

# Rebuild



*hen they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)*

## *Ingredients of Community (Part 2): The Need for a Flight Plan - A Teaching Emphasis on the "How To" of Community*

"Sure, we are a committed Christian Community," the pastor confidently asserted.

"That's great!" I said. "It's so important that we restore this New Testament vision. Tell me," I continued, "what kind of teaching do you offer your congregation so they can live as a Christian Community?"

*(Significant pause)* "I am not quite sure what you mean. What exactly are you asking?"

"You know how difficult it is for American Christians to establish long-term relationships in a culture constantly pulling at them from a thousand directions. What specific teaching do you offer to help your people deal with these tensions so they can move ahead into Community?"

*(Significantly longer pause)* "Well, uh, that is important, isn't it? Yes, the Christian people face many challenges, don't they? *(Yet, another pause)* We need to preach the Word!"

*Conclusion: Intentional Christian Community does not exist in that pastor's congregation.*

How can I say that? Isn't that judgmental? It is, if I am making a conclusion that neither he nor his people were sincere, or honestly desired community. But my comment has nothing to do with weighing anyone's intentions. It is simply that sincerity, as essential as that is, does not mean a people are a Christian Community.

If I wanted to take a flight from

Denver to New York, I would expect the pilot, co-pilot and navigator to have an accurate and tested flight plan. I would expect them to refer to that plan all along the way. Let's say I saw the pilot passing through the flight cabin, and I happened to ask, "How long do you think it will take us to get into New York?" If he answered, "You know, I haven't got the faintest idea in the world," I would be worried. "What do you mean you have no idea?" I would say. "You have a flight plan, don't you?" "Eh, well, no, not really," he mumbles. "But," he continues to say with enthusiasm, "I do have a *heart* to fly and I am *really* determined!" At that moment, I'd reach for the emergency procedures card faster than a camera flash.

If we wish to arrive at Christian Community, we need to be aware that sincerity is no substitute for a plan. We must have a clear road map, and we must refer to it consistently and intelligently at every point along the way. The sharp truth is that, without an accurate course, there is no way we are going to leave an individualistic, money motivated, stress driven culture and realistically think that we are going to arrive in a place where relationships with God and one another are the priority. The distance between the two places is just too great, the obstacles too tall, the fog too dense.

We may have dreams of New Testament Christianity, and envision people sharing in love, and thousands being drawn to Christ by their example, but these dreams will not move us any further toward the goal

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any more than the pilot who thinks that by merely shutting his eyes and seeing himself eating Coney dogs that his daydream will bring him to a safe landing at JFK airport.

Without clear, focused teaching that accurately takes into account both where we are (our present entrenchment in the world), and where we want to go (Covenant Community), we will never get off the ground. And even if "inspiration" catapulted us into the air, what would we do once we were up there? We'd endlessly circle in the clouds— until we ran out of fuel.

I have known sincere believers who, after catching the vision for Christian Community, either moved close to one another, or, in a few cases, actually moved *in* with one another. They received no teaching about the relational dynamics that would emerge from these new arrangements. No one was ready or able to handle the pastoral issues that would come up. (Nothing brings hidden things of the heart to the surface faster than sharing one's life.) None of these attempts at Community succeeded. Most of these well-meaning people ended up bitter and totally burned out on community. Why? The assumption that sincerity can be a substitute for thought out "flight plans."

It shouldn't surprise us that teaching focused around the why, and how, of Christian Community is absolutely essential if a group of people is ever going to arrive at Christian Community. Christian Community is not merely an organization of people who want to do things together; it is not like a food co-op where membership comes down to paying dues and volunteering a few hours a week to stock shelves. If Community were only spending a few hours together, and doing a task or two, then teaching about relationships would not be so necessary. But Christian Community is not just a volunteer organization; it is a coming together of a complex matrix of families and singles who have put *their whole lives in common* in the Name of Christ. It is a people who wish to show the world - by how they love - what God is like, and how He lives. The requirement for this kind of commitment requires a whole re-ordering of life, not just making more time to do "church things" in one's schedule.

I'd imagine that if all the practical instruction about how to love one another were cut out of the New Testament it would whistle in the wind. Paul, Peter, and the other disciples knew that there was no way to practically live in God's Covenant power unless His people were taught how to live in love.

Teaching on relationships is the constant emphasis of the New Testament. If we wish to be a reflection of Biblical Community this emphasis must also be a clear, focused, and repeated emphasis in our churches.

We Christians need to learn how to love more now than perhaps anytime in the past. The likelihood that the average Christian's marriage will end in divorce is now slightly higher than it is in the general population. The Christian runs as fast on the treadmill to attain money and status as any nonbeliever - and has as little time for cultivating a relationship with God or others as anyone else.

How are we possibly going to live in Christian Community when we are so unsuccessful at our attempts at loving relationships? There is no way around, over, or under it; if we really want to arrive at Christian Community, we have to be taught how to get there.

Here is a list of *some* of the kinds of teaching that must be continually prayed through and pastored within a people, if a congregation is going to be a true Christian Community:

- What it Really Means to Love
- Servanthood: What is it? How Do We Enter Into It?
- How to Ask For & Receive Forgiveness
- How to Handle Conflicts

- How to Give and Receive Correction
- *Independence, Dependence, and Interdependence: What's the Difference?*
- Loving Speech (vs.. gossip & slander)
- Simplifying Our Hearts & Lives
- Ministering As Community, Not Independent Individuals
- Speaking the Truth in Love
- Accepting Others, Accepting Ourselves
- The Meaning of Covenant Loyalty
- How to Provide Mutual Accountability and Support
- Why the Need for Community
- The Meaning of Faithfulness

As you review the above list, ask yourself, "Are these the kinds of teachings that are emphasized from start to finish within my congregation?" If the answer is a clear "Yes," you may well be on your way to genuine Christian Community. But what if you answer, "No, not really." I'd study the emergencies procedures card.

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