

## ***LONGING TO BELONG, PHIL.2:1-4***

40 Days of Community #3

◆**Intro:** It was in the early 1970's. My dad was stationed in Pearl Harbor, HA. We lived on Pearl City peninsula in military housing. It was Christmas. Our nearest relatives were in CA. I was about ten years of age, the second of five siblings. People were greeting one another with "Mele Kalikimaka" (Hawaii's way of saying Merry Christmas). Then a big box arrived from a distant aunt in the states. Inside were four or five of the latest, plastic, mass-produced products of the time that lasted all the way to...oh I think the new year! I recall a bin of marbles with skewers that poked into it's sides, and some other odd board games. We were familiar with none of it as we had no toys in our home, and merely played with rocks and old bones we found in the forest... (Well the "unfamiliar" part is true.) It appeared to my juvenile mind that this faceless aunt has cleared off a shelf of ToysRUs and put it in a box bound for Hawaii.

◆I will never forget the strange sensation that came over me; these things were not at all like us. They didn't fit with who we were and what we liked to play. It was just an impersonal box of stuff! Mom and Dad always stressed trying to give someone a gift that they would find special. You were to do your homework and try and figure out what that might be. Now I'm sure our Aunt's intentions were much kinder and nobler than I experienced them at the time. But it felt as if this box was like an urban boy being given a saddle, or an illiterate man being given a NYTimes

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best seller. Something was missing. The giver didn't really *know* the recipient. They had no fellowship to speak of.

◆ Fellowship is the bonding of people such that they belong together and can tell it to be so. You can tell from reading Philippians that Paul had fellowship with the church there. There's an advantage to having true fellowship. That's our topic on this third week of 40 Days of Community.

◆ **1. True fellowship makes me healthier.** I don't know if it has occurred to you or not, but all people long to belong. Everyone wants to be loved and accepted. It's why adopted kids often go investigating their birth-parents even if they were raised in a loving home. They want to know about their origins and why they do or do not belong, and if or if not they were loved. When people are sure down deep that they are loved they have power they otherwise would live without. The child washed in the love of her parents doesn't find the need to experiment sexually. The teen most capable of saying no to peer pressure is the teen who has relationship at home, and knows his home is safe, supportive. The wife with an attentive husband is less stressed by the trials at work; she has someone she knows will help bear her burden. Listen, people with real fellowship in their lives are more likely to be joyful people. We are better together. So how can we make better fellowship?

◆ **2. I can make better relationships when I have one with Jesus.** People sometimes wonder if going to church or reading

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God's Word does anything for you. Well I can tell you right now that the more you become like God, (or godly), the more good relationships you will have. Jesus can give you **new** feelings, new emotions, new thinking. Nobody loves you like Jesus does! Someone on earth might even die for you, but to leave heaven to come here, so you could go there!? Nobody else can love you like that! That kind of love changes your whole outlook!

◆A. As soon as I accept into my life the love and forgiveness of God, I have a motivation, and a storehouse for loving others.

Because of Christ's love we can afford to love other people, even difficult people and evil people. Let's start with the **storehouse**.

◆*Verse one:* Paul says "if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ..." That's exactly what we have. We've been made heirs of the richest Being in existence! By becoming sisters and brothers of Jesus through the repentance of sin, and faith in his death to pay for it, you become a child of God himself!

◆*John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-*

◆Note that you are a direct child of God. God doesn't have grandchildren. Just children. And now we have courage because we know we are eternally, indisputably, and unquestionably loved by the Author of the universe! We know that in the end, no matter what, everything HAS to

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work out for our salvation! (Rom8:28) Paul reminds us we have the tenderness of God. We have the compassion of God. We have comfort in his love. We have encouragement. The term "encouragement" in verse 1 is the Greek term "paraklete". And it doesn't refer to a pair of soccer shoes! It means "one who is called (kaleo) alongside (para). That's the very title Jesus uses to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14 and 16, who we know lives inside every believer, for belief itself is not possible without him. We have the encouragement of God with us.

◆v1 "tenderness and compassion": These are two different terms for your bowels. You heard me right. But when you think about it, we talk that way too, don't we? We say, "I FEEL IT IN MY GUT." When something disgusts us we say IT TURNS MY STOMACH. When we are ignored at a party we FEEL LIKE WE WERE KICKED IN THE GUT. The stomach is one of the places we use to describe emotion. Paul is saying "You, church, can have guts, because God feels for you in his gut!" Mary Nelson put it

◆"The church is the glue that keeps us together when we disagree. It is the gasoline that keeps us going during the tough times. It is the guts that enables us to take risks when we need to." Courage!

