

Purposeful Community

Bryan Elliff

In the church, we need each other. This is a simple concept, but do we believe it? The New Testament teaches us that the church is an interdependent community. Each of us is dependent upon others to meet our needs, and each of us is responsible to others to meet others' needs. When we walk through the door into Jesus' kingdom community, we acknowledge that these two realities will now define us: dependency and responsibility.



This applies in a myriad of ways. We mutually sustain each other in struggling against sin, in holding fast to our confession of Christ, in training for godly living, in admonishing and being admonished with the gospel. No one member of the body can say to another, "I have no need of you" (1 Cor 12:21).

I've noticed that this is easy to talk about, but not so easy to believe. For some reason, though we might claim that we depend on others in our community, we don't act like it very often. We often struggle through decisions, work through problems, fight sin, and pray about it all—*alone*, or perhaps with our spouses. Then we update our brothers and sisters in our community. And the update is good, but updating is not dependency.

The bald fact is: without each other, we really might not make it. *You* really might not make it. Sin, despair, unbelief, and apathy all flourish in isolation. And you and I, and those around us, are not exempt from this principle.

If we are going to act like the interdependent community that we are in Christ, we are going to have to be purposeful. Let me suggest two areas in which more intentionality will serve us.

Intentionality with Time

Here, we are not fighting against flesh and blood, but with that ravenous monster of our age: busyness. We often simply cannot find time to meaningfully be with our brothers and sisters. This is a sad situation and a dangerous one. When we stuff our lives so full of activities that we cannot deepen fellowship in our church community, we walk on the precipice. Below us lie the bleached bones of those whose isolated commitment to a persevering faith eventually collapsed.

Or, it may be that even when we ourselves *do* find the time to spend with others, we have the perception that the others do not. We are afraid to initiate time together because we worry that our offer will burden them. They may accept an invitation to get coffee, we think, but then they will take a deep breath after hanging up the phone.

Allow me to say two things in this regard. First, try not to give the impression to others that you are too busy to spend time with them. If you have to say no sometimes, that's fine, but suggest another time and let them know that their initiation is welcome. Second, let us be courageous enough to take other people's time. I don't mean that we should be insensitive to their schedules, but that someone needs to cut through the perception of busyness that we live with and initiate. The reality is that you need them, and they need you. If that is so, taking the plunge is worth it for both of you.

Intentionality with Conversation

It is the rare person who can interrupt a conversation on, say, the Super Bowl, with something completely different . . . and serious. Like, "By the way, I just wanted to say that I'm struggling with anger," or "Hey, can I share something with you that I discovered in Scripture?" or "Can we pray together about something that's burdening me?" Some people can do it, but most people can't.

That's why we need space, not only to be together, but to have those more serious conversations. We need intentional time where life in Christ is the subject on the table. I leave it to you to think through how to accomplish this. It may be through intentional one-on-one breakfasts, it may be through inviting families over, it may even be over the phone. Even then, these conversations may be awkward sometimes, but we must push on into deeper fellowship. If we don't, we will forever stay splashing around in the kiddie pool of small talk.

Life in Christ's church is a life of dependency and responsibility. To live in light of this, we need intentionality. We need a commitment to arrive at the end of our lives or the end of this world with growing faith and growing purity—together.