

The Power of Biblical Community (Love People)
James 5:13-16
Grace – January 31, 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 somehow, 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 with 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.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in Romans 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?

Two weeks ago, I emphasized the answer Paul gives in Romans 7: *“Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 7:25).

I did my best to make it clear that we must begin with Jesus. Not just a vague belief in Jesus, but a wholehearted commitment to the one who came, lived, suffered, died and was raised again from the dead.

Having said that, there are a variety of ways in which God brings freedom into our lives. Circumstances, trials, prayer, Bible study, and worship, just to name a few, but I would like to emphasize today is that all of this is greatly enhanced when we are fully engaged in Biblical community.

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. **Prayer**

Let us look at the above passage. This is radical prayer!

Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray for you. And what does the Scripture say?

Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well.

But it does not stop there. *And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

This does not sound like a boring prayer meeting!

Now I understand the call to private prayer. Jesus prayed by himself, *“Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.”* (Mark 1:35, NLT)

And Jesus states this clearly in Matthew 6:6, *“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* (NIV)

But the context, which is made clear in the Message translation, relates to the Pharisees who prayed in public *in order to be seen by others.*

“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” (The Message)

While there are some of us who pray in public for all the wrong reasons, this does not mean we should forsake public prayer or relegate the spiritual disciplines to simply private acts.

“I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. 20 For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:19-20, NLT)

There is power in community!

“When they (the apostles and other believers) arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying... They all met together and were constantly united in prayer.” (Acts 1:13-14, NLT)

And what was the result of this united, group prayer?

“Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.” (Acts 2:2-4, NLT)

And the rest, as they say, is history.

[Clip from Flight 93]

B. Scripture Reading

*“All the believers devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching**, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all... And all the believers met together in one place... And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”* (Acts 2:42-47, NLT)

“...you must read this Book of Instruction to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the Lord your God at the place he chooses. 12 Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may hear this Book of Instruction and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully obey all the terms of these instructions. 13 Do this so that your children who have not known these instructions will hear them and will learn to fear the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 31:11-13, NLT)

“They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage... They remained standing in place for three hours while the Book of the Law of the Lord their God was read aloud to them. Then for

three more hours they confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord their God.” (Nehemiah 8:8 & 9:3, NLT)

C. 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 example 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

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.]

When we gather for prayer, Bible Study, worship or to share a meal together in each others homes – do we expect God to meet us there?