

January 21, 2024

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

We Need One Another : The Church as Community

We begin today with Year Two of “God’s Good News Story”. Our focus this year is on the remainder of the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. Our theme is “***The Church Alive & Growing***”

James Emery White tells this story...Many years ago, I read of a pastor who boarded a plane in a pair of old blue jeans and a T-shirt, looking anything but ministerial. He sat down next to a well-dressed business guy who was reading a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*. They exchanged the usual pleasantries, and then the pastor asked the man what he did for a living. With obvious pride, he said: “Oh, I’m in the figure salon business. We can change a woman’s self-concept by changing her body. It’s really a very profound, powerful thing.” He was a fairly young guy, so the pastor asked him if he had been doing it for very long. “No,” he said, “I just graduated from the University of Michigan’s School of Business, but they’ve already given me so much responsibility I hope to eventually manage the western part of the operation.”

“So you’re a national organization?” And he said: “Oh, yes. We are the fastest growing company of our kind in the nation. It’s really good to be a part of an organization like that, don’t you think?” The pastor nodded in approval. Then came the inevitable question: “And what do you do?” “It’s interesting,” the pastor said. “We actually have similar business interests. You’re in the body-changing business, and I’m in the personality-changing life-coaching business. In my field, we apply basic theocratic principles to accomplish indigenous personality modification.” The younger man had no idea what that meant, but he said: “You know, I’ve heard about that. Do you have an office here in the city?” “Oh yes. We have many offices, up and down the state,” the minister replied. “In fact, we’re national; we have at least one office in every state of the union including Alaska and Hawaii.” By this time, the guy was racking his brain trying to identify this huge company that he must have heard about or read about somewhere. The pastor went on: “Yep, in fact, we’ve gone international. And Management has a plan to put at least one office in every country of the world by the end of this business era.” The pastor paused a minute and then asked, “Do you have that in your business?”

The younger man said: “Well, no. Not yet. But you mentioned management. How do they make it work?” “Actually,” the pastor said, “it’s a family business. There’s a Father and a Son... they run everything.” “Wow. That must take a lot of capital.” “You mean money? Yes, it does. No one knows just how much, but we never worry... those of us in the Organization have a saying about our Boss, that ‘He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.’” “Oh,” the man said. “He’s into ranching, too? Wow. Well, what about you?” “You mean the employees?” the pastor asked. “They are something to see. They have a ‘Spirit’ that pervades the organization. The Father and Son love each other so much that their love filters down so that we all find ourselves loving one another, too. I know this sounds old-fashioned in a world like ours, but I know people in the organization who are willing to die for me. Do you have that in your business?” “No,” the man said. “Not exactly. But what about your benefits? Are they good?” “Good? They’re amazing. I have complete life insurance, fire insurance—all the basics. You might not believe this, but it’s true: I have holdings in a mansion that’s being built for me right now for my retirement. Do you have that in your business?” “Not yet,” the young man said, by this time feeling like the figure salon business wasn’t exactly the place

to be. “But can your operation last? I mean, companies come and go.” The pastor said, “Oh, I think we’ve got a pretty good future. After all, we’ve got a 2,000-year run going.”

“Nothing compares to the church, does it? No business, no investment, no enterprise, no activity. It’s the heart of God’s plan and the hope of the world. It’s the most dynamic, active, vibrant, forceful project on the planet. It is the one thing we will give our lives to that will live on long after we are gone—and not just for a generation or two, but for all of eternity.

But sometimes we just need to be reminded”.

Adapted by James Emery White from Jeffrey L. Coter, “Witness Upmanship,” *Eternity*, March 1981.

<https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2023/11/6/nothing-compares-to-the-church>

The key point is “We need each other”. We belong to each other. We need community in our lives. God wired you to go through life not as a solitary individual but in community. The Church is God’s best source of Community!

Let’s read again the passage from Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 ... ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* ⁴³ *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* ⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* ⁴⁵ *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.* ⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,* ⁴⁷ *praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

This passage reminds us of the need we have for each other. From the very beginning of the New Testament Church, God reminds us 'community is not optional'. There's no way you can be all God wants you to be, do all God wants you to do, fulfill the purposes that you were put on this planet to fulfill by yourself. You have to do it in relationship to other people. We need each other and we belong to each other in the body of Christ. We're going to focus on the greatest lesson in life. That is, learning how to love. Why do relationships go bad? How do you turn a bad relationship into a good one? What is it that God does when He uses other people in our lives and how does He do it to make us what He wants us to be? We're going to look at why we need each other.

Why we need God's family specifically the five reasons God says you need other people in your life and why you need a small group.

