

# THE COMPANION (INTIMACY WITH GOD)

## The Renewed Church:

John 17:20-26

October 5, 2003

Bethany Church

Wesley J. Gabel

A man walked into a psychiatrist's office and blubbered, "O Doctor, O Doctor, I think I'm curtains." "What did you say?" asked the doctor. "I think I'm curtains. I think I'm drapes," the man sobbed. The psychiatrist looked disgusted and said, "Man, pull yourself together."

"Pull yourself together?" Not the most helpful expression to use with someone who thinks he is a curtain! Good intentions and even a graduate degree don't always lead to the desired results, do they? A few weeks ago we discussed that we have been shaped by churches that may not be healthy. That is not just true of one congregation or one denomination. Did you know that between 1990 and 2000 over 100,000 churches in the United States closed their doors? Not a single county experienced a net gain in churches. The American church is in trouble. It needs healing and renewal.

Michael Wuehler superintends United Methodist churches in Southeastern Minnesota. He shared a reality check at the Men's Advance last weekend. He identified five categories of churches: beginning, transforming, reproducing, maintaining and dying. He defined a *beginning church* as one that is creating or reclaiming a healthy balance of reaching out to lost people and developing current believers as disciples. They have made plans and devote significant

resources to reach and develop more people. A *transforming church* both reaches lost people and develops believers. As a result it experiences growth in attendance and giving. According to Mike, a *reproducing church* plans and starts new congregations or campuses. This is the true missionary church. God reaches great numbers of his lost children through church planting. It is my hope that eventually every one of you will personally help start a new congregation or campus. A *maintaining church* focuses primarily on members. It has no plan to reach lost people, is stable or declining in attendance and often suffers financial problems. Mike finally categorized some churches as *dying*. He said that their decline in attendance appears irreversible. They offer little effort or support for the kind of changes that are necessary to regain health. How are the 73 churches Mike superintends doing? Some 16 are beginning, 6 are transforming (Bethany is one of the six), zero are reproducing, 31 are maintaining and 20 are dying. This is sad news not only for these congregations, but also for the communities they serve. Doesn't Jesus care about these churches and their communities? Don't you think he loves these people?

Did you know Jesus prayed for them? He prayed for them and us. He told his father:

***I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony.*** (John 17:20, NLT)

That is for them; and that is for us, isn't it? Jesus prayed for us, and here is what he asked:

***My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father — that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.*** (John 17:21, NLT)

Jesus prayed that you, I and other believers would have the same relationship with one another that he had with his father. They were one, and he prayed that we together would be one. He also prayed that just as the Father was in Jesus and Jesus was in the Father we would be in the Father and in Jesus. In other words, we would share in that intimate divine fellowship. We would know God and his will because we were in him and he was in us.

There is a threefold plan for us. A – Anointing! I – Intimacy! M – Mission! We are to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. Peter told Cornelius:

***You know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with him.*** (Acts 10:38, NLT)

Jesus did all he did because he was anointed. He told his followers to wait for that anointing. They were to be clothed with the same power Jesus had. However, Jesus was effective because also he was intimate with the Father. He once said:

***I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.*** (John 5:19-20, NIV)

We are to share that same intimacy with our Father. That is what Jesus prayed. Then and only then can we accomplish our mission, for we have been given the same mission as Jesus.

***“As the Father sent me,”*** Jesus said, ***“so I send you!”*** (John 20:21)

Throughout the book of Acts, there are vignettes that reveal not only this threefold plan, but especially the intimacy believers experienced with God. Luke records the communion believers had with the Father through the Holy Spirit who both lived in and led believers. The Spirit talked to Philip (Acts 8:29), Paul (Acts 9:4-5), Ananias (Acts 9:10-11), Peter (Acts 10:19), prayer groups (Acts 13:1-3) and the whole church (Acts 15:28). No wonder Paul ends his final letter to the believers in Corinth with this prayer and blessing:

***May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*** (2 Corinthians 13:13)

Paul prayed that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all the believers of Corinth. That is what I pray every Sunday over you. I want Jesus and Paul’s prayer to be fulfilled in you all. I want us all to experience the intimacy that Jesus prayed for. How can we experience it? Let’s consider how Jesus and his followers developed it.

First, Jesus' followers started differently than Jesus. They began with repentance and forgiveness. We have to begin there to. Unless you realize your sins cause separation and that Jesus came to deal with them and reconcile you, everything you do to become intimate will be in vain. Reconciliation always precedes intimacy.

Second, Jesus began his trek of intimacy with the Scriptures. The disciples began their journey by listening to Jesus and his take on the Scriptures. If you ignore the Bible, you ignore the words of your Father in heaven. Get a Bible. Read it daily. Bring it to church. Read it and mark it as we discuss its message. (I'm asking my leaders to do that. I'm assigning my confirmation students that; and I'm encouraging you). Take your Bible wherever you go. It's your toolbox for life. It reveals God's desire and direction for all humanity, and often there will be counsel for the very situation you are in.

Third, Jesus received the anointing of the Spirit. So did his disciples. Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life. Open the door of your heart to him. Ask him to come in. Share your life with him. He's to eat with you. He's to be your companion in the basic tasks of living.

Fourth, Jesus immediately began to pray and fast. The disciples did that as soon as they were separated physically from Jesus. Next spring we as a church will take an intense, collective look at fasting. Jesus called and called and called us to pray. Answer his call!

Finally, embrace your sisters, brothers and their spiritual gifts. Your heavenly father meets with his family. Together they become a temple where he lives and acts. Don't isolate yourself. Get involved... especially where growth is pursued.

The church is not an institution. It is a people. You are the church if you believe. And you will be renewed if you choose. Will you choose?