◆ **B.** The fellowship of (presence of/ the love of) God in your life is your **motivation**. God has set your gut at ease about your

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eternal destiny, and about whether there is anyone who knows and loves you unconditionally, and about how this will all turn out. And so, people who are far from God often feel far from other people too, even family. But the closer we get to God, the closer we end up getting to people too, because love naturally overflows! (2cor.1:3-4) You want to love your spouse more? Get to know Jesus more than you do.

◆**3. I can make better relationships by choosing to be humble.** Oh here's a biggie! What is it that divides relationships? Many immediately assume that difference opposes unity and keeps us apart. Irreconcilable differences. But that's not true, is it? My brother Tim married a girl from China who didn't even speak fluent English. My brother-in-law's other brother married a girl from Mexico, and he's of that crazy Dutch descent!

◆A. Diversity doesn't divide. Pride divides. That's why humility develops better relationships. Pride is the killer of friendships. People mostly concerned about their own agenda don't usually make good friends. Other people are just obstacles to the way they want things.

◆Verse 3: *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;*

◆Did you notice how it's conceit/pride that is the opposite of humility? If your way and your opinion is most important to you, you will not have close relationships. Instead you will have

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constant friction with the people around you, or at least the ones you feel wiser than. When someone says "I can't get along with so & so, we are too different." it's not really differences but selfish ambition that gets in the way. It's our demand for our way, our idea, our answer, our result that can make us not like other people. But humility is the footpath to fellowship. Humility doesn't measure everything by itself. Humility isn't thinking poorly of oneself, it's just not thinking primarily about oneself in the first place. "Considering others better than yourself" does not mean you must feel badly about yourself.

◆ Behaving humbly is not easy in our culture. As E. Peterson observes, it is difficult to recognize pride as a sin when it is help up on every side as a virtue, urged as profitable, and rewarded as achievement." Some years ago, in a previous church, the church council decided to let an employee go. I had the hard job of the closing interview. I told him the biggest part of the problem was his pride, that he wouldn't take directions from leadership, or leave room for other people's ideas. His response was, "That's right. I am my own man!" I guess he thought it was a good thing even though it just lost him his job. Do you see how normal our pride can become?

◆ I dare say, there is next to nothing that you will watch on TV that will teach you the things we've read in our text this morning. But how crucial it is, if you want good relationships. We are all

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about winning, getting our way. But remember in the winners circle you usually stand alone.

◆B. Let me share with us four reasons that humility breeds togetherness.

◆1) Good relationships require respect. You don't respect others much if you are proud. If you are proud you are likely to yell at people, and pester people, and counter people. But when I respect you enough to listen to your thoughts, I must be humble enough to allow that my thought might not be better than yours.

◆2) Good relationships take mutual give and take. Are you the one who talks the most in your conversations, your group, or your meetings? It's a good bet you are not forming deep relationships. It requires humility to allow others to speak, or even to "be right". It takes humility to simply NOT correct everything thing you might know to be incorrect. Pride leads us to leap into correction, and instruction, and lengthy explanation.

◆3) Good relationships require patience with the faults of others. You simply cannot be patient without humility. Pride cannot let go of other people's flaws because holding on to them promotes yourself. (They are clearly worse and more wrong than you!)

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◆ *Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. (Ephesians 4:2, NLT).*

◆4) Good relationships require servanthood (v4 *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*) Lets do a little comparison.

◆ Two homes are having birthday parties. In one the father is saying, "George loves chocolate ice cream. Let's put that on the list for the party." In house two the father is also planning. It occurs to him that his daughter likes mint-chip ice cream, so he writes it on his list, but then he crosses it out because *he* doesn't like mint-chip AT ALL! He likes vanilla, so we're going with vanilla. Which one looks to you like v4?

◆ Or suppose it's Mothers Day and in one house dad gives mom a pair of earrings that she once picked off the rack at the store. Personally, he doesn't like them 'cuz they're long and dangly but he knows she likes them. Meanwhile Dad 2 gives mom a brand new cordless power saw? Which house has a better relationship between Mom and Dad?

◆ *We should please others. If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord. (Romans 15:2, NLT).*

◆ Did you catch that? Servanthood builds people up.

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◆ **Conclusion:** Humble servant people make others feel important and loved. That builds community, just as surely as Christ's humility resulted in our salvation (v5-8). In one magazine I was reading it said, "how you relate to others is the true acid test of your humility." Now that's what's so beautiful about the family of God, which is more than attending a worship time. In the rhythm & process of various people looking to other's interests - relationships/love are born! And lots of folk are getting cared for! Everyone longs to belong! Jesus went out of his way so we could belong to God. Follow the mind of Christ and you will experience the same thing.