

Leadership Development Program

Module 10 – Leading in building community



John 17:11 *“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”*

John 17: 22 *“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one”*

The pattern for community

The relationship that the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit have with each other gives us the *template or pattern* for community. Jesus prayed in the preceding Scriptures that we would be one as the trinity is one. The three members of the Godhead have the same attributes, same value, exist in perfect harmony but have different roles. This is also our template for community. We should value ourselves and others the same, live in harmony as well as respecting the differing roles we have in the body. The members of the trinity co-operate to achieve the purposes of the Kingdom. This is also the plan for us in the church. We are different parts of the body, meant to co-operate with each other to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth.

The power for community

The second Scripture above also shows us how to achieve community. It says that we become one by receiving “glory” from the Lord. This word “glory” is the Greek word “*dóksa*” which means “*exercising personal opinion which determines value*”. The Scripture says that Jesus knew the Father’s opinion of Him and determined His value from that opinion. Through the preceding Scriptures Jesus told us that we become one as we understand the Father’s opinion of us and others and ascribe that value to us and them. When we treat people with the value that comes from the Father’s opinion of them, community is naturally built. There are many expressions of unity and community but if they are not built with valuing others equally, then ultimately we are not building a Kingdom community.

The fight for community

Because community rises and falls on our opinion of one another, it is important to understand and potentially adjust our opinions of one another.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”*

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The preceding Scripture tells us that our warfare is in the strongholds of our arguments and thoughts. It instructs us to examine what goes on in our brains to see if it is aligned with God's thoughts (knowledge of God) and Jesus's example to us (obedience of Christ). If that stronghold or "pattern of thinking" is misaligned to either of these things, then we should consciously change our thoughts.

It essentially does not matter whether these thoughts originate from our soul or through the spiritual realm, they are defeated in the same way. Our soul (memory, emotions, rationale and will) may produce a particular mind-set that is misaligned to God's thoughts because of experiences in the past. Amongst other things, our positive and negative experiences, our culture, our family and our education cause us to have ways of viewing the world and ways of reacting to differing situations.

Also, we live in a spiritual realm where spiritual messengers (angels and demons) bring messages from their respective masters. Of particular relevance to building community is to be aware of the enemy's messages that attempt to persuade us to devalue our opinion of ourselves or others. Demons bring messages:

1. *Of lies (John 8:44)*
2. *Of temptation (Matthew 4)*
3. *Of accusations of the brethren (Revelation 12:10)*
4. *Of deception (2 Corinthians 11:14)*
5. *To steal the Word (Mark 4:15)*
6. *To promote unforgiveness (2 Corinthians 2: 10, 11)*
7. *To oppress (Acts 10:38)*
8. *To blind minds (2 Corinthians 4:4)*
9. *Of anger (Ephesians 4:26- 27)*

All of these messages attempt to challenge what Jesus said about our path to community. They try to ensure that we do not have the Father's opinion of people (including ourselves) and devalue them accordingly. We are not under constant verballing from the enemy. If he cannot get us to adjust our thinking, he will retire from us for another time (*Luke 4:13 "Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time."*) As with all our mental warfare, we examine our patterns of thinking about ourselves and others with the two criteria mentioned in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 as in the following action point:

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Action: Bring to mind a person that you are having difficulty with in your community (family, church, other)

1. Does what I am thinking about them reflect the Father's opinion? (Is it exalting itself above God's knowledge?)
2. Is what I am doing represent what Jesus would do? (Is it captive to the obedience of Christ?)

If you find yourself at odds with one of these two (you should) then get ready for a spiritually empowered mental battle.

Forming our opinions

To ensure that our opinions of one another are aligned to the Father's opinions, there are five operations of our thought life that we should consider

1. Considering

Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works"

We should consider others (literally "observe fully") so that we are in a better position to encourage one another to love others and do good to them. The phrase "in order" in the preceding Scripture is very important. We observe others so that we are effective in helping them. We do not observe them to find fault with them or to try to feel better about ourselves.

Hebrews 13:7 "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct"

According to the preceding Scripture, we should also consider the outcomes of our leader's lives and learn from their faith and adjust the way we live our lives.

2. Judging

James 4:11 - 12 "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another"

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The Bible is very clear that we should not judge one another. Judging others is simply not our role and we should steer clear of it. The Bible is also clear that there is only one judge, being the Father. The truth is that we are not very good at judging. We over-emphasize others weaknesses and underplay our own. (*Matthew 7:3 “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”*)

If we should not judge, then it is important to know what the Scriptures mean by judging. “Judging” simply means “to decide”. It is to have a closed mind about someone. The opposite of judging is to have an open mind about them, give them the benefit of the doubt, to step into their shoes. We can never know or experience what it is like to be another person so we should be open minded with them and not have set (negative) opinions of them.

