



FRESH START

You are beginning life's most satisfying adventure – your walk with God! As you start this adventure, here's what God says to you:

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be —you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean. Psalm 32:11 (MSG)

When you make a commitment of your life to Jesus, not only is your "slate wiped clean", you also get a "fresh start" – a new lease on life. This class is designed to help you have a good start to your fresh start. During these weeks together you'll discover and begin to unwrap ten gifts that God gives you:

- F**ORGIVENESS – Accepting God's Grace
- R**ELATIONSHIP – Worshipping
- E**NCOURAGEMENT – Handling Failure
- S**CRPTURE – Understanding God's Word
- H**ELP – Following God's Guidance

- S**HAPE – Being You
- T**OGETHERNESS – Living in Community
- A**UTHORITY – Serving Others
- R**ECOGNITION – Being Baptized
- T**ESTIMONY – Telling Your Story

This session: TOGETHERNESS – Living in Community

Descriptions are extremely important. One day a rabbit and a snake met in the woods and began talking. The snake had never seen a rabbit and the rabbit had never seen a snake. So the snake asks the rabbit, "What are you?" The rabbit replies, "Well I really don't know. I've never seen myself so I'm not sure what I am. If you would be kind enough to describe me, then maybe I could figure out what I am and we would both know." The snake was glad to oblige so he started the description. He said, "You are furry, you hop, and you have a tail like cotton." The rabbit said, "I'm a rabbit. Oh thank you, I'm a rabbit." Then looking at the snake the rabbit asks, "Well, what are you." The snake says, "You know, I don't know what I am either if you would describe me maybe I could figure out what I am too." The rabbit said, "Sure. Well, you have two little beady

eyes, you have a forked tongue, you slither along the ground, you're deceptive, and low down." Suddenly the snake said, "I'm a television evangelist."

Descriptions! How would you describe the church?

The most powerful description of the church in the Bible is that of community, being together.

For where two or three gather together because they are Mine, I am there among them. Matthew 18:20 (NLT)

In Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Ephesians 2:22 (NIV)

What do I need to experience community?

1. A clear identity.

Our clear identity is that we belong to Jesus and to each other. God called us to be one with Him and with one another. We cannot be the people of God and shut out others.

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (NLT)

We have to remember that in Jesus, all the things that normally would separate us are wiped away. We are all God's children and it doesn't matter what race, color, or creed the individual has, his or her entrance into the kingdom comes the same way, through the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is the tie that binds us together.

Jesus Christ is Lord

That is the one confession that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus doesn't accept us on the basis of our standing as South Africans, or because of our view of the Bible, or a title we tag on ourselves, or any other topic that some would like to make an issue. The only basis on which Jesus accepts us is our coming as repentant sinners, seeking His forgiveness and calling on Him as Lord. We don't have to walk alike, look alike, and smell alike to be in the same family. The man was right who said, "We can be brothers without being twins."

Our clear identity is that we belong to Jesus and to each other.

2. A consistent purpose

What is the purpose of your life? This is an age old question. The answer is – to love God, to love His people, to live your life and advance His kingdom while doing this. The way we do this is through family. So often, our purpose can get lost in the midst of our living because we get so busy and distracted.

So often, our purpose can get lost in the midst of our living because we get so busy. There was once a man who wrote his own epitaph. It read: Born a human being -- died a wholesale grocer. He explained, "I was so busy selling groceries that I did not have time to get married and have a family. I did not have time to travel or for the movies, or concerts, or for reading. I did not have time for community affairs. All of these were pushed out of my life by groceries. I was successful but I never had a life."

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

We want to be so very consistent in our purpose that our church is structured around the five biblical purposes of the church.

Here at Oakhill those 5 bases are:

- **Encounter**

Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Matthew 4:10 (NIV)

- **Engage**

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church.... Acts 2:41 (NLT)

- **Equip**

Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.... Hebrews 6:1 (NIV)

- **Empower**

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16 (NIV)

- **Export**

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.... Ephesians 3:10 (NIV)

Our family has a very specific flavor. It's to create a holistic person that works on these purposes with God and people.

3. A credible church family

They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. Acts 2:42 (NLT)

If you grew up in a church as I grew up in, you grew up with an extremely distorted view of the word fellowship. Fellowship at best was getting together to eat, at worst it was standing on the back steps of the church smoking a cigarette between Sunday School and Worship. And the conversation between two guys would go something like this: "How's it going at work?" "Fine." "Zat a new truck?" "Nah, it's used." "What you gonna do this week?" "Not much." "Well it's been good fellowshiping with you."

Anything under the category of fellowship was all very, very surface level. But....

The word in the Bible for fellowship is: koinonia

It was true fellowship and in the Bible, fellowship has the ability to revolutionize lives. Masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited and tenderness flows. People really become brothers and sisters in Christ.

