



Life
Groups

CURRENT

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*Equipping the church to reach the world for
the glory of God through Christ*

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Editorial note

Life. Groups.

We live life, or do we? It is not good for man to be alone, someone once said, and still it is true. Then, why do we stay in our car/house/work-cocoons? We purport to be a community, but community does not happen without getting our hands dirty. You could even say that's what happened with God. He got His hands in the dirt and made us. It got messy pretty quick. He didn't turn away, though. He got in the dirt, once again, millennia later, and became one of us. Somehow, He brought us life from that. And now, He gives us the opportunity to continually receive life from His Spirit and to be conduits of such new life to each other in our community. In dying to ourselves, we become sources of life to our brothers and sisters. Perhaps even in a Life Group.

Ingrid Chung

Supernatural Community, Part 1

By Pastor Bob

We have lived so long by ourselves, with ourselves, for ourselves that living with others in any kind of significant Christian way may be an unknown quantity or at best seem strange. It is almost so abnormal to us that we may have never experienced even the outskirts of its ways. We live private lives without interference from others. And if they try to get involved, they are quickly dispatched back to where they came from.

We have emotional problems—we go to a therapist, quietly. We enjoy our transient short-term, relationships. We change spouses often and with greater clarity than at first. We change jobs regularly. Sports teams change players and have no commitment to an organization. We change churches, or we go to a different church that fits our needs better.

And, I believe, we have almost completely lost our ability to relate as God intended for us in the supernatural community of the church.

Cultural Analysis: the Last 100 Years

It might be good to take an honest look at the modern inventions and rhythms that have taken its toll on the church:

The automobile has brought us a greater variety of friends and a greater variety of everything at the breakneck speed of 65 miles per hour.

Interstate highway system and the relative inexpensive travel on the friendly skies of American Airlines or Southwest or...

Texting. I'm not sure how small units of thought, transmitted hundreds of times a day, has changes a whole generation, except that they will text thoughts, ideas, inappropriate pictures, etc.--with less reticence than any previous generation, or any biblical reticence that Proverbs would encourage us to entertain (Proverbs 10:19).

Email. Same as above. We write email and hit send and then regret washes over us.

The telephone has morphed into cell phone.

The Internet. Instant information. No more discussions over who is right or wrong. But more importantly the availability of inappropriate information and images with no means for accountability.

Amazon. You can get it now and with the aid of a little plastic card, pay for it after you declare bankruptcy.

Gaming. Hours and hours of play with total strangers is the ultimate act of selfishness: there is no accountability, no love, none of the other requirements for relationship: just play.

Credit. Credit cards. If we want it, we get it. Saving for the future, saving for that expensive car, is almost unheard of.

Television and availability of limitless services have meant we don't need each other.

Marketplace: we can get what we want without anyone else.

Our deification of democracy and the deification of the individual go hand in hand. I should get my way—all the time.

Technology—we connect by Facebook, Twitter, etc. Toyota Venza commercials say it

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Supernatural Community, cont. from page 2

best. Our friends, our events, our pictures—they are all shared online. Anyone without a modicum of Internet savvy is left in the dust relationally with anyone under 30. Information. Google can get you any piece of information in .334 seconds.

Convenience and people are not bedfellows. People have never been easy, and they will never be tidy. People are messy, relationships are messy, and the mess yields great benefit.

We have entertained our way into not being able to carry on a conversation. Just make me laugh, cry, wince and cringe with no lasting reality to deal with. Watch, live, experience the whole array of human experience....but not really. It's easier that way; we don't have to live with it.

Air-conditioning. Who needs the front porch? In the past, that's where we cooled off, discussed the day's events, and watched the kids play with the neighbors' kids. Many homes built before the 60s had kitchens in the front of the house where mom watched the kids playing in the front yard. Now, kitchens are typically facing the back yard, while the kids play video games or watch the latest Blue Ray disc.

Basic exchanges of information took personal encounter. Now, we can just Google—or Facebook—the info.

Evolutionary teaching. There is no God that we need relationship with. There are no standards for behavior transcendent of what each person thinks is right.

Acceptance, tolerance, pluralism, the non-exclusivity of Jesus.

You may not agree with all the analysis above, but there is no denying that fact that life has changed, and...

The time is ripe for believers to present a community that is radically different.

