



Leadership Training Class

CLASS TWO: LIFE LIVED IN COMMUNITY

From *The Good and Beautiful Community* by James Bryan Smith

“There is a false and pervasive narrative [in our churches]: The community exists to serve me and my needs. The community should not tell me what to do - that is up to me. We live in a consumer culture. Each day we are treated as a customer, and this leads us to believe we are entitled to have all of our needs met. We have become spoiled. The modern ethos of narcissism is pervasive in our culture and prevalent in our churches.

The good and beautiful community is not made up of merely comfortable Christians but Christlike men and women growing in their live with God and each other. In order to become that kind of community we need a new narrative, a biblical narrative, to reshape our behavior. Here is the true narrative regarding the rights and responsibility of the community: The community exists to shape and guide my soul. The community has a right to expect certain behavior from me, and can provide the encouragement and accountability I need.

From the beginning the ecclesia of Jesus has practiced soul shaping through many means: corporate worship, the breaking of bread, the teaching of the apostles, corporate fasting and holding each other accountable to live godly lives. Transformation into Christlikeness has been the aim and responsibility of the church from its beginning (Hebrews 10:24-25).

If the church has that responsibility, it also has the right to encourage certain behaviors from its members. We can and must offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all who seek it, and accept all who are broken and dysfunctional. But acceptance does not mean we ask nothing of the people who join our community.

I want a community who will take an interest in my well-being, a community who is not afraid to ask me to make a commitment to my own spiritual growth and service to others, a community who dares to offer me a reliable pattern of transformation and then backs it up by challenging me to enter into some form of accountability in order to help me meet our commitments. I want a community who will challenge me to become who I already am: one in whom Christ dwells and delights, a light to the world, salt to the earth, the aroma of Christ to a dying world. I want a community who reminds me of who I am and will watch over me with love - which means offering both comfort and warning - so that I might live a life worthy of my calling. This involves encouragement, admonishment, and watching over one another in love.

I know three things from experience. First, people rise to the level of expectation. We fail because we do not ask for accountability and commitment. Second, people intuitively know that when things are made easy there is little chance that any good will come from it. We lower our expectations because we think people will respond in greater numbers, but in reality we do them no service, and most people sense this. Third, whilst not everyone in every church is ready to make a commitment to transformation, there are many who are ready and not being challenged. Far too much attention is being paid to getting people to come to church, and far too little is paid to those who are hungering for a deeper life with God.”