

Last month we started a conversation about ***Spiritual Community***. Here are a few highlights to get us up to speed.

- **Discipleship always takes place in the context of relationship**—relationship with God and relationships with others.
- Our relationship with Christ (being **in Christ**) is first and foremost. Outside of Christ, ***Spiritual Community*** cannot happen.
- **Transformation** natural and expected result of ***Spiritual Community***. If we are not changed by it we are not experiencing genuine ***Spiritual Community***.

Okay. Those are the highlights from last month. If you would like to catch up on the whole conversation, please feel free to visit our website (www.lampcob.com). Hover your mouse cursor over the “Ministries” tab at the top and click on Discipleship. You can then click on “more” under “connect” (small groups). From there it should be pretty self explanatory.

Now, moving right along, ***Spiritual Community*** is **a relationship of belonging**. There are two aspects of this word “belong” which need to be mentioned so we can more fully understand what this means to ***Spiritual Community*** and how they affect our relationships and discipleship.

First, “to belong” means we are *in the right place*, or *made for a specific position*. I.e., “That piece of the puzzle belongs right there.” You and I are meant to be ***in Christ*** and ***in relationship with others***. When we are ***in Christ*** and ***in relationship with others***, we are where we are meant to be. Our right place is found ***in Christ***. When we are not ***in Christ*** we are out of place. When we try to grow spiritually outside of Christ we are indeed doing it wrong. The same is true when trying to grow spiritually outside of our relationship with others.

The second aspect of belonging may offend the ears of some, but “to belong” also has the meaning of **ownership**. ***I am owned by Christ and by others***. Now, before you get all twisted up about this, let’s just make believe for a moment this statement is true.

If you are a follower of Jesus you probably have very little difficulty saying, “I belong to Jesus.” The Bible tells us we were “bought with a price.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20) And in context, it is not just a “spiritual” purchase, but a “physical” purchase because Paul is talking about our actual bodies. And, in context, they are possessed by the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but in context, Paul is referring to how we relate to one another sexually. So those who might dismiss this verse as being used as a mere “proof text” would be correct in so far as the further we dig into it, the more it proves the point, but I digress. (Also, note how Christ’s ownership of our body and the possession of it by the Holy Spirit is supposed actually affect how we live in relationship to others. Okay, now I’m done.)

Also, **with ownership comes responsibility**. This means because I belong to you, you have responsibility for me and vice-versa. This screams in the face of American individualism which says we are only responsible for ourselves. I call “horse pucky.” We are responsible for one another. We cannot grow spiritually or “take our next step with Jesus” if we are only concerned with ourselves and shirk our responsibility for others.

Finally, ownership is not a “right” but a “trust.” Again, as Americans we are told all about our “rights.” But in the Kingdom of God we are given trusts. God entrusts to us our spouse, our children, our friends and even our possessions. They all belong to Him. So when we say we “belong” to Christ and to one another, it is a yielding or submission to Christ and to one another. We are, in essence, choosing to be possessed, by Christ and by other people. We are entrusting ourselves to God and each other.

As we will see later, this understanding of belonging informs other statements we’ve made regarding what ***Spiritual Community***, such as: accountability, confession, encouragement, commitment, vulnerability, and more.

So let’s stop here for now and allow this to be an ongoing conversation. I encourage you to take some time to ponder these questions...

#1 – In what ways, do you think, we are where we *belong* when we are in Christ?

#2 – In what ways, do you think, we are where we *belong* when we are in relationship with other people?

#3 – Can you describe a time when you felt like you didn’t “fit in” in your relationship with God? With other people? If so, take some time to reflect on that and consider how it affected your spiritual growth.

#4 – How do you feel about being “possessed” by Christ? By others? Why do you think you might struggle is being “owned?”

#5 – How are you doing at “owning” others? What specific responsibilities do you see you have towards others if they belong to you?