



Session Two: Christian Community before a Watching World

“In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...” *1 Peter 3:15*

GOAL

It is the content of our lives together as Christian Community that serves as the summative testimony of our Christian witness – in word and deed.

Practice Review

- Who did you NOTICE over this past week?
- Who did you give Generous Attention to?
- What did you observe?
- What did you notice about yourself?

Telling Our Stories

- Can you describe a group of friends from high school, college or work life that you really enjoyed hanging out with? You spent a lot of time together, shared risky experiences, they are still your go-to, best friends?
- What made that a unique group of friends?

Read

Acts 2:40-47

- Can you describe a time when you experienced Christian community like we find here?
- If you don't have an experience like this, how do you explain that?

Acts 11:19-30

- What would it have been about these people that gave them the label “Christians?”

Athenagoras, an early Christian leader, (133-190CE) writes:

“But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth; they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbours as themselves.”

“Building healthy missional community is in fact a major focus of New Testament teaching. Note how much of the New Testament is devoted, not to exhortations or strategies for evangelism or mission, but to building community that truly is Christ’s body. Why is this? Because the biblical writers knew that covenant communities that truly incarnate the character of Jesus would in fact do Jesus’ work and fulfill God’s mission. It is that simple and that profound. The community building that Paul and other New Testament writers stress is the Spirit’s missionary strategy.” Howard Snyder, *“Holiness and the Five Calls of God,” - Yes in Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission, and Culture. Clements Academic, 2011.*

Explore

“The heart of evangelism is the Spirit’s formation of a people into a distinctive set of habits, practices, disciplines, and loyalties that together constitute a visible and recognizable pattern before a watching world.” Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, p.317

- What are these habits, practices, disciplines and loyalties that form us into “a visible and recognizable” witness in our spheres of influence?
- What do your friends and family see when they observe how we live, act and think? What feedback do you get from them on your involvement in our faith community?

RHYTHMS AND PRACTICES AT THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (RESOURCE #2)

Discussion

Connecting Word and Deed

We want to develop habits and practices that help us to connect our desire to live as godly, loving Christians (deeds) alongside our desire to communicate to others the “good news” that we have found in Jesus (words). These practices are spiritual discernment exercises. We need to learn how to pay attention to what God the Holy Spirit is already doing in the lives of the people within our spheres of influence. **Our task is not to “evangelize” our friends; our task is to bear faithful witness as we participate with what God is already doing in their lives.**



The Practice: Notice

In our world of individualism, we have a very serious attention deficit disorder. We are so busy doing our own thing we rarely take the time to notice each other. We don’t pay attention.

The Kingdom practice here is to make enough time and space in our lives so that we can actually notice – pay attention – to other people.

Be generous with your attention. Give it away freely. Keep watch. Make sure that the people we come into contact with are ‘ok.’ This practice also helps us become familiar with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Becoming sensitive to His guidance is vital!

Assignment: You started this practice last week. Don’t go back to the same person; identify/discern another person this week for whom you will give your generous attention.

Prayer

God of the Universe, you noticed us, you sent us yourself in Jesus, you gave us your generous attention. Thank you for the beautiful feet of those who shared good news with us. Jesus, we revere you as Lord and Master of our hearts, help us to pay attention to others, as you did to us. Holy Spirit, lead us to those in our lives who need us to pay attention to them, in Jesus’ name. Amen.