



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 11th - Oct 17th

Sermon: October 10th



October 11

Galatians 6:2

This week presents a fantastic opportunity and an interesting challenge as I am continuing to write devotions on the same subject as the sermon has carried over into a new week. As such, we are going to focus on one topic and that is the subject of community. Community was the main emphasis of our time together yesterday and it will be a driving force for our church if we are going to accomplish the commission that our Lord has given us over the next years and decades. Community is the way we manifest the rule and reign of our Lord in the midst of a dark world. Community is the “proof of concept” of our theology, it is the place people can look to see how the truths of God’s Word are fleshed out in “real life”. As such, it becomes paramount that we live, together, what we claim we believe, so that the world can look upon our church and see the difference we claim to preach.

Today’s text begins our week by focusing on one of the simple and most meaningful ways we benefit from community. I’m sure every person who reads this can understand what I mean when I say that life is hard sometimes. All of us struggle with tragedy and challenges and this world has a way of weighing us down at times as we try to navigate all of the obstacles and difficulties we encounter. As always, our loving and wise God has made provision for those issues in a myriad of ways but one of those avenues for dealing with difficulty is the church! In fact, the Apostle Paul instructs us here that we are to “bear one another’s burdens”. The picture is instructive as Paul alludes to the physical act of literally coming alongside of a person and offering our strength to assist them in carrying the weight that is on them. It draws our attention to the importance of living with one another in such a way that their issues become our concern.

Now, if we are to obey this command, we must adhere to these two conditions. First, we must be active in the church if we are ever going to know the burdens other people face. Folks, if we don’t know each other, spend time with one another and have open and honest dialogues with our brothers and sisters, we have no hope whatsoever of even knowing what burdens people face. I’m often amazed when I learn of challenges that people face who when I get to know them! Every person you meet is struggling but only in meaningful community do we develop the relationships necessary to comprehend what is going on in our fellow Christian’s life.

Second, we must be willing to sacrifice for the good of our brothers and sisters. Here is an obvious yet worthy point to make: bearing burdens means carrying weight too! To bear a person’s burden is to get up underneath a difficulty and strain alongside of them. Folks, being in the church is a marvelous blessing but it is also a calling that requires us to sacrifice for the good of others. If your life is never inconvenienced for someone else, if you are never tired from the problems of someone else, then you aren’t living in community... at least not in the biblical sense! No, we must be ready and willing to endure with our brothers and sisters and as we do so we must believe that we are assisting a family member AND displaying the beauty of being apart of the family of God at the same time.

October 12

Romans 12:16

One thing I've notice about worldly communities is that they tend to be homogenous in nature. By that I mean that communities are formed around certain attributes or passions and, therefore, they tend to be created around people that come from similar backgrounds and enjoy similar things. You can look at most communities and see this: their appearance is strikingly the same (they wear the same clothes, drive the same cars, etc.), their socioeconomic status is alike, their preferences typically align. This is not always bad but it does provide a wonderful door for the church. You see, we also align based on our greatest love but the One that we love transcends all of the things that we typically would see form the foundation of community.

Our Savior does not unite to only those who have the same hobbies, wear the same clothes, make the same amount of money or even have the same skin color. Instead, the church has always been intended to transcend all of the superficial things that bind us (race, money, preferences, hobbies, etc.) to get to the most crucial foundational commonality which is Christ. This is the heartbeat behind Paul's admonition to the Romans. They are not to segregate themselves based on their position in society.

The proverbial Christian CEO of Paul's day could not fall into the trap of separating from the lowly, minimum wage worker in the body. Instead, he must be willing to associate with those of low position in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed in his actions, the love of God expressed to his fellow believer and the world can see the difference Jesus makes.

To state the obvious, we live in a world that is desperately trying to find some way towards unity. Many are grasping at straws trying to find some way to bind the lowly and the exalted together, but the truth is only Christ and His love for all men will do it! In the midst of chaos and disorder, the city on a hill can be the place the world looks to see the unconditional love and social acceptance they crave. In the community we demonstrate the value and worth of all of our members based on the fact that they each are created in the image of God and are redeemed by the infinitely precious and worthy blood of Jesus Christ.