3. Remembering

Acts 20:35 *“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

There are certain thoughts that we should ensure that we do not lose. In the preceding Scripture, Paul was reminding believers to remember Jesus’s words about giving. The Scriptures tell us in many places to remember words and examples and people’s life stories that help us to live in a way that we ought to. (*e.g. Revelations 3:3 “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.”*). We should remember the strengths of those we relate to and remember the positive deeds that they have done.

4. Forgetting

Philippians 3:12 - 14 *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

In the preceding Scripture, Paul was explaining the way he viewed his past, present and future. He was comfortable with facing the fact that he had not already “attained” (or “seized”), been “perfected” (“accomplished”) or “apprehended” (“possessed”). Paul used

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three different words to explain that he was still on an unfinished journey, even though he was advanced in years. There were aspects of his potential that he was yet to seize, things that he was yet to accomplish and still other things that had not possessed or taken hold of him. Having been aware of these things, he decided to forget what he was deficient in and focus on what was up ahead of him. Later in that passage Paul said that this forgetting was a mark of a mature mind-set (Philippians 3:15). If we also desire a mature mind-set, then we should also forget our past failings and the past failings of others and focus on what is up ahead.

5. *Meditating*

Philippians 4:8 *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things”*

Meditation is about what we hold constantly in our thinking. It is what we continually go over in our minds. The word “meditate” means “to take an inventory of”. In our relationships, we should take an inventory of whatever is good and noble and lovely and think about these things.

Action: *Think on your three closest relationships – one from your family, one from church and one from your work and apply the five preceding mental activities*

1. *What in them is worth considering to learn from?*
2. *What about them do you need to stop judging (have an open mind about)?*
3. *What positive action have they taken in the past that you need to remember?*
4. *What negative feature in their past do you need to forget?*
5. *What good things about them do you need to meditate on?*

Positive and negative reinforcement in relationships

We have patterns of thinking (mind-sets) that we have built up over our life through our experiences and learnings. In relationships, these mind-sets outwork in what we think or meditate on about someone. It is that thought life that drives what we feel about that person.

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And it is what we feel about a person that drives how we act towards them. This in turn affects our thoughts about them. The cycle works positively or negatively. Negative thoughts produce negative feelings which produce negative actions which in turn reinforce negative thoughts. Positive thoughts produce positive feelings which produce positive actions which reinforce positive thoughts. This is illustrated in the figure below.



In all of our relationships, we are either on a negative or positive reinforcing cycle. If we are on a negative reinforcing cycle, then we should understand how to jump to the positive reinforcing circle. We do this by changing our thoughts, our feelings and our actions. Changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts will result in positive feelings which results in positive actions which in turn increases our positive thoughts. Similarly, changing our feelings or actions to be positive affects the others positively. Changing all three at once has a remarkably positive effect on our relationships. Doing this is effective spiritual warfare, as we are resisting the enemy's messages and treating people as the Father sees them.

1. Changing thoughts

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”*

We should purposefully examine our thought life to challenge arguments and thoughts to see if they are in line with what the Lord think about others and about us. Are we thinking with the Father's high opinion of ourselves or others and holding them in that value? If we are not, we need to bring our thoughts captive and hold them captive. Entrenched thoughts are not changed by one challenge to them. They take many challenges. This is why it is described as warfare. If you keep “pulling down” and “casting down” wrong thoughts, your thought

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patterns begin to change. Changing your thoughts will begin to change our feelings and our actions.

2. Changing feelings

Romans 15:13 *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

The Holy Spirit has many facets, including filling us with His attributes and power. Included in His many attributes is the ability to put great feelings inside us – joy and peace being the main ones. When we are feeling emotionally poor about something, we can come to the Lord and He will fill us and put His joy, peace and hope in us. This enables us to take (emotionally fuelled) love actions in all of our relationships. It is so much more enjoyable for everybody if we have positive emotions whilst doing something for others.

3. Changing actions

Matthew 5:43 - 44 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”*

We have the ability to act in a different way to how we think and feel. We can decide to love, bless, do good and pray even though we are feeling poor or not receiving from the person. This is what the Bible means by the word “love”. Ultimately, love is about taking some action. Doing something for a person we are having a difficult relationship with results in us feeling and thinking better about them.

Action: Consider your most difficult relationship.

- 1. What thoughts are you going to war against?**
- 2. How will you receive God’s love, joy and peace for them?**
- 3. What good will you do for them?**

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Finding satisfaction in community

It is the Lord's desire that people build healthy relationships in their family, church and other community involvements. Many people who come into church life are seeking others to reach out to them to build them into the church community. Although we should help people to connect, we should realise that it is our role as leaders to disciple people to reach out to others. The desire for others to cater for your needs is an insatiable desire. **Matthew 16:25** *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* We do not serve and lead people well by helping them to keep focussed on themselves. The Scriptures are not full of what others should do for us, but for what we should do for others. We help others to build community by helping people to give out to others.

Who should I help?

