

Spiritual Truth, In Community

ISOLATION—part 1

We are made for a particular kind of community

April 17, 2022

Community that delivers truth that comes alive in everyday life (**Spiritual theology**)

DAY 1: The need for daily interaction

1. During the last two years of COVID, we have witnessed a huge rise in isolation. When COVID first hit, there was a lot of uncertainty about how to deal with a dangerous virus.
2. Isolation was one of the first ways: social distancing, fewer trips to the store, fewer times with friends, working from home, ZOOM business calls, ZOOM personal calls, ZOOM meetings, ZOOM school classrooms, and face-to-face conversations that ended up being mask-to-mask conversations, etc.
3. In some states, governors limited the number of people that could be at social, civic, and religious gatherings. Some governors forbade families from gathering more than a handful of people at popular holidays. In some cities, restaurants and bars, places where social interaction regularly occurred were shut down for long periods of time.
4. For families that were dealing with serious pre-existing health conditions, isolation seemed like it was mandatory. Last week I met a young woman at church where her visit to our church was her first interaction outside of her home. She had been pregnant during COVID, and delivered her baby a number of a number of months ago.
5. Whether we are aware of it or not, isolation has an insidious affect on us personally, and relationally. It is insidious in this sense. It often goes undetected. We may sense something is wrong or different, but it's hard to trace it to increased isolation.
6. Suicide rates have increased, as have mental health issues. There has been a serious increase in anxiety, fear, hopelessness and depression.

Let me state the obvious. Human nature does not do well on its own. We are made for community. More specifically, we are made for a certain type of community!

7. This is what we will explore this week.

Hebrews 3:13 But let us exhort one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

8. To exhort someone is to encourage, urge, motivate, or nudge someone in the right direction.
9. How often does the writer say this exhorting should take place?
10. What is liable to happen without daily exhorting?

DAY 2: Isolation exposes our addiction to self

*John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free**.”*

1. What kind of freedom is Jesus talking about? Political freedom? Freedom from Rome? A different kind of freedom?

*John 8:22 They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall **be set free**?”*

2. What kind of slavery do the people think Jesus is talking about?

3. Jesus is not talking about economic slavery or political slavery. Jesus is not talking about an outside slave master. He’s talking about *personal* slavery. He’s talking about you and me, and the human condition.

*John 8:34 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, **everyone who sins is a slave to sin**.”*

4. This begs two questions.

a. What is sin?

b. How does sin make us a slave to sin?

5. People general think of “sin” in the plural sense. They think about terrible atrocities committed by Hitler or Putin. But here, Jesus is not talking about sins, in the plural. He is talking about sin in its singular form.

6. In this sense, sin is our proud commitment to “look out for #1” as top priority. Sin doesn’t look to God as our highest priority, privilege or responsibility. Sin is centered on self. All of life revolves around the self as top priority.

When Jesus tells us that we are slaves to sin,

He is telling us we are addicted to ourselves.

7. When we think of addictions we think of substance abuse. But everyone is addicted to self, to feel better about self, to look out for self, to get what self thinks it needs and desires *as top priority*.

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: What sets us free from our addictions to self?

1. “Sin” is the preoccupation with ourselves before anything or anyone else. What Jesus is saying is that the preoccupation is so lodged, ingrained, and buried deep in our souls that we are slaves to that preoccupation. It is so deep that we automatically respond to every situation and conversation with a “first me, then you,” priority. It is so ingrained in us that we are slaves to that preoccupation.

2. The question then becomes, how do we become free from this addiction to ourselves?

3. Jesus gives us two stunning answers.

a. **We need a certain kind of truth.**

*John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**”*

b. **We need a certain kind of community.**

*John 8:35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So **if the Son sets you free**, you will be free indeed.*

4. What kind of truth is Jesus talking about? (vv. 31-32)

*John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**”*

a. Jot down three important observations from John 8:31-32.

b. The truth Jesus is talking about is His teachings. This includes the Old and New Testaments.

c. It is a truth that must be “held to” (obeyed), in your daily life.

d. This truth must penetrate into your daily thinking, not just “head knowledge”.

5. The truth Jesus is describing is absolute truth. If you believe in “relative” “truth” you will not find the keys to unlocking your addiction to sin and self.

*Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶ Yet you desired **truth** even in the womb; you taught me **wisdom** in my inner parts.*

6. I need truth that stirs up **a greater affection for God** that releases me from using the people and things in my life to feel good about myself. If not, the road I’m on slowly erodes the very things I hunger for the most.

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: I need a certain kind of truth

1. How will I gain the truth Jesus is talking about? The truth of the bible is “packaged” in different ways and with different aims. Let’s look at three major types of God’s truth. Dr. Larry Crabb called these:

- a. Resurrection truth,
- b. Story truth, and
- c. Signpost truth.

2. Resurrection truth.

a. Biblical truth has the power to bring life out of death, bring personal freedom out of personal addiction or failure.

Isaiah 61:3 ...and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

b. Resurrection truth can also affect us powerfully when we see it lived out in someone in our community.

3. Story truth.

a. Truth is more than didactic truth. It is more than propositional truths. Often times it is more powerful when it is wrapped up in a person’s story. It’s one thing to hear about propositional truths about how a man should relate to a woman. It’s another thing to read about how Jesus related to women in the gospel stories.

b. Story truth means we can be real about ourselves. God’s story ends with “All will be well.”

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

c. When we read the bible, we realize that we are part of God’s Larger Story, and He is telling a story with our lives. It is vital and powerful when we see people like ourselves living for God’s story as priority.

4. Signpost truth.

In this world sometimes, we go far off the Narrow Road. Like the prodigal son we decide to do something and just drift away from God and drift to messes of our own making. What helps us get back on the Narrow Road of life? Signposts. Signpost truth sometimes stops me in my wayward tracks, and then points me in the right direction back to the Narrow Road of real life.

5. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: I need a certain kind of community

1. If we are going to become free from our addictions to self, in whatever forms that takes, Jesus says that freedom comes in two forms.

a. We need a certain kind of truth.

*John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free**."*

b. We need a certain kind of community.

*John 8:35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So **if the Son sets you free**, you will be free indeed.*

2. The kind of community we need is God's community, His family. God invites us to become His sons and daughters, to know Him as our Father, and then to experience the joys of community with Him and His children.

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example as I follow Christ.

Philippians 4:9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you.

3. God's community of people provides powerful examples of people who are in the process of overcoming our addiction to self, and whatever addictions that may enslave us, like the "needs" for validation, affirmation, acceptance, a sense of value and importance.

4. EASTER:

Easter declares that we don't have to be ruled by addictions, whether physical or relational. We don't have to be slaves of depression or anger or fear. A woman doesn't have to shut down her feminine soul any more to "protect" her from hurt. A man doesn't have to retreat to his cave so he doesn't hear any more "failure messages."

John 11:25 I am the resurrection and life. He who comes to me, though he dies, yet will he live.

"The best news the world has ever heard came from a graveyard - Christ is risen!"

- Soren Kierkegaard

5. The power that rose Jesus from the dead is the same resurrection power that is available to us, as we turn in dependence on God to transform us.

6. What strikes you from today's devotional?