(The following is adapted from *Why We Need Each Other. 40 Days of Community Part 1* Rick Warren October 2-3, 2004

1. WE NEED OTHERS TO WALK WITH US.

What does that mean? It means I need you to help me grow spiritually. **Colossians 2:6-7** says, "***Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him.***" Did you know that the Bible often compares life to a walk? Why? Because you're on a journey. You don't just sit still in life. You're not where you used to be. You're not where you're going to be. You're on a journey. So, it calls the spiritual life, the Christian life, a walk.

Throughout the New Testament we're told to walk in wisdom, to walk in love, to walk in light. We're told to walk in obedience, in the Spirit, walk as Jesus walked. Many, many other ways the Bible tells us that we are to live life.

But one of the basic principles of God's plan for our lives is this: ***You were never meant to walk through life alone.*** This has nothing to do with whether you're single or married. Nothing at all.

We have many single people in our church who are very involved in a deep, intimate, meaningful community. We also have married couples in our church who are desperately lonely.

Marriage does not solve the issue. Marriage is a core part of God's plan for community, but it is not the universal source of community that the Church provides.

Some of you say, "what's wrong with walking alone? I like walking alone. In fact, I prefer it. I can go at my own pace, my own speed. I don't have to wait for anybody. Whatever. I like walking alone." You may like it but you need others to walk with you.

SLIDE: Let me give you three reasons.

1. **It's safer.** Walking through life with other people in your life is safer. It's less risky. Have you ever had to walk through a dark alley at night in the inner city by yourself? It's a little scary. Or a walk down a long road in the countryside by yourself. It can be scary. It's safer to walk through life with others.

2. **It's supportive.** What I mean by that is it keeps you from giving up. When you're walking with other people you get the energy to keep on going that you wouldn't have. Have you ever been in a marathon where you're running this marathon and you start getting a stitch in your side, a little pain there and you want to give up. That usually happens about mile twenty! Actually, *step* twenty is when it happens to many people, lol. You start going and you feel you can't go on. I'm not going to be able to do this. I want to give up. But if you have other

people walking with you, you can keep on going. There's an old Zambian proverb that says, "*When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far.*" Good words. Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. You want to make it to the end of life. The only way you're going to make it to the end of life the way God wants you to is by having other people involved in your life.

If you've ever watched in the fall when a flock of geese are flying south and they're in "V" formation. Do you know why they do that? Because it creates an uplift in the back draft, and it makes it easier, and they can fly farther and longer when they fly together. The same is true in your life. You're going to burn out in life if you go through it without any meaningful intimate relationships. It's safer. It's supportive. Not only that but...

3. **It's smarter.** It's just smarter to go through life with a few really close deep friends. You learn more by walking with others than you do by yourself. **Proverbs 28:26** says "***Only fools trust in what they alone think.***" The Bible tells us "*In a multitude of counselors there is safety.*" One of the things that's very important that you learn when you walk with others is you learn how to get along with other people.

If you go through life isolated, never let anybody get close to you, never cooperate with anybody you don't learn how to cooperate.

The Bible says this in **Genesis 2:18** ***“It is not good for man to be alone.”*** That’s the first thing God said after He created Adam. He looked down at a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, and said, “It’s not good. It’s not good for man to be alone.” God did not design us for loneliness. So, what’s His antidote? He created two groups. Physical family and a spiritual family. The physical family is the one you grew up in. The spiritual family is the one you have for the rest of your life. It goes on into eternity. The physical family eventually moves apart, eventually dies and doesn’t go on. But the spiritual family, God’s church, is going to go on forever and ever and ever. So, God says, I want you to be connected in My family, the church.

Hebrews 10:25... ***“Let us not give up the habit/discipline of meeting together instead let us encourage one another.”*** He says you’re created for community, and I want you to encourage each other by meeting together.

The Church Community is God’s answer to loneliness. We all need a place where we can practice love. It’s what the world needs. We need to learn how to love. So, we’re going to begin a revolution of love today.

The Bible says that I’ve got to have other people in my life as I’m walking through life. I need other people to grow. I can’t grow without others. The

Bible is very clear about this. I cannot grow without other people in my life. Why? Because life is about relationships not about achievement. God is love and He wants me to learn to love Him and to love others. Those are the two greatest lessons in life.

So that’s the first reason to get in a group. *We need people to walk with us.*

2. WE NEED OTHERS TO WORK WITH US.

I need people to work with me. The Bible says God put you on earth to do a certain work that only you can do. **Ephesians 2:10** says *this “For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.* Before you were even born God decided the talents that He was going to give you. The natural abilities He was going to give you. The background. He even chose where you would be born, who your parents would be, when you would be born, and all of this. Because He has a purpose for your life and part of that purpose is He has some work for you to do.

