

“WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? (#4): MADE FOR RELATIONSHIP”

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 11-4-07]

–I–

1. Read Texts: Hebrews 10:24-25 and Pray.
2. For the last four weeks, we’ve shared in a series called What Is A Christian? in which we’ve explored the fact that for Jesus, a Christian is one who loves God and loves their neighbor.

A–We’ve learned that we can “love God” through spiritual practices like *worship* and *stewardship*, and that one way we can “love our neighbor” is by sharing Christ through our *words and deeds*.

B–Well, today I want us to discuss yet another way we can “love our neighbor”: ...through ***our relationships in Christian fellowship***.

C–We’re going to talk about WHY they’re important, and HOW we can go about developing lasting and meaningful ones for our lives. [*Refer to “Sermon Notes” blanks in bulletin*]

–II–

3. Let’s start by recognizing that one of the innate needs we have as human beings is the need for fellowship.

A–In the words of today’s title, we were “*Made for Relationship*”¹ – how does the author John Donne put it? ...“*No man [one] is an island...*”

1–And the Bible even affirms this in one of its first stories: in Genesis, after the creation of Adam, God said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner/companion.*”²

2–Now, we usually think of this as a scripture about marriage, but it actually is merely a recognition of the fact that whether we’re married or single, none of us is intended to journey through life *alone*, but in fellowship/ relationship with *others*.

B–In fact, most famous Bible stories are not stories of individual, lone-rangers who made it all by themselves, but are stories of *partnerships* of people who worked *together* to accomplish God’s plans and purposes:

1–For example, Noah, Abraham, and their families; Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, Ruth and Naomi, Ezra and Nehemiah, David and Samuel.

2–And in the New Testament, there was Mary and Martha; Peter and John; Paul and Barnabas; Paul and Silas; Paul and Timothy; Priscilla and Aquila; and others.

3–And remember that not even Jesus tried to save the world by himself. No, the first thing he did was form his followers together in a small group (his 12 Disciples).³

C–My point is that the Bible presupposes that people of faith will work out and grow in their salvation *not* alone, but within the context of spiritual relationship with *others* – that to be who God created us to be, each of us needs other people, and other people need us.

4. Now, the New Testament word for this is “*koinonia*” (fellowship/partnership),⁴ and it basically has a two-fold purpose: ***Helping***; and ***Companionship***⁵ ...both of which are illustrated in today’s scripture from Hebrews 10:

A–For example, Verse 24 says “*Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds*” – the implication being that “love” and “good deeds” don’t come naturally, but instead quite often need the assistance of others – a **HELPER** – who’ll help us remember who we are and to what we’re called.

1–I don’t know about you, but there have been times in my life when I’ve been busy doing something I wanted to do, and I’d get a phone call about some crisis or tragedy in a church member’s life, and honestly there’ve been times I just didn’t want to fool with it at that time.

2–But usually, my wife would prod me and ask, “*Well, are you going to see them?*” Of course, I hadn’t *planned* to at that moment, No! I was busy doing something for ME, for a change, thank you!

3–But you know, it’s always smart to listen to your spouse, and so I’d go anyway. And later, I’d be glad that she had “*provoked me to love and good deeds.*”

4–You see, sometimes the things we *should do* don’t come naturally – they have to be prodded along (And sometimes they need a swift “kick in the butt!”). Either way, that’s one reason why we need Christian fellowship/relationships.

B–But there’s also a second function, found in Verse 25, where it also says that we’re to be about “*encouraging one another...*” – in other words, God gives us Christian **COMPANIONS** so that we can be encouraged, comforted, and cared for us when we’re having a tough time.

1–I don’t know about you, but when I’m having a rough day, I find it extremely hard to encourage *myself*. To the contrary, I usually want to have a pity party and tell people how bad things are.

2–What it usually takes to get me out of such a mood is a Christian brother or sister who’ll encourage and lift me up as a “Companion” in Christ.

C–So, these are 2 reasons that we need others in Christian fellowship/relationship: because...
 (#1) they can be a HELPER to assist us in becoming the person God wants us to be;
 (#2) they can be a COMPANION along side us through whatever we face in life.

–III–

5. So then, ***HOW do we go about developing this kind of life-enriching, Christian fellowship*** and these kinds of deep relationships?

