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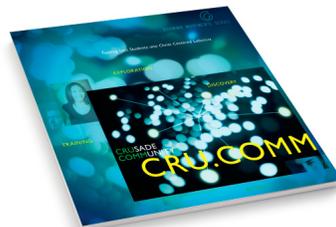
RELATIONSHIP STUDIES—BOUNDARIES AND BONDING

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE • Our Need for Community

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Hebrews 10:24-25; 3:12-13

Hebrews 10:24-25

The passage deals with the powerful role Christian community and fellowship play in encouraging Christians to grow and persevere in their faith. God has designed us to need one another. Often, we are unaware of how great that need is until we actually experience true Christian community – community that propels us forward in our holiness, ministries and walks with Christ. As a plant grows strong and healthy in good soil, God has designed us, too, in such a way, that we will only grow spiritually strong and healthy within the soil of a close-knit group of Christians.

The way in which “meeting together” as Christians causes spiritual vitality is manifold: there is encouragement in hearing of others’ struggles and victories in their walks of faith; there is motivation that comes from hearing the Word of God and learning insights others have into the Scriptures; and, in a less tangible way, there is the experience of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in and through the lives of others, which fans-to-flame the Spirit of God in our own lives.

The study focuses on a particular aspect of Christian community that is often overlooked – the visible manifestation of God’s grace. Although God knew our deepest sin, He chose to love us in and through Jesus Christ. Being known in all of our weakness, insecurity and hidden sin, and yet being loved and accepted is critical to our lives being transformed by grace. Because we cannot visibly see God, He has designed Christian community to manifest this grace so we can truly experience it. To enjoy this transforming grace, we must have a few close Christian friends with whom we can be extremely honest and vulnerable.

Let Us Consider

While there are many ways that our faith and heart are reflexively strengthened through Christian fellowship and relationships, the word “consider” in Hebrews 10:24 (“let us consider how we may spur one another on”) points to the need for intentionality. Fellowship can be reduced simply to a social time, if we are not intentionally considering how, in the context of meeting together, we might encourage particular individuals to press on in their walks with the Lord.

Let Us Not Give Up Meeting Together

Hebrews 10:25 exhorts believers to “not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” because we are all in the habit of doing it. As these life-giving relationships are only found in community, Satan tries to “deceive” us

What’s the Big Idea?

God has designed us to need community. Community allows us to experience life-transforming grace, protects us from the hardening and deceitfulness of sin and spurs us on toward love and good deeds.

What’s the Problem?

We continually move toward isolation and independence even though God created us to live in community.

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into thinking we don't need to get together. He often uses our fears, insecurities and the distractions of our busy lives to lure us into living independently. Yet, a Christian life lived in isolation will always lack the spiritual health and vitality of a life lived in community.

Hebrews 3:12-13

In Hebrews 3, these verses follow a quote from Psalm 95:7-11, which is a reference to Exodus 17:1-7. In Exodus, the Israelites were complaining and failing to trust God. The text says that they "hardened their hearts." The Israelites were facing a real problem and a real need – a lack of water. Having a need was not wrong. Neither was it wrong to express their need to God. But the way they went about it showed their disbelief in God. It is this lack of belief that made God angry.

The passage points to the vital nutrients found only in the soil of community, which protects our hearts from hardening, and minds from unbelief. It is the "daily" encouragement and interaction with other believers, that helps maintain our spiritual vitality.

Check out what *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says on this subject:

Each Christian brother, therefore, should be most careful to guard against a sinful, unbelieving heart which God's flock in the wilderness displayed, the kind of heart that turns away from the living God. One preventative against such a tendency would be a spirit of mutual concern and admonition among the Christian brotherhood. Accordingly, they were to encourage one another daily...so that none would be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. This exhortation is just as pertinent today, where the hardening tendencies of sin can often be counteracted by truly concerned fellow Christians. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord and Zuck, p. 787)

What's Our Response?

You want to help the group see that they need each other and that they are needed in the lives of others

You want them to realize that God has designed them to need community. They need it to experience life-transforming grace, protection from the hardening and deceitfulness of sin and encouragement to persevere in their walks with God.

They need to believe that a Christian life lived in isolation will always lack the spiritual health and vitality of a life lived in community.

