



CORE
VALUES



FOUR:
COMMUNITY

Core Values
four:community
Courage Church
October 15, 2017
scriptures: 1 Peter 2:4-5, Psalm 133, Ephesians
2:19-22

Okay so here we go, onto more Core Values.

Lets begin with a brief recap... the first week we talked about “why” - why do we do what we do? or in other words: what is the vision that drives the values?

Then we began each week going through a few things that we can bounce everything we do off of... to make sure we are staying true to what we believe God called us to do, and what he has directed us in how our community is supposed to look. And as we are doing this, we have been encouraging you to not only get on board with the things we value as a church, but also to think about, pray about, and talk about what types of values you should have in your own home, and for your own families, if that is not something that you have already done.

So, we will continue this series until around Thanksgiving, taking a break on November 12th when Pastor Kevin is here speaking to us... and then after this series we will step into all things “Christmas”

So the first three things we talked about were:

Courage.
Communion.
Compassion.

and today we are moving on, to:

Community.

and by now, most of you are probably starting to wonder... are they all going to start with C?

In fact, people began asking me that question, after only the second message... so we talked about Courage, and then Communion, and then people began asking... Do they all start with C?

and in fact, they do all start with C. and beyond that, with the exception of only the VERY LAST ONE, the values all actually start with CO.

Another name for this series could be the “Co-Values” and the reason that we did it that way is because we believe very adamantly that life is meant to be done together. Only the very last value that we will talk about is something that you have to work out to a degree on your own... and that is CHARACTER... but in everything that we do, we want to make it very clear that we do not want you doing it by yourself.

and there will actually be a few different things we talk about in the coming weeks that really show the different ways we work together, and the different roles in this singular body, that each of us play.

But one thing is absolutely clear in scripture, and quite frankly it has been made absolutely clear in our culture, that **YOU ARE NOT MEANT TO DO LIFE ALONE.**

and so that is where we are going to focus this morning... on the importance of community... so lets all open our Bibles together to 1 Peter 2:4-5:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Lets Pray.

A friend of mine who I have known for years posted a video update about his life, and he was posting it from Haiti. He had taken a job in Haiti and would be there several months out of the year...

and I am still a little old school... I remember when I was like 19 or 20 and I went to London, how difficult it was to call home... how much money even one international call cost... so I was amazed that I could watch this update from Haiti. Yet at the same time, I was a little bummed that the first time that I found out about this huge transition, was after it happened, and I saw it online.

It is fascinating, that we live in a day and age in which the world is more connected than it ever has been before... technology can get a message around the world in the blink of an eye... there are very few places a person can even go now where they are actually “unreachable” -

yet study after study after study has shown that the thing that this generation desires most is CONNECTION.

so the generation who is more connected than ever before, craves connection as if it was something that is missing from their lives, in a world where everyone is a text or direct message or Facebook post away...

and when I first thought about it, I thought “if that is true, it is almost like our world is dying for thirst while you are sitting next to a well...” right? the water is right there... the connection you crave is RIGHT THERE...

but when I thought about it, I realized that its more like dying of thirst while floating in the Ocean. you see... Just because there is water all around you, doesn't mean that it is going to quench your thirst... in fact, if you drink that water, it will leave you much more thirsty... because it has some of the characteristics of the thing that you need, but it is not what you actually need.

and just because we have 4,000 Facebook friends and our posts generate hundreds of likes DOES NOT MEAN that we have healthy relationships. Social media has, and certainly CAN play an important role in our world... for some people it is the only way to keep in touch with old friends who literally live on the other side of the world now... so I am not saying it is always bad... but in other ways, the whole “digital communication” thing has made relationships so much more dysfunctional.

for instance... I can send someone a text message, and not think I am doing anything wrong... not even be mad at that person AT ALL, but because the person on the receiving end of that message only reads my words and the rest is left to assumptions... they create whatever tone it is they they think I would be saying it if I were saying it... and so words that when spoken could feel totally normal, when read the wrong way can feel cold and harsh.

Like to me, the purpose of a text message is not to write each other books even though I sometimes write long messages... but rather, the purpose is to give a quick and short response to questions... so often I answer texts with the letter "K" or "ok" - and I don't think anything of it...

but then I have sent people messages, giving them information, and then just gotten back a response that says "ok" and I start to think "did I say that wrong? are they upset about what I am asking them?"

it is impossible to know what people are actually thinking or to know what is really going on... are they mad? are they happy?

Did they have a good day?

Are they doing well in life? Do they need anything right now?

and in a world where so much of what you are conveying is left to the interpretation of whoever is seeing it, we have to understand that as valuable as technology is, it is not a replacement for the relationships that we were designed to have in our lives.