Anytime you use your talents or your abilities to help somebody else there’s a word for that. It’s called *ministry*, or service. All of us are ministers.

Not pastors – ministers. What that means is when you use your gifts and what God wired you to be to help others, you’re doing what God wants you to do.

He says these are your good works. Remember we've talked about this many times. Life on earth is practice for eternity. You get 80-90 years at the most on earth, you get trillions of years in heaven. In heaven you're going to do four things and one of the things you're going to do in heaven is you're going to serve God. So, what God wants you to do while you're here on earth is spend some of that time practicing. Practicing serving. He says I want you to learn to serve, but not to do them just by yourself. God never meant for you to go through life walking alone or working alone. You need to be in relationship with others who help you get done what you need to do. Otherwise, you're going to be worn out and fatigued all the time.

God tells us in the Bible why we're supposed to work together. **Ecclesiastes 4:9** ***“Two people are better than one. Because they get more done by working together.”*** They get more done by working together! Everybody knows this. You get more done as a team than you do as an individual. It's also a whole lot more fun. It's also less tiring. You learn to cooperate together. There's all kinds of benefits to working together.

Nobody's good at everything. Because when you share together it lightens the load. Snowflakes are frail but if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic. Individually we can't make that big a difference in the world.

Together we can make a difference if everybody does just a little.

The Community is God's answer to fatigue. If you're tired, it's because you don't have the relationships built in to support you that you need in what God has called you to do. Have you ever watched on TV or a movie *Witness* where the Amish build a barn together. They do it in a day. The whole community shows up and where there was nothing, at the end of the day there's a barn standing. How? Everybody has a little part to play.

The Bible says this in **Galatians 6:10...** ***“Every time we get the chance let us work for the benefit of all starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.”*** What's the community of faith? It's our church family.

I need people to walk with me through life and I need people to work with me through life, but also...

3. WE NEED OTHERS TO WATCH OUT FOR US IN LIFE.

I'm talking about people who'll defend me, stand up for me, protect me. Who will help me keep staying on track, watch my back, warn me.

We all need this because we all have blind spots.

The Bible says in **Philippians 2:4** “***Look out for one another’s interest, not just your own.***” If you want a counter culture verse that’s it. In America, the general idea is it’s all about me. It’s all about my needs, my interest, my wants, my desires, my ambitions. Forget you! I live for myself. Forget everybody else. This verse says don’t just look out for your own interest, look out for others too.

Have you ever seen these Neighborhood Watch signs. Sometimes you see them out in an area. That’s a sign of community. It says we watch out for each other here. We’re looking out for each other. My guess is if you went on vacation this summer, you would be gone for a week, maybe two weeks, you probably told your neighbor you were going to be gone. You said, “I’m going to be gone for a couple weeks. Would you kind of keep an eye out on my house. Look out for my stuff.” We all want our stuff looked out for! That’s a good thing to have your stuff looked after, watched out for.

But my question is not is anybody watching out for you. Is anybody watching out for your soul? Your soul is a whole lot more important than your possessions. Is there anybody in your life who helps you stay on track spiritually? Is there anybody who loves you enough to say, “I’m not going to let you get discouraged. I’m not going to let you drop out. I’m not going to let you get tired. I’m here with you. Let

me support you.” And they encourage you in your spiritual life. If you don’t have anybody like that, that’s sad.

The fact is we all have blind spots. Things we can’t see. You get a taillight out. You’re never going to know it. Somebody’s got to look out for you. Somebody’s got to say, “You’ve got a taillight out!” Hopefully somebody tells you when you’re unzipped! Friends don’t let friends get tacos in their teeth. That’s what people who care about you do. We need to watch out for each other because there’s some stuff we just can’t see.

The Bible says in **Hebrews 13:1** “***Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord’s followers should.***” We should care about each other. We’re family. We’re in God’s family. As brothers and sisters, I should defend you and you should defend me, and I help you stay on track and you help me stay on track.

It says, “keep being concerned.” That means not just once. You’re vigilant. In a war everybody has to take time on sentry duty. While everybody else is sleeping somebody stays awake and makes sure the enemy isn’t crashing in.

Since 911 we’ve all been a whole lot more vigilant for each other with terrorism and things like that. But did you know that you have an enemy far more destructive than terrorists?

Oh yes! You have a personal enemy. And he hates your guts. He wants to defeat you. His name is Satan. Satan wants to mess up your life. Satan wants to bring problems into your life. Satan wants to ruin your relationships. He wants to hurt you as bad as he can.

