

Loving One Another

Introduction

We have much to be thankful this Thanksgiving season. I just love the Thanksgiving season. Partly because it has not been commercialized like Christmas and Easter – but mostly I love the Thanksgiving season because it's a time for taking some time out and reflecting back on the past and giving thanks for what God has done. Looking back not just to the past year – but to the past years and seeing God's faithfulness.

As I have done that over the years, I am always drawn to reflect back 36 years ago this Thanksgiving, when I became a follower of Jesus. As I remember back to that first month – between Thanksgiving and Christmas I remember how I devoured the New Testament. I must have read it 2 or three times. There were three things in the New Testament that I found particularly captivating.

The first was the person of Jesus. He was unlike anyone I had ever met. I loved the way he related to people – it was both fresh and challenging. Like the way He interacted with the “nice respectable” people of his day. Calling them a “brood of vipers” and white washed graves. He obviously hadn't read *“How to win friends and influence people”*

And I loved the way he cared for those who were in trouble – direct but loving. I was also drawn to the fact that he was a man of action – It wasn't just nice words – but he spoke with power – I was drawn to his healing power – for healing the soul and the body.

I was also drawn to the promise of a community of caring brothers and sisters. Woven throughout the New Testament is what I now call the One Another ministry. The Jesus community that I was invited into was one where the brothers and sisters were called to

- Love one another (John 13:34)
- Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Be devoted to and Honor one another (Romans 12:10)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Be forbearing with one another (Ephesians 4:2)
- Forgive one another (Colossians 3:13)
- Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Instruct One another (Romans 15:14)
- Admonish one another (Colossian 3:16)
- Encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3: 13; I Thessalonians 5:11)

As I read the pages of the New Testament for the first time, I was extremely excited about the possibility of being part of such a community. It was something I had unknowingly been longing for my whole life. To be part of an authentic community where I could love and be loved. Know and be known had a major impact on me.

The other theme in the New Testament that I found very hopeful was the promise of personal transformation. I knew that I wanted to be a different person. Some people say that Christians are brain washed – I knew that my brain needed some washing. I also knew that I wanted to be like Jesus – one who spoke honestly and lovingly. And one who spoke and acted with power.

I found in the New Testament the promise that I could be transformed from one who is separated from God into a fully devoted follower of Jesus. Does that sound familiar to some of you. That's our call here at the Barn. That is our mission here – to work with God to help those of us who are separated from God become transformed into a fully devoted follower of Jesus – one who would be like Him.

Each year, as I think back over the past 36 years, I realize that Jesus is more real to me – more personal – more winsome – and more powerful than ever.

But looking back also reminds me of some areas of sadness and disappointment. For me, the promise of community has only been fulfilled here and there. I've experienced occasional pockets of unbelievable rich community where brothers and sister live out this "one another" ministry but by and large it still remains an unfulfilled promise.

And the promise of transformation in my life has such a long way to go. Much has changed – but there is so much work to do.

I've been helped by Gordon MacDonald's analogy that transformation in the life of a follower of Jesus is much like the clearing a New England plot of ground

When we start out, we clear the trees and then start removing the largest boulders. Although that's a big job, it start's looking pretty good. But then there are many many medium size rocks that need removal – and that takes a much longer time to remove. Once that's done – you look around and think – "hey we've come a long way." But then you begin noticing the innumerable small rocks – which never seem to go away. And each new winter season pushes more and more rocks to the surface. And it even begins to expose some boulders bigger than the ones we removed at first.

Unfortunately I'm not the only one who's not being transformed. All social indicators tell us that by and large we the church are indistinguishable from our neighbors who are not following Jesus. And in some areas we are even worse:

"Christian marriages are more likely to experience divorce than non-Christian marriages."

50% of Christian men had visited a pornographic site within the last year.

Why is this? Why is this promise of community so elusive? Why does transformation take so long? The answer to these questions is extremely important to us. We have to get better at building communities of love and service. We have to get better at helping one another be transformed by the power of God into more loving and caring people. This is important, not just because it's part of our mission statement.

It's important because Jesus says that it is by our love for one another that the world will know that he is who he said he is. ¹ Without true transformation – our message is impotent / it has no power.

Friedrich Nietzsche, who was the father of the “God is dead” movement at the end of the 19th century, said “If Christians want me to believe in their Redeemer, they need to look more redeemed.”

We need get some answers to these questions. Let's see what our scripture for today has to say about these. Let's first pray.

Scripture Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Brief Context of the passage

Let me first set the context of this passage. The entire 1st part of the book of Hebrews is comparing the way things were before Jesus came with the way things are now after Jesus came and demonstrating how Jesus changed everything for the better.

In Chapter 10, the book emphasizes how Jesus has dealt with our brokenness compared to how it was dealt with before he came.

