
Parenting in Community

Hebrews 10:24-25

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NOTE: This talk was done as joint presentation by the Pastor Russ and Pastor Greg.

Introduction

Greg

I served on a leadership board at another church. I can remember very vividly one discussion that we were having about a single mother and her rebellious teenage daughter who were members of that church. The daughter was disruptive and disrespectful, both in the youth Sunday School class as well as the youth meetings on Sunday evening. It had gotten so bad, that the teachers were asking that she be removed from the classes until she could prove herself able to participate in a constructive manner. The teachers complained that they couldn't teach and that she was adversely affecting the rest of the class members. The mother was pleading that this was the only godly influence in her daughter's life and couldn't we please help her with her daughter. It was brought to the board to decide what to do with her daughter.

The discussion was lively, but not moving toward any kind of conclusion. I suggested to the rest of the men that it was our responsibility, as her church family and leadership, to help her parent her daughter. She was a single mom, poor, working two jobs to try to make ends meet, and living in an area of town that none of us were willing to live in ourselves. I said that we needed to come along side this mother and help her learn to parent and we needed to be like a father to this young girl.

One of the other men brought the whole discussion to an abrupt conclusion by quickly proclaiming that parenting was a personal and private matter that was not the business of anyone other than the family, much less the business of the church. He prevailed and the rest of the men agreed. It was decided that the daughter would be forbidden to be a part of the youth group until she was able to be a positive contribution to it.

Was that a true reflection of what the Scriptures teach about our gathered community of believers? I hope that after this morning's message you recognize that the conclusion decided by that board was inconsistent with Biblical teachings. Tonight Russ and I would like to address the Biblical principles of our gathered community as it pertains to rearing children and give some practical applications of those principles.

The privileges that shape our thinking about being a gathered community:

We have a confident entrance into heavenly realities (v.19-20).

We have a compassionate High Priest over God's household (v.21).

The responsibilities and warnings that orient our being a gathered community:

We should draw near with a true heart and a holy conduct (v.22) with the danger that we drift from God and decline in godliness.

We should publicly and practically maintain our confession of faith (v.23) with the danger that we deny union with Christ and the congregation through our attitudes or actions.

We should watch and warn over each other's lives (v.24-25) with the danger that we become uncaring, distant and alienated from one another.

This third responsibility is our primary focus as we think together about parenting in community. Remember three essential truths must be believed and embraced if we are to please God in this area of parenting. (These were taught in the prior lesson on Sunday Morning.)

God is a community who is a Father and a parent within that community.

God's people have been taught to be engaged with and accountable to one another within the framework appropriate for their place in redemptive history.

God has established the gathered church as the His local kingdom community where believers are to watch and warn over one another.

So, how do we parent together as a community of believers?

Building Relationships – Knowing One Another

Its Biblical Foundation

The phrase, "let us consider one another" means that we are to know one another well. I see this because *one another* here is the receiver of the action of consider. This construction has been used before in the epistle. In Hebrews 3:1, we are to "consider" or to "fix our thoughts on Jesus." Same word. Same structure. If we are to consider by focusing our thoughts and attentions on Jesus in such a way that we learn of Him and know Him and cultivate a relationship with Him, is that not what is in view here? In Hebrews 3:1, consider Jesus; in Hebrews 10:24, consider one another.

So we must know one another. What is actually commanded here is a focusing of our attention on one another that grows and develops our relationships and our knowledge that is like the way we are to develop our relationship with Jesus.

Its Practical Application

Here are some practical steps in getting to know one another for the sake of our parenting.

Expand your circle of friendships

Most of us have a circle of friends. We have commonalities that draw us to each other. We have shared experiences, children of similar ages, situations that are similar, personalities that complement each other, etc, etc, etc. We have chosen our particular circle because it is comfortable and doesn't take a lot of work. But it is that comfort of familiarity that may be depriving all of us of the ministry that we need from each other. In 2 Corinthians 1, we suffer and are comforted by God so that we can comfort others with the same comfort we received. There are people in the Chapel who have the comfort that you need, but you don't know them well enough to receive that comfort. There are people in the Chapel that need your comfort, and you don't know them well enough to have the opportunity to give that comfort.

