

Session Three - Other's Effort. 30th January

1. Reflect back

- How has your week been? Did you do anything different after last week's teaching?
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?

2. Review the teaching

The pandemic has affected us all differently but in our isolation and loneliness, if left to our own devices we can become fickle and inconsistent. When there is structure and support we generally do better.

We're not designed for isolated living. God is community - he is trinity - and said of Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone" Gen 2v18

1. Stir Up

Heb 10v24 *let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds*

There is value of a community with shared practice

Since Covid there has been morning prayer (Then lunchtime and evening prayer added). A reason to get up to pray every day with others - whether I feel like it or not. Held by the prayers and the faith of others.

Holly's testimony is that prayer in the "Upper Zoom" gave consistency, a safe space and a place for growth

Collectives are good places for us to encourage one another. Or taking walks with others. Create space for transformation to occur.

2. Sharpen

Prov 27v17 *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another*

Jill used to think she was holy - until she got married - and realised she was merely undisturbed.

For all, our primary relationships are God's number one agent of sanctification in our lives.

Graham Cooke says that "God gave us family to prepare us for our enemies."

Sometimes our public and private personas diverge. We need to get rescued from ourselves by allowing others to speak into our lives. Prov 27v6 *Wounds from a friend can be trusted.*

What might happen if we changed the social contract? What if in our collectives, we committed to a spiritual practice together, and then the next week we checked in with one another to see how it went? Can we be accountable to each other? Where might God be at work in us in the midst of that? What is God's invitation? What can we learn from the communities of shared practice that we call 12 step programmes - alcoholics and narcotics anonymous, where they practice generous hospitality, solidarity, sometimes brutal honesty, confession, where they fight for one another's freedom?

3. Stay the Course

Has God engineered your current circumstances to accomplish His purposes in you and through you?

Becoming community has 3 clear stages: we all begin as angels - everybody is so wonderful! Then we become demons. "I can't believe they did that!" Then we settle into being merely humans, flawed with foibles, loved by God and saved by grace, bringing our broken selves to the Cross and finding the life of Jesus, and the life of our community there. For example, the disciples, fishermen, taxmen, zealots, etc., were fumbling their way forward together, into the kingdom.

Bob Goff says this - "Love difficult people. You are one of them."

In his book *The Power of Place*, Daniel Grothe says, "People are great purifiers - we don't always stay around long enough to let that purification take place."

Why is it hard to stay the course? Why do we run? Because we want to be undisturbed!

A caveat: the following does not apply if you're facing domestic violence or exploitation. We want you to be safe. Talk privately with your collective leader or town pastor.

"The muck of others composts us into fertiliser." Phil 1v6 *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

Don't run away from each other. Life is messy but we are to die to self and live for Christ.

3. Realise the value

1. Who can I stir up, encourage and strengthen today, with love and good deeds? (Heb 10v24).
2. In what way is God sharpening and me in the context of my community? How can I say yes to God as He does so? (Prov 27v17).
3. How am I doing at staying the course? What makes it challenging? How is God using this particular place and these particular people to help me become more like Jesus?

A helpful appendix

Beyond Jill's talk she helpfully provided the following which, as leaders, you may draw on as appropriate in your Collective.

We sometimes choose to avoid conflict - it's easier to cut ties and leave. We don't want to do the hard work of facing one another, working through the difficulty, naming the hardship, confronting the things that have led to breakdown.

Conflict transformation

- God is at work in the midst of conflict, carrying with Him an invitation for transformation.
- There is nothing wrong here that a little more relationship wouldn't fix - advice from a mentor.
- Seek transformation in and through the conflict.
- Find ways together to be open to the transforming presence of Christ - prayer, solitude, silence, self examination, spiritual direction.
- Pursue love and unity - John 17.
- Pursue your own transformation - what part of this conflict is about me?
- Affirm Jesus' presence with us in the midst of conflict - find ways to open to His presence in it. Conflict can be the catalyst for needed growth and transformation for everyone involved.
- Commit to face to face direct communication vs triangulation (Matt 18v15).
- Commit to involve an objective third party who is trusted by each person (Matt 18v16).
- Commit to an increasing awareness and the practice of self examination to allow God to show us our part and confession as needed.
- Commit to discerning and doing God's will in the midst of conflict. What is God doing so we can join Him?
- Be proactive in developing skills and practices related to conflict transformation.