

# Everyday Church

## Reflection

Take time together to read Philippians 2v1-11

As you read reflect on who Christ is and the salvation we have received through him. Respond by praising and giving thanks to God.

## The Next Step

Read 1 Peter 5v1-7

## Gospel Communities

The letter that Peter writes reminds us that while we live on the margins in a hostile environment we are a *'chosen people...a people belonging to God'* called to *'live such good lives among the pagans'* as we *'love each other deeply...using whatever gifts we have to serve others.'* In short Peter is calling us to realise our potential of being Gospel Communities in a world without hope and without Christ.

Gospel Communities are all about God's people doing mission together. They are the context for living out the gospel individually and corporately, the place where, *'I am able to care and be cared for; love and be loved; forgive and be forgiven; rebuke and be rebuked; encourage and be encouraged'*. (Timmis & Chester). As we speak the gospel to each other and apply the gospel to each other we become a community of light and hope to those around us. As the Gospel takes effect in our lives we will be moved to *'love the unlovely, forgive the unforgivable, embrace the repulsive, include the awkward, accept the weird.* It's in these contexts that we are conformed into the likeness of Christ and others are transformed by the grace of Christ.

Philip Yancy comments: *'We often surround ourselves with the people we most want to live with, thus forming a club a clique, not a community. Anyone can form a club; it takes grace, shared vision, and hard work to form a community.'* In other words it's only the miracle of the gospel at work in our lives that will enable us to be a Gospel Community. Therefore as God's people we must saturate ourselves with the gospel. We must listen to it, meditate on it, talk about it and apply it to our lives. Through the gospel we learn to repent of our failings and through the gospel we learn to exercise faith that Christ is our only hope. When this glorious gospel is at work we *'live in harmony with one another, are sympathetic, love as brothers and sisters, are compassionate and humble...and are always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give a reason for the hope that we have.'* (1 Peter 3v8,15) In summary: Gospel communities are all about God's people doing mission together as we live and apply the gospel to our lives.

## Question:

From what you have just read, How does belonging to a Gospel Community encourage us and challenge us?

## Leading Gospel Communities

Of course a Gospel Community is another way of talking about Church, and if we are to function well it must start with good leadership. Godly leaders create a gospel culture through their teaching and example, where people can flourish and grow. So leadership is vital and that's why Peter turns to the subject of leadership as he concludes his letter. Peter says: *To the elders among you...be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..* 1 Peter 5v1-2.

The model for leadership is Jesus Christ our 'chief shepherd' (v4) who gave up his life for us. The apostle Paul reminds us of this: *'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood'*. Acts 20:23 Leaders are to follow the sacrificial and servant example of Christ.

### Teach the Gospel

*'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers..'*

Peter himself had been instructed by the risen Jesus 'take care of my sheep' and 'feed my sheep' (John 21v16-17). In other words the primary means of caring is by teaching the gospel, calling people back to the gospel, applying the gospel into the context of everyday life and resting in the hope of the gospel. Leaders are to literally feed their people with the gospel, nourish them, fill them so that they are satisfied in nothing less than the gospel. The gospel is not just the way in to the community it is the way in which the community of God's people grow. The gospel motivates us in our mission, it restores us when we fail, it shapes us as we grow and it directs us as we plan. A Gospel community is best cared for when the gospel is taught by their leaders, whether it's formally through public teaching or informally through day to day conversations.

### Live the Gospel

*'...not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not greedy for money, but eager to serve,..'*

Leaders must also live the gospel, applying it to their lives so that they serve with the same compassion and grace as the Lord Jesus. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is seen as The Shepherd who came to serve. The 'Good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep'; the one who has compassion on the people for they are 'like sheep without a shepherd'; and the one who 'searches for the lost sheep until he finds it.' Jesus came to serve not to be served. He came to give, not to see what he could gain. Leaders likewise are to serve sacrificially, they are not in it to gain wealth or a good salary they are in it to give of their lives. A Gospel Community must not settle for anything less, they must encourage and remind their leaders of their calling and they must pray for their leaders that they will serve well.

### Model the Gospel

*'...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.'*

Leaders have a responsibility to model what the gospel looks like. Their words must be matched by their deeds. The Gospel must not only be heard it must be seen in action. In fact people need to see the gospel to be able to grasp it. Leadership is not a position to 'lord it over' it is a position to demonstrate the gospel in everyday life. Leaders model forgiveness and grace, they model compassion and care, they model encouragement and rebuke, they model mercy and humility – they set an example to the flock. Leaders are responsible for shaping Gospel Communities, they create a place where people not only hear the good news but experience the good news.

