



Ma Ke Alo o: *Presence*: Competing for Community

Purpose of Community

When we consider community, what are some things that come to mind in terms of the purpose of community? While many of us can think of the benefits of community in both providing a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose within a neighborhood and actual place, the unspoken hardship is that, most of us, if we're honest with ourselves, are either met with disappointment because of community or are at a stagnant point. We're faced with comparisons, unmet expectations, polarizing beliefs and values, and unfairness. An honest question we are often faced with is, "What does Community do for me?"

Matthew 20:20-28 (TPT)

The wife of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons, [James] and John. She knelt before him and asked him for a favor. He said to her, "What is it that you want?"

She answered, "Make the decree that these, my sons, will rule with you in your kingdom—one sitting on your right hand, one on your left." Jesus replied, "You don't know what you are asking." Then, looking in the eyes of Jacob and John, Jesus said, "Are you prepared to drink from the cup of suffering that I am about to drink? And are you able to endure the baptism into death that I am about to endure?" They answered him, "Yes, we are able."

"You will indeed drink the cup of my suffering and be immersed into my death," Jesus told them. "But to be the ones who sit at the place of highest honor is not mine to decide. My Father is the one who chooses them and prepares them."

The other ten disciples were listening to all of this, and a jealous anger arose among them against the two brothers. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, called them to his side and said, "Kings and those with great authority in this world rule oppressively over their subjects, like tyrants. But this is not your calling. You will lead by a completely different model. The greatest one among you will live as the one who is called to serve others, because the greatest honor and authority is reserved for the one with the heart of a servant. For even the Son of Man did not come expecting to be served but to serve and give his life in exchange for the salvation of many."

Even in a tight-knit community like among Jesus' closest friends, community was at the verge of being fractured because of how each individual was thinking about the purpose of Community. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts and intentions, was redefining the purpose of Community for them. In place of a system of one-upping one another and trying to gain benefit through the Community, Jesus was showing that serving one another and having the heart of self-giving love was the purpose of Community.

James 4:1-3

What is the cause of your conflicts and quarrels with each other? Doesn't the battle begin inside of you as you fight to have your own way and fulfill your own desires? You jealously want what others have so you begin to see yourself as better than others. You scheme with envy and harm others to selfishly obtain what you crave—that's why you quarrel and fight. And all the time you don't obtain what you want because you won't ask God for it! And if you ask, you won't receive it for you're asking with corrupt motives, seeking only to fulfill your own selfish desires.

Disunity, quarrels, in-fighting within Community – these seemingly *external* triggers – actually come from *internal* desires. It comes from asking that honest question, "What does Community do for me?"

What do we do with those kinds of desires? How do we actually become people who ask the question, "What can I do for the Community" before demanding, "What does the Community do for me?" What is actually happening inside of us to land often in the place of my personal gain or benefit from Community versus my contribution towards the benefit and gain of the whole Community?

It has to do with the heart.

Throne seat in the heart

Who or what is primarily sitting in the throne of my heart? What is capturing my worship and attention most?

Going from "Community for me" to "Me for Community" mentality requires us to examine what is seated in the prominent seat – THRONE – in our hearts. What is competing for that seat of prominence? If imitation of Jesus is there, then it's easier to live out a service and self-giving love for others. But, if something or someone else is there, then most of the times, unfulfilled expectations, envy, and selfish gain are used as weapons against one another.

Sometimes, it's hard to answer that question. For most of us, we don't really realize that this is going on until it's too late or it's so embedded into our culture that we don't think twice about

it. But, if we truly begin to examine our own hearts, we can easily see that we seek something else over the heart of Jesus:

Power: control, voice/say

Popularity: identity/worth, reputation, likability

Productivity: accomplishment, achievement

Most of the disunity, quarrels, in-fighting within Community stems from individuals valuing the heart of power, popularity or productivity over the heart of Jesus. What is competing for the throne in your heart?

Eyes on Jesus

At this point, once we realize that there's a competing something or someone in the throne seat, we try to change our behaviors to better ourselves. We will ourselves to become "better people" or less selfish people. We grow in either shame from the guilt of not being "right" or we attempt to change outward appearances or behaviors to look like we're living "right". But, matters of the heart can only transform in the heart. And not one of us can change this.

This is the redemptive power of Jesus. And it's in our relationship with Jesus that transforms our hearts to become people who love the Community.

If Power is what competes for your heart, it's not in trying to give it up ourselves that leads to resentment, but it's in looking at Jesus and loving and trusting his control and his work of using power to serve others. He is in total control and it's for your very good.

If Popularity is what competes for your heart, it's not in erasing your own identity or allowing others to slander your reputation that all leads to shame, but it's in looking at Jesus and loving and trusting what He says about who you are. You are more loved than you can ever imagine.

If Productivity is what competes for your heart, it's not in become undisciplined or demonizing accomplishment, but it's in looking at Jesus and loving and trusting his way of work as worship that establishes flourishing for all not just a few or just oneself. Your work doesn't measure your worth.

What is competing for the throne in your heart?

Holy Spirit, how can I move forward in putting you at the center of my heart?