

Intro

I love children
That is why I had two of my own.
And they have their own children now

(UK trip)

One thing I have noticed about the very young is that they have no filter between what they think and what they say.

They think it or feel and you get to know all about it.

"Mommy, is that lady having a baby?"

5 year old when she was told to stop cheating.

"I'm not cheating, I'm only helping myself win"

When you ask your 3 year old son, "Do you want the baby to be a boy or a girl?"

And he says, "I want the baby to be batman"

4 year old walks into the room and says, "You're such an idiot mom".

Mom says, "What, why?"

4 year old says, "Wait, what does idiot mean?"

Sophia, aged 3, "Mommy. I'm not joking, I'm not kidding, and I'm not playing. I need chocolate."

You walk into your son's bedroom and say, Good morning! Do you need a hug."

And he says, "Actually I need pancakes."

Kid aged 4, "Can I have a new mommy, you say No too much?"

Kids tell you as they think it.

No filters.

And that is where our work as parents begin.

If they are going to survive this society that we are going to expose them to we have to teach them to put a pre-processing unit in before their thoughts or their feelings reach their externals, their mouths or their faces or their muscles.

This takes years, roughly twenty or so and then we let them go.

And their society will teach them the nuances we have missed.

And then at some point we become disciples.

And we realize that the way we have been processing life and ourselves is not what Jesus taught.

My background is very different to the Kingdom life.

I need to become Kingdom minded.

And today we are going to look at that in the context of our series, Together

Recap

Last week James started a new series called Together.
He showed how the Scriptures, especially in the NT kept using the word, "together."

Act 1v14

*They all joined **together** constantly in prayer*

Act 2v44

*All the believers were **together** and had everything in common*

Act 5v12

*And all the believers used to meet **together** in Solomon's Colonnade*

And so on.

He said that we are not a system, we are a family made in His image

How we spend time together is what sets us apart.

And when we struggle to find the time to get together it's rather a faith issue than a scheduling issue.

'Together' takes a mind-shift - A new Kingdom way of thinking about things

'Together' takes a recasting of our schedule.

Just Try it.

1) It has always been God's plan

If there is one thing that we as Christians want to make sure of is that we want to get on board with God's story.

So let's do a quick review

Gen 1v27

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

God creates Man in His image and tells us (Mankind) at least two things

Gen 2v15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

There is physical work to be done.

Gen 3v8

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God wants a relationship with us, "Where are you?", He asked.

The expectation was that we **should have been** there.

Being made in His image has Relationship inherently built into that image.

Work and Relationship

Gen 3 - Mankind makes some poor decisions and God expels them from the Garden.

Gen 6 - Mankind keeps on making bad decisions and God reboots them with the flood and Noah's family as the new seed.

When Noah comes out of the ark God tells him to, "be fruitful and multiply".

And then he reminds him.

Gen 9v6

*in the image of God
has God made mankind.*

Work and Relationship

We are not where we should be, however we are still made in God's image.

Gen 12 - God calls Abram

Gen 12v2

*²"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

.....

*and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*

And how?

Through work and relationships

Gen 17 - God promises Abraham to greatly increase his numbers.

By the time Moses gets the call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, they number in the millions. One huge group of people working as slaves and living in a community, in a relationship with God.

Moses leads them out of Egypt.

They have their struggles.

Years later Joshua finally leads them into the Promised Land and they settle into their various tribes.

Still in community and still working and still in a relationship with God.

And what was the purpose of this community?

To influence those around them.
To show them what living in the image of God looked like.

Time passed

The Psalmist wrote

Psa 133v1

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live **together** in unity*

This is a picture of what it should look like.

Our Messiah was born and was crucified.
Soon afterward Paul wrote:

Eph 4v1-2

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the **calling** you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love*

What calling did we receive?
As a Christian, Work and Relationship.
How do I know it's Relationship?
Because Paul's teachings throughout his letters are about character change.
Why do we need character change?
So that we can learn how to deal with each other within our communities.

In this passage, he says, "Be ..."
How do I get to be?
I grow towards it.
Why?
So that I learn to do Relationships better.

A little later in the same letter he wrote about maturing in the body of Christ

Eph 4v15

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in **love**, as each part does its work.*

He says we need to grow.
Why?
To become the mature body of Christ.
With Christ Himself at the head
And the rest of the body built up in love.
What is unique about the word love?
It can only be expressed towards others.
Only when we are within a Relationship space can we learn and grow in love.

That is why we need to be Together.
Often.

The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone or just within our biological family unit.
It was always meant to be within the context of work and relationship within a bigger community.

In our case, also within our Family Groups.

The tendency of the world is isolation, locking itself up in the homes and castles, alone.

And yet

The Christian calling is community and relationship.

Walking with God and each other.

2) It needs to become our plan

So we get convicted about God's plan about community and relationships.

Then something interesting happens.

One day we don't feel like going

To church

To Family Group

A prayer group

And we listen to that feeling and we don't go.

What we don't realise that listening to that feeling is the same process that the kids that we spoke about earlier, went through.

I think this, I say this.

I feel this, I share it, no matter whether it is appropriate or not.

Remember

Sophia, aged 3, "Mommy. I'm not joking, I'm not kidding, and I'm not playing. I need chocolate."

Did Sophia need chocolate?

Not really.

She felt like eating chocolate, but she didn't need it, not like one needs oxygen.

I also like chocolate, a lot, but I have learned over time that I need to cap this need and sometimes I need to put a stop to it altogether, as in say, "NO".

Here is what I want in my Christian life.

I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit

I want the Spirit to tell me everything I need to do.

Even better, I want to do only the things I feel like doing and I always want those things to be aligned to the Spirit.

