

Love and Grace Expressed Among us in Community
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Introduction

The one true God we worship is a Triune God. Within the Godhead, He is in continual relationship with Himself. The three members of the Trinity interact in pure relationship, and that relationship takes place within an environment that reflects His grace and truth. As the members of the Trinity interact they experience a unity of will that is rooted in their mutual concern for one another. They experience the welcoming grace that is the by-product of His core attribute of love. They experience truth, which flows from God's holiness, one of the central characteristics of the Triune God. All of this is important because as we enter into relationship with God that environment becomes substantially available to us. Our communities and our relationships should likewise be marked by a significant experience of the environment of grace and truth.

Meditate on the following verses that convey God's realm.

John 1:14
John 1:17
Revelation 21:3-4
I John 1:7
I John 4:7
I Peter 5:10
Psalm 27:4

From the above verses and other passages that you may want to consider, write out a paragraph that describes the realm or culture of God.

The Environment Itself – What Does it Look Like?

As we enter into relationship with God through the Lord Jesus we enter into His realm. We are drawn into the midst of the Trinitarian God, to experience for the first time a fully loving, caring, and life-giving relationship. This experience is profoundly different from anything we have experienced before, and through this we can begin to leave behind our false selves, our hiding and self protection, and be drawn out into the open of God's life-giving and energizing light.

Our experience of being drawn into the midst of the Triune God can be summarized by three great truths. The first is the promise from God that **He will never do anything to us except what is in our best interest**. This does not mean only "good" things will happen to us. It does mean that as we move through the mountains and valleys of life, God will orchestrate all of them for our ultimate good. The second promise is that **we are absolutely secure in Him**. We do not need to earn His love, and we do not need to prove that we are worthy of His love. Perhaps most important, our sins do not cause God to love us any less. Therefore, we can freely confess our failing, our fears, and even our anger to Him, knowing that our relationship and our life is fully secure in Him. Lastly, **we can draw near to the living God**. We can come close to the One who truly loves us, cares for us, seeks our best interest, and we can find rest, both in the present and in the eternal in Him. We can find our home!

What do the following passages reveal about God's concern for our best interest?

Romans 8:28
John 10:7-18
Hebrews 2:17-18
Philippians 4:19
Hebrews 12:4-11

Take a few moments and meditate on how God cares for our best interest even when His training of us is sometimes difficult. Write a few paragraphs about how God's care for us is worked out in our lives.

How do the following passages increase your sense of being secure in the Triune God through the Lord Jesus?

John 10:27-30
Romans 8:35-39
Philippians 1:6

Ephesians 1:3-14
Romans 5:1-11

How does our security with the Lord Jesus open the way for us to receive His love? How does it open us up to learn as His apprentices?

Read these passages. How concerned is the Lord Jesus that we draw near?

Matthew 11:28-30
Hebrews 4:14-16
Hebrews 10:19-22
John 12:32
Revelation 3:20
John 7:37-38

What benefits do we gain by drawing near to the Lord Jesus and the presence of the living God?

Communities of grace and truth as a means of our own transformation

Communities of grace and truth are powerful in bringing about my ongoing personal transformation. As I experience the substantial realities of *concern and care for my best interest, security and safety and the possibility of drawing near to fellow human beings*, I can begin to let go of those things that hinder me, that hold me in bondage.

Two of the biggest hindrances to transformation in my own life are unresolved sin and personal wounding. Both often result in a life of hiddenness. Hiddenness does not allow me to be vulnerable and open with others, robbing me of the benefit that they can contribute to my own growth. A community marked by grace and truth is a safe environment, a place where healing can occur. The stones of unresolved sin and woundedness clog up the channel where God's Spirit wants to flow. When we experience that we are truly secure, we can begin to invite others in to see the true self, not the "strong" front that is put on to defend against future hurts or to inflict retribution for past harms. The community marked by grace and truth is a place of healing, rest, and renewal.

Likewise, the hiddenness that unresolved sin issues create can finally be exposed to the light allowing grace and truth to be fostered. In a community where people know their relationships are secure, there is more freedom for people to respond to the leading of the Spirit and become clean. Hiddenness requires huge expenditures of energy. When freed from the burden to continue hiding, one can finally allow God's Spirit to work in their lives, bringing them to a taste of life.

Ephesians 5:1-21 is written to a collective community of believers. The Apostle Paul is instructing the community of Ephesian believers in how to live among one another. Study this passage carefully. What is really involved in being transformed in community? Key ideas have to do with walking in the light, walking in the Spirit, and mutual submission. How does it all work?

Bring it to Earth – The Substantial Experience of Grace and Truth in Our Relationships in the advancement of the Gospel

The experience that each believer has as they are drawn into the presence of God should not stop at their own personal "spiritual" life. The scriptures are filled with the descriptions, commands, and challenges to live out with others what we receive from the Lord. The scriptures are pointing to the fact that we are called to bring a substantial taste of the reality we experience in the heavenlies as we engage in relationship with God into all of our personal relationships.

I cannot promise to do what is *always* in the best interest of the people, *but I can* promise to seek in integrity their best interest. When I fail to do so, I can also in integrity seek their forgiveness and try and make things right.

I cannot tell anyone they are perfectly secure in their relationship with me. *But I can*, in integrity, commit to making the sphere of my relationships a safe place, built on trust, grace, love, and truth, where people can begin to come out of their false selves and hiddenness and taste the Kingdom for themselves.

I cannot invite people to draw near to me as the Lord Jesus does without apprehension, *but I can* through God's Spirit, substantially reproduce the environment of the heavenlies so that people desire to draw near to me and to the community of God's people and begin to taste the light and life that God offers.

The Bible places so much emphasis on community because it is in community that heavenly reality can most fully be tasted and experienced. Our communities are called to be marked, every bit as much as our individual relationships, with the grace and truth. Those communities are then called to be the first fruits, the outposts, of the kingdom of God. The renewed and renewing community created by God's Spirit, marked by grace and truth in all its relationships, is essential to the calling of God to advance the Gospel of the Kingdom into all the nations of the earth. It is in these communities that light and life is experienced in tangible earthly ways by the peoples of the nations.

Spend the next few days mediating on I John. I John has been called "The Epistle of the Fellowship". How does this Epistle show the differences in the community of God versus the communities of the world?

How do the scriptures see the role of community in advancing the Gospel?

Matthew 5:13-16
II Corinthians 2:14-16
Philippians 1:27
Colossians 4:5-6
I John 1:3

Conclusion

Community is extraordinarily hard to build, especially in the Western context. It requires giving up rights. It requires being your "true" self. It requires trust and love. Love and grace expressed among us in community is a value of the Kingdom, but it is not something that is easily created in real human settings. For it to work the people involved must taste the realities of the heavenlies. They must seek and desire to have the divine realities become substantially present in their lives. And they must undergo the ongoing work of the Spirit of transformation.

Communities marked by grace and truth have the ability to radically transform the people involved and the world in which they are situated. There is remarkable potential in experiencing true kingdom community as we draw into our earthly experience the divine realities.