Then in verse 19, the author launches into Part II of the book – the practical application of these truths. Because Jesus has come into this world and changed everything – how should we then live?

“Consider” verse 24

That's where we pick up passage this morning. I want us to look at three ideas in our text. The first thing I want us to consider is the word “consider” in verse 24.

Most of you know that the New Testament was written in Greek which was the market language of the day. In the Greek – the word translated consider is very intense -means “to thoroughly weigh a matter so as to come to a full knowledge of it. To think deeply – pray about – meditate on – spend a significant amount of time working through –

I've read this verse many times before and I've never asked the question – Do I do this? Does anybody do this? Does anybody here spend time deeply thinking about how to encourage other people to be more loving and more caring?

¹ ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:21-23 (NIV)

Our scripture this morning is not directed to the pastors or the leaders but is addressed to all of us. Not only that, but I also want you to notice that this exhortation is not directed to us individually – it's not a work that we are to do alone. God isn't telling me to say "Now let's see – how can I make Gage more loving?" This call to "Consider" is just one of what I call the 4 salad exhortations in this section

- Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart vs 22
- Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess vs 23
- Let us consider how we may spur one another on vs 24
- Let us not give up meeting together vs 25

Each of these exhortations are to be worked out together – with one another. Not something that we do by ourselves. "Let **us** consider how **we** may ..."

I want to say something to you young people – relationships important are very important to you at this stage of your life – you spend time an immense time thinking about relationships – you have some things to teach us adults in this area. A lot of us adults have lost that. We have become like the Dad in the Verizon commercial – you know the one where the Dad tells his wife and kids how special they are to him and then walks out of the house saying I'm – "saving the best for numero uno." What it would it look like if among your friends, your Christ care group, your youth group you focused some of that time thinking together – how you can be more loving – more caring – do more acts of service.

What would our church look like if we applied ourselves to this idea?

Are we are setting apart chunks of time when we gather together where we address this. Think of each of the small groups that you are involved in (and I define a small group as 2 or more people united together for a purpose):

Married couples – do we take time together to consider how to make each other more loving and to serve better. Now I know that we spend a lot of time individually thinking how we wish they would be different – but we are talking about doing this together.

Families – do we ever spend any time together discussing how can we help each other to become better followers of Jesus?

Ministry teams – deacons / elders / trustees / worship team -

Small groups

How much time to we spend thinking deeply / praying / meditating / wrestling with helping one another to learn how to love – to learn how to serve? I think we've missed this – and whenever we find that we've missed the mark on something – it's good to take some time and just bring it to Jesus – Let's do that right now.

Confession - pause

“Spur one another on” verse 24

Okay let’s move on to the second idea I want us to look at in our scripture. In verse 24 we are told that we are to consider how we may “Spur one another on” –

Some translations use the word “Prod” – both are good translations conveying accurately the sense of the underlying Greek word comes from another word meaning Sharp.

We are called to deeply think about how to spur and poke and prod one another. Does anyone here like being be poked, or spurred or prodded?

Our scripture is telling us specifically how we are to encourage one another. Not by being nice but by being honest. If we are honest with each other – if we really hear what the Holy Spirit tells us how we need to learn to love better – to serve better – to honor one another better – to accept one another – it is going to create some “spur” moments – Ouch! Ooh That hurts – Real truth hurts. But getting spurred moves you. And that is critical to growth and transformation.

Last summer our company went to the Willow Creek leadership summit together and afterwards we devoted some time considering / thinking deeply / meditating on some of the truths we received there. One of things we looked at was what de-motivators existed at our work place – and we were doing this in order to get better at loving and serving. One of the guys pointed out something specific that I had done that de-motivated him – ouch – spurring me on to love and good deeds. Ouch Whose idea was it to talk about these things anyway.– ooh that hurts. But even though it hurt I had to say “You’re right I need help in this area” – ouch.

We definitely need to be very careful and thoughtful before we spur or prod. It’s very important that we put these two together. Jesus told us that if we are going to touch on the short comings of another person – we need to deal with it like you would deal with touching someone’s eye – very carefully²

“Not give up meeting together” verse 25

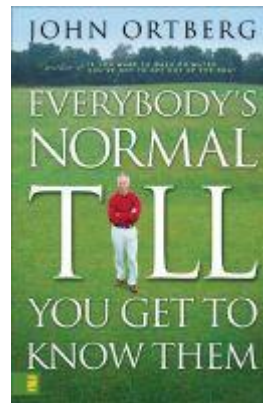
The last thing I want to look at with you is a warning. Our scripture this morning warns us about what might happen if we actually start getting to know one another. We are warned not to “give up meeting together.”

Why in the world would we “give up meeting together?” Why would we disassociate ourselves from a community of people who loved us and honored us and cared for us?