Why not make a list of the people that are in your current circle of friends. Then, go through the Chapel directory and make another list of people that you want to include in your circle of friends. Make specific plans to include them. This doesn't have to be formal or costly. By making the details clear at the beginning about what is going to happen and who is responsible for what, these initial approaches should be more relaxed and easier to initiate. Make a goal for expanding your circle of friends this year, and then plan on how to make it happen.

Learn the art of godly listening

The only way we are going to get to know each other better is by developing the discipline of being good, godly listeners to our circle of friends. There is no way that we can know other people in the way that this text requires without listening to them in a God-honoring way.

Be present – this involves both outwardly and inwardly.

First of all, we should be present, both outwardly and inwardly. By outwardly I mean what your body "says"; what we refer to as body language. You should be facing the speaker, not turned sideways or with your back to them. You shouldn't have your arms folded across your chest, or be pushed back in your chair. You need to lean forward slightly with a relaxed posture. And you should have good eye contact. Don't look around the room, or acknowledge the presence of other people. Don't stare out the window, or look at other objects close at hand. Focus on that person, giving them your undivided attention.

By inwardly I mean what you are saying and thinking to yourself while the other person is talking. Are you thinking and planning what you are going to say next? Are you hoping that they will hurry up and get finished so you can talk? Are you thinking about something totally different? Are your thoughts far, far away? Are you thinking that this is not important and you are just trying your best to be polite? Or, are you concentrating on what the other person is saying, feeling, and trying to get across to you? Are you trying to enter their world and understand it from their point of view?

Don't interrupt

Next, we should make it our practice not to interrupt. We interrupt by telling a story that is better than the other person's story. We interrupt by finishing their sentences for them. We interrupt by breaking in and telling them that we understand, or that we already know what they are going to say. Godly listening doesn't interrupt.

Give appropriate feedback

Appropriate feedback involves nodding your head, having short comments in appropriate places like "Wow", "Really?" "Hum" "Is that right" "Tell me more". You get the picture. It indicates to the person that you really are listening and are tracking with them. There is nothing more frustrating than having someone looking at you with a blank stare saying or doing nothing at all.

Ask clarifying questions

Even though we all use the English language, we each bring a different background of experiences with us attached to those words. So the use of words by one person with their set of definitions attached does not mean that the receiving person has the same definition or understanding of those words. Each person believes they have communicated and received the same information, but in reality it has not been transmitted and received in the same way with the same understanding and interpretation. In order to really understand what someone is saying, questions must be asked for clarification.

Practice godly love and humility while being a listener.

We also have the ability to attach motives to words that may or may not be what the speaker intended. Practicing what 1 Corinthians 13 teaches about love means that we give the other person the benefit of the doubt. If your interpretation of their comments has a negative connotation to you, then you need to clarify with questions framed in humility, that is, giving the benefit of the doubt to that person, in order to see if your interpretation is correct. You assume that your interpretation was incorrect until proven otherwise.

If we are going to "consider one another" – if we are going to get to know each other as this text instructs, then we must make a conscientious effort to expand our circle of friends, and get to know each other better by practicing godly listening.

Overcoming Inertia - Motivating One Another

Its Biblical Foundation

The word here is to stimulate, to provoke, to stir up. We can think of prodding someone along. The idea of these two is captured by our translations. We need to care for one another by knowing each other so well that we can motivate and stir one another up. The Bible has more motivational material than imperatives or instructions. This usually comes as a surprise to people. What we learn from this is that simple instruction may bring people to know what they ought to do, but it does not necessarily bring the grace to believe it and desire it. In other words, part of what it takes to give grace is working hard at the motivational aspects.

Now, a word of caution. Biblical motivating is not worldly manipulation. Worldly manipulation plays on a person's weaknesses, vulnerabilities and so on often using deceit at some level to move people. Even guilt can be used the wrong way to get people to do the opposite what they are doing without true repentance. Studying 1st and 2nd Corinthians and Galatians will be a great help in seeing how Paul motivates all kinds of Christians to godly faith and conduct.

Its Practical Application

This is a real challenge for us. How can we Biblically motivate one another?

Ask questions that help us engage hearts

One way we can motivate is to ask questions that help us engage our hearts and the hearts of those with whom we are talking. What kind of questions should we ask and what should we be asking about? Those are good questions. We could spend several hours discussing this, but let me give some general thoughts.

We need to be listening for words that characterize emotions. Such words as "I'm scared." "I'm angry." "I'm discouraged." "I'm sad." These little clues should be explored with questions.

