



Formed for God's Family

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Chapters 19 & 20

Notes: This Bible Study is intended to be a companion to "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

Chapter 19: Cultivating Community

How can we have a loving Christian community in the church?

Only the Holy Spirit can create true fellowship between believers but we share in this responsibility by the choices and commitments we make...

Ephesians 4:1-3 - walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

How may we learn the right choices and commitments to cultivate a loving Christian community in the church?

The Bible is filled with instruction on how we should share life together with other believers...

1 Timothy 3:15 - I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God

Ephesians 4:15 says that we should help each other grow by "speaking the truth in love." How does "speaking the truth in love" cultivate a loving Christian community in the church?

In order to cultivate a loving Christian community, we need to be honest with each other. We need to speak the truth even when we'd rather just take the path of least resistance by giving superficial affirmations.

Ephesians 4:25 - Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

Why do we remain silent when we see fellow Christians doing something that harms themselves or others?

It takes courage to bring such topics up in a culture that teaches us to mind our own business. There is the fear that such a confrontation will result in tension or conflict. It is easy to rationalize that glossing over the issue is in the interest of peace.

What is the flaw in the rationalization that it is best not to rock the boat?

If a problem is not dealt with, it causes rifts between people and this is deadly to fellowship. Sin always has ramifications in terms of damaging relationships with others. In the long run, the person being corrected will see the wisdom in it...

Proverbs 28:23 - He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.

How should we go about correcting someone?

We need to first judge ourselves to make sure our motives are pure, our motivation in correcting someone should be to restore their fellowship. And we should do it with gentleness and be careful not to do or say anything that would harm the fellowship ourselves...

Galatians 6:1 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

We need to also recognize that there is a right time and place to offer correction to others...

Ecclesiastes 8:6 - Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly.

We need to treat each other as family and offer correction with the appropriate respect...

1 Timothy 5:1-2 - Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity.

What does it mean we should exhort an older man rather than rebuke him? What is the difference between an exhortation and a rebuke?

- Webster's dictionary offers the following definition for exhort: to incite by argument or advice, urge strongly; to give warnings or advice; make urgent appeals.
- Webster's dictionary offers the following definition for rebuke: to criticize sharply; reprimand.
 - So the difference is in the manner of delivery, an exhortation is more of a logical argument made to help the person see their error whereas a rebuke is a bolder encounter intended to reinforce what the person already knows.

How does 1 Peter 5:5 help us see how we may build a loving Christian community?

1 Peter 5:5 - Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Humility fosters relationships between people. The opposite of humility is pride... pride builds walls between people, humility builds bridges.

What is grace?

Grace is God's unmerited favor. The humble receive God's unmerited favor while God acts against the proud.

What is so wrong with pride? The city of Houston recently has an improvement campaign called "Houston Proud." Isn't pride a good thing to have?

It depends on the object of your pride. If you are proud of other, that is a good thing. If your pride is in yourself, that is where you get into trouble.

What does Romans 12:16 have to say about how we may learn to be humble in our dealings with others?

Romans 12:16 - Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

We should think of others as highly as we do ourselves, we should seek to be with other humble people and learn from them, and do not think that we know it all

What does Philippians 2:3-4 have to say about how we may learn to be humble in our dealings with others?

Philippians 2:3-4 - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Put the needs of others ahead of your own. Value others as greater than yourself. Put yourself in their shoes (so to speak) so that you may be able to take action with their best interests in mind.

How does Romans 15:2 help us see how we may build a loving Christian community?

Romans 15:2 - Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

We should be courteous with one another, respecting differences, being considerate of the feelings of others, and exercising patience. It is a great encouragement to your brother when you seek to please him.

How does Titus 3:2 help us see how we may build a loving Christian community?

Titus 3:2 - speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

My Mom's admonition that "if I didn't have anything good to say about someone, it was best to say nothing at all" was good, Biblical advice. Seeking peace between people, being gentle and humble all serve to build up relationships.

Why does God put people in our midst that are difficult, unloving or otherwise especially hard to love?

God puts difficult people in our midst to present us with an opportunity for growth and to be a test of our fellowship. Recall that life is a test. Rick Warren calls these people *EGR* people, for "extra grace required."

What is acceptance within a family based on, our intelligence, beauty, talents, or something else?

We accept one another not because of our characteristics, but because we have a relationship, we belong to one another. When I was a freshman pledge in Pershing Rifles, a military fraternity... an upper classman was fond of saying, "you pledges may be the scum of the earth but you are our scum of the earth."

How does Proverbs 16:28 help us see how we may build a loving Christian community?

Proverbs 16:28 - A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.

We should seek to keep confidences confidential. An environment of trust is essential to foster openness between people. Gossip devastates Christian fellowship because it always causes hurt and divides people.

What does God think of people who gossip?

God hates Gossip, and has commanded us to not dabble in it...