Larry Crabb wrote a book called "Encouragement"

and in it he talks about how everyone lives their lives behind various layers... in today's terms, we could call them "filters" - but essentially, the layers guard the "real" you...

and the more and more I thought about it, the more I realized how true this really is... and this is how the process usually looks in a community like this...:

we know that the church is a body... a community... we know we are supposed to be ONE, just like Christ and the Father are ONE...

we know we are supposed to carry each others burdens, and do nothing out of selfish ambition...

but what happens is, we step out... we are vulnerable... and then we get hurt.

Someone in the church does something, and it stings. and so we put a layer around our heart, and say, "That person will never hurt me again... because I won't let them in again." and we don't. We figure out a way to KEEP THEM OUT.

Then someone else hurts you. and you do the same thing, you put up another layer. And soon, you decide, "I am not going to let anybody in."

And now you have this little bubble around you... or as Larry Crabb puts it, this LAYER AROUND YOU.

and your relationships become very surface level... you can always communicate something different on your public walls... but the reality is that you don't really let anybody in anymore.

But the problem is, if nobody knows the real you... then nobody will know when the REAL YOU has a real need... a family member gets sick... you lose your job... whatever it may be... and then when nobody steps in, what happens is you begin to put up more and more walls around your heart because nobody was there for you... even though nobody really even knew.

and a lot of us live our whole lives this way.

What people tend to do is they integrate themselves into a community just enough so that they can feel popular. but they isolate themselves just enough that they can feel safe in the process.

but the truth is, everyone at the core of who they are has many of the same basic desires and needs... and from a relational sense, what everybody longs for, whether they frame it this way or not, is they long to be:

fully known
accepted for who you are
and needed where you are.

but to actually achieve all three takes an incredible amount of intention on the part of everyone in the community. Because it is very easy to be accepted, if you aren't fully known. Which is where most of our world lives... in the "accepted" realm, but not necessarily for "who you are" as much as for "who you have projected to be"

so we float... in an ocean... surrounded by water that can't quench our thirst... when all we need is a drink.

All we need is for someone to see the real us... for the mess that we are, and say "I still choose, in spite of all of that, to be in community with you."

This must be our community... there is no way to say that we are reflecting Jesus in our church if we aren't living this way toward one another. Jesus knows every single detail of our life, and not only does he accept us still, but he loved us so much that he was willing to die for us.

But I want you guys to understand something... something absolutely crucial for our church. You don't cultivate a community like this by simply airing your dirty laundry every chance that you get. Dawn and I are all about transparency... we try and be as open and as honest with people as we possibly can be, and we want people to know that we are going to be open and honest with all of you about where we are... I think you all know that about about by now.

BUT The mark of a healthy community is not so much that it is a place of complete openness, where everyone knows every detail of everyone's lives...

again, we believe in transparency, and believe you need people who you are so accountable to that they do know all of those things... but a healthy community... a body as a whole, is NOT marked by that.

instead... a healthy community is marked by its commitment to each other. IT IS commitment that keeps someone by your side when you ARE open with them, and they find out the things that are buried in your closet that you wished nobody could ever find out about...

it is commitment that keeps someone in your life after they have seen you at your worst. You absolutely have to have commitment before you can have that, sort of, last layer of openness where you take off the masks, and you sort out the things that you are dealing with, along side of other people who maybe are dealing with the same things, or maybe they have dealt with them in the past, or maybe they just love you enough to sit with you and walk with you through whatever you are going through even though they have no idea what it is like to go through something like that.

but if you have transparency WITHOUT commitment, you will have an absolute mess on your hands... you will have gossip... you will have people taking sides against other people... you will have factions like Paul talks about when he writes the Corinthians.

True, Biblical commitment to the body takes so much intention... it takes determination that says "I love the church, and the gospel so much, that I am going to be the one that keeps this thing together..." - what it takes is ownership.

we all need to be owners of our community... of our relationships... of our church. As I was studying for this, praying about it and thinking about the best way to do this... I couldn't help but think of a story that I read in a book called "The Pilgrim's Progress" - and its kind of funny, because this is not "The Pilgrim's Progress" that John Bunyan wrote... but its written the same way, that it characterized Christian virtues and things that we should possess. and in it, the writer told this story about a character called "commitment."

And commitment has a mission to go and make a difference in a city. But when he gets there, he discovers that the city is surrounded by a huge wall and there is no way to get in. But commitment had already left his home, and he packed all of his things into his bag and he was traveling with all of his possessions, because he really felt, "I am suppose to go to this city."

But He can't get into the city! There is a wall. There is no door. There is no gate.

He circles the city, looking for an entry point, and there is none.

And He looks around, and he realizes, “The only way that I am going to get into this city is if I scale the wall.”