Last, they need to see that one of the most vital ways they will experience Jesus is in the context of community.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Hebrews 10:24-25; 3:12-13

LAUNCH

Describe your first experience attending a Bible study. Did it seem strange, awkward? Why did you go? Why did you go back?

EXPLORE

Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 3:12-13:

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

- In Hebrews 10:24-25 and 3:12-13, the term “one another” is used three different times. What instructions are given about how we are to relate to “one another”?
- What is the purpose in “encouraging one another”?
- The word “consider” means to ponder, observe or study. “Stimulate” means to spur or excite to action. Who are the people God has placed in your life to observe and think about?
- What personally spurs you on to good deeds and loving others?
- What could be some reasons for someone not wanting to speak into the lives of others by ‘considering’ and ‘encouraging’ them?
- What do you think it means when it says “all the more as you see the Day approaching”? Why “all the more”?
- Scripture tells us to “not give up meeting together.” What are the encouragements and benefits of meeting together as Christians that we cannot get on our own?
- What personally draws you to a body of believers? What turns you away?
- What would make those outside of your fellowship want to be a part of it? In what way(s) would they see Christ?
- What was the last thing you did to encourage someone?
- Has there ever been a time in your life when someone else’s encouragement protected you from turning away from God? Have you ever been there for someone else?
- Satan often uses fears, insecurities and a busy schedule to lure us away from Christian community. What typically tempts you to avoid “meeting together”?

Being known in all of our weakness, insecurity, and hidden sin, and yet being loved and accepted is critical to our lives being transformed by grace. Because we cannot visibly see God, He has designed Christian community to manifest this grace so we can truly experience it.

- Who knows your hidden “badness” and is still committed to loving and encouraging you? Who, specifically, do you manifest God’s grace, love and acceptance to?

APPLY

- Where have you felt your heart hardening or becoming less responsive to God?
- Who is someone who could use your encouragement this week?
- Why do you think Jesus looks to meet certain needs only through His body, the church?

What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the group to make observations.
2. We need to spur one another on to love and good deeds.
3. Allow the group to discuss.
4. We are spurred on by seeing someone else do it, or by hearing of someone else's steps of faith.
5. Some reasons: No one is doing that with me! My life is not together. Who would want to follow my example? No one will listen to me. I have no influence.
6. The Day refers to Christ's return and the longer that Day is delayed, the more we need to encourage one another.
7. Meeting with Christians helps a person's spiritual progress and protects him from the deceitfulness of sin. Allow the group to share what draws them to a body of believers, what turns them away and whether they think their own group is attractive to others.
8. Allow the group to share.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. It is important for the group to see how Satan desires to keep Christians from true fellowship.
13. This is really the heart of the study. It's critical for those in your group to have these kinds of relationships.
14. Allow the group to share.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. He desires us to connect to one another – love one another. This would be rather difficult if we didn't need one another.

Memorize

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:24

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ALL YOU NEED TO LOVE • Bonding

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Romans 12:9-18

Overview

In the last study, we talked about the need for community in the life of a believer. God created us to have relationships with others. Why? Because we are made in His image - He is, by His very nature, relational. Also, relationships provide the environment we need in order to grow and mature spiritually. Without connectedness to God and others, our souls slowly wither, often leading people into depression and other related emotional problems.

The focus of this study is how to reach out to others, in love, to form the connections that God designed us to have. Basically, how do we put last week's lesson into practice? The answer: through the process of 'bonding'. We will, however, be looking at this processes more conceptually (What is the idea?) than practically (Where do I go/what do I say to form relationships with others?).

Our own heart attitudes and actions have a lot to do with the quality of relationships that we have. This passage of Scripture, filled with commands and exhortations to love, serves as a "measuring stick" to see the ways in which we need to grow in our love for others.

Context

The first 11 chapters of Romans contain a great deal of theology and doctrine. In chapter 12, the content becomes very practical as theology integrates with day-to-day living and loving. It's here that we are challenged to live out what we believe, and nothing is more challenging than living out a sincere love for others.

