

TITLE: WHO WILL WATER YOUR FLOWER? WHY WE GROW BETTER TOGETHER
[FOR SOUTH SHORE COMMUNITY CHURCH; 10.15.05]

THEME: GOD HAS MADE US SUCH THAT WE GROW BETTER TOGETHER THAN IN ISOLATION.

OUTLINE: INTRODUCTION
I: PRAYER SUPPORT
II: LOVING ENVIRONMENT
III: EMOTIONAL AND RELATIONAL HEALING
IV: ENCOURAGEMENT
CONCLUSION

VISUALS: GREEN SMALL GROUP LIST; HOW PEOPLE GROW; BIBLE WATER

VIDEO: COACH CARTER: SCENE 17: 137:50-139:15; SCENE 7: 35:00-36:08 & SCENE 8: 40:55-43:20

HANDOUTS: BULLETIN INSERT

Introduction

† [SMILE!!!] I wore my Rick Warren shirt!

‡ [Subtle] I think Rick would appreciate that. He has a pretty good sense of humor. In the videos we are watching in small group, he's not funny that often, but in his sermons he really is. I read the transcript of one of his sermons this week, and he was teasing all these different groups of people in his congregation! He picked on the people who sneak out early; he says it is so they don't have to hug him.

‡ I also noticed that his sermon notes were over twenty pages long... I don't know how he gets people to sit still that long. Maybe it's his gift of teaching. Maybe twenty pages of sermon notes explains the real reason those people in the back are sneaking out early...

† Enough about Rick. Let's talk about you. Have you ever looked back on the previous year and sadly wondered how you could have done the things you did?

‡ Every year for the past ten or eleven years, I have looked back on the previous year and thought, "How could I have been that foolish?!" This used to drive me crazy! I even began praying that it would end, that just once I would look back on the previous year and think, "Hey, I did alright that year!"

‡ But now I hope that this continues every year for the rest of my life. I hope every year I look back and think, "How could I have been so foolish?!" You see, now I know that what this means is that between that time a year ago and now, I have grown immensely. I have grown in my understanding of God and in my ability to apply his Word to my life. That's why when I look back, I seem to have been foolish before. So I hope that continues for me, and I hope it happens for you too!

‡ My name is Will Groben. I am passionate in my pursuit of God and excited about the opportunity to help you accelerate your spiritual growth.

† We have been going through the forty days of community

‡ We have been discussing on stage and in our small groups how being in a strong biblical community like a small group can help us achieve all five purposes of worship, fellowship, evangelism, service, and today's topic, spiritual growth.

† Last week, Brian said he was being changed from inside out – transformed by God – and that this process would continue throughout his life. The truth is that God desires for us to continuously grow, that we can know him better, obey him better, and reflect his glory better.

- † Romans 12:2: “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.”
- † “Transformation,” that’s a cool word, like the guy in the dramas says. Transformation is a radical word! The Holy Spirit is going to do a transformation in you, to make you like Christ, if only you will choose to cooperate.
- † Colossians 3:10: “...you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.”
- † Here we see that this growth involves our cooperation, it is continual, and that it involves learning from our Bibles, learning about Christ. The more we grow, the more we become like Christ, as it says in this next verse...
- † 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.
- † Philippians 2:13: “For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.”
- † We are supposed to continue growing for the rest of our lives. The question for tonight is why we grow better together than we can alone...

I. We grow better when others are praying for us.

- † I don't know how or why prayer works.
 - † But I do know this: You want to get the Big Guy involved!
- † Paul provides us with many examples of praying for spiritual growth.
 - † Ephesians 1:16-17: “I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.”
 - † Colossians 1:9-10: “So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better.”
- † You can pray scriptures like these into the lives of the people you love. If you want to see change, improvement, growth in your spouse – and come on, who doesn't, right? – or in your children, coworkers, neighbors, friends, family, small group members . . . be praying for their spiritual growth.
 - † When someone makes you angry, don't pray for curses upon their head! Instead, pray they will become like Christ; then they won't annoy you anymore; or if they do, then you will know the problem is in you, not them!
 - † When I first came to South Shore, the pastors and elders immediately started praying for me: I was a loud mouth without maturity, and they saw the need to grow me up quickly before I caused too much destruction.