So he looks at the wall, and he looks at his bag full of everything in his entire life that he had to his name, and he took this bag of everything, and he throws it *over* the wall. He threw his entire life into the city.

and when the bag had cleared the wall, He was *committed*.

He could never get his stuff back if he didn't make it into that city.
He could never get his *life* back if he didn't make it into that city.

Commitment was all in.

The truth is, it is easier to see the wall, and turn around... it is easier to go back to your house and hide behind a screen... because on the other side of that wall is a mission...

and on that mission with you, are PEOPLE... who are sinful... who have pride, who make mistakes... who will almost certainly hurt you.

and if you don't scale that wall... you can keep being anyone that you want to be... behind your screen... or whatever wall it is that you hide behind.

but if you want to be who God made you to be... you need to do it with people.

If you aren't committed to the community that God has put you in, you will find it very easy to drift off into isolation...

if we don't commit to anything, we don't have to be accountable to anyone.
if we don't commit to anything, we don't have to worry about people asking things of us... we don't have to worry about our lives getting interrupted by someone else's life... and someone else needs.

there is the easy way, and then there is the right way.

Think about the words that Peter uses about bricks.

I briefly told a story once here as it related to this verse in 1 Peter, about a brick pathway that we have been trying to build for a while on the side of our house... I am going to add onto it today... and try to help you really understand the significance of the what Peter says here.

for a while, we were driving all over the city when people were giving away bricks, and we were loading up and weighing down our car so that we could get them back to our house... and we laid out all of these bricks in a pathway, but we haven't yet actually laid them in the ground with mortar... they are just set on the ground and rest there loosely.

But this has caused us several problems... and I will use them today as observations related to what Peter is saying... one, with the construction that still takes place in and out of there when we are able to, all sorts of construction debris, drywall chunks, plaster, etc. end up falling on the bricks as we take out the trash, and it gets wedged in there, and we can't just sweep it, because its not one solid piece... so we have to pick up the bricks individually, and clear around them. If it were one solid piece, it would be as simple as running a broom over it.

but instead, it is way more work than anyone should ever do, and for no reason besides the fact that we haven't committed the bricks to their permanent place yet.

Did you catch that? Every time there is a mess, it is much harder to clean.

The devil works in gaps. He looks for the areas that aren't secure... he looks for the doors that aren't locked...

Ecclesiastes 4:12 tells us: if someone attacks you when you are alone, you can be beaten, but if there are two of you, you will withstand him—**a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

it is the language of someone breaking into your home... catching you off guard... and if you are alone, there is a pretty decent chance that the person who is able to catch you off guard is going to be able to overcome

you... but if you have someone with you, it won't be so easy... and if you have multiple people with you... you will surely triumph.

when people are together, they are stronger. They are better. When you are blindsided by life, if you try and face it alone... if you aren't connected to others... if you haven't allowed yourself to be a brick that is actually mortared into the greater body, you are much more likely to be broken by it.

See, if you go walk through my back yard, you will find lots of bricks that are not on the path anymore... because my kids picked them up and moved them, played with them... tripped over them... whatever it may be...

we recently gathered them all together and put them in a pile, and you wouldn't believe how many of them are broken.

In fact, the majority of the bricks that were taken from the path and put somewhere else, are now broken...

The longer they sit alone, the more fragile they become. The more I notice them starting to crack, and split apart. They are more prone to weathering, making them more and more brittle... but when you mortar them together, suddenly all of those pieces makes one very very VERY strong piece...

and if I were to take one of the loose bricks, and smash it against a mortared brick wall, which piece would break?

The one that is by itself.

Peter's brick analogy is so perfect because bricks are pieces of something greater...

look what Paul says, in Ephesians 2:19-22 says:

you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

We, the church, when we come together, are building up the temple of God. Peter describes us as each being bricks in this temple... but listen to why this is so significant:

There was always a temple. Every religion had a temple. The Jews had their temple with its four courts and Jesus had to come in and turn tables at... that temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.

In Ephesus there was a temple to the goddess Artemis.

All of the gods had temples... and all of the gods demanded something of its people... it demanded sacrifice of its people... but of course, Jesus, our God, sacrificed himself FOR his people...

and Peter here is saying that the temple that honors the God that we serve is not made up of brick and mortar, but of people... who each individually have places in the one true temple of the living God... who does not need a building to manifest himself through... but he does need a body.

The Church (as a body) is the dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

and the thing that is so crazy to me, is that the early church was built not on a structure, but on a community of people who loved and took care of each other, who knew each other, and who fought each others battles. and that was the image of the invisible God. Nobody fought alone... Nobody struggled alone... nobody thrived ALONE.

a simple look at Acts 2:42-47 and you will see how the church is actually called to permanently do away with the "me" mentality and shift it to WE. It grew by the thousands because it was not contained to how many people they could fit in an enclosed space, but rather how many people could be changed by the radical love and generosity and grace of the God that was working through them.