A New Way to Measure Love

Romans 12:9-18 clearly defines what it means to love another deeply and sincerely, providing us a working model. The study asks the group to look over the list and consider how their family did or did not demonstrate these traits. Why do this? Throughout our lives, our primary model of love and how it is expressed has been our families. We all need to grow into this new model and definition of love, and it can be instructive to consider where we've come from and what our model of love has been as we consider which aspects of our lives need growth. This would involve questions like: "Where has it been helpful?" and "Where has it been deficient?"

Barriers to Loving

The study asks the group to consider what might be holding them back from loving others. Due to many factors, people are often afraid to reach out and

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What's the Big Idea?

The capacity to bond with others is contingent on our ability to love sincerely, not selfishly or self-protectively.

What's the Problem?

Our hearts are selfish and self-protective and unable to love people sincerely – from the heart.



love others. One of those factors is “past injury” – where they’ve been hurt in past relationships. We live in a sinful world and all of us have been injured, often by those we’ve loved. As a result, we all adopt ways of coping with the world: we cease being vulnerable, we put on facades, we stop empathizing, etc. – we implement any number of tactics to protect our hearts from being injured again. Jesus wants to create a new heart within us – a heart of compassion and love. We need to recognize our tactics of self-protection in order to allow Jesus to teach us anew how to love.

Qualities of True Love: Empathy, Mercy and Humility

Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” While our hearts might have a proclivity toward self-protection, God enjoins us to emotionally engage in the lives of others. Empathy is a depth of connectedness that causes us to share not only the burdens of another, but to adopt his or her very feelings.

We are told to “bless those who persecute” and not “to repay evil with evil.” Mercy, and not justice, must rule the heart of the believer. We have received God’s mercy in Christ’s death on the cross for our sins and we must extend that same mercy to others.

“Humility” is the accurate appraisal of our own spiritual poverty and the grace we have received. It is the righteous medium between pride (an over-estimation) and low self-esteem (an under-estimation). Only a humble heart is able to love purely, without jealousy and competitiveness and not from its own neediness.

Where Will this Love Come From?

While there are a variety of ways God changes our heart, three are worthy to note from the passage and study. First, in describing a sincere love, the apostle Paul does not leave out the need to love God with zeal and passion. Our love relationship with God fuels our ability to love others.

Second, while almost all of the commands involve our attitudes, Paul does command an action. He calls us to “share with God’s people” and show hospitality. While these certainly express sincere love, they also help produce it. Jesus said, “Wherever your treasure is, your heart will be also.” As we actively give to others, our hearts are taken captive in the process and are redirected toward others.

Third, God changes our hearts through community. The study asks how Christian community plays a role in God changing our hearts. The answers to this are manifold. Perhaps the greatest component of transformation occurs as we experience God’s love through others. You cannot impart what you are not experiencing. True Christian fellowship involves the experience of being known (in all our weaknesses and sin), and being loved, accepted and encouraged in spite of all those shortfalls.

Love for Unbelievers

While most of these commands talk about a Christian’s responsibility toward other believers, verses 17-18 focus primarily on a believer’s relationship to unbelievers. Sincere love must also encompass those outside the family of God.

What’s Our Response?

You want the group to see what it means to love sincerely and you want them to recognize the personal sin and barriers in their own lives that keep them from experiencing this kind of selfless love. This love can not be self-generated, and you must make it clear that such love flows from our experience of Christ and His grace in our lives.

You also want the group to see that this inability to love leads to an inability to be loved and bond with others.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Romans 12:9-18

LAUNCH

How would you define the word “love”? How do you think the world defines “love”?

EXPLORE

1. We all have a desire to love and be loved. How has someone recently shown you that they love you? What did they do?
2. This passage starts off by saying “love must be sincere.” The rest of the passage describes a sincere love. Make a list of the following:
Things to do:
Things not to do:
Attitudes of the heart:
3. What keeps us from loving others this way? Do you think the world would define love in this way?
4. In verse 10, why is humility a prerequisite for loving sincerely?
5. How does your family demonstrate or show their love for each other? How do these methods correspond to the actions and attitudes listed in Romans 12:9-18?
6. How do you feel the model of love you witnessed growing up affect your responses today?
7. Who do you know who truly models some of these aspects of love?
8. How does rejoicing with those rejoicing and mourning with those mourning, express love? Was there a time recently when you did this?
9. What keeps you from actively loving others? What barriers or obstacles stand in your way?
10. How do you find yourself loving others selfishly and not selflessly (sincerely)?
11. What aspect of your personality, or even personal history makes it difficult for others to connect and bond with you?
12. While most of the things listed in the passage deal with attitudes of the heart, what real action(s) are listed that can actually redirect the focus of our hearts?
13. Why do you think Christian community is essential in order for us to see our hearts, attitudes and behaviors change?
14. In verse 17-19, non-believers seem to be in view. Are we to love them the same way we love believers? Can we love them the same way we love believers? How would we express love to them?