Leviticus 19:16 - You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

God especially hates it when people attempt to disguise gossip by calling it a prayer request for someone else.

What should we do about people who Gossip?

Gossiping people should be rebuked...

Titus 3:10-11 - Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

It is better to risk them leaving your fellowship than to allow them to damage the fellowship with their wicked habit.

How does Hebrews 10:24-25 help us see how we may build a loving Christian community?

Hebrews 10:24-25 - And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of

some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Relationships take time. In order to build relationships it is necessary to take time to be with each other. In order to build a genuine fellowship, you must have frequent, regular contact with your group. This is what they did when the church began...

Acts 2:46 - So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart

What do you think the state of fellowship is in most churches today?

Most churches do not take the time that it takes to build deep relationships so the fellowship is very shallow.

Besides, not taking the time, why is true fellowship so rare?

The characteristics of biblical fellowship require people to give up their self-centeredness and independence to become interdependent:

1. Share true feelings (authenticity)
2. Encourage each other (mutuality)
3. Support each other (sympathy)
4. Forgive each other (mercy)
5. Speak the truth in love (honesty)
6. Admit our weaknesses (humility)
7. Respect our differences (courtesy)
8. Not gossip (confidentiality)
9. Make meeting together a priority (frequency)

How does sharing our life together prepare us for heaven?

Fellowship will be one of the things we will enjoy in our eternal state. The more we get the hang of it in the here and now, the more the Lord will reward us with opportunities to exercise it in eternity.

What would make it easier for you to share your needs, hurts, fears and hopes with others?

Pray about it, and engage in one-on-one conversations about these things. Encourage the small group to open up and share "growth experiences" they have had. Prime the pump (so-to-speak) by the leader sharing "growth experiences."

What are the most common excuses people give for not joining a church, and how would you answer them?

Church has been disappointing

Christians and Church activities are not perfect. Real Christians are the first to admit they are not perfect and hold up Christ rather than themselves as their model of perfection. Christians are not perfect, just forgiven...

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

One religion is as good as another

Christianity is unique from all the world's religions. Only Christianity has a resurrected Savior. All other religions proclaim what one must "do" for salvation. With Christ it has already been "done" (John 14:6).

John 5:24 - he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

I'm not a Baptist

Salvation is not a matter of being a member of any religious denomination. It is a function of putting your faith in Jesus Christ alone. Brazos Bend Baptist Church is autonomous from any worldly hierarchy. The head of our Church is Jesus Christ. We strive to take direction from His Word as the only reliable source of truth in this world. Our objective is not to make people into Baptists, but to help people have a relationship with Christ...

1 Corinthians 1:9 - God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Bible is full of errors

Show me one. God is Almighty enough to have accurately inspired and preserved His Word even using imperfect mankind

Jeremiah 32:17 - "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness

Christians are too dogmatic

Genuine Christians are only dogmatic about truths from God's Word. If you hold to the world's view that there is no absolute truth, you will not recognize truth when you see it. Jesus said, "*you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32).

Christians are hypocrites

Yes, Christians often say one thing and do another. But genuine Christians are the first to admit it. They strive to do the will of God but they aren't there as yet...

Romans 7:15 - For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Actually, everyone could be called a hypocrite because there is no one who can live up to what they know to be God's perfect standard...

Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

I don't need to go to church

It is true that salvation is not a function of Church attendance. But fellowship with other believers fosters spiritual growth. The truly saved have a hunger for God's Word and a love for one another. You want to be with the ones you love...

John 13:35 - By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

I'll get around to it some day

No one knows how much time they have before God's patience runs out on them. Also, we don't know when Christ will come back but events in the world indicate it could happen any day. *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

How can I help cultivate today the characteristics of real community in my small group and in my church?

I need to be better at encouraging and supporting others and consider them more in my prayers.

Ch. 20: Restoring Broken Fellowship

In the Purpose Driven Life, we are reminded that life is about learning how to love. So given this, what should we be doing when we find ourselves in a rift in our relationship with someone?

We should be working to restore that relationship, ease the pain of the hurt, or resolve the conflict. This is what Jesus did with us and He has called us to do the same thing...

2 Corinthians 5:18 - Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

What does Philippians 2:1-2 tell us about how we may reconcile with others?

Philippians 2:1-2 - Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

It pleases God when we seek to reconcile with others by showing others the sacrificial love that Jesus showed us. It also pleases Him when we seek to reconcile with others by working to achieve a consensus about all things. This is reinforced in Romans 15:5...

Romans 15:5 - Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus

If God's children can not get along with each other, what kind of message does this give the world?

Not getting along with one another is a disgraceful testimony to the world. Rather than being proof that the love of God is real, it becomes evidence that what we tell people is not true...

John 13:35 - "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

How should we respond when we see conflicts emerging within the church?