As we associate with the lowly, we are showing the world a picture of the Exalted One who associates with all of us sinners. In our own fellowship we demonstrate the truth that we grasp that God's association with us is far more mind-blowing than our willingness to love and appreciate someone who is of lesser social standing. We show that the blood of Christ is available to all kinds of men and we proclaim the excellencies of the love of God to an unworthy and dying world.

October 13

Hebrews 10:24-25

Why is it so important that we gather for corporate worship? I wonder how you would answer that question. My guess is that many different answers would be given, and I believe most of them would be valid. Some may say it is imperative that we hear God's Word preached (true!), others might say that we gather to sing corporately, ascribing glory to God (true!), others might say that we are commanded to gather (true as well!) but I wonder how many of us understand the necessity of gathering for our own spiritual encouragement and strength.

This is the point of our passage today as the author of Hebrews reminds us that we gather in order to "spur one another to love and good works". The word translated spur means forcefully encourage. It has the connotation of lovingly but strongly propelling one forward in their desire to see their fellow brother or sister live faithfully.

The point is simple, as we gather, we do so in order to refuel and refocus for our task as believers. The body's gathering is not an ancillary matter in our personal faithfulness, the body's time together is a crucial and important component of our personal faithfulness! Just like a coal loses its heat if it is removed from the larger fire for any length of time, so the individual Christian loses much of his or her resolve and passion for the Lord if they are removed from the body of Christ.

The truth of our passage has at least two implications for us as believers. First, it means that we need to be here for our own well-being. We need to be encouraged and we need more and more encouragement as the world grows darker around us. It's not easy being a believer in our society today. We need our brothers and sisters if we hope to be faithful. God's design for the well-being of His people includes community! Who are we to tell Him that He doesn't know what He's talking about?

Second, it means that we need to be in community not just for our own benefit but for the benefit of our brothers and sisters. I'm not sure if you've thought of this before but it is imperative that we grasp that our gathering together is for the wellbeing of those we might encourage as well. We are not to see the body in totally consumeristic terms. The gathering is not just for you, it is for those who might be encouraged by you! This means that when you decide not to attend, you are not just harming yourself (by the way, if you believe the Bible, you are undoubtedly harming yourself) but you are also robbing someone else of the encouragement and joy they may need to be faithful in their lives.

As we gather and live-in community, I pray we will begin to think as much, if not more, about what we can offer as we do what we can gain. When you pull into the parking lot, walk through the doors of your Sunday school class, linger after worship to talk and the like, I pray that you are eagerly and intentionally looking for ways to encourage your fellow man. This is an important component of our lives together and I pray we are all faithful to extend our efforts accordingly.

October 14

1 Peter 2:9-10

Have you ever been told something that was simply too difficult to believe? I remember a few times in my life in which someone had a message for me that was too outlandish for me to grasp... at first. The first moment that I remember clearly occurred on September 11, 2001. Many of you remember where you were on that fateful day as the planes flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I was in high school, in gym class when it happened. We were outside that day as someone came running across our football field telling us that planes had just been flown into the towers.

Honestly, the young man who was the first “herald” was not the most trustworthy guy in all the world, so I simply didn’t believe, at first. But you know what happened? Over the next few minutes, a literal flood of individuals came into my midst, and they all had the same story to tell. In the matter of just a few moments, the overwhelming number and consistent message of those men and women caused me to reconsider whether I was hearing the truth.

The truth I’m trying to illustrate for you today is that there is power in numbers, particularly as it relates to testimony of truth. One person telling us something could just be a “one off”. Perhaps that man or woman just doesn’t understand or maybe they’re simply crazy! However, when numerous folks all come forward with the same message, the power in that testimony increases.

You know Smyrna, the message that you and I must tell is as seemingly unbelievable as 9/11 if you think about it. I mean consider for a moment that we believe a carpenter from Bethlehem is the Savior of the world. To make matters even more unbelievable, we believe that He rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of God, and will return and His sacrifice results in our spiritual salvation to be with Him and our regeneration to make us into totally new creatures. This is a difficult message to grasp!