APPLY

15. How are we to “keep our spiritual fervor serving the Lord”? What do you do? Why is this connection vital to everything that follows?
16. Responding with grace toward those who mistreat us rather than with judgement requires us to already be experiencing grace. How are you currently experiencing the grace of God in your life?
17. What barriers keep you from experiencing God’s grace? Do you think treating others with grace helps you experience God’s grace?

What Are the Answers?

1. To generate discussion on this topic, ask people to share specific ways they have felt loved recently.
2. These are basic Bible study observation skills. Have the group take a close look at the passage and write down what they see.
3. Allow the group to discuss.
4. See notes under “Humility”
5. See notes under “Barriers to Loving.”
6. Families can show love in various ways: buying gifts, giving money, doing something nice, hugs and kisses, etc. Some have learned to “keep score” – “I’ll do this loving deed, if you do that, etc.” Help the group to see how what was modeled affects how they see love. Then, ask if it is the correct biblical model.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. This is empathizing – caring so much you take on the feelings of another.
9. See notes on “Barriers to Loving.”
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. This is getting pretty personal, yet you want the group to see what hinders them in bonding with others.
12. Sharing with others and showing hospitality.
13. It is in Christian community that we experience God’s love in a deeper way, being manifested by grace, acceptance and encouragement from others.
14. Discuss. Love may need to be expressed differently. Sharing Christ is an excellent example of showing love.
15. See notes under “Where Will This Love Come From?”
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:10

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

KNOWING WHO I AM • Boundaries

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

I Corinthians 12

Overview

This study is about knowing who we are so that we can fully live out our Christian lives as God intended. People are often confused about who they are, trying to be what others think they ought to be or trying to be what looks good to them. In this passage, we see that God has uniquely designed each of us for a special job, or role, in the body of Christ. There is freedom in knowing who we are and living that out, rather than trying to be someone we're not and never feeling successful at it.

Context

First Corinthians is a letter that is concerned with the spiritual health of the local church in (you guessed it!) Corinth. Paul is addressing the various problems they were facing. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Walvoord and Zuck) says:

Different parts are needed if a body is to exist (v.19). So too, no believer should think of himself or his gift as inferior and so desire another member's gift. The gifts were not haphazardly distributed (cf.v.11), but carefully arranged according to the perfect will of God (v.18).

The Body

Paul's use of the metaphor of a body for a Christian community or church seems to underscore three important lessons Paul wants to teach us about how we are to view ourselves in relation to one another.

Uniqueness

Upon becoming a Christian, everyone receives a certain spiritual gift or gifts. These gifts are elaborated on elsewhere in Scripture and include: evangelism, teaching, encouraging, mercy, giving, leadership, etc. We must add to that gifting those gifts with which we were uniquely born, the skills we have acquired and our own personalities. Paul's point is that we are each unique, and uniquely gifted. God has designed each of us in a very specific way to serve, participate and live out His will for our lives.

Not Being Who You Are Not

This understanding of our uniqueness causes us to humbly and gratefully accept who we are and who God has made us to be. We are not to envy the gifts and abilities of others, nor are we to try to be something we're not.

What's the Big Idea?

Help the members of the group see their unique abilities and contributions to the body of Christ. Also, show them that God has specifically made them this way for His (not their) purposes for their lives.

What's the Problem?

We desire people to admire us and our gifts and abilities, rather than seeing ourselves as stewards of gifts given by God to serve others.

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While being jealous of the abilities, gifting and personalities of others is certainly a transgression against others, it is also a transgression of God's will for our lives and of His creative work in making us who we are. Growing in maturity should bring greater unity within the Christian community but not greater uniformity. As we mature in Christ, we should be growing in a greater understanding of the unique persons God created us to be and His unique plans for each of our lives.

