

The Power of Biblical Community (Love People)
2 Chronicles 5:12-14
Grace – January 17, 2010

I. Introduction

Rick Warren once received the following letter: Every day I wake up with good intentions to change my ways. I think today is going to be different. But it never is. Somehow and someway, I fall back into my same old ways of relating to people and my old bad habits. Sometimes I feel like there's a tug-of-war inside me. I really want to do what's best, but I always end up disappointing myself and God. I've tried everything - prayer, resolution, self-help tapes, and even hypnosis. Nothing seems to work. Why do I keep making the same bad mistakes? Why am I so resistant to change? Why do I do the things that I know are bad for me? I'm very discouraged. Pastor Rick, I need help.

Do you ever feel like that? The fact is, good intentions are never good enough. The kind of change that God wants to see in your life, in my life, and in the lives of others does not happen by simple willpower.

The truth is we all have emotional pain, addictive behaviors, and bad habits that keep us from being everything that God has created us to be, and we won't change simply by trying harder.

The Bible says, *"If the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free."* (John 8:36, NIV).

But if you look around our church and others who claim to be Christ followers, we have a lot of people who are not living free.

Jesus says, *"I will set you free,"* but most of us don't really feel free, and we certainly don't live free. Instead, we feel more like Paul who said in Romans chapter 7:

"I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway."
(Romans 7:15-19, NLT)

All of us know where Paul is coming from. In every human being there's a civil war going on inside - between what is good and what is bad, between God and Satan. The changes that God wants to see happen in your life may start with prayer, but it takes even more than prayer.

Just attending church isn't the answer, either. There are people who have been in church all their lives, and they are just as envious, just as angry, and just as cantankerous as everyone else. Church alone doesn't change you.

So, how do we experience real life change?

As you keep reading in Romans 7, Paul tells you what the answer to real life change is. And Paul's answer for life change is the same as ours and the same as the answer for the people sitting in our church each weekend. He says, *“Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 7:25).

Jesus is the answer and that is the good news of the Gospel. This point can not be emphasized enough.

Many of us live under a subtle **deception** even as Christians. We think that if we pray harder, read the Bible more, do more ministries, give more money, achieve a certain position in the church or at work, or even attend a small group that we are going to become better Christians.

While we should certainly do all these things, the temptation is to bypass the radical message of Jesus Himself, which is, *“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”* (Matthew 16:24-25, NLT)

You cannot **bypass** the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and work your way to God.

So, whenever you hear me talk about how important worship, prayer, small groups, ministry, fellowship, giving, or anything else is – you have to understand that if you have not been crucified with Christ, having laid down your life, and put all your hope and trust in Him, all this other very important stuff can not really help you.

The Scripture says, *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”* (Philippians 2:12-13, NIV)

The Bible does not say to work **for** your salvation. It says to “work it out.” There's only one way you can find salvation – by grace through faith.

When you lift weights you don't create new muscles; you work out to strengthen the muscles you already have. When you “work out” your salvation, you don't earn it. Instead, you strengthen what God has already given you.

This is the paradox of the Christian life: You can't change yourself; however, because of the cross, the Holy Spirit can. At the same time you can do certain things that facilitate that change.

The important thing is where you start. You have to begin with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If not, you are always going to find yourself going around the same mountains.

Having said all that, Jesus uses various tools, circumstances, and situations to change our lives. Can you name what some of those might be? [Ask if anyone is willing to look for a passage or two and share their thoughts about prayer, Bible reading, etc. and how that is expressed in the context of community – they would need to be ready on the Jan. 31.]

While there are many things God uses in our lives, I would like to emphasize the power of Biblical community – this is what we are emphasizing when we speak of “love people.”

II. The Power of Biblical Community

“Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. 14 Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” (James 5:13-16, NLT)

All of this occurs in the context of community.

Let us look at what we usually consider vital to our spiritual growth in the context of biblical community.

A. Worship

Worship in the Bible is almost always spoken of as occurring in the context of community.

*“Do not worship the Lord your God in the way these pagan peoples worship their gods. [Individually, on whatever high place or altar they wanted to] 5 Rather, you must seek the Lord your God at the place of worship he himself will choose from among all the tribes—the place where his name will be honored...7 There you and your families will feast in the presence of the Lord your God, and you will rejoice in all you have accomplished because the Lord your God has blessed you. 8 Your pattern of worship will change. **Today all of you are doing as you please...** When he gives you rest from all your enemies and you're living safely in the land, 11 you must bring everything I command you—your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, your sacred offerings, and your offerings to fulfill a vow—to the designated place of worship, the place the Lord your God chooses for his name to be honored. 12 You must celebrate there in the presence of the Lord your God with your sons and daughters and all your servants. And remember to include the Levites who live in your towns, for they will receive no allotment of land among you.”* (Deuteronomy 12:4-12, NLT)

I think one of the major reasons people don't like church or “organized religion” is that they just want to do what they please.

Even King David who provides the strongest indication of individual praise and worship says: *“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you **among your assembled people.**”* (Psalms 22:22, NLT)

And again he says, *“Come, let **us** sing to the Lord! Let **us** shout joyfully to the Rock of **our** salvation. 2 Let **us** come to him with thanksgiving. Let **us** sing psalms of praise to him.”* (Psalms 95:1-2, NLT)

“Praise the Lord! I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with his godly people.”
(Psalms 111:1, NLT)

“...be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...” (Ephesians 5:18-20, NIV)

III. Application

We will continue to look at other ideas that relate to transformation in the context of community the next time I speak, but let me conclude with a few thoughts.

[Show the clip from “The Princess and the Frog.”]

Worship is like eating a good bowl of gumbo. And something that good just needs to be shared.

There is something unique about gathering together with other believers for worship, but do we come with that kind of expectation?

Do we anticipate the glory of the Lord coming and filling this place as we worship?

“And the Levites who were musicians... were dressed in fine linen robes and stood at the east side of the altar playing cymbals, lyres, and harps. They were joined by 120 priests who were playing trumpets. 13 The trumpeters and singers performed together in unison to praise and give thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, they raised their voices and praised the Lord with these words: ‘He is good! His faithful love endures forever!’ At that moment a thick cloud filled the Temple of the Lord. 14 The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple of God.” (2 Chronicles 5:12-14, NLT)

[Tell the story of the Morningstar worship gathering.]