We also need to be listening for words that interpret life. Such words as "God must be angry with me." "God just isn't hearing my prayers." "I guess I deserve kids like this." These words need to be explored with questions.

And we need to be listening for words that express what the person is saying to themselves. Such words as "I feel like quitting." "I'm tired of being the only one who does anything." "I'm such a failure." These words need to be explored with questions.

All of this goes back to being a godly listener. Is this relationship just a social interaction with other believers, or is this a relationship brought about by God in order to be used of God for the mutual ministry of growth and change to each other? Your mindset will determine how you listen and respond to the opportunities God brings into this body of believers here at the Chapel.

Help people to be motivated biblically

And we need to motivate our brothers and sisters biblically. This involves understanding what we ought to trust and treasure.

As Russ said, we don't want to get involved in manipulation. We want to motivate in ways that Christ and Paul motivated. We have been teaching about the heart from this pulpit and in classes for a number of years. Last Sunday we talked about changing our hearts. We need to get to know what we believe to be true about God and about parenting. We need to see what it is that we want from parenting and from our children. And as we allow other believers to help us see what we believe and what we want, then they can help us when we stray by believing the lies of this world's philosophy and helping us to see what it is we want and desire more than we want God. All of these elements are interrelated. We must know each other and allow others to know us intimately enough to be able to motivate in a biblical manner.

How do we motivate biblically? We do so by providing structure. We help our brother by helping him see how to specifically apply the changes in thoughts and desires that are necessary in concrete ways in his life. We also provide guidance. When he doesn't know the wheres, the whens, and the hows of change, we are there to help. We also provide encouragement. We know him well enough to know those times of temptation and weakness and will provide encouragement during those times. We will also provide warning when disobedience and rebellion rear their ugly heads. We will remind him of the harvest that will come from what is sown.

Motivating one another involves questions that engage the heart and Biblical motivation born out of the knowledge gained from those questions expressed through love and concern for that brother or sister.

Cultivating Righteousness – Having Biblical Objectives

Its Biblical Foundation

To what end are we to study people in order to know how to stir them up. What is it that we are trying to motivate people to do? We are to study and know people well in order to stir them up and motivate to love and good works. We want to be pushing people in their loving and in their serving. We want to know what hot buttons in people's lives stir up the grace of God in them so that they are energized to deeds of sacrificial love for one another.

Notice that two categories are given here: toward love and good deeds. This is an amazing exhortation for parenting. We are to stir up people to truly love their children and to do what is pleasing to God for their children. In other words, we are to help each other be on the alert for being shaped by our culture in these areas. We must help one another see where we have a way of engaging our sons and daughters that is love as defined by the world and not by the Scripture. A key example of this is in spanking, or the use of the rod. Proverbs clearly says that if we do not spank our children we do not love them (Proverbs 13:24). True love then is not the withholding of correction, but the administration of Biblical discipline. When we do not discipline, we are not expressing true, godly love. Contrary to what the world teaches, the Bible teaches us that we are assured of our relationship with God and experience His love through His chastening of us (Hebrews

12). So, here is one area of motivating towards love in parenting that has very practical ramifications.

Its Practical Application

What kinds of practical steps can we implement so that we are moving toward Biblically defined objectives?

Talk much with each other about what the Bible commands

It is such a comfort to know that the Creator of all the universe has an owner's manual for rearing human beings. The problem that most of us have is that we have not read and studied the manual adequately in order to be able to know the Biblically defined objectives for our child rearing. Most of us were ill-equipped to be parents. And all of us are walking on the same road of parenting. Our situations and kids are not unique. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, to face the issues that you are facing. Just knowing that other parents have been through issues and understands the temptations and delights that we are experiencing is encouragement all its own. To see that God provided for them and see what others learned that His Word said about issues brings energy and the ability to love our children and be pleasing to God in our child rearing.

We must use our times of getting to know each other as times of talking about what the Bible commands for us as parents as well as for our children. We must encourage each other with the Scriptures and their application to our parenting. The encouragement that comes through sharing what God has done in our lives with us as parents and with our children can be just what is needed to help others on their way.