II. We grow better in an environment that provides acceptance and affirmation.

- † Even though I was allowing my bold tongue to get me in some trouble, I found acceptance and affirmation in this church.
 - ‡ When Rick Warren preached on this at Saddleback, he said that everybody needs affirmation, and we are willing to do almost anything to get it. He mentioned how people on reality shows are willing to eat worms or do whatever so that people will applaud for them.
 - ‡ I thought of how desperation for acceptance often drives us to hang out with the wrong crowd of people. This is especially true for teenagers, but it is true for adults too, and it usually happens because we fail to get acceptance from the good crowd of people.
 - ‡ Romans 12:10: “Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.”
 - ‡ So much of what we have been discussing over the past month has been about showing love to others, in the same ways as God shows love to us. In fact, we are ministering in the way Jesus did.
 - ‡ The people here at South Shore accepted me as I was – understanding that I was not perfect – and they affirmed me as a valued member of the body and as a brother in Christ; and this helped me feel comfortable enough to begin growing.

- † But let’s face it, with five or six hundred people milling around on a Saturday night, it is hard to have deep conversations or meaningful relationships.
 - ‡ In fact, as Brian mentioned a few weeks ago, you might find yourself feeling alone in the crowd.
 - ‡ That is why we have small groups and why most of us are going to them every week.
 - ‡ Romans 15:7: “So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.”
 - ‡ In small groups we have a chance to truly experience the acceptance and affirmation of others.
 - ‡ We need to experience love from God’s people to fully understand it; we need to experience grace from God’s people to fully understand it; so until you are in a healthy Christian community, you are lacking in this area of understanding, and that will hamper your growth.

- † Now if you are in a small group already, think about who in that group you have a hard time accepting.
 - ‡ Don’t look at him or her! Just think about it.
 - ‡ God is going to use that person to help you grow spiritually tonight. Tonight, he wants you to realize that he accepts that person, and therefore so should you!
 - ‡ Then God wants to use you to help that person grow spiritually. But you cannot help anyone grow and reject them at the same time... Relationship comes before influence, and the relationship begins with acceptance and affirmation.
 - ‡ Try to find something positive you can say to the people in your small group, something affirming. This can make a tremendous difference in someone’s life!
 - ‡ I am not wired for teen ministry like Justin and Tony, but I was an effective growth group leader anyway, because the students knew that I loved them. At every opportunity, I tried to affirm the good in them, and they responded to it. And I was tremendously lifted up when one of them or their parents sent me an affirming note.
 - ‡ By the way, this is effective on pastors and elders too... a word of affirmation can really brighten their day. Don’t be afraid to send those cards or emails.

- † Have you seen the movie, Coach Carter? It’s about a guy who tries to rescue the basketball program at a troubled urban school. In this scene a kid shows up at the coach’s door who has repeatedly been

insubordinate, twice left the team, been involved in drug dealing, and now shows up in the middle of the night, covered in blood. Let's see how the coach reacts...

† *Show movie clip: SCENE 17: 137:50-139:15*

† Now you see how they hugged, right? Rick Warren spent a good five or ten minutes talking about different ways to hug each other.

† There's the three pat man-to-man hug, right? In contrast is the truly loving Patty Fleck hug. Rick Warren says that Doug Fields, the youth pastor, grabs his fanny when he hugs him.

† More seriously, he mentions a UCLA study that said we need eight to ten meaningful touches a day for our emotional health. Sometimes church and small group are the only places to get them.

† And sometimes church and small group are the only places where we will truly be accepted and affirmed for who we really are, and therefore the only places we can begin to understand the loving nature of our God.

† Acceptance and affirmation also help us grow by leading to each of the next two points.

† First, acceptance and affirmation lead to emotional and relational healing . . .

III. We grow better when we heal emotionally and relationally.

† Last year, the entire staff read this book, Cloud and Townsend's *How People Grow*.

† They are Christian psychologists. In this book, they revealed some very interesting facts:

† First, God's Plan A is to use other people to help us grow.

† Yes, we are supposed to become self-feeding by learning to study and meditate on God's Word every day, but ...

† God made us to need others in our lives, to help us grow, because so much of what we learn in the Bible, so much of the transformation he wants to work in us, has to do with how we relate to each other.