Our Need For Others

A logical corollary of understanding our own role in the body of Christ is an appreciation for the roles others are to play. Part of a greater realization of who we are is the realization of who we are not. It is as a group, and not individually, that we are to meet each other's needs and manifest Christ to the world. God's desire in distributing His gifts in this way was to create our need for connectedness to each other. To know yourself, and your gifting, is also to know what you need to receive from others. This produces a thankfulness and gratitude for the gifting and abilities of others, not jealousy or competitiveness.

Character Development Involves Identity Development

Our spiritual growth and character growth are compared in Scripture to the growth of a child. Part of a child's growth is learning his own unique identity: who he is; what he is good at; what he likes; and in what he is not gifted. This is commonly referred to as establishing personal boundaries, or identity. Henry Cloud in his book, *Changes that Heal*, describes it this way:

Boundaries are the realization of our own person apart from others. This sense of separateness forms the basis of our personal identity. It says what we are and what we are not, what we will choose and what we will not choose, what we will endure and what we will not endure, what we will feel and what we will not feel, what we like and what we do not like, and what we want and what we do not want. Boundaries, in short, define us.

Boundaries have three different elements: 1) defining ourselves; 2) defining our responsibilities; and 3) defining our limits. In this study, you want to help students in the process of defining who they are, and seeing that everyone is not alike. Each person has a special and unique role in the body of Christ. Even though we are all different, we are all important.

We'll talk more about boundaries and how to set them in our next study.

What's Our Response?

You want the members of the group to see that God has uniquely made them and gifted them to serve Him and others.

You want the group to embrace and appreciate those gifts and seek to serve with those gifts, rather than trying to serve in ways that do not correspond to their gifting.

End

What Are the Questions?

I Corinthians 12

LAUNCH

When you were a kid and an adult asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, what did you say? What would you say if someone asked you that today? If someone were to ask you “Who are you?”, how would you answer?

EXPLORE

Read I Corinthians 12.

- In I Corinthians 12:14-26 (NIV), circle the word “body” and underline the word “part(s)” or “members.”
- Below, list everything you learn about the “body” and the “parts.”
Body:
Parts:
- In summary:
“The body is not complete, or whole, without _____”
“All the parts are absolutely necessary to _____”
- I Corinthians 12:4-6, what is meant by the different terms: gifts, service and working?
- Why do you think Paul feels a need to remind the Corinthians of these things?
- Do you think the ministry you’re involved in tends to value certain gifts more than others?
- In I Cor, 12:11 and 18, it says that God determined which gifts we were to have. How does that effect your perspective? How does your gifting make sense for who you are?
- Many in the Corinthian church were not content with the gifting God had given them and wanted other gifts. Is there any way you have been dissatisfied with your gifting and personality? What gifts or abilities do you find yourself wishing you had?
- We often neglect to see God’s hand in designing our personality, natural gifts and the skills we have acquired through life. How do you see God’s hand in you having your unique personality?
- How have you seen God’s hand in your personal history, contributing to who you are, what you’re good at and what interests you?
- What part does God play in the make-up of this body (verses 18, 24)? What are some of the unique gifts and personalities you’ve observed in your group/ ministry that demonstrate God’s intentional design for your specific Christian community?
- Look at the other members of your group. How do you see each of them contributing to the body?
- What leads us to appreciate the gifts, skills and personalities of others without coveting them?
- In verse 31, Paul says to be eager for certain gifts, seemingly contradicting what he has been saying. But what is he actually talking about?

APPLY

- Write down how you see yourself making the greatest contribution to the body of Christ? What things do you feel the most drawn to be a part of?
- Take time to pray individually and thank God for the gifts He has given you. Pray as a group, thanking God for the specific gifts He has given to others.

What Are the Answers?