Wouldn't that be cool.

But you and I know that's just foolish.

If I followed that philosophy, I wouldn't be here on stage talking to you.
I'd be comfortably in the service, listening.
Or even better, home in bed, secure in the knowledge that I can download the video later in the week.

So what's at work here?

We have a clash between what I feel like doing and doing the right thing.
Between God's plan and my plan.

The question is, is this struggle evident in the Bible?

Has anyone else ever experienced this?

I think this struggle is what defines the Story of Mankind from the first pages to the last.
From the moment where Mankind argued themselves into eating the fruit, feeling that it was the right thing to do.

Up to and including the point where we put Jesus on the Cross

And then continuing with Paul exhorting us continually to live lives devoted to God.

Yes, we have to come to terms with the facts that there is a battle between what is Right and what we Feel Like Doing.

Best described by God in this heart rending passage.

Gen 6v5

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

We did what we felt like doing.

All the time.

And it was evil.

So now what?

The first thing we have to do is recognise it.

It's called self awareness.

Every inclination of the thoughts of our human hearts is not necessarily always the right thing to do.

As we have seen earlier God has always been about relationships.

The one thing with relationships is that they are difficult to do on their own.

Have you ever tried to grow in humility on your own?

It's amazing how humble we think we are until someone else enters our bubble

And disagrees with us.

Oh no, they must be wrong because it is certainly not me.

What's happening?

My real, relational humility is being tested in the only way possible, among other people.

Now I can grow as I become more self aware and with the help of others.

The more I get with others, the more opportunities I get to know myself better.

And the same with gentleness

And patience

And 'bearing with one another'

I'm very tolerant with bearing with myself and my shortcomings.

"Oh shame Marc, are you having a tough day, why don't you sit down and have a cookie and some chocolate".

Super tolerant.

The Bible however does not teach that I need to bear with me, it teaches that I need to bear with others.

Where is the place where that happens in a way that I can get the best help to do this properly?

Together, In my FG.

In the relationships God has put me in because that is where my Christian growth can best be helped.

God's plan needs to become my plan.

Just like a child needs to be taught how to interface to the world.

After my second birth, I also need to learn how to relate to my new world that God has chosen me for and whose Lord I have proclaimed is Jesus.

I need to learn to Kingdom filter my thoughts and feelings.

Until I'm only thinking Kingdom thoughts.

Here is what I have noticed in my own walk with God.

At the beginning I made some radical decisions.

I came to church every week.

I came to every midweek, every Bible Talk, every study, every prayer morning, every one-on-one time. It was new and exciting and it felt we were storming the enemy because everyone was doing the same.

We sought the Kingdom first.

Then stuff happened. Life happened. Health happened, Finances happened.

I got older.

People hurt us.

People left the church, maybe they left God, they definitely left us.

People made decisions that were not Kingdom first.

My Kingdom First zeal was being diluted.

The Kingdom stood out at the beginning, head and shoulders above the rest.

Things of the world started becoming of equal importance

You know when we start thinking that way is when we start saying and thinking things like:

"My needs are not being met"

"It's too far"

"I have to study"

"I'm tired"

"I can't get a lift"

"The kids ..."

"It's just another lesson"

And so on

So what is the answer?

When our plan starts deviating from God's plan, then ...
It's time to get back to the Bible.
It's time embrace God's vision again.
It's time to believe God's Word all over again.
Because His Word does not teach this.

3) Through hearing the Word

Words are inspiring
The right words at the right time can inspire a nation.

In the midst of the second world war, Sir Winston Churchill had this to say:

May 13 - to the House of Commons

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be.

That is inspiring
In many ways we can apply that sentiment to our own lives.
We also have an enemy of the most grievous kind.
We also have ahead of us, a time of struggle as we battle this enemy and make headway in our faith.

What is our policy?

To wage war with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us

What is our aim?

Victory, to get through to the end of our lives, faithful to the One and Only God, that is the only victory.
At all costs and however long and hard the road may be.

One more speech

June 4 - to the House of Commons

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or

fail. **We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender ...**

What stirring words, from a Prime Minister to his people.

Words to inspire a people, never to surrender in the fight against the enemy.

Fighting words.

Just like the words Paul used when he encouraged us to look outside of ourselves in Phi 2

We also have an enemy.

He is not as obvious.

Not as visible.

He does not attack us with guns and knives and bombs.

Yet, in many ways he is more insidious.

He attacks us through circumstances

He attacks us by allowing us to entertain negative thoughts

He attacks by weakening our resolve.

And so our faith is weakened.

And the burning desire in our hearts to please our Lord and Saviour is lessened.

And yet, the Bible teaches us a different message.

Let's say you had a Quiet Time one morning and read the following:

Phi 2v1-5

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love,
if any common sharing in the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,*

*²then make my joy complete
by being like-minded,
having the same love,
being one in spirit and of one mind.*

*³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

Let's break it down.

IF I have any inkling, as a Christian, what Jesus has done for me.

That I am now united with Him

That I am now comforted by His love

That we share a common Spirit
If I detect any tenderness or compassion towards me

... then ...

Make Paul's joy complete.

How?

Having the same mind as Christ
The same love and Spirit.

How do I do that?

Don't be selfish
Value others above yourself
Look to the interests of others
In your relationships ... think like Jesus.

Do you see the common denominator.

Me

Thinking too much about me and too little about others.

That is the battle I have to fight every day.

The battle with me.

And the more I overcome me, the more I want to get Together with others.

The more I filter my thoughts and actions using God's Word to guide me

The more God, in whose image I am made, is glorified and His Kingdom built.

God's plan of Relationship and Togetherness

Must become my plan

As I grow in faith through His Word.