In the movie *As Good as It Gets* with Helen Hunt and Jack Nicholson, Jack plays a obsessive-compulsive writer who has some moments of kindness and generosity but by and large is just rude. There is a scene where at 4 in the morning he goes over to Helen’s house and he is standing at the base of her stairs doing some of the odd things he does when Helen cries out – “I just want a normal boyfriend”

² Luke 6:41-42

John Ortberg has written a great book— whose title tells this whole sermon in one line *Everybody Looks Normal till you get to know them*. There is a desire on our part to relate to “normal” people. But if we are going to get real with each – learn how to love one another better and to serve this hurting world better – we are going to come face to face with real people. And guess what – real people aren’t “normal.” Okay – no looking around.



In every significant small group (again I am defining that as 2 or more) where I have gone deep with people – at one time or another I have cried out – “why can’t they just be normal.”

And when we start feeling that way – we start want to start avoiding them. There wells up inside me the desire to take my marbles and go home.

But there is a second reason we give up meeting together. It happens when we find out that others are probably asking the same thing about me. Inside me there is a deep fear – that when people get to know me – know me as I really am –they will find out I am not as great as they once thought. This is not an unfounded fear. I have seen it happen.

A number of years ago some one I was getting to know used to encourage me – write notes – say things about me – what a great man of God I was – what wonderful things I was doing. But then the relationship progressed and this person got to know me – really know me – warts and all. They don’t send those kinds of notes or cards anymore. They don’t say the kinds of things they once said.

Sometimes we give up meeting together – where we can be real with one another – because we are afraid people will see that we aren’t such a great person after all. That underneath – we’ve got some major work

But I have found that following the encouragement of today’s scripture is important. Don’t give up meeting. Press on. Keep going relationally. Give up your desire to be seen as “normal” or great. I have found that there is a deeper level – where people really do accept me – they may no longer think that I am such a great man of God – but they are helping me become a better man of God. And I want to say – that this is huge difference.

And that’s one of the purposes of keeping meeting together – of pressing on in relationships. Relationships are one of God’s primary vehicles of transformation in our life. Don’t give up meeting together. (Notice the little guy leaving the fold). It’s the place where real transformation takes place.

Healthy Small Groups

One of the ways that we have tried to facilitate this at The Barn over the years is by setting up a small group ministry. –

When the small groups are working (and guess what – they don’t always work), they are a place where no one is “normal” – where our imperfections are known. Where we can love and be loved - know and be known.

When a small group is working – it is a safe place to be real. Most of you know that Joseph Lehman and I have a small business in town. And a lot of you know that both of us are very opinionated people. And when you put two opinionated people together – occasionally there can be (let’s just say) a difference of opinion. After we had been together for about 9 years, we hired our first full time employee. Some of you know Andrew Springman. You can imagine that Andrew was finding his way that first day. But in the course of the day – Joseph and I had – let’s just say – a difference of opinion. And things were heating up and becoming a little tense. Andrew is just watching what is going on and finally breaks the ice by joking. “If you guys are going to be real, I’m oughta here.”

A healthy small group is a place where truth is spoken in love and where conflict leads to reconciliation and growth. A place where there is simultaneously an outward and an inward focus – remember – to spur one another on to loving one another (inward focus) and good deeds (outward).

This is why our goal at the Barn is that if you are a member of this church you should be a member of a small group.

Small Group Opportunities at CPC

If you are interested in finding out more about small group ministry here at the Barn, or you are interested in either joining a small group or starting a small group, at the end of the service there will be some of the small group leaders down here in front. If you are interested in starting a small group – we have excellent resources to assist you and information about on-going training to equip you for this. If you cannot stay after there is a form at the bottom of the sermon notes you can fill out for more information and someone will contact you.

These leaders represent high school groups, men’s groups, women’s groups and mixed groups – all of whom are open to inviting in new members.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to read to you a description of a man named Allen that I read in preparing this sermon. As I read this I said to myself – that is me – untransformed:

“Allen approaches conversations like a prosecuting attorney marshalling evidence to prove his case. He is very good at pointing out logical flaws to people who disagree with him – especially his wife He wins many arguments. He has a gift for sarcasm. He has a way of communicating – by tone of voice, dismissive gestures, the way he cocks his head – that conveys impatience, cool disdain, or condescension. He takes himself, his opinions, and his prestige with deadly seriousness.

Some of you who really know me will say – “Wait a minute – Bob – that describes you now. I thought you said that this describes you untransformed.”

That is exactly what I said and that is why I need you. The last sentence in the description of Allen said:

He is very alone.

That's the part where I am different from Allen. Because over the years I have committed myself to a number of small group settings – where others are spurring me on to become more loving and helping me to serve this broken world more effectively – I am not alone. I encourage you to do the same.

If you are not part of a small group – check us out after the service. If you are already in one – talk to the group about thinking deeply / praying about / working through how you can spur one another on to love and good deeds.