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Enriching Christian Community

Welcoming – part 1

Note: Study 4 in this series was the seminar on 'How to Resolve Conflict Well'

At the beginning of your time you might like to hear how everyone went with their second week of reading the bible with a friend.

Most of the New Testament images for the church are communal or community ones: the family, the flock, the household, the nation, the body. Even architectural ones like the building, or agricultural ones like the vine and the branches, emphasise the interdependence of the Christian Community. The strong emphasis in the New Testament on unity, mutual love and care within the Christian fellowship reinforces this picture of community.

And so the quality of *our* Christian Community ought to be a powerful thing. People today are desperately looking for community. As they discover Christian fellowships that are caring, loving, open and welcoming they will want to belong. In belonging many will find Jesus who says, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, I and will you give you rest."

Questions

1. Read 1 Peter 1:22, Rom 12:10, 1 Thes 2:8 and then discuss this question; "Is there a cost to being a welcoming Christian community?"
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2. It may seem difficult to pay this cost as an individual, but what difference would it make if you were just one person of a larger group committed to being a welcoming community? Are you willing to pay *this* cost?
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Motives

A. God's heart

The Bible makes it very clear that God loved us so much that he took the initiative, at great cost to himself, to rescue us and draw us back to himself. He is the God of the gracious and warm welcome. The following passages make this very clear:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

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What would you say to a Christian who said that, "Welcoming is not my 'gift' so I just let those other people do that bit."

How do you feel when you first meet a new group of people? Can you remember your first day in this church?

God moved towards us, he didn't wait for us to move! His loving initiative towards us should be reflected in the way we regard others. What do the following passages tell us about God's heart, and the way that we also should act?

Leviticus 19:33-34;
Hebrews 13:1-2

Luke 15:1-7
1 Peter 4:8-10

Luke 14:12-14;
Mark 9:36-37

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What are the different ways that we might make a person feel 'welcome' in our Christian community?

B. Our heart (discussion questions)

We've seen already that there is a cost to welcoming new people to your Christian community. That cost exposes our heart motive: only sufficient motive will lead to pay the price.

1. What should be our motive in welcoming someone into the Christian Community? What ought not be our motive in welcoming newcomers?
2. Sometimes our attitude towards welcoming depends upon the kind of person we are welcoming. It is easy to welcome someone just like us, or someone we admire, but it is more difficult to welcome other kinds of people. Read James 2:1-9 and Luke 19:1-10. How might these passages impact our welcoming?
3. Even if you have been a member of the same church for a while, it's quite likely that there are people there whom you have never really welcomed. Perhaps others have welcomed them. Perhaps they've never been welcomed. To what extent do you think that your church congregation is a welcoming community?

What makes a person feel unwelcome?

Practical Assignment

Plan and implement some way of making people feel especially welcome at your regular church meeting. You individually, or perhaps your whole Home Group working together, need to actually implement your plan this coming Sunday or the following Sunday.

Some questions to consider as you plan:

- i. Are there particular individuals who have never been welcomed to your community? How do you know this?
- ii. What will help everyone feel at home and an integral part of your church gathering?
- iii. How will you know whether your plan is successful or not?