† You can be the best Bible scholar or theologian in the world, but if you cannot relate to others well, you have missed a main theme.

† Second, the answers to life's problems are in the Bible.

† One of those answers has to do with being in community: "Virtually every emotional and psychological problem, from addictions to depression, has alienation or emotional isolation at its core. Recovery from these problems always involves helping people to get more connected to each other at deeper and healthier levels than they are." [Cloud and Townsend, 122]

† Many emotional and relational problems are truly spiritual in nature,

† So getting right with God and learning to live and relate in his way will cure those problems and provide a fresh start.

† God wants to provide this healing and new beginning, so he can use your past mistakes to help others.

† That is why we have Celebrate Recovery groups and that is why ...

† To have godly relationships, we need to learn to be honest with each other. God is true, and there is no falsehood in him, not even white lies, not even flattery to prevent hurt feelings:

† Ephesians 4:25: "So put away all falsehood and tell your neighbor the truth because we belong to each other."

- † Here is the deception we need to fight: we think if we are open and honest, vulnerable about our imperfections, fears, and failures, then people won't like us.
- † But the truth is if you are not being the real you, you are not really getting acceptance or affirmation for who you are.
- † And the more honest you are, the more people in small groups are going to appreciate you. What is more attractive to you, deceitfulness or integrity?

† The Bible shows us how, in our honesty, we can accelerate our healing:

- † James 5:16: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results."
- † When you experience God's grace and love through your Christian friends, that is when you can truly feel and understand the grace and love God is giving you.
- † In confessing to each other we also get our dirty secrets out into the light. As they say, the beginning of healing is revealing.

† We need this healing, because emotional and relational problems will hamper your spiritual growth

- † God's system is all about love! and selflessness! and yieldedness!
- † So until you learn to love God's way, to put others before yourself, and to yield to God's will in your relationships, you won't be growing much.

† Let me give you an example: Al

- † Al had been coming to this church for six months, and he still only knew the two people who had invited him. He was painfully shy, and as a result he was unhappy, lonely, and a bit alienated from and disillusioned with the church. To his credit, he kept coming.
- † After a church service, LeeAnn invited Al to our small group.
- † Al came to group every week after that. For about two months, he didn't speak, not even during the social time!
- † But as he realized that we accepted him, and as we continued to affirm him and pray for him, he began to relax and become more active in our discussions. Eventually, he became friends with most of us in the group.
- † Now when we met Al, he not only had a lot of emotional and relational issues, he also was confused in a lot of ways about God and being a Christian, even though he had been going to church and reading his Bible for years. This is not a criticism of Al: it is a very common problem for people trying to grow in isolation!
- † Several months later, Al gave an interesting testimony to the group: He had taken a maintenance job at a large retirement facility, and he now found himself sharing the gospel and praying with the residents of that retirement facility!
- † He told us that being in our small group had changed his life!
- † In the small group, Al found acceptance and affirmation; he found people who would pray for him; he found a safe environment to learn how to relate to others, and through that he found healing for his emotional and relational problems, which resulted in accelerated spiritual growth; he was able to overcome his shyness to become a bold sharer of the gospel to relative strangers, and because he was healing and because he had friends with whom to discuss his questions about his faith, he also began to grow in his understanding of God's Word and of God himself.

- † Healing is a first step in spiritual growth. If, tonight, you are hurting emotionally or you are struggling with relationships, let us get you surrounded by people who will love you to good health. This is your first step in further spiritual growth.
- † Last week, when Brian was discussing the dos and don'ts of relationships, he started our healing process by encouraging us to forgive others and let go of painful memories. Now we need to be sure we are in an environment that allows our healing to come to completion.

IV. We grow better when we have encouragement.

- † Let's look at another clip from *Coach Carter*.

- † *show movie clip:* SCENE 7: 35:00-36:08 & SCENE 8: 40:55-43:20

- † This is the first time the student had left the team, and to come back he has to prove to the coach that he is willing to cooperate and make restitution of sorts.

- † Nobody cares about the character or growth of the students until Coach Carter comes into the picture. He is trying to build their sense of team, and you see in this clip that his efforts are beginning to payoff: they are working together

- † He also wants them to excel just as he has, not only on the basketball court but also in school and in life, and they respond to his passion and encouragement.