Be sure that you deal with the issues in your own child-rearing

I am going to be talking about developing trusting relationships during the next point. But for now, I want us to be reminded that when we talk with each other about what the Bible commands and how we have experienced those commands, there are two temptations. The first involves someone taking it upon themselves to be the parenting patrol. And the second involves being open to someone coming to us with concerns for us as parents or for our children.

We have the teaching on the log and the speck found in Matthew 7 for our guide in these issues. We are a community of believers that are charged with the responsibility to stir up and encourage each other. But that is sometimes greatly misunderstood and misused. We have a responsibility to help each other along in our parenting and that will involve talking to each other about issues that we observe. The temptation is to get defensive when we are approached and to ignore what the other person is saying by looking at all of their faults and failures. If we are going to obey this text in Hebrews, then we need to be sensitive to each other and be willing to take a close look at our lives when someone has the courage to approach us about issues they believe need to be addressed. At the same time, we need to be careful that we have looked at ourselves in the mirror of the Word of God before we make blanket

statements about other parents and their children. We have a tendency to observe the child of another believe and make the comment that my kid will never be like that. Or that you would never allow your child be say or do that. My brothers and sisters, we need to be very careful in how we judge. As we learned last week, there are no guarantees to the final product. Let us be open to the loving concern of others and look at those telephone poles in our eyes before we try to get that tiny speck out of the other person's eye.

Maintaining Contact – Faithfully Meeting Together

Its Biblical Foundation

We learn to know each other well enough to motivate one another to love and good works in gathering together to encourage one another.

- Not forsaking – We must not abandon our gathering together. There is first a forsaking of it in our attitude. We do not value being together as God's people. Then we forsake it in our action. We bit by bit become less and less engaged in the life of God's people *together*.
- But encouraging – The word here is also translated *exhorting* in some contexts. The point is that we are to actively engage in helping one another along in the process of growing in grace. Whether it is encouraging or exhorting, it pictures people actively engaged in one another's lives.

What *gathering together* does the Author have in mind? Even a brief look at the book of Acts depicts a church life quite different from ours today. There is an emphasis on daily and weekly. There is a definite rhythm of one-on-one, small group and then corporate gathering. It certainly means the regular and faithful participation in the gatherings of the church. Note that I did not say *attendance*. Simply being here is not the point. You must be actively participating in the gathering: simply showing up is not what God has in mind.

Finally, he brings some real perspective. As we come upon the end of the eschatological age, we must do this more. We must gather more, consider more, encourage more and be more faithful. And yet, it is just the opposite of what is happening. It is the pain and persecution and suffering that comes upon us in the last days that frames the expectation that we will do this even more.

Its Practical Application

There are the public gatherings of the community of believers and the private gatherings of the community of believers. Each have different and distinct purposes.

Must be active in the gathered meetings of the church

Here at the Chapel, we are trying to have a planned purpose, vision, and mission for each of our public gatherings of this community of believers. We have decided that those purposes, visions, and missions can best be accomplished by meeting together as one body for certain times and meeting separately by age groups for others.

9:15 Bible Education Hour

We have divided the children, the youth, and the adults during the 9:15 Bible Education Hour on Sunday mornings in order to accomplish the purposes that we have determined are crucial to our lives together.

For the adults, our vision is to see the minds, affections, and wills of God's people transformed by His Word so that He is magnified by their obeying faith in every sphere of life. We are working on that through the Chapel Starters classes, the Heart of the Chapel classes, Searching the Scriptures classes, and the Issues and Answers classes.

For the youth, our vision is to inspire, instruct, and influence the youth of Clearcreek Chapel for the glory of Christ by the grace of God. We are working on that through the Clearcreek Chapel Youth Ministry as it is taught at the 9:15 hour.

For the children, our vision is to see the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of the children of The Chapel transformed by the Word of God so that God is magnified by their faith in every aspect of their lives. We are working on that through Scripture Scholars classes.

AM Services

The Sunday AM service is dedicated to corporate worship for the entire family as we teach and model worship of the One Who is worthy of all praise. The children leave for their age-appropriate study in Leaning Lambs. The youth and adults are participating together in the systematic book by book exposition of the Scriptures.

PM Services

The Sunday PM service is, again, a time of corporate worship. The adult time is dedicated to more of a topical or issue specific time of teaching. The youth have their Sunday Morning Enhancement and On the Media during that time. And the children have their Scripture Sowers classes.

