



Bedok Methodist Church

40 Days of Community, Week 7, 31 May 2009

Celebration Sunday

We Are Staying Together

Philippians 4:8-9 (NLT)

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say **one more thing** as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. **Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me** – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of Peace will be with you.”

The 40 Days of Community study has come to a close today. For many of us, it has been a journey of rediscovering the passion of being together. We come to an understanding of what we must do in order to live in unity as a faith community. We learn what God expects of us as His family – to stay together, for better or for worse.

I pray that this sermon will help us answer the question, “What is next after the 40 Days of Community study?” Paul wrote to encourage the Christians of Philippi to stand firm and stay united in their Christian faith. Paul, in his closing note to the Philippians, highlighted that there is yet “one more thing”. Paul repeated and reiterated this for the good of the entire faith community.

What is that “one more thing” that is so important in Philippians 4:8-9? Paul gave three pieces of advice:

- Fix our minds on godly thoughts.
- Set a new lifestyle.
- Receive the promise that the God of peace will be with us.

1. Fix our Minds on Godly Thoughts

Paul urged us as Christians to think about *everything* that is godly. In the New International Version, the word, “whatever,” is used seven times – what our thought life should be like.

“Whatever” means anything and everything.



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Paul introduced eight adjectives to describe what we should be mindful of: “Whatever is **true**, whatever is **noble** (honorable), whatever is **right**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **admirable**, if anything that is **excellent** or **worthy of praise**.” These are old-fashioned words that we often ignore nowadays.

How we can put such ideals into practice from now on?

Let us move together as God’s family – Let us fix our minds on godly thoughts.

Importantly, know that we are in relationship with God and in relationship with one another in the love of Jesus Christ. Our relationship ought to be true, genuine and real with no pretense. We do not have to put on a brave, false front. We can be real with one another in the comforting presence of God’s people who love Him very much. We are to be good witnesses of what God’s love is all about. We pray for one another; but bearing in mind that we need to learn to keep things confidential. We shall not gossip. It is a deadly sin. Walk away when people are gossiping. (Proverbs 20:19)

Jesus summed up the 10 Commandments to be this: “Love God with all your heart and love your neighbours as yourself.” (Matthew 19:19) If we say that we love God, we must love one another. “Loving together” comes easily if we care and are sincere about being engaged in a relationship. Nothing will happen if we insist on keeping our lives “private”. When bad things happen, we complain, “Where is God when I need Him most?” God lives among His people. “Where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:20) Come into God’s community and we will find Him there.

Let us be a loving and caring church - When anyone walks into the sanctuary or any classroom where Bible lessons are taught, he or she can feel the warmth of God’s love instantly by our rainbow smiles and warm handshakes. He or she can get the sense that people in the church are genuinely interested in them, that we belong to one another. Each Sunday, we can take the initiative to welcome visitors to our church, knowing that it is not just “the greeter’s job.” After the service, we can politely accompany them down to the fellowship deck for a cup of tea or buy them breakfast. Our new friends have taken great pain and courage to come here. The least we can do is to extend God’s love to them. Our new friends will like it and come back for more. It is a blessing to be among God’s people.



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The benefits of staying together in a small group are tremendous. We shall not walk through life alone. We have friends who care for us and we can care for them. It is heaven on earth when we show care and love to one another. Sometimes, I hear people saying that they do not feel like going to small group meetings. They do not feel welcomed as people are just talking among themselves. Do not feel awkward, if you must change to another small group. Let our care group zone coordinators, Alicia Cheo, Anthony Tan, Peter Yong and Ho Boon Tiong, know. They will help you find a right group mix that can meet your interests and needs.

The strong bond of God's people is important to carry us through trials and difficulties. I like to share a testimony from Elpis Care Group: "Our Care Group found the 40 Days of Community study very practical. It is a wake-up call that we need each other and cannot isolate ourselves. Our group went through some tough trials and the way the group supported, encouraged and strengthened one another affirms what Rick Warren shares about the value of a small group. The group experienced God's love as we shared our burdens, prayed for and helped one another. It also broadened our perspective to reach out to the community around us. It was a good experience for all of us and we enjoyed the sessions together."

Genuine care radiates from a pure heart. I read of two Christian ladies who did just that. They washed the clothes of the homeless in their community without fail every week at their church premises. They had nothing to gain but everything to give. Some may wonder, "Are the homeless taking advantage of the two ladies?" Does it matter, my dear friends? I am glad God is not calculating. He is a gracious God; so are these two dear ladies.

2. Set a New Lifestyle

Today, we call this Sunday Celebration Sunday. It marks the end of our 40 Days of Community study and the beginning of something exciting. What are we really celebrating? We are celebrating because we are ready now, to move beyond 'self', beyond our families and loved ones to reach out to the community at large.

Let us all purpose to set a new lifestyle. From now on, allow the word of God to sink deep into our hearts. Paul says: "Keep putting into practice all you learned..." (Philippians 4:9)



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Right living results from right thinking. Read your bible and pray everyday. Talk to someone about Christ. Be interested to join small groups and be part of church life in Bedok Methodist Church. Paul was a noble example before the people of Philippi and everywhere he went.

Paul dared to point to his life as an illustration of the godly ideals he advocated. He was telling us that it is possible to live a pure lifestyle. We are to live spiritual lives and our lives should be an example for others to follow. Our life is the best visual aid or object lesson that God can use mightily to influence the world.

Leaders - care group leaders, Masterlife facilitators, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and ministry leaders - should influence those under their care. We are to be examples to all believers; encourage them to follow us as we follow Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:6) Our lives must be an open book to our disciples – there is no hidden agenda.

3. Receive the Promise that the God of Peace will be with us

When the faith community gathers in unity and puts into practice God's teachings, Paul says the God of peace will surely be with us. That is God's promise, not mine.

It is tough for a person to change his lifestyle if his family and friends do not support him. Therefore, we need one another to pursue this new life together. Then, we will find new meaning to wake up every Sunday morning. We look forward to come to church because our friends, whom we have been through thick and thin together with, are there.

The God of peace will be with us in a tangible way. Today, we also celebrate Pentecost Sunday. We are reminded of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The early church received the outpouring of God's Spirit. God's Spirit will touch us in the same way when our focus is on Him. God is moving. God is working. God's Spirit is alive in our lives and in this world. We believe that. Like in the Upper Room 2000 years ago, God comes and God works. The Spirit of God breaks through; and life in Bedok Methodist Church will never be the same again.



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Conclusion

As we end our 40 Days of Community study now, let us begin experiencing God in the community right here and beyond. It is not by accident that we are put together in one family community called Bedok Methodist Church. It is amazing what God will do through us when we are committed to stay together to serve one another, to worship together, to share and grow in fellowship together.

Let's pray:

Holy Spirit come, we are ready. Fill your lambs once again with Your special blessing and anointing as we stay together as one community. Hallelujah! Lord Jesus, we are staying together. Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill Your lambs - that is the one more thing that we desire. Amen.

- By Rev Fred Tan

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