And when the Spirit moved in supernatural ways... the same Holy Spirit that came upon Peter and the others flowed out of them and into others...

because that is how a true temple is built... it is built through people who live the Love of Christ out in community.

lets read Psalm 133... it is only three verses long but it is incredible:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

Two analogies.

oil and dew. The first time I read this, I thought it was the strangest thing. It just didn't make sense to me as to why David would relate the importance of dwelling together in unity, with the oil running down the beard of the Aaron...

Until I remembered that Aaron was the high priest. See, if the oil was for anybody else besides Aaron, it could mean anything, it could be ANY OIL... but because he is the high priest, we have a pretty good idea of what this oil was...

the oil that was used to anoint the high priest was like an olive oil mixed with four of the best and most expensive spices that were available.

Now, if you read the Psalm carefully, you see that David says that when brothers dwell in unity, it is like THAT SPECIFIC OIL. It is the best of the best of the best... There is nothing of greater value. But the thing that is even more fascinating about this, is David doesn't just tell us how great the oil is... He doesn't just say that it is GREAT to be in community with each other...

he also tells us what happens when it is placed on Aaron's head...

it trickled down onto his beard, and from there, continued to run, trickling down onto the collar of his robes.

So what started on his head, leaked to his body.

See the reason that community is so important is because Biblically, it is the context in which discipleship truly takes place. What was placed on Aaron's head was not meant to stay on his head, it was meant to go to his whole body... and that is discipleship. What the Psalmist is saying is that when brothers dwell in unity, something is passed from one person to another.

That is discipleship.

Living life alongside people, and yes, walking through struggles together... but we don't just share our testimonies so that we can know each other better... we don't. Sometimes we feel like that is why we share. Because we want to be known... and it is important that as people do get to know us they love us for who we are in Christ and not for the perfect track record that none of us actually have.

but We share our testimonies WHEN they are helpful to edify and advance someone who is going through something similar.

That is that affect of the oil coming off the beard and onto the garments of the high priest.

In community, God can use every facet of your life as a means of discipleship. As a means of trickling what is in you, and the healing power that has worked in your life, into the next person.

and then the Psalmist says:

“It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!”

Hermon was the highest mountain in the region, and the Zion mountains were much smaller... So the dew from the high point would descend and fertilize the lower mountains as well.

Its really the same analogy. Oil coming down from the head to his garments, and dew coming from the high point to the lower points....

something is trickling and feeding everything else.

The great dew that was produced from this high mountain would fertilize the mountains of Zion so that the land could keep producing.

It was fruitful.

and when we come together, the reason that it is so incredibly important beyond the fact that it is edifying, is that it is fruitful.

Together, we can reach a whole lot more people... and through each other, and iron sharpening iron... you will discover a whole new world of fruit that comes in your own life when you begin to do life intentionally with others.

I have done enough sermons in this place, that hopefully there is not doubt in any of your minds as to where I stand on the church... I believe with all of my heart that the church is the hope of the world... it is Gods vessel to bring reconciliation to a broken world... it is our opportunity to be the temple of the living God... with Jesus as our cornerstone, literally partnering with the God of the universe in the renewal of all things.

you have heard all that before... this is nothing new... but apart from all of that... you just need people. I need people. it is impossible to feel known if you never let yourself be known... and in a world where you can be anything that you want to be behind a computer screen, most people I talk to say they are starving for more... because we were built for community. We were built to do life together. We were built to have the oil drip off of the head, and onto the shoulder and the rest of the body... we were meant to having someone pouring into us, and we were meant to pour into others.

That is community. It is the foundation for discipleship, the great commission... it was the last thing that Jesus ever told his disciples... Go, and make disciples... go, and be in relationship with people... that they may learn what you know... that they may see Jesus the way you have seen Jesus...

So at Courage Church:

Community is a body, *committed* to all its parts.

When one person falls, we are quick to pick them back up... when one person hurts, we all hurt. and we are all in on this thing... seriously... you don't just one day decide "I don't want my arm anymore" and cut it off and part ways with it... no... it is your body. You know what that arm is worth... you know you couldn't live without it.

We have to remember that... how much each and every member of this body is worth... they are worth the blood of Jesus that was shed for each and every one of us, and treat each other likewise.

and so my challenge for you this morning, is to live your life like the character in the "commitment" story... give yourself to the cause of community.

Take your bag full of everything that is your life, and throw it over the wall, and commit to one another in such a way that says "I can never go back."

IT IS IN THAT PLACE, of total commitment to one another, that hearts will start to open as mouths do... as we tell our stories, and we feel what each other feels... and we bear one another's burdens... and we realize that we are all human, but **WE ARE NOT ALONE.**