'audio file' of the encouraging and affirming things people have said to us. Relate one of these memories and say why it means so much to you?

11. Who is one person in your life who needs to hear a word of encouragement and love from you?

12. In what ways can your cell/ group members pray for you as you commit to honestly expressing your emotions to this person in the coming days?

If you study the life of Jesus you will see that Jesus did more than just offer a look of love, or a word of encouragement, he had a habit of using a loving touch.

13. Describe a time when someone reached out to you with a touch of love. What was it about their actions that made you feel loved?

14. Who is one person in your life who currently needs a touch of love?

15. What would be an appropriate expression of love towards this person?

Study 6

How to receive truthful words in building an authentic community

Introduction

When someone summons up the courage to tell us the truth, we need to be ready to hear it. We need to look at the challenge of receiving and responding to the hard words other people speak to us. We have to learn to overcome our natural human instincts in order to receive the hard truth from others. It takes a tone of courage, self-control and maturity, to do this. We need to learn how to receive words of affirmation and encouragement in an appropriate way. It always pays to hear the truth. Relationships built on anything less than truth are destined for disaster.

The Big picture

1. Tell about a time you heard the truth, responded to it, and were glad you did.
2. Tell about a time you refused to hear the truth or did not respond to the truth you heard, and regretted this decision

The Biblical picture

Read James Ch 1 v 19-20

3. It can be painful to hear the truth. With this in mind, James gives us three guidelines or truth hearing.

Be quick to listen

Be slow to speak

Be slow to become angry

How do these guidelines function together to help us in the process of hearing the truth?

Being in the picture

When we hear a truth we can have one of three primary knee-jerk reactions. Denial, retaliation, rationalisation

4. When someone speaks a hard truth to you, what are some of your reflexive responses?
5. How do you see patterns of one of the responses [denial, retaliation, or any other] in your relationships when it comes time to hear the hard truth?

6. If these responses stand in the way of hearing the truth, what is the antidote to each?

Denial

Retaliation

Rationalisation

Other

7. How do you respond when someone says something positive and affirming to you?

8. How do you want people to respond when you give them a truthful word of affirmation and encouragement?

9. Why is it hard to respond this way yourself?

10. What is a positive and affirming thing you want to tell a member of your cell/ group right now?

11. If you have come to a place where you have faced the hard truth of your own sinfulness and your need of Jesus as your Saviour, what helped you come to this realisation and face the truth?

12. How has facing this truth changed your life?