



God At

HOW THE LIVING GOD TRANSFORMS US

Our Side

PART THREE: HOW THE LIVING GOD TRANSFORMS US THROUGH COMMUNITY

By Pastor David Fields

Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:1-2; 5:18-21

I. The Problem: Individualism as the Waters We Swim In

“...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Romans 12:5

The word Paul uses here as ‘members’ isn’t what we often mean – like members of a social club. The word he uses here is *melos* {μέλος (MEH-los)}, which is where we get our musical term ‘melody’ from – like a ‘part’ in a choir or symphony. It’s primarily used to mean a body part. So, one commentator says,

“You are the limbs and organs of one another. You are the eyes, arms, and heart of one another.”¹

Which is to say, we are profoundly interdependent.

II. How the Living God Transforms Us Through Community

“You cannot know God, change deeply, or win the world apart from community.”¹

A. We know God in and through the Community of God

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them.” –

Matthew 18:20

Jesus makes himself present among those who are gathered in His name. The ‘name’ is a stand in for Jesus Himself, His own divine presence. We experience

something of Jesus’ own living presence, present even in the smallest possible grouping – two or three. Jesus chooses, promises, to be present when we gather in His name.

B. We Change Deeply Through the Community of God

“The goal [God’s goal] is to create a people, who in their life together reflect God’s character.”²

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:35

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i. God places us in a community of ‘difference’ as a key part of our growth

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It's precisely the challenge that come with intentional community, knowing we are saved by grace alone, that's what makes this site of our transformation. Our truest, deepest happiness comes on the other side of being deeply committed to God's good work of developing our holiness. Being near to others reveals what's wrong inside us but is also the source of the change we desperately need.

To be the people of God is to be a multi-ethnic community of people from various socio-economic situations, and then call this diverse group to Spirit-filled "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." as Paul puts it in – Ephesians 5:21.

What kind of dispositions do you need to live like that? Paul says it like this:

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."
Ephesians 4:1-2

Be committed to a community of people and stick through the challenge of your differences.

-We want to be committed to deep welcome. To openness to everyone.

-Take initiative to connect to others; you can join a Life Group, or other small group of sorts.

-Form a 'Trio' or other sort of small group where you ask: How's it going – like really? And listen. And what has God been teaching you this week, what are you reading? And how can we pray for you?

ii. The Church is a School for Maturity

You are being formed by a community. The question is: which one?

You become like the people you spend time with:
"Bad company corrupts good character."
1 Corinthians 15:33

Which is Paul's way of saying, 'You become like the five people you spend most of your time with.'

“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”

Philippians 3:17

Paul expects that the ‘mature’ in the community are there to provide concrete examples of what following Jesus looks like, and for there to be deep enough connection for that to be a source of growth.

God transforms us through community by giving us the example of mature believers and calling us to ‘do life like that.’

Be committed to getting close to those who are further down the road of maturity and watch how they do life.

iii. We help each other avoid spiritual wreckage.

And part of our growth is to help hold each other. Sin grows in isolation. Shame grows in isolation. But healing and hope and joy grow in community. Holiness grows in community.

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” –
Galatians 6:1

This isn’t coercive or condescending. There is no ‘superiority’ built into this, since we are all vulnerable, we are all people in need of God’s grace. This is a form of serving one another, not for our good, but for the good of the other. Offering warnings and encouragements and offering our presence to walk with people who need that help, this is a gift we give each other.

Be committed to ‘speaking the truth in love’ and allow others the place to do that for you.

iv. We are Formed through Corporate Worship

Notice, in Ephesians 5, how the Spirit-filled life lead to a life of celebration and joy in community?

“...**but be filled with the Spirit, speaking** to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, **singing and making music** from your heart to the Lord, always **giving** thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **submitting to one another** out of reverence for Christ...”

Ephesians 5:18-21

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Gathered worship reshapes our imaginations.

“As we rehearse God’s story in worship – through song, sacrament, prayer and sermon – we are reminded of the way things were in creation and the way things will be when the dream of God is fully realized, and God sets the world right.”³

Be committed to gathered worship each Sunday. For your good, but for the good of those around you too.

III. We Win the World in and through the Community of God

A deeply formed people are also a people living out God’s deep purpose for them, and, according to the New Testament, the church is not a place for people to pursue their own private, spiritual agenda, or a place to ‘hide away’ from the wicked world to ensure that they arrive safely at an otherworldly destination. Not at all. We have been called on mission.

It’s particularly *through* the way that such a diverse group of those who would be ‘natural enemies,’ yet who love each other deeply – it’s as we put that on display, that the world’s ways are challenged, and the truth of the Gospel is made manifest.

It’s why Jesus will say in John 17:21:

“I pray...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Be committed to a life of making Jesus’ known through community.

ENDNOTES

1. Timothy Keller, The Gospel in Life.
<https://gospelinlife.com/>

2. Fee, Gordon D. (01 June 2009). God’s Empowering Presence; The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul. Baker Academic.

3. Jones, Barry D. (2 Sept 2014). Dwell: Life with God for the World. IVP.

NOTES

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DISCUSSION

Open Up

What factors make the Christian community of a local church distinct from ‘community organizations?’ Why does that matter to you?

What are some barriers/hang-ups we might have with ‘doing community’ as the Bible describes it? What factors make it appealing/inviting and possible?

Dig In

One of the big ideas in the message is that we are saved into a community with people who are very different from us. And that this difference is one of the major ways God ‘forms’ us to be like Jesus. In Ephesians 2 and 3, Paul argues that the Gospel forms these two disparate groups – Jews and Gentiles – into the one people of God, destroying the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ (Eph 2:14). In Chapter 4, he shifts to talk about what this means for how the church is to relate:

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

- a. What do you find most encouraging about these instructions? What is most challenging for you personally?
- b. Are there particular areas you want to put into practice more deeply this week?

Read Romans 12:9-16. Read the following list derived from Romans 12:

- Love honestly, speaking out against what is wrong (v.9)
- Love even unattractive people, because they are your brothers and sisters (v.10)
- Love by making others feel honored and valuable (v.10)
- Love by being generous in practical ways with your home, money, and time (v.13)
- Love without bitterness. Don’t “pay back,” or hold resentment against others (v.14)
- Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others (v.15)
- Love with humility. Be willing to associate with people who differ from you (v.16)

In which of these areas do you personally, and as a Life Group, tend to be the weakest, and why? What practical steps can you take to grow?

Which parts are the strongest? How can you continue to build on those strengths?

Pray: Take some time to thank God that he is building for himself a people, who, in our life together, reflect his own character. Ask for help to live out those areas you spoke about tonight. Pray for any needs of people in your group.