

Moving Forward -- The Goal: Relationships

Introduction -- when I was in Myrtle Beach in January, there were many times that I felt lonely. That's not the only time I've felt lonely, but I was without my family for much of it. The purpose was to have some solitude. However, a phrase from Epictetus helped me. He said, "the world is full of friends." What he recognized is that we are made for community, and so is everyone else. Humans are made to cooperate and work together. Now, many things ruin community, and we'll talk about those later. However, to a remarkable degree, the ability to connect and love is still there. As I thought about "the world is full of friends," it encouraged me to reach out. This is how we should think of ourselves and others: we are made for community.

Scripture Reading on Community

Reader: The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:19).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord (Lev. 19:18).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up (Eccl. 4:9-10).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (Is. 2:4).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (Jn. 13:34-35).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Gal. 6:10).

Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Reader: Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (1 Pet. 2:17).

All: Reply: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps. 133:1)

Community in Genesis

1. Notice all the good things that God has created (Gen. 1:31). He says that one thing is not good. Even in Paradise, a life without relationships is not good.
2. He created human beings with diversity (male and female) and a help suitable for him.
3. We were made to live in gentleness, kindness, and love toward one another. Anyone who does not do this harms their own nature (as we will see below).
4. Humans would have hierarchy. There was an order established from the beginning. Hierarchy is not bad.

5. We should cooperate in large-scale endeavors. Taking dominion requires pooling a large amount of resources.

Community in Philosophy

Note: we can learn from philosophy/science because we have two books: creation and Scripture. Listening to what others have read in the book of creation helps us see things we might not have seen. It may even rebuke us when those who do not have the second book see things better or more clearly than we do with the second book.

1. “For we are made for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth. To act against one another then is contrary to nature and it is acting against one another to be vexed and to turn away” (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.1).
2. If our friends depart, we should remember “that everything is full of friends, furthermore, first the gods and then human beings too, who by nature form one family with one another . . . and that we should take delight in those with whom we live, without being upset to see others go away” (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.24).
3. Why, if things turn out in such a way that you find yourself living alone, or with few companions, call that peace and quiet, and make use of those circumstances as you ought: converse with yourself, work on your impressions, perfect your preconceptions. But if you get caught in a crowd, call it the games, call it a public gathering, call it a festival, and join in the festival with everyone else. For what sight could be more pleasant to someone who loves his fellow human beings than a crowd of people? (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.4).
4. “Without friends, no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.1).
5. “But it is not only necessary, it is also noble” (ibid., VIII.2).
6. “Further, such friendship requires time and familiarity, as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together’; nor can they admit each other to friendship till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each. . . . a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not” (ibid., VIII.3).

How We Relate to Others

1. The fact that we are made for community means that we should be peaceable, kind, gentle people.
2. James 3:17 - “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Note the parallel with the philosophy of the time: “The first thing which philosophy undertakes to give is fellow feeling with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability” (Seneca, Letter V, 7).
3. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col. 3:12).

When Others Harm Community

1. When people do not like in kindness and humility, they harm themselves. We should not harm ourselves by responding in a like manner.

2. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17–18, 21).
3. This does not mean that we don't set boundaries or are allow others to continually harm us, but we maintain an attitude of kindness and gentleness even in doing so.
4. Note for the time being that relationships are distorted by our alienation from God. The relationship stool is stabilized by having three legs--God and two people. We will discuss this at much greater length.

Communities of Which We Are a Part

1. God made human beings with an organic connection, i.e., as part of families and communities. There is a connection with parents, siblings, and relatives. We are part of particular cities and communities. We have friendships we have developed. We are part of worshiping communities. We should ask, who are the significant people in my life?
2. See how the Apostle Paul does this in Col. 3 and Eph. 4. Am I showing honor to these people?

Diagnostic Questions

1. Am I engaging with people enough to be building relationships?
2. Do I show kindness, cooperation, and gentleness toward all people?
3. What happens when things get heated or difficult? How do I respond?
4. How do I interact with the important people in my life?
5. What is my relationship like with my neighborhood, city, church, friends, and broader nation? Am I participating in a way that builds these communities up?

Prayers for Community

O God, who hast made us in thine own image and redeemed us through thy Son Jesus Christ: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish thy purposes on earth; that, in thy good time, all nations and races may serve thee in harmony around thy heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad thy Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead us all, we pray thee, from prejudice to truth; deliver us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in thy good time enable each of us to stand reconciled before thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer