



#homedevos 19.1

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

The Gospel and Community

Have you ever been given a new toy, game or device with the owner's manual? Give yourself a thumbs up if you always read the manual first, and a sigh if you always go directly to using the toy/device/ game without reading the instructions.

It would be interesting to see how many will have thumbs up versus those who sighed! Let us relate this to the story of creation. God had this great plan to replicate Himself in humanity hence He created us in His own image. He then placed all good things at our disposal and wanted us to be the head of a Godly community in the garden. God gave only one instruction **NOT** to do a particular thing (*let children guess what this instruction is*).

Everything was excellent, till man decided he was smarter than his creator and deviated from what was written in the owner's manual (the instruction). In Genesis 3:8, we understand that Adam and Eve heard God's voice in the garden and they ran to hide. I always try to picture God coming down in the evening to fellowship with man, and then both of them scampering away as if God's eyes have a place it could not reach. This is how the community God created began its downward spiral. Man's disobedience led to separation and loss of community with the Father. If you are wondering why, maybe you can find a hint in Habbakkuk 1:13a.

We know that God is love, and He loved us first, before we love Him (1 John 4:19). He loves us with a passion that cannot be equalled therefore He was saddened by the loss of community and fellowship with man. So much so that He made another plan to redeem man from the state of sin where he has fallen and restore him to enjoy community and fellowship. Any guesses as to what the plan is? (Read John 3:16). God decided to send His son, Jesus, to pay the price for all our sins.

Before Jesus came, God's chosen people lived in communities, but it was nothing like the original plan that God had. Human beings repeatedly fell into sin, made sacrifices to ask for forgiveness, and then returned soon after to sacrifice again for the same sins, it was a never-ending cycle of sin-atonement-forgiveness and then repeat. It was simply hopeless for man to try and be good, his very nature makes it impossible! At last God decided to make the ultimate sacrifice and put an end to the circus- He sent Jesus to the cross to pay the full price. Man's sins were now fully redeemed (paid for in full) and we could get back to the ultimate purpose of our creation: building healthy community with other people, and relationships that honour God and expand His kingdom on earth, after all He paid the price in full.

This sounds and seems pretty simple, right? All of humanity should now live in bliss, with everyone being their brother's keeper and loving others as they love themselves, right? We should all be eager to participate in healthy, God honouring relationships, right? I wish! We get into communities and then our true colours begin to show. Let us think of our different communities right now - your school, your neighbourhood, the church, your circle of friends, the extended family and so on.

Spend a few minutes sharing how we have fared in these communities and if we feel we are still following the owner's manual for community (Romans 13:8-10). I daresay the lockdown has thrown up some of our habits or attitudes that we were not even conscious of when we were forced into 24 hours' community with our families unbroken by school, work or sports. I found out a few things about myself during this time that has brought me to my knees in prayer for patience and quietness of spirit.

So now what must we do? If you believe that you are part of a living, loving and affirming community of God's people, praise God. If your popularity at school is as a result of your consistent acts of kindness, gentleness and love for others, praise God. If you are that one who feels like you have tried hard, but now believe that you are better off by yourself, outside of community. Guess what? Praise God! God is one person who never, ever makes mistakes and He understands your frustration, and that you are trying. Maybe it is time to stop trying and ask the founder of community himself to give you grace for meaningful relationships with other people. Community is an essential part of His plan and he does not want you to be isolated at all. How do I know this? Hint - Genesis 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. We all help each other to grow, mature and thrive. How will I know that I have an anger problem if there is no one to be angry with? Or an unconditional love

problem if everyone I encountered loved me dearly? You see, I need to allow myself to be tested before I can talk about my knowledge of a subject. In the same way, we need to ask God for the grace to live meaningful in community. Grace is given, you do not deserve or work for it. God is always eager to give good gifts to his children; shall we go ask him for bucket loads of grace to do well in our diverse communities?

In conclusion, each member of the family should mention one or more thing that will empower/enable them to function better in community. The list should then be lifted up in prayers, with each family member in agreement about receiving answers, and abundant grace for every situation.