Nevertheless, Peter tells us that this is exactly the message the church should be busy heralding. We should be proclaiming the Gospel but, we should remember the principle I lived by on 9/11, there is strength in numbers. As we go about our day and lives together, it becomes more and more difficult for someone to dismiss our claims as they see the transformation that is rendered in our lives makes the truth of the “excellencies of Christ” more believable with each passing messenger. Folks, we have the opportunity to demonstrate the excellent nature of Christ, corporately. As we associate with brothers and sisters and meet, publicly, to show the truth of the power of the Gospel, we do so believing that we are offering a powerful and unified message that is not easily refuted! There is strength in numbers but only if the numbers cooperate and live obedient lives... together.

October 15

1 Peter 4:9

Today and tomorrow's devotion is going to be focused on one of my favorite topics. It is the subject of "hospitality". Hospitality is the act of welcoming someone into your home. Webster defines it as the "friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers." It is the sacrificial act of having someone over into your home for the express purpose of loving on them, providing for them (a meal, a drink, a place to stay, etc.) and doing so totally at your own expense.

There are two wonderful effects of hospitality. The first is the deepening of the community of believers. The simple truth is that we grow in our love and affection for one another as we spend time with them. To be welcomed into someone's home and to converse with them is a weighty sign of friendship and love. There is something disarming and magnificent about enjoying untimed moments around the dinner table just talking about our difficulties or successes. It meets a deep need that all of us have to know someone and to be known.

In his magnificent book on the subject called "A Meal with Jesus", Tim Chester writes, "We may not long for bread, but we long for meaning, intimacy, fulfillment, community, purpose, and joy." This is so true and a necessary insight into our world today. There is no substitute for time together and there is no other way to grow in our intimacy with one another than to commit ourselves to quality time.

As we relate to our brothers and sisters in the faith, I pray we consider how we can welcome them into our lives at times other than Sunday mornings. I'll speak from my own experience here, when I moved to Dinwiddie, I'm not sure that I knew more than a handful of folks from our community. I knew next to no one in our church and yet now, 7 years later, my family has developed deep, meaningful relationships with so many of you. How did that happen? I'll tell you how: we have spent countless hours with the Kesters and Pages at their pool, in their backyard and around their tables. In many ways, they've become the most influential people in mine and Ashley's life as they've walked through very difficult days with us. We have shared Thanksgiving, every year, at the Davis home. We've enjoyed having dozens of folks over to sit on the couch and watch football while we laugh and talk. We've been welcomed into Mrs. Duke's home for dinner (my kids LOVE to go there to see what new toys she pulls out for them to play with), we've gone to the beach with the Mcbrides, Rowlands, and Erdmanns. Larry Caramela has become my children's de facto grandfather as he shared meals with us and holidays at our home and Cheryl Joyner has become their grandmother as she dutifully takes them to movies, pumpkin patches, candy stores, McDonald's and the like. We've grown to love the Perkinsons as we've traveled to Baltimore to watch the Braves whip those Orioles and eaten a ton of good food along the way.

I hope the point I'm making is clear. None of those meaningful relationships were developed just on Sunday morning. Instead, as we live life together, as we enjoy hobbies or interests or a good meal, we grow in our love and affection for one another and that simply cannot happen if we are not willing to show hospitality. How about you? Are you showing hospitality? Are you spending time with others outside of our gathering? If not, you are robbing yourself, and them, of a rich and marvelous blessing!

October 16

1 Peter 4:9

Yesterday's devotion was about the benefit of showing hospitality to those in the household of faith and today's is about the benefit of showing hospitality to those who are not yet believers. I'd love to begin this devotion by trying to describe the world utilizing the title of a country song. I realize that is a somewhat unique approach, but I think it would be appropriate. This world struggles because it is guilty of "looking for love in all the wrong places." The issue in our society and culture is not that people no longer crave to be loved, the issue is that they think that love and fulfillment comes from somewhere besides Christ.