Flocks

Flocks are designed for the Chapel family to set aside a specific time to get to know each other better in order to foster a not forsaking – but encouraging ministry like we are talking about tonight. It is only a beginning to facilitate the meeting together that we see in this passage.

It is imperative that the entire Chapel family participate as fully as possible in our corporate meeting together so that this vital ministry of not forsaking, but encouraging can have its foundation on the Word of God.

One other comment before I continue. We have chosen to separate parents from children for certain times of ministry for specific purposes. There may be some here who do not believe that it is right for the community of believers to have a ministry to their children. Some believe that it is only the parents responsibility to teach, and others believe they should always be present when their children are being taught by others. I would like to challenge that way of thinking.

Hebrews 3:12-13 teaches that each and every one of us has the great ability to fall away from the living God because of an evil unbelieving heart and that we can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore, it is possible for all of us to not see our children or ourselves clearly. Having others involved in ministering to our children gives the opportunity for someone else to bring the truth of the Word of God, not only to our children, but to us, in ways that we may be blind to. Also, allowing our children to interact with other believers helps them see the grace and love of Christ in the lives of other believers that God may use to make Him more attractive to our children and in ways that help and enlighten them to the wonderful life of faith and obedience. If your concerns are about what is being taught, then see those who are teaching for clarification. If your concerns are that you are the only one who should be teaching your children, let me encourage you to not keep your children from being involved in this ministry of people actively involved in each other's lives.

Get beyond the superficial

But the corporate meeting together is not sufficient for this call to encourage each other. There must be the private meeting together that gets beyond the superficial.

I think that we attempt to fool ourselves by believing that we really know other people. If I asked you if you really knew one of your friends, you would probably say, "Yes, of course I know them. They're my friend. Duh!" But may I challenge you that you don't know them in a way that will lead to growth and change in their life or in yours? Sure, you know their birthday and about their family, and what food they like, and what activities they enjoy, yahdah yahdah yahdah. But, do you know what they are struggling with right now? Do you know where they are tempted? Do you know where they are in their relationship with God? Do you know what they really want in life? Do you know what regrets they have? Do you know what they really believe to be true about God and the situation in which they find themselves? Do you know what they fear the most? Do you know what their heartaches are? Do you really know this person in such a way that you can be used of God to help them grow and change for God's glory? If you answered yes, then you are one of the few. But I suspect that very few of us can answer yes, we really do know someone in such a way that our relationship is a vital avenue that God uses for growth and change. We keep relationships on the superficial for what we believe to be good reasons and we are going to cover superficiality later in this message.

We talked earlier about learning the godly art of listening and then asking questions that engage the heart. But in order to be able to ask those heart-engaging questions, we need to build trust between us. Change happens in the context of trusting relationships. Earlier I asked you to make a list of the people in your that are in your current circle of friends. Now ask yourself a question as you look down that list: which of those relationships goes beyond the superficial level? With whom do you talk about your temptations and struggles? With whom do you share insights that you have learned? With whom

do you have a relationship in which you keep each other accountable for your thoughts and actions?

We all engage in surface talk, and that is a necessary part of relationships. But we must get beyond these surface relationships and develop relationships that will cultivate growth and change in our lives. We keep our interactions at a superficial level for a variety of reasons. But most, if not all, of those reasons stem from pride. We don't want someone else knowing that we struggle and sin. We are deeply concerned about what people think of us. And we have a fear of what the other person will do with the private information we reveal. How many other people will they tell, or can they be trusted to keep it to themselves? What spin will they put on it if they do tell others? What are other people going to think about me after they find out? How many people will ultimately know this insider information? And will it be told in the right context for the right reasons? So the building of trust should be something that is high on the list of priorities in building our relationships.

Conclusion Let's draw this to a close and make some summary statements. I don't believe there is one of us who obeys these two verses in Hebrews 10 as we should. We all need to make some changes.

The main point of tonight's message is that we do not parent alone. God has given us this community of believers to help each of us parent children for His glory.

We must work hard at developing more than superficial relationships within our church family.

We must know others in such a way that we can motivate them to love and good deeds for their children and for each other.

We must be open and ready to receive as well as give counsel.

We must be faithful to the public and private gathering of the saints here at the Chapel.

It is hard to obey these verses because the time is drawing short. That Day is drawing near and we must be even more determined to encourage and stir each other up.