1. Not a question...I know. This is just a basic observation task to help people see what Scripture actually says.
2. Allow the group time to fill in the chart.
3. The body is not complete, or whole, without all the parts. All the parts are absolutely necessary to the body.
4. "Workings" means "energies," "service" – "ways to serve others." "Gifts" – "capacities, abilities."
5. They were jealous of certain gifts and desiring the more "spectacular" gifts, not valuing the love and servanthood that should animate the gift they actually had. A worldly perspective.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. God's personalizing of our gifts should help us appreciate them.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. Allow the group to discuss
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. As a leader you will need to set an environment where people can share. It's always interesting and helpful to hear what other people see as your strengths.
13. Appreciating the gifts God has given to us. Knowing who we are and what we uniquely add to the body. Serving and seeing God use us in our unique gifting and personality.
14. He's saying to be eager to love and serve and seek those gifts which most help others.
15. Allow time for personal reflection.
16. Allow time for both personal and group prayer.

Memorize

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:14

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KNOWING WHO I'M NOT • Boundaries

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Exodus 18

Background

Before going to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses left his wife Zipporah and two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, with his father-in-law, Jethro. Moses crosses out of Egypt with several millions of Israelites in tow. Safely out of Egypt, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, comes to him, bringing with him Moses' wife and sons who had been staying with him for safekeeping. Upon arriving, Jethro spends the day with his son-in-law observing him as he attends to his vast responsibilities as the father of a nation.

Jethro, being older and wiser, and having a great deal of experience in leadership himself, makes an important observation. There are hordes of people waiting to have their court cases tried by the great judge Moses. Why? Because Moses, alone, meets with God face-to-face, so who better to decide what God's will is?

Upon seeing this, Jethro states, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you can not handle it alone." Jethro makes a profound observation. Moses was doing the work of a dozen men. He was wearing himself out – he was stretched too thin – and the people weren't all that happy having to wait for him to try their case.

The solution proposed by Jethro is delegation. He tells Moses to appoint qualified representatives from the people who can hear simple matters. Moses was to teach these new judges the existing case law – decisions God had already given regarding different types of disputes. This would then provide enough information to decide the bulk of the disputes. If an issue came up that was too difficult, or had no legal precedent, it was only at this juncture that Moses' involvement was required.

Observations

Moses had come to see himself as the only person qualified to rightly judge the people's disputes. As a result, he was assuming more responsibility than he could possibly handle. He was assuming a burden that God never intended for him to shoulder by himself. The exhaustion it produced most likely increased his loss of perspective and objectivity, not allowing him to see his way out of his circumstances.

What's the Big Idea?

In the previous study, we looked at the unique way God has gifted each believer. Part of what it means to mature as a Christian is realizing who God has uniquely made us to be. Understanding our identity has a second component: recognizing who we are not. This study looks at the Christian's need to exercise self-control, realizing what we should take responsibility for and what we should not.

What's the Problem?

Due to pressure and our own emotional and sinful needs, we take responsibility for things that we shouldn't.

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Application

In the last study we focused on the need to know the unique way God has made us: what we excel in and what gifts we have. Basically, how are we best able to serve? The corollary to this knowledge is realizing our limits, knowing what we can't do and not taking responsibility for things we shouldn't. The term often applied to this knowledge is "boundaries". Think, for example, of property boundaries: typically a fence demarcates what's on your property and what's not, what you're responsible for and what you're not.

Just Say No

Sometimes guilt, fear, insecurity or even an unhealthy need for control can cause us to take responsibility for things that are not ours to own. We need to exercise good stewardship and self-control and learn – often against emotional pressure – to say, "No." When we say no to things we know we cannot do (or should not do), we erect a fence, effectively saying, "This is where my property ends!" We can encourage others and even lend a hand, but this is far different from assuming responsibility or control.

The first step in this process is realizing that God is not calling you to do everything and that it isn't godly to say "yes" to everything. Saying "yes" to some things automatically means other things will go undone. This is as it should be. This is only problematic when we say "yes" to everything and then what goes undone are the things we were best at – the things God actually wants us to do.

Other Implications

When we begin to erect boundaries in our lives as it relates to responsibilities and relationships, we notice this self-control backwashing into other areas of our lives as well. We'll find ourselves building fences against other encroachments and find ourselves saying "no" to things such as overeating, unhealthy relationships, even sexual sin. Self control is a muscle, and the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets.

Just Say Yes

While most people have a tendency to over-commit, and therefore need to erect fences to keep themselves reigned in, there are some who need to grow in their ability to take responsibility. We have all known people who have seemingly disowned their need to be responsible for their own actions, behavior, comments, bodies, children and responsibilities. For these folks, maturing as a Christian does not involve erecting fences as much as occupying the property that's already theirs.