As people look and long for deep relationships and as they search for fulfillment and joy, they need the message of the Gospel, but they need to see that message lived out in our families. One of the best ways you can demonstrate the hope and joy of Christ is by welcoming people who need Him into your homes and lives so that they can see the difference He makes!

Think about this for a moment, what is more beneficial to you: a lecture about what you should be doing or someone who comes alongside of you and shows you how to do something or live in a certain way? We learn as much, if not more, from observing than we do from hearing. This is true in the vocational world, and it is true in our spiritual life as well. It is one thing to hear about the traits of a godly marriage, but it is another to observe someone as they demonstrate those attributes. I can hear about being a godly father but when I observe one so much of what I may have already been told makes sense!

As we welcome people into our homes and lives, we are giving them the opportunity to observe the difference that Christ makes. We are showing them that we are both real and redeemed and we are allowing them to see the hope we have and ask the question of where that hope comes from! Folks, the days of inviting people to an event and making that our total evangelistic thrust are over (mercifully if I may say so). Instead, the thrust of evangelism in our society will be led by those who live out their Christian convictions and do so while inviting others in to see the difference that Jesus alone can make in our lives.

Do you have a lost neighbor(s)? invite them over! Let them see your family's life and marvel at the difference! Do you have lost family members? If so, invite them over and welcome some of your Christian buddies so that they can see and savor the beauty and depth of Christian community. Show them that you live a "normal" but redeemed life. Show them that Christians don't have to be weird, but they are set apart. Laugh, enjoy good food and great company, allow them to see real joy in the gifts of the Father and look for opportunities to tell them that these things they are observing are normative for Christians who see all of life as a precious gift from God that is to be enjoyed for our joy and God's glory. This may well whet their appetite for more and it is a primary benefit of hospitality in our difficult and trying days.

October 17

1 Peter 4:10

We have reached our final devotion about community. This last passage deals with the beauty of God's design as He has given us each gifts that are to be used and leveraged for the good of those around us. As we think about God's goodness to us, may we consider the fact that He has provided others around us that are strong where we are weak.

Think about this for a moment, we are commanded to sing when we gather corporately. This is true and all of us are to be a part but there are those among us who have gifts that assist us in that process. As Brad stands to play the guitar or Judi plays the piano, they are leveraging their gifts for the benefit of all of us. They help us live faithfully! The Bible tells us in a myriad of places that all of us have been given gifts by God in order to glorify Him through serving the body of Christ. We each have things that we can contribute. There are ways that we add to the fellowship and when we do so, the entire body benefits.

Peter says we are each to use whatever gifts we have for the benefit of others in the flock. This passage has at least two implications. First, notice that Peter uses the word "each". This word means "every". It denotes the fact that every believe in the fellowship has something to give and, therefore, we all are to be active in our service. There is no such thing as a faithful Christian who is merely an observer. No, every one of us is to be obedient to use that which we have been given for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters.

Second, Peter says we are to use our gifts. The assumption that we have them is clear but there is also an understanding that we must discern our gifts as well. How many of you know what gifts you've been given? If you do, then I pray you use them! If you don't let me recommend two avenues of discovering your gifts. The first is less reliable but it is important as it is necessary for you to try to discern the gifts you have. You do so as you consider your passions and abilities. What are you good at? What do you enjoy? These are windows into the giftedness you've been given. However, there is a second way to discern your gifts that is even more reliable and that is the feedback of the body. As you serve, are there things you do that brothers and sisters obviously affirm? Do they love your teaching or singing? Do they marvel at your organization or your willingness to serve in some background role? Do the kids love it when you teach them or chaperone? Are there students who run to you with their problems and concerns? If so, these are indications that you are possibly gifted in those areas.

As you discern your gifts, you do so in order to use them to beautify our city on a hill. A city on a hill is full of citizens who understand the need for their own contribution. They are active and ready to provide whatever loving service they can offer to the rest of the citizens, and its King, in order to contribute to our marvelous and important civilization together. Christian, the city on a hill (our church) needs you! May you find your gifts and use them well!