We should seek to get them resolved before they become a festering rift that impacts the fellowship of people in the church. Indeed, Jesus said...

Matthew 5:9 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Is peacemaking avoiding a conflict?

Peacemaking is not avoiding a conflict, it is resolving a conflict (these are not the same thing). As Rick Warren points out, "Running from a problem, pretending it does not exist, or being afraid to talk about it is actually cowardice."

Is peacemaking appeasement?

Peacemaking is not appeasement either. Certainly the give and take of compromise may be appropriate and necessary but appeasement implies always giving in unilaterally letting others run over you. Such an approach to conflict does not resolve it, it only serves to deepen the rift.

How did Jesus, the Prince of Peace deal with conflict?

Jesus dealt with conflict, on some occasions He even provoked conflict. Jesus certainly did not dabble in appeasement, He refused to back down on many issues and stood His ground in the face of evil opposition.

The rest of Chapter 20 describes 7 biblical steps to restoring a relationship...

What step does James 4:1-2 give for restoring a relationship?

James 4:1-2 - Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

Pray about the conflict before you take any action. Many of our conflicts are allowed to happen because we have not prayed about the situation. Many conflicts may be resolved by God either changing your heart or changing the other person.

What step does Matthew 5:23-24 give for restoring a relationship?

Matthew 5:23-24 - Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has

something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Always take the initiative in resolving a conflict and do it right away with the highest priority. As Rick Warren put it, "Restoring broken fellowship is so important, Jesus commanded that it even take priority over group worship."

Why would God make fellowship with others a higher priority than worship?

Unresolved conflicts block our fellowship with God and keeps our prayers from being answered...

1 Peter 3:7 - Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

This is reinforced in the Proverbs...

Proverbs 28:9 - One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

What counsel does Philippians 2:4 give for restoring a relationship?

Philippians 2:4 - Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

In restoring relationships it is important to be an active listener more than to be the one talking. As Rick Warren says, "Focus on their feelings, not the facts. Begin with sympathy, not solutions... Feelings are not always true or logical." David recognized this in himself...

Psalms 73:21-22 - Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

Why is it a good habit to put-off your anger in dealing with other people?

Exercising patience comes from wisdom and allows you to consider the perspective of the other person.

Proverbs 19:11 - The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.

Listening shows the other person that you value your relationship with them. The cliché is true: people don't care what we know until they know we care.

Why should we be the one to take the initiative in restoring a relationship and be the one doing more of the listening?

If we love our neighbor as our self, we will seek to please them and be an encouragement to them. It is a sacrifice but this is the mind of Christ for He did the same for us...

Romans 15:2-3 - Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

What counsel does Matthew 7:5 give for restoring a relationship?

Matthew 7:5 - Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

If we are serious about restoring a relationship, we should begin by admitting our own sin or contribution to the rift. There is always something we need to correct in our own lives to improve relationships with others...

1 John 1:8 - If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Why is confession such a powerful tool in reconciliation?

Humbly admitting your own mistakes diffuses the other person's anger and disarms their attack because it is not what they expect you to be on the defensive. It is a rare thing in our day for a person to accept responsibility for their mistakes. This is a prerequisite to be able to ask for forgiveness which is essential for restoring relationships.

What principal does Proverbs 15:1 give for restoring a relationship?

Proverbs 15:1 - A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

How a person says what they say is often more important than what is being said. Our tone should not be one of trying to establish blame for the conflict. We should work on getting to the root cause of the problem, not attack the other person.

Proverbs 16:21 - The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.

What kinds of thing do people say and do that make matters worse in relationships?

There is several relational "weapons of mass-destruction" such as: condemning, belittling, comparing, labeling, insulting, condescending, being sarcastic...

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

What counsel does Romans: 12:18 give for restoring a relationship?

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

We should be cooperative with others in order to have peace with them. For the sake of fellowship, we need to do our best to compromise, adjust to others and show preference for their needs...

Romans 12:10 - Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another

Can we restore a relationship without resolving our difference with the other person?

Yes, Christians can disagree with each other on some issues but still esteem each other as important family members in the Body of Christ. God expects unity, not uniformity.

Why should our focus be on relationship reconciliation rather than problem resolution?

When we focus on reconciliation, the problem loses significance and often becomes irrelevant.

What are some examples of disagreements that Christians may have but should not be reason to break fellowship over?

Paul called these kinds of disagreements, “disputable matters” in Romans 14:1... eating meat sacrificed to idols... today: speaking in tongues, using musical instruments, watching TV, drinking alcohol, the order of end-time events, young earth versus old earth, etc. These are things we should debate vigorously without breaking fellowship.

What kinds of things should Christians break fellowship over?

There are fundamentals of essential Christian doctrine that all Christians must believe to really be Christians such as: the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His dying being full payment for our sins, the literal fact of His resurrection, the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, etc...

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 - **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore **"Come out from among them and be separate,** says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."