

September 5, 2015

For the Apprenticeship to Jesus Community in Phoenix

Introduction to Christian Community

- 1 - God is a community of persons who are in relationship with each other. We are created like him. Without relationships a core aspect of our being is missing.
- 2 - Sin has left us guilty. It has also left us severely damaged. Our damage negatively impacts our capacity for healthy relationships.
- 3 - It is normal for followers of Jesus to be drawn toward Christian community. The make-up of our person takes us in that direction. So does the Holy Spirit.
- 4 - Very often our initial experience of Christian community is positive, attractive, desirable. It seems to meet a real need. We want more of it.
- 5 - In this initial experience of Christian community we are in touch with positive traits in others. Caution: In this stage it is easy to romanticize community.
- 6 - As relationships deepen, we inevitably are presented with the damage in others, and in ourselves. Their damaged areas collide with our damaged areas.
- 7 - At this point Christian community can easily become painful and undesirable. This can be described as a move from **pseudo community** to **chaos**.
- 8 - It happens too often in courtship and marriage. Courtship easily romanticizes marriage. This is pseudo-reality—unreality. Marriage then becomes chaos.
- 9 - Christian community is one of the best preparations for marriage. We learn how to love others in their brokenness, and in our brokenness.
- 10 - We turn to Jesus. We go deeper into his teachings. We submit to Him as our Master Teacher. We learn from Him that **not to love is not an option**.
- 11 - The original sin of our first parents was to move from the God-centered life to the self-centered life: self-worship, self-will, self-confidence, self-reliance.
- 12 - The human source of our problems—our damage—is the self-life. The solution—our salvation—is new life in Christ, accessed through the cross by faith.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matthew 16:24
- 13 - To love one we find difficult (ultimately most people!) requires God’s grace accessed through the cross. There can be no healthy community without the cross.

14 - The cross of Christ has broken the power of the self-life. But we must access that power situation by situation. This is the ongoing reality of Christian community.

15 - As we mature in our choices to appropriate the cross, our experience of community moves from pseudo-community and chaos to **emptiness**.

16 - Dying to the self-life empties us of our demands that others be a certain way—the way we want them to be. We accept them for how they are. We love them.

17 - This opens the way for **genuine community**. We are now ready to enter the awesome beauty of Christian community. We share the love God has for others.

18 - Christian community is costly; it is also deeply desirable. It is a laboratory for learning the way of the cross and entering into the grace-filled life of Jesus.

Summary:

+ **Pseudo-community:** We are romanticizing community. Relationships are on the surface—superficial. We are not yet in touch with reality.

+ **Chaos:** Reality below the surface begins to emerge. Our damage hits the damage of others. They are different than we thought they were and “need” them to be.

+ **Emptiness:** We allow the cross to take effect in the self-life. We surrender all conditions we have placed on others. We give them space to be who they are.

+ **Genuine community:** New life in Jesus begins to replace the self-life. We relate to each other with Christ in between. Our interactions are ones of grace and love.

Scriptures:

John 13:34-35

Romans 12:9-21

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Colossians 3:5-17