

070724Village People

1. Warm-up: Sunday's sermon was about the importance of community to our quality of life, especially spiritual community. Where's a place in your life (other than church) that you find community and meaningful people connections?
2. On Sunday we continued our study of Jennie Allen's book, "Get Out of Your Head: Stopping the Spiral of Toxic Thoughts." Allen maintains that *the* greatest threat to our quality of life is distorted thoughts – toxic thoughts – all the lies about ourselves and our reality that constantly bombard our brain. The only thing strong enough to dispel those lies, she says, is the truth, God's truth – which means, we need to learn to think more like Jesus did. With that in mind, Allen identifies seven great truths that anchored the mind of Christ that we need to internalize if we're going to disarm the distorted thoughts that hold us captive and learn to think like Jesus. On Sunday, we focused on Truth #2 – We cannot thrive in life and achieve the fullness of our God-given destiny unless we choose to live together with others in close-knit community. This is a core Biblical teaching.
 - a. Genesis 1:26 tells us how, in the beginning, God said, "Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness." Note the pronouns used for God – "us" and "our." Even the Hebrew word for God – *Elohim* – is plural, not because there are many gods, but because the one true God exists in an unbreakable, completely interwoven community of three-in-one, traditionally referred to as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity. Why would God need community?
 - b. Note that the verse quoted above says that we were created in God's image. That means if God, at the core of their being, exists in community, we share that same existential need. Think about a time or place where you felt a deep sense of belonging in a community. What was that community, how did being part of that community make you feel, and how did that affect your life?
 - c. Genesis 2:18 says, "It is not good that the human should be alone." Why?
3. Jesus modeled for us the importance of living in community, especially spiritual community. He created what, in his culture (Jewish culture), was known as a Yeshiva [yuh-SHEE-vuh]. A Yeshiva was/is a group of disciples who come together to share life and to intensely dialogue about life and God and the Scriptures under the guidance of a rabbi/teacher. Jesus lived with a group of disciples that included the 12 apostles and several other disciples named in Luke 8 – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. He taught that all who follow him down through the ages should continue assembling themselves in Yeshiva-like spiritual communities, promising that if we did so, "The gates of Hell will not prevail" against us. Matthew 16:18.
 - a. But living in community, even spiritual community, ain't easy. Satan comes along and whispers in our ear, "People are too messy, it takes too much effort, and they'll inevitably disappoint you and hurt you. It's not worth it!" Tell us about a

time when you have felt deeply disappointed, hurt, or rejected by a spiritual community or other type of community? What happened? How did that feel?

- b. The point is not that we should never leave a community. Sometimes a change is necessary. The real danger is when we get so disillusioned that we say, “I’m tired of being disappointed and hurt. I don’t need people. I’ll do this by myself. God and me alone. I don’t need spiritual community.” Jeff said, “That’s a lie of Satan because the truth is: you can’t do it alone.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - c. I John 1:7. “If we walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” What do you think that means? Can we “walk in the light” like Jesus did without being in close fellowship with one another?
 - d. Jennie Allen says, “Every valuable relationship in my life is one I’ve had to fight for. People can be jerks and flighty, inconsiderate and self-centered and forgetful. I know this because I’m a person, and I’ve been all these things at some point. Also true: you’re a person too. So instead of letting the enemy hold us captive in isolation, let’s remind ourselves: I have a choice.” Tell us about a relationship you had to fight for – and now you’re glad you did.
4. Based on all the foregoing, Jennie Allen challenges us to CHOOSE to do the hard work of living in community and patiently bearing the inevitable hardships. Our scripture reading for last Sunday detailed what it means to do the hard work of living in community. Read Colossians 3:12-15, as printed on p. 3.
- a. Which word or phrase in the passage we just read most jumps out at you – and why?
 - b. Bishop Joseph McKiney says, “Anyone can love the ideal church. The challenge is to love the real church.” But we don’t want to hear that. We’d rather believe the lie that perfection can be found out there somewhere. And so, Jeff said, it’s easy for us to “become church hoppers, job hoppers, people hoppers, spouse hoppers, bed hoppers.” But there are exceptions to every rule. So how do we know when we should fight to stay put and when we should let go and depart?
 - c. Let’s make two lists. Let’s brainstorm both the benefits and the drawbacks of living in close community. Then discuss this question: Given the benefits and drawbacks, is it worth it to you to be in community? Why or why not?
 - d. Tell us about a time when, in the context of a relationship or community, you experienced something, were told something, or heard something that really stretched you (and maybe you didn’t even want to hear or experience), but it benefitted you greatly.
 - e. Tell us how being part of this Yeshiva community – LifeJourney Church – has impacted your life.

Colossians 3:12-15

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called into one body. And be thankful.