Galatians 6:10 *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

The answer to "who" we should give out to is simple – it is as we have opportunity. As our personal circumstances and resources dictate, we should aim to serve whoever. The parable of the good Samaritan reinforces this idea. We build community by doing as much good to others as we can, with a special focus of those in the church.

2 Corinthians 8:16 *"But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus."*

God will also impress upon you those whom He wants you to earnestly care for. It may be for a group of people or a few people or one person. If we all respond to God in who we are supposed to be caring for, everyone will receive the love and the care of the family of God. The Holy Spirit is a good organiser.

Romans 5:5 *"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

The Holy Spirit will not only direct us who to care for, but will also pour love into our hearts for those people.

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Key aspects of community building

The phrase "one another" appears about 80 times in the New Testament (depending on your translation). The phrase "love one another" appears about 20 times in the New Testament. It is through understanding these "one another's" that we can more fully understand the nature of the community that the Lord wants us to build. Without listing all of these Scriptures, let's look at the main themes that run through them.

1. Love one another

John 13:34 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

This is the obvious place to start - it sets the standard of all that follows. To love other people as Jesus loved us. God loves us with all our baggage and others with all their baggage. He wants us to love them as He loves us. He wouldn't ask us to do this if we were not capable of doing it.

Three quality measures of love

1 Peter 1:22 *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart"*

There are three quality measures of love contained in the preceding Scripture: sincerity, purity and fervency.

"Sincere" means *"free from any element of deceit, duplicity or hypocrisy"*. We are not sincere in our love when we have other motives for our actions. Loving sincerely means that we without the need or desire to get something from the person we are caring for. We have no need for a feeling of importance, position or respect in the eyes of others, we are not soothing our conscience, nor are we desiring to receive a return of some kind.

"Pure" means *"free from every admixture of what is false"*. Are our motives purely to love without any condition? Do we love purely because God has poured His love into our heart and we want to spread it somewhere?

"Fervently" is from a word that means to "stretch out the hand." It means to be stretched out. We stretch ourselves to people. We do not do only what is comfortable for us.

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2. Care for one another

1 Corinthians 12:25 *“that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

True community doesn't happen when members of a church expect that all care comes from the pastors or staff. Community happens when each church member take the opportunities to support others. It is a pastor's role to equip the saints to care for one another, not to do all the care themselves. There are many Scriptures that encourage ever believer to be a carer.

Romans 12:10 *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”*

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”*

As leaders, we should encourage and facilitate people to see that care comes from the members as well as help them to care for others.

3. Serve one another

Galatians 5:13 *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”*

1 Peter 4:10 *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

We all have been given gifts and have opportunities to serve others – to do things for them. That is the beauty of the body of Christ. When one suffers, the others help. Others do for us what we can't do for ourselves and we do for others what they can't do.

4. Receive one another

1 Peter 4:9 *“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”*

Romans 15:7 *“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”*

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An essential part of community is to spend time with each other. The word “hospitable” means “friendship with strangers” and addresses our need to be welcoming new people into our life. Receiving one another means that we invite and welcome people into our lives.

5. Do church meetings together

Hebrews 10:25 *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Gathering together for services, conferences and events is an essential part of a church community. In an age where people can get world class teaching from books, blogs and various other places, discussions on internet forums, worship streamed online, and church services on their television, we need to be convinced of encouraging people to assemble. It is in assembling that people, amongst other things, meet others, serve others, experience the corporate presence of God that they both build into and receive from, receive revelatory teaching for their church community, help others in need and be helped when they are in need. They can receive and give prophetic words, encouragement, and the warmth of human interaction.

As leaders, we transition from a focus of receiving to a focus of giving. That’s what a leader is. They are one of the “joints and ligaments” (Colossians 2:19) that nourish the body.

Ephesians 4:16 *“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

The preceding Scripture tells us that it is the supply from the joints that brings health to the body. Leaders are these joints and it is their supply that makes the body work. So leaders do not assemble to receive but to give. So leader’s thoughts are not about the quality of the services, but on what they can supply others through their relationships. If our church attendance is based on what we get from the services, we have declared ourselves not to be leaders.

6. Commit to one another

Colossians 3:13 *“bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

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Ephesians 4:2 “with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love”

Commitment in relationships gives the context for personal growth. When we commit to any relationship, we will work through the difficulties in order for the relationship to thrive. And as we face the difficulties, we also have to face our own issues and immaturities. When we withdraw our commitment to relationships in the midst of difficulty, we miss out on the growth that the Lord desires in us by working through the difficulties. We find this out most strongly in marriage, but it is also true for our church relationships. The preceding Scriptures encourage us to bear with others and to suffer long and we can't do that if we withdraw from relationships in the midst of difficulty. The benefit of commitment is that the relationships are invariably richer on the other side.

Action: Think about those you are leading in the church. How will you help them to do the one anothers. Think about asking people to reach out to others, invite new people into their lives or serving others in some way. Have a plan for every person in the group. Remember that you are saving their lives by helping them to lose it for Christ's sake