A Radically Different Community: the Church that God Intended

Church strategists are asking for paradigm shifts in the church, but they are mostly in line with the contemporary business world. What makes the church truly different? What should make us stand apart?

Many of these good modern inventions have been misused as a way to hide from God and others. Adam and Eve started the revolution of hiding; this was not really a revolution, but a fall, a fall into shame and hiding. We have perfected it.

But God...but God...being rich in mercy, brought us together and brought down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentile and the wall between sinful humans. He calls us to forgive as He forgave, he calls us to confront, comfort, encourage, and confess to one another.



Shipping out to India...



Further Resources on Community & Cultural Analysis

Amusing Ourselves to Death | Neil Postman

Life Together | Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy | Eric Metaxas

Community | Brad House

The Expulsive Power of a New Affection | Thomas Chalmers

We were made for the church; Adam and Eve hid from God.

But what is church? A local church? *A local church is a fellowship of true believers in Jesus Christ who gather together regularly in order to make the glory of God visible through the Gospel, using biblical means and purposes, under recognized spiritual leadership, and then are sent into the world for redemptive purposes* (Ephesians 1:3-14, 10; 3:10-13).

A truly Christian community is the centerpiece, the focus of God's mission to glorify himself (Eph. 3:10-13).

We all want it. We have real needs: to serve something great, be part of something enduringly great, be understood in our struggles. Some are built for more of it. Everyone needs it. Some could learn from more aloneness, some from more authentic community. Does God ever ask us to do things that we don't feel like doing? Like being open, in community?

Most of the New Testament commands cannot be done on your own—they were never meant to be done in isolation. They make no sense unless you are close to Christians.

Love one another.

Don't argue, bicker, gossip.

Obey your leaders.

God's gift to us is each other.

We've substituted the necessary and best and core, for the periphery and we are fine with that. And we wonder why this 1.5-hour Sunday worship event doesn't meet our needs, and go looking for more pizzazz, as if that will fix what we need.

For an accurate understanding of what the core of community is, let's look at key New Testaments texts on the church—Matthew 16; 1 Peter 2; 1 John 1; and Philippians 2 .

A local church is a supernatural fellowship of true believers who reflect the brilliance of God's character(1 John 1, 2-5) in Jesus Christ, who when they gather together regularly (Hebrews 10:24-25), make the glory of God visible (to rulers and authorities and the whole universe, Ephesians 3:8-12) through the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4-6), as they obey biblical injunctions for the church, under recognized spiritual leadership (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5), and are then sent into the world to preach the Gospel (John 17).

To be continued in next month's Current, including the contours of a radically different, Christian community.

Forgive Me for Not Trespassing

A Confession
by Ingrid Chung

Lord—
save us from our adversaries
ourselves, who want
more than we were made for—
nay, not more, but less.
We believe Twinkies are what we crave.
We believe mud pies are better than holidays by the sea.

But why pray for Your kingdom?
Thy kingdom is already here—
At least the part that matters:
Assurance of eternity with You
And all the comforts of modern existence.
Insta-Internet, the portal to near complete fulfillment.
Why venture outside my bubble?
It would pop.

Earth is already close enough to heaven.
If it isn't, we can always access a virtual version in the here and now.
The then becomes the now
And now it doesn't matter what is real.

It's much easier to flit through pixel and page
To another world—anywhere but here.

Forgive me for not trespassing—
I have stayed in my fort and made it a cottage—
Snug, secure, cozy.
Just perfect for me.
My neighbor I do not know, let alone hate enough to possibly love.

Lord—why hast Thou given us our body and our blood?
The flesh that reminds us all too clearly—
We are here?
For this is where we need You.



This month @Taft Avenue...

Communion Sunday

Sunday, October 7

Connect Class Starts

Sunday, October 7, @9am

1 Timothy Women: Saved for What?

Saturday, October 13, 2-3:30pm

Family Fall Festival (Dinner Included)

Wednesday, October 31, 6-8:30pm

“1 Timothy Women: Saved for What?”

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul has some strong words about how women should behave in church and in the home. But what should women be doing in the church, in the community and in the home to help fulfill the church's role in reaching the world for Christ? Women, come Saturday, October 13, 2-3:30pm to find out. Also, we will have a cupcake challenge, so bake a cupcake! Okay, maybe more than one.



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