And, unfortunately, that's something that very few of us have ever experienced. We grew up thinking church was a place where you put on your mask. And the implicit understanding was you shouldn't have a problem if you are a Christian. But, if you do, for God's sake, don't tell anybody about it. We just kind of bumped lives very superficially, and we called that fellowship. But the kind of fellowship where we become family is crucial to your and my becoming a devoted Christ-follower.

A little boy was asked to define fellowship. He said, "I guess it is two fellows in a ship." That's a pretty good definition because when two fellows are together in a ship they go up together, they go down together, they move forward at the same pace, they are together in a common purpose, sailing the same direction, both working to get to the same destination.

What's needed?

- Authenticity

During the Gulf War a nurse wrote to her mother: "Mom, I've seen a fellow here I'd really like to get to know - but they won't let us wear makeup, so he doesn't have any idea what I really look like."

Many of us go through life trying to impress people. We wear masks at church, at work, at play, at school, and anywhere else we might happen to be.

– *What a person plants he will harvest. Galatians 6:7 (MSG)*

When we're honest with one another, when we are authentic, then we're able to do what we're supposed to do in the family of Christ, the community of faith as we live life together...look at this verse...this is how we are to do community.

*Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2 (NIV)*

- **Commitment**

What is a friend? Erma Bombeck said, "A friend is somebody who doesn't go on a diet when you are fat." Someone else said, "A friend is someone who goes on the same diet with you (& cheats with you)."

Here are a few others: "A friend is someone who will keep your secrets and never divulge them - even if tortured and tempted by chocolate."

"Friends are those rare people who ask how we are and then wait to hear the answer."

"A friend is someone who thinks you're a good egg, even though you're slightly cracked."

A friend is always loyal. Proverbs 17:17 (NLT)

When the going gets tough? What happens? Who is really there for you?
And that's closely related to this next characteristic of a credible church family.

- **Devotion**

We could talk about this one...but I think we'll really get it if we see it. In the movie "Forrest Gump," Forrest...enters the army and is sent to Vietnam. In his platoon, he is befriended by Bubba...one of the few real friends Forrest ever had. They come under enemy attack, and Bubba is missing. Forrest goes into enemy fire to rescue his friend Bubba. Bubba dies in Forrest's arms and Forrest makes a reference to Bubba being his only real friend.

Jesus said...

*This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. John 15:13
(MSG)*

Jesus intends for us to be that devoted to each other.

- **Encouragement**

Everyone needs to be encouraged – Everyone! We need an authentic, honest cheerleader Whether you're 2 or 92, we all need affirmation from time to time. So every one of us should be an encourager.

– encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

Queen Victoria had 2 powerful prime ministers: William Gladstone & Benjamin Disraeli. When asked to compare them she said, "When I'm with William Gladstone I feel like I'm with the greatest leader in the world. When I'm with Benjamin Disraeli I feel like I'm the greatest leader in the world."

The best way for you to get connected in community is through a small group. Information about small groups is on our website: www.oakhill.org.za

- **A connecting communion**

When we talk about "living in community" that does not mean the town where you live. Look what we're told about some of the first Christians, these new believers:

They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing the Lord's Supper. Acts 2:42 (NLT)

They devoted themselves to "sharing the Lord's Supper." The goal was not to eat, but to develop community. While they may have been eating their regular meals, they also were breaking the bread together representing the body of Christ and drinking the cup together representing the blood of Christ.

There is not a more vivid picture of what the Father did for us in the Son than the celebration of the Lord's Supper. No two substances of nature better symbolize community and unity than bread, made from a multiplicity of grains of wheat, and the fruit of the vine made from a multiplicity of grapes. No two substances in nature suffer more to become what they are than bread, which goes through fire, and the fruit of the vine that goes through great pressure. No two substances in nature have more traditionally nourished people than bread and the fruit of the vine. These elements symbolize unity, suffering, nourishment.

When these believers broke bread together they were saying, "We will be one. We will stand together." They were surrendering their individualism for the sake of the body. They gave up what was important to themselves for the good of the whole. They gave priority to what was best for the future of their group, rather than their own preferences or desires.

When these believers broke bread together they were saying, "We might suffer, but we will do it together." They lifted one another in burdens and rejoiced with one another in successes. Others became more important than self.

We are to nourish one another, to build a new kind of community, and the Lord's Supper is a picture of our being in community with the one who died for us and our community with one another. Perhaps that's why it has been called "Communion" in history. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we should know more and more of Him, and know more and more of each other.

In a society that celebrates the loner and thinks of self. We need to stand out because of our love for one another and togetherness.

In our next session:

AUTHORITY

– Serving Others

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