



CONNECT: Deeply Devoted Brothers and Sisters

Message Notes, January 24, 2016

This week's message focused on the third point in our "River of Life," Connect.

The message began with a meaningful testimony from the Faircloths about how joining a community group at CCC has been supportive, encouraging and enriching to their lives.

CONNECT Pastor Billy Gross ended the message with his own testimony of how small group community has been a strengthening fiber in the fabric of his life since he was 14 years old. His first community experience was an early morning prayer group that met everyday before classes at his high school. Through many years since then, and many small group communities, there have been profound, defining moments in which community relationships have been impactful in his life, but the greatest impact has been the steady influence of sharing authentic life with others around Jesus. This faithful gathering with others has been transforming in the following ways:

- It reminds me who He is and who I am.
- It strengthens me against temptation and sin.
- It fuels my worship, and deepens my faith.
- It teaches me how to listen and care.
- It gets me out of myself, out of my selfish bent.
- It enlarges my capacity to give, and serve, and love.
- It sandpapers me and helps me to become more like Jesus.

Between these two testimonies, Pastor Keith gave a stirring and challenging message centered around the community portrait of Acts 2:42-47. Here God captures in His word a "snapshot," if you will, of the dynamic community life of the church just born (following Pentecost):

- They were devoted to spending much time together and sharing their lives in all aspects.
- They met with intentionality and expectation – that God would knit them together in love and move powerfully among them.
- Love in practice was the defining characteristic of their life (not simply theology and doctrine, though these were also important)

The fruit of this devoted, authentic life together?

- Awe and signs and wonders
- Unity and joyful generosity
- Favor with the surrounding community
- "The Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved."



We read this account of the early church's life and it should stir our souls! Why do we not see such dynamic, extraordinary life in our American churches? Certainly we hear of such in other parts of the world, typically where believers face hardship and persecution. Why not here?

1. We love the *idea* of community but not the inherent investment it requires: Time, energy, the risk of being vulnerable, the weight of caring about others burdens.
2. We have "lowered the bar" of expectation about what the extraordinary life of Christ-centered community looks like.
3. We resist the reality of community:
4. My flesh hates it! (I don't want dependence on God and inter-dependence with others; my flesh wants independence.)
5. My life experiences leave me torn – community can be a source of great blessing; it can also be a source of deep hurt and pain.
6. Our enemy desperately opposes authentic Christ-centered community.

Community is not easy. It asks much of us and it can be challenging at times. There is a:

Cost of Community:

1. It requires a meaningful investment of time and energy.
2. It means being vulnerable and risking hurt and disappointment.
3. It means bearing the weight of other's burdens.
4. It means dealing with messiness. We all bring our flaws and baggage with us into authentic community.

But there is a greater cost in not being in authentic Christ-centered community.

Cost of Non-community:

1. We lose the opportunity to **be known** (to belong).
2. We miss the **spiritual depth** that can only come when we are "fleshing out" the ways of Jesus in authentic relationship.
3. We miss the special **presence of the Lord** that only comes in the context of authentic relationship.
4. We miss the **multiplication of joy** that comes as we share life with others.
5. We miss the **dividing (and lightening) of sorrows** that comes when we share life with others.

Response

1. Give thanks to God, worship Him, for this rich gift of community – that we were made in His image to share life, deeply, with each other.
2. If in a group, renew your commitment and devotion to deeply investing your life with those in your group. If not in a group, take practical steps to get more info and to sign up for a group.