Why would he do that? Because he can't hurt God. What Satan wants to do is hurt God, but he can't. When you can't hurt somebody what do you do? You go after their children. If you couldn't get to me you'd go after my wife or my kids. Satan can't hurt God. So, what does he do? He tries to hurt God's children. He doesn't care what it will take, how badly you get hurt. He wants to mess you up anyway. The moment you wake up in the morning he's already been plotting how to get you to waste that day, to blow it with anger or worry or fear or guilt or shame or depression. Or any other resentment or bitterness. He'll just try to get you all messed up.

Here's my question. Is there anybody watching your back? Anybody who's watching out for your spiritual welfare? Do you have anybody close like that?

The Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12...** ⁹ *Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor;* ¹⁰ *for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls*

when there is not another to lift him up! ¹¹ *Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?* ¹² *And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.*

The Church Community is God's answer to defeat.

4. WE NEED OTHERS TO WAIT WITH US AND TO WEEP WITH US.

To wait and weep. I'm talking about they wait while I'm waiting for the bad news. And they weep when I get the bad news. I need people with me in the inevitable crises of life, when the tragedies hit. I don't want to face that alone. There are situations that nobody should ever have to go through alone. Nobody should ever have to wait in the hospital while a loved one is in a life and death surgery. Nobody. No woman should ever have to wait alone waiting for the lab report back on a problem pregnancy. Nobody. Nobody should have to wait for news from a battlefield alone. Nobody should have to stand at the edge of an open grave alone. Nobody should have to wait at home alone for the coroner to come and publicly identify the body of a loved one who just died. Nobody.

Nobody should have to spend the first night alone after their husband has died or wife has died.

Nobody should ever have to spend the first night alone when their wife has just walked out. Or their husband's walked out.

The fact is some of these things are going to happen to you. They're inevitable. You're going to have loved ones die. You're going to go through tragedy. You're going to get bad health news. You're going to find out one day that you are dying. You need other people in your life. Only a fool would go all the way through life totally unprepared for something that you know is inevitably going to happen. The time is now to build the safety net, the network of supporters, of friends. Get it in place now because at some point the tragedy is going to happen. You don't know when. The time to prepare is now.

What is God's safety net? It is a group of other believers. You don't need a hundred. You only need five or six. But it's a group of other believers who are committed to you.

The Bible says this in **1 Peter 3:8** "***You should be like one big family full of sympathy toward each other.***" When you're in the hospital you don't want the whole church to visit you. In fact, it'd be kind of bad if all of us came. But it would be nice to have four or five come see you and say we're praying for you.

Here's God's plan, **1 Corinthians 12:26...** "***If one member suffers all suffer together.***" I read recently about a guy who died at home in his bed and nobody discovered it for two years. I thought how tragic! That guy was not even missed for two years. Can you imagine the despair in that man's heart as he was dying in bed? Nobody should ever die alone. Nobody should ever have to go through that kind of despair.

The Church Community is God's answer to despair.

Romans 12:15 says "***Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep.***" We do that in a group. Somebody has a good thing a promotion or celebration, a graduation, we party. We have a good time. We have fun. Somebody has a tough time; we weep with them.

The fifth reason I need other people in my life is...

5. WE NEED OTHERS TO WITNESS WITH US.

You have a life message that God wants you to share with the world. It's part of your mission. The Bible says that God put you on earth to do a mission. There is great power in group witness.

God never meant for you to do your mission alone. God would never send soldier out by himself. He says we go out together.

What is the way you witness best to people who don't know the love of God? How do you witness best to them? God says it's by loving others in the family of God. Jesus said in John 13 *"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."* What impresses the community the most? When Christians – believers – love each other. The one thing that proves to the world that you're in the family of God, that you've stepped across the line, that you're headed for heaven is that you love other people in the family of God. If you do not love other people in the family of God you've got a reason to doubt, "Am I in it?" Because that's one of the things. When you're truly in God's family you start loving others in God's family.

2 Tim. 1:7.8...⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.⁸ So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me His prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

Have you ever thought about this question: *Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you?*

The Church Community is God's answer to fear.

Philippians 1:27 says ***"You are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the Good News."*** That verse has the two goals of what we're going to do. First, deepen community within our church. And then reach out to the community around our church.

We all need each other. We need other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch over us, to weep with us and wait with us when we need to wait, and to witness with us. Say this, "I really, really, really need a group." That is your declaration of interdependence.

Say no to Loneliness, fatigue, defeat, despair, and fear. Community starts with a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, then develops by pursuing a right relationship every day!

<i>Adapted From Why We Need Each Other. 40 Days of Community Part 1 Rick Warren October 2-3, 2004</i>
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Invitation