A–Well, thankfully, God’s already done most of this for us by giving us this funky, sometimes awkward thing called the “Church.”

1–Contrary to what I sometimes hear, it’s not a human-made invention, but instead is *God’s* idea – it’s *His* way of providing a structure for us to find Helpers and Companions for life’s journey.

2–And as such, our participation in His Church is absolutely essential to God’s purpose and plan for our lives – that’s precisely what we celebrated earlier as we remembered some of God’s “saints” who’ve gone before us.

3–Christian author George Morris explains it this way: “*God never enters into a relationship with us apart from our relationship with others. Therefore, we cannot have a relationship with God unless we are part of a community.*”⁶

B–Now, when I use the word “Church” to describe one way to develop Christian fellowship, you need to know that I’m *not* talking about what happens at the worship hour.

C–No. Just saying hello and goodbye before or after a worship service is not enough to develop significant, life-enriching relationships with others – we need something more.

6. And that’s precisely why throughout the centuries, those who were serious about growing in their faith discovered the power and importance of being in a small group.

A–Small groups were used by Jesus, by the early Church, and even by John Wesley as the backbone of early Methodism.⁷

B–You know, I wouldn’t trade anything for the three small groups that I’m in today:

1–During Monday morning Staff time, we spend the first 30 minutes to talk about and pray for the needs of our staff families;

2–Then, each Monday night, I participate in an interdenominational covenant men’s group, who are my accountability partners in the faith;

3–And finally, each Wednesday afternoon I’m in telegroup with fellow Pastors.

C–Each of these helps provide me with prayer, encouragement, occasional challenge, and the emotional and spiritual support I need to be who God wants me to be, not only as your Pastor, but more importantly just as a fellow traveler in faith.

-IV-

7. My point in all of this is that being a Christian is not just an *individual* call, but a call to be part of a *family* – a reminder that we cannot truly *believe* in Christ without *belonging* to His family!

A–So, let me ask: where is it that YOU belong?

1–What type of small group connection do you have in the church where you can be challenged and encouraged as you grow in your faith? –...

2–...Where you have fellow travelers who’ll “*provoke [you] to love and good works*” and will “*encourage*” you along life’s journey? ...

3–...People who (if we’ll allow them to do so) can become our Helpers and Companions along life’s journey?

B–As we close today, I want to give each of us a chance to consider this by inviting us to take out of our bulletin the sheet titled “Small Group Opportunities.”

1–On it are listed a number of small groups that our church offers that can help connect us in Christian fellowship and relationship.

2–And after I offer a prayer and invite us to Holy Communion, I want to invite you to complete this sheet as you feel led, & then bring it forward during Communion as a way of expressing to God your desire to grow in faith by participating in a small group.

C–You see, to “*love our neighbors*” is to be connected in fellowship in the body of Christ.

1–You and I were “*Made For Relationship*” through the church.

2–So, how are YOU connected?

9. [PRAY]
10. [ALL-SAINTS SUNDAY HOLY COMMUNION]
11. [Offering of “Small Group Opportunity” commitments as people come forward for Communion]

ENDNOTES:

1. We were created for a relationships with God, with others, and even for a proper relationship with ourselves. And yet, today there are many people who’ll say that they don’t need the others or the church; that they can be “good Christians” by ourselves, just “me and Jesus!” In fact, in Verse 24 of today’s scripture, it seems that that’s precisely what was happening, because the writer there challenges his readers to “*not neglect... to meet together, as is the habit of some....*”

2. Genesis 2:18-25.

3. In fact, in Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, “*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in your midst*” Notice, not just ONE, but at least TWO. So it’s no surprise, then, that when he sent his Disciples out to do ministry, he sent them out “two by two” (Mark 6:7).
4. Read John 15:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, & 1 Peter 2:5 & 9.
5. These two are also paralleled in the Genesis 2:18-25 story of the creation of Eve as Adam’s *Helper* and *Companion*.
6. Dr. George Morris, spoken at the “Academy for the Practice of Christian Ministry” Evangelism Module at Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center, October 23, 2007.
7. In fact, John Wesley made small group participation a requirement for his early Methodists – you couldn’t be a Methodist *unless* you were first part of one of the Methodist classes or bands. These were the fundamental way he had his Methodists practice Christian fellowship, which he referred to as “Christian conferencing.”