Leadership is vital to the health of our Gospel Communities and so we need to invest time in training and equipping leaders, nurturing them and supporting them. Without leaders the sheep will scatter and get into trouble, they will fall away and lose their way. Peter's command is that leaders take their role seriously because it will mean the growing of Gospel Communities.

#### Question:

While Peter highlights the need for good leaders – in what way is this to be true for all of us? (See 1 Peter 4v10-11)

### **Growing Gospel Communities**

Having reminded us of the need for good leadership Peter goes on to warn us about our enemy – the devil. The church is God's means for mission, it lies at the very centre of God's purposes for the world and so we need to be alert to our enemy who is out to break and destroy the gospel community. *'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.'* 1 Peter 5v8. It's important then, that we continue to grow and be strong and that the attacks of the devil do us no harm. The devil will use whatever means he can to disrupt what we are seeking to do and so we must be aware of his schemes.

Here are five ways in which he will seek to break up Gospel Communities.

#### First Individualism

Our culture is marked by individualism. We want to control our own lives. We don't want anyone interfering with what we want for ourselves. This is the air we breathe. It's all about me and what I want. This is how Satan attacked Adam and Eve – he fed the seed of individualism – you don't need God you can live your own way. The reality is individualism breaks the community.

#### Second Pride

None of us like to accept help – we rely on ourselves. This is not only true practically it is true spiritually. We believe the lie that we can do the Christian life alone. Others need help but I don't – to admit my need of support is to admit weakness and my pride won't allow that. The Gospel community however reminds us that we do need each other. I need you and you need me.

#### Third Comfort

We all like our own comfort. We love ourselves more than others and the devil will remind us in subtle ways that we deserve our comfort – look after number one – everyone else does! Gospel community living means people who need time and support and help. It means opening our homes and sharing our resources. This is hard and the desire for own comfort above others will always be there.

#### Fourth Fear

Living in Gospel Communities means being vulnerable. We fear what people might think of us if they knew what we were really like. We fear that people will see the real 'me' so we put on a façade, a mask to protect us from others. But to hide the real 'me' means we never change and we never grow. Gospel Communities are places of support and grace, a place where we trust one another.

### Fifth People

Lets face it we are no better than each other – we are all problem people and no one can claim to be above others. Our temptation is to think that 'I' am somehow different to everyone else – it's not me it's them! The truth is the Gospel Community is made up of forgiven people who are in need of forgiveness everyday. Opting out of church is not an option – we belong to God and we belong to each other.

### Question:

What temptation do you relate to the most?

The reality of the devil is in evidence everyday as he looks to disrupt and break up the community of God's people. If we are to keep growing not only do we need to be aware of his attacks we must also be able to stand strong and resist him.

*'Resist him standing firm in the faith, because you know your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.'* 1 Peter 5v9 The way to deal with the devil is that we stand together in the faith. In other words we stand in the gospel.

This must be underlined again and again. We start with the gospel and we continue in the gospel. We don't progress to a new teaching, Christians always go back to where they started – the gospel. Peter tells us: *'For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.'* 1 Peter 1v23. So we start with the gospel word but we also go on with the gospel word. *'Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...'* 1 Peter 2v2. It is the daily hearing and applying of God's word that will keep us strong and will help us to live out that truth in our lives. Returning to the gospel reminds us that we can't do this alone it is God's work of grace in us. *'And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.'* 1 Peter 5v10-11

We are not independent individuals resting on our own strength and determination, we are a community of people resting on the power and grace of the gospel. Timmis and Chester comment: Everyday church will either witness to God's grace in our lives or it will fracture. We cannot 'achieve' it, for it grows out of God's grace to us and to others. It is the fruit of grace and therefore a testimony of grace. When people see us living life together, loving, serving, forgiving, forbearing, supporting, encouraging and proclaiming the gospel to one another, it cannot but provoke questions.

*'Finally all of you live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers and sisters, be compassionate and humble...In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give a reason for the hope that we have.'* (1 Peter 3v8,15)

### Question:

What steps can we take to grow our gospel community?

### Response.

Pray through together thanking God for our Gospel community and pray that God will lead us and grow us as we do mission together.