- † In a small group, you can be immersed in an environment of passionate Christians, who want to encourage you to excel in your growth and in your walk as a Christian, just as they are.

- † Coach Carter also was a role model and mentor, which you can find in small groups too.

- † It helps us to have someone in our lives who is a strong mature Christian, so we can see in real life action the instructions God gives us in the Bible; we can see how it looks and how it works.

- † We need people to show us how to do marriage God's way, how to relate to our children God's way, how to handle stress God's way...

- † A few years ago, I had the privilege of working part-time on the church staff. So I got to work, talk, and pray with all the pastors and elders. This had a tremendous impact on me. Randy's steadfastness; Jeff's unconditional love; Brian's enthusiasm; this vision for what could be created in me a desire and that desire is enough for the HS to start his transforming work.

- † Another way to accelerate your growth is to realize that you are modeling Christ for others! This will cause you to be more attentive to your walk and start thinking more about how to apply the Bible to life situations.

- † This could look like teaching in your group or mentoring someone, or it could just be living the biblical life before those around you. You should be modeling biblical behaviors and responding to things like Christ would.

- † Tiffany example [Keep it short]

- † Nonbelievers in our offices are watching us; our children are watching us; people in our small groups are watching us. And we need to show them that God is real; and that the principles in his Word are life changing.

- † Hebrews 10:24-25: "Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near."

- † We are not to neglect our meeting together . . . back when this was written, the small Christian communities in each town often met daily, sharing meals and discussing life, encouraging each other.
 - † You see the word “encourage” twice in this passage, but in Greek they are two different words.
 - † The first one – par-ox-oos-mos' – which means “stimulate.”
 - † We are to stimulate each other to outbursts of love and good deeds like our small group project. How is this growth?
 - † A) it gets you out following Christ, doing what he did; and there aren't too many of us that are willing to do the things Christ did without someone stimulating us.
 - † B) it works on your heart; as you experience helping others, God softens your heart.
 - † C) you experience God's love and power in action when you serve
- † The second word – par-ak-al-eh'-o – has so much depth to it that the translators here have broken it into two English concepts: to encourage and to warn. This is two sides of the same concept:
- † The first sentence was about our horizontal relationship with others; this one is about our vertical relationship with God.
 - † We are to encourage each other to do the things that will bring us closer to God: that means in our small groups, we should encourage each other to have daily quiet times; attend small group; attend church; get mentoring, to face our issues...
 - † On the flip side of that, we also are to warn each other of when we are drifting away from God, to hold each other accountable to our commitment to follow Christ!
 - † LA finger in throat and why I listen: because I know she loves and respects me and I do her [acceptance; relation good]; describe road rage example.
 - † As Rick Warren said in our workbook, if you don't show up in your friend's life, who will?

Conclusion

- † In the student ministry, we think of the five purposes as a flower
- † The roots are being in a community with acceptance, love, affirmation, and encouragement
 - † As you experience those things, you begin to grow because you are comfortable and because you have passionate Christian people around you; as you grow, you flower into worship, service, and evangelism
 - † You need to grow to flower well, and you need to experience biblical community to grow. You need someone to **water your flower.**
 - † Story of being a student vs. attending classes
 - † are you just attending church, or are you a disciple of Christ?
- † The truth is, if you are not growing then you are stagnating.
- † You don't want to be a lukewarm Christian, right? Jesus compared those to vomit.
 - † God wants you to be passionate about growing spiritually and getting to know him well.
 - † It is hard to be disciplined enough to engage in this with our busy lives. You need community to develop the disciplines you need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit so you can grow.
- † If you are not in a small group, why don't you give one a try?
- † I know, we've been hammering you on this for several weeks now; and maybe if you are not in a small group yet, we'll never convince you... but why not try it?

- † I didn't want to join... pastors invited us . . . six months later had a testimony like Al's
- † There are over thirty adult small groups, including celebrate recovery, young adult, married couples etc.
- † We are not asking for a five year commitment! Just check it out. There will be a table outside...
- † If you are not experiencing true biblical community, then you are not experiencing life the way God intends it . . .and therefore you are missing out on many blessings, including the opportunity to grow deeper in intimacy with God and to follow Christ more closely.

Pray