



Bedok Methodist Church
40 Days of Community, Week 4, 10 May 2009

We Are Connected To Grow Together **“Living Together For Christ”**

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-13

IN CHRIST, we are sons and daughters of God. As a family of God, we should live together by having a common purpose in Christ; seeking peace and forgiveness; affirming each other's worth; not harbouring rivalry and encouraging and edifying one another.

Having a Common Purpose

Even within our Christian community, differences exist. There is such a diversity of life styles and backgrounds. We need to learn to live with differences. Where can we find that one common purpose that can unite us?

First, we are a redeemed people saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ will “live together with Him.” If everyone lives together with one common purpose for Christ, there will be peace for the individuals as well as for the nations. God promises eternal peace when we live for Christ. (John 14)

Second, as a redeemed people, we have a common purpose of looking forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, a time when all of us and our loved ones will be received by the King of the Universe.

Third, we are going to live together with God forever. Does the thought of living together forever scare us? How many of us are prepared to live together forever? Will we be carrying some unsettled issues to our graves? Have we ever thought about going to heaven and finding that same person we dislike? The reality is, that same person is going to live forever,



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too. Trust the Lord, my friends, even when the hurt is deep. The Lord desires us to be free from all hurts before we get to heaven. God is already at work even before we know it. The other party will be ready to talk peace with us again. Even if they are not ready to accept us, our love for them will eventually bring them round one day.

Seeking Peace and Forgiveness

Every Sunday, God gives us the opportunity to seek forgiveness, to pass grace and peace to one another in His presence. Let us be intentional. Reach out to seek peace with those whom we find hard to love in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It helps to release our anger and disappointment when we stretch our hands in peace and are ready to forgive those who hurt us. God has forgiven that person. Now, God is giving us an opportunity to reverse the situation for our own good. Let us put the smile back on our faces.

God instituted Holy Communion to remind us that we are a family here on earth. If we have not forgiven someone, we are to seek his or her forgiveness first before taking the communion. (1 Corinthians 11.29) All these rituals will help us be pure and blameless, preparing us as a faith community to receive Christ's coming again.

If we find it hard to forgive someone, come to the altar area and pray with a counsellor. Confess our inability to forgive and allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to break the bondage of pride and unforgiveness. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with the love of Jesus to love the toughest and most unlovable person. After prayer, expect something to happen. Thank God for He is doing something beautiful for you in your life.

Affirming Each Other's Worth

Our key verse for Week 4 is "encourage one another and build each other up." Pastor Rick Warren advises us that one of the key principles is to affirm one another's worth. We do this through acceptance, giving attention, showing affection, and expressing appreciation.

Learn to be like Jesus. *Jesus accepted people rather than condemned them for their sins.* To Him, everybody was precious; He did not want any to perish. As Jesus ministered to the people, He accepted and affirmed them as valuable persons.

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Jesus gave his personal attention to those whom society rejected. Jesus ministered to the prostitutes, the blind, and the very least. He mixed with unpopular people like the tax collectors, calling each by their names and dined with them in their homes. He did it at a high price of being criticized by society and the religious leaders.

Jesus appreciated everyone as persons worthy to be called His own. Jesus appreciated Mary's anointing of perfume on him at a home in Bethany. She was singled out by Jesus that her name would be mentioned wherever the gospel was preached. (Matthew 26.13) The disciples were not happy watching the pouring of such an expensive perfume. "Why this waste?" they asked. In Biblical times, such costly perfume was reserved for the bride's first wedding night. Now, it was lavished on Jesus. Mary believed what Jesus said in his earlier prediction, that he would be killed, and raised from the dead three days later. To Mary, it was all worth it to bless Jesus while He was alive.

We can learn a valuable lesson from Mary's devotion. Is there someone who comes to your mind, a friend or family member, or someone in church, who can be honoured and encouraged by an expression of your appreciation and love? Then do something to show it – while the person is still alive! Be generous in your expression of appreciation. Pour out loving words to bless the person. Do not be afraid of people criticizing us for being generous with our words of appreciation. Celebrate when one of our brothers or sisters is honoured.

Not Harboursing Rivalry

Jesus rebuked his disciples to stop troubling Mary. Learn to enjoy the full fragrance of the perfume that permeates the room. The disciples sitting near Jesus would also smell like Jesus. Blessing poured out on one person from a heart of love will be passed on to those associated with that person.

Do not harbour "sibling rivalry"; it is not healthy and godly. Those of us doing it are seeking attention to ourselves. We will destroy the church when we go around complaining and saying unkind things. May our Good Lord convict us to stop it. Like a bad virus, words once said cannot be retrieved. It will go global on the internet. It will be passed on beyond our control, causing damage to God's image. We hurt God more than we hurt ourselves.



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Learn to enjoy seeing others more successful than we are. When someone your junior, whom you have been training for many years, is promoted to be your boss, what would you do? Would you say: "I'd rather resign than work under him. It is unfair. I taught him all the tricks of the trade and now, I have to report to him!" Rather, learn to say: "I have done a good job in training him; now he is now better than I am." Learn to enjoy the successes of those at our work places. God, in His own time, will bless us in many other ways.

Encouraging and edifying one another

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT) says: "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." Do not sow seeds of discord and hatred that prevent us from loving and serving God with all our heart, mind and strength. A good Christian is one who speaks words of encouragement to edify, to lift up the spiritual worth of the community. Speak with a heart of love and bless others lavishly.

Conclusion

My friends, you are close to God as you choose to be. Learn to appreciate God's presence in our community. Encourage one another and affirm God's anointing and presence in one another's life and ministry. Know God is present when God heals; when God delivers us from troubles; when God protects us.

Let us pray: LORD, You are right here in my presence. I know You are near; I can sense it by the caring presence of Your people. I want to see and recognize what You are doing in Bedok Methodist Church. I appreciate what You are doing in each one of our lives in this community. I am committed to be in fellowship with Your people in small groups and make a difference for You. O loving God, help us to encourage one another to grow strong in our faith, so that the world will see Christ in all that we do. Help us to fulfil our purpose on this earth, to make Christ known through our daily living together. Amen.

- By Rev Fred Tan

Reference: Rick Warren, 40 Days of Community, Purpose Driven Publishing