Discernment

Our last application has to do with discernment. In the story, Moses does not simply retire from his job as judge. He assumes only the cases others can't figure out. He does what only Moses can do. He knows his role and gifting and, therefore, where he must stop and others must begin to take responsibility. Two things are worthy of note. First, when we choose wisely, we have more time and energy to put into the things we should be doing. Second, it's critical to take time to pray and plan before we commit ourselves to things, in order that we may choose wisely.

What's Our Response?

The most significant application is for the group to understand that saying "no" is not ungodly. In fact, it is a crucial aspect of godly character and wise stewardship. You want the group to leave with a desire to begin thinking through their lives and schedules, considering when they need to say "yes," and where they need to erect boundaries by saying "no."

End

What Are the Questions?

Exodus 18

LAUNCH

Do you ever feel like you don't have enough hours in your day? What are the "unplanned" or "unscheduled" things that seem to constantly crowd out the important things that you need to be doing?

EXPLORE

Read Exodus 18.

1. As an outsider to the situation, what was Jethro able to see and discern about the way Moses was spending his time?
 2. All of our choices have consequences. What are the consequences that Jethro warned Moses about if he were to continue in his current patterns of leadership?
 3. What's Jethro's solution?
 4. Moses has encountered a wise counselor, yet he still has the freedom to choose what he will do with the insight and advice offered to him. How did Moses respond?
 5. When we see a person make decisions to not over-commit, it typically brings conviction for all the ways we are over-committing. What things come to your mind?
 6. What are some principles you can draw from this incident to help you determine what you should and should not be doing?
 7. In what ways do you tend to over-extend yourself (with your time, in relationships, in activities) or take on more than you can accomplish? Why do you think this pattern is in your life?
 8. Like Jethro, has anyone ever confronted you about over-extending yourself? How did you respond?
 9. A fence is often used to set a boundary, marking what is our rightful property and responsibility, and what is not.
- What sorts of feelings or emotions often cause us to take responsibility for actions, responsibilities, people or choices that ultimately don't fall on our property?
10. Sometimes our emotions can cause us to take responsibility for things that aren't on our property. Check off those things you feel would be on your property:
 - Someone continually needs help with schoolwork because they fail to plan or prepare.
 - You feel you should have to be a parent to your siblings because your parents are uninvolved.
 - You feel responsible for your parent's divorce.
 - Someone is lonely and you feel an obligation to be his or her friend.
 - Your boyfriend says that you are making it difficult for him because you won't have sex.
 - Your roommate never cleans up the room, so you feel you have to do it for her.
 11. What would be a godly response to someone who is asking, or guilted, you to own more than you should?
 12. Some people can do the opposite of over-extending, erecting tight walls or boundaries around themselves. What would be the consequences of having these kinds of boundaries? Do you know anyone like this?
 13. There were still some things Moses continued to do. What were these things and why was it important that he do them? What principle could you apply from this?

APPLY

14. Where would you place yourself on this spectrum? What things should you continue to say "yes" to? What are you saying "yes" to that should be "no." What are the personal issues and sin that are keeping you from obedience to God in this?

Closed off to letting other people into your life or getting involved in others' lives

Usually say "yes" and "no" to appropriate things

Always living beyond emotional and physical limits

What Are the Answers?

1. Jethro was able to see that Moses was spending his time doing things others could be doing.
2. The consequences included both he and his people getting worn out.
3. The solution Jethro offers involves appointing others to judge the easier cases.
4. Moses follows Jethro's advice, perhaps because he was already worn out and feeling the need for a change.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. Seek the council of others. Think through your own gifting. Reflect on your use of time.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. Sometimes guilt, fear, insecurity, or even an unhealthy need for control, can cause us to take responsibility for things that are not ours to own.
10. You are not looking for a right answer as much as surfacing the need to discern.
11. You can encourage them to take responsibility. You may also offer to help, but that is different from taking control.
12. They need to be encouraged to take more responsibility and risk.
13. Moses still decided the hard cases. Moses did what only Moses uniquely could do.
14. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.

Exodus 18:17-18

Cru.Comm is the small group material for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this study. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org

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