**New Hope Global Sermon “Body Life”**

**Introduction**

Our move back to Wheaton this summer has literally only been possible through the help of many, many different people. It has been a practical example to all of us of the blessing and necessity of Body Life for survival. In our upcoming book, *Thinking Outside the Box,* this is another key concept we highlight. In fact, we open the chapter on Christian Community with this quote from Ajith Fernando, a world-renowned Bible scholar and practitioner from Sri Lanka:

According to the Bible, the entire Christian life, including spiritual growth, battling sin and Satan, and serving God are intended to be done in community. Community life is an integral part of the Christian life because Christianity is by nature a community religion.“ (A. Fernando, *NIV Application Commentary, Ac*ts, 1998, p. 125)

God has made this possible through the Body of Christ. Hence, another crucial element of the supracultural gospel is belonging to the Body of Christ. This is necessary for the believer’s survival. From this perspective it is essential in the supracultural gospel to maintain that the individualism embedded in the West is not a Biblical emphasis. All those who come to faith in Christ *need to live out their Christian lives connected to the Body of Christ*. This will protect them and grow the church. Christianity is a communal religion at its core. The Body of Christ is central to the Christians’ growth.

**A Communal Religion**

We use a deep sea diving analogy to illustrate the necessity of this aspect of Christian discipleship:

Years ago the only means of going to the bottom of the ocean was in a diving suit. It was made of thick canvas and was complete with weighted shoes, a heavy metal headpiece with a window to look out, a long rope to jerk if something went wrong, and an air hose that supplied oxygen. Everything about the environment into which the diver went was hostile--there were a thousand things that could go wrong and cost the diver his life. For that reason, the crews constantly monitored the air hose to make sure everything was okay, and the long rope was the diver’s assurance that s/he could signal for immediate help if needed, and that help would instantly lift the diver back up out of the water. The church is God’s way of helping believers be connected to others who are vital to their survival, growth, and exploration.(Adapted from J.S.Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession*, Baker Books, 2013, p. 153).

Being vitally connected to other people is, indeed, essential for our survival and well-being.

In the early church Body life involved a reaching out, a support, a concern, a longing, much prayer, and a welcoming hospitality. Paul stressed it in each of his church plants through the over 50 “one anothers” in the New Testament. Believers were called to be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10), to accept one another (Rom. 15:7), to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13), to carry each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:7), to forgive each other (Gal. 4:32), to admonish one another (Gal. 3:16), to build each other up (Eph. 4:32, I Thess. 5:11), to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other (James 5:16), and to use our gifts to serve one another (I Peter 4:10).

Ray Stedman, a North American Pastor adds:

These one anothers. . . call us to a special kind of life together. . . . The New Testament lays heavy emphasis on the need for Christians to know each other, closely and intimately enough to be able to bear each other’s burdens, confess faults to another, encourage one another, exhort one another, admonish one another and minister to one another with the Word, song and prayer. As we carry out the various “one another” ministries of the New Testament–style Body Life, we all come to comprehend “with all the saints what is the width, length, depth and height of the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge” (Eph. 3:18-19).(Ray Stedman, *Body Life* reprinted, 1995, pp. 151-157)

Similarly, Wayne Cordeiro, in his book *Doing Church as a Team*, calls that being in alignment. This becomes an important strength component of vision in the Body of Christ. He says:

“Everyone pulling together for the [same] cause is alignment. . . . You can have the most visionary ideals but without alignment you will not be able to achieve them. . . . When everyone is in alignment, every daily activity contributes in a more meaningful way to the overall vision of the church.. (Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team*, Regal Books, 2019. pp. 150-151)

**The Theory Put Into Practice**

That’s the New Testament theory which was lived out practically in the first century. It has been lived out in all the successive generations since then. Keith and my experience is yet another demonstration in our contemporary post-Christian culture of what this concept looks like today**.** Here’s a praise report I wrote in our first week back to Wheaton. It starts, of course, with God’s goodness and leading:

1. The Lord heard my cry to return to Wheaton and has made it possible.
2. Hanny flew down to Orlando from Michigan to drive our van up to Wheaton on the 2 day trip – June 22 and 23. Our grandson Sam also came from his home base south in Naples Florida to drive the U Haul truck.
3. On Sunday Bruce and Becky helped me wrap some of our furniture for the truck and on Monday Becky continued some wrapping as Bruce and Sam loaded the truck. Everything we hoped to get in, and more, fit in the truck because of Bruce’s excellent packing skills. Even several of the items we had crammed into our van were able to be transferred to the truck so we had more space in the car for the long drives. (Many of the extra items I had not thought I would bring fit in the truck and are being stored in the basement of our new house until we can get our own place next summer!)
4. Bruce and Becky were very gracious in our leaving and kind in all the preparations needed for the trip.
5. Keith and I both did fine on the drives, and both drivers had great attitudes and wisdom in driving and strength to drive the long distances solo.
6. The weather was great for the drives and God granted us safety the whole way.
7. When we arrived in Wheaton a team of friends were here at the house, waiting for us. They were Given, Marti, Bing, Kun, Miyuki and Joe. Together with Hanny and Sam this team got everything set up, unpacked and unwrapped from the endless bubble wrap around all the furniture etc.
8. I had 3 different meals I had already prepared; Yandan sent over a pot of rice; we heated it all up and everyone filled their plates and ate outside in our backyard on the assortment of outdoor chairs that had been donated forthe house. The weather was perfect for that outdoor picnic– in the low 80’s, sunshine, low humidity and the comment was “This is just like the church.” A fellowship dinner the first night. (We have another fellowship meal planned for this Saturday, July 10th, in honor of Evan’s visit from Norfolk. After the second week, Kun and Yandan bought Keith a wonderful lounge chair which he can sit in to enjoy the outdoors. That, of course, will be his chair of honor at the party.)
9. Marti gathered an incredible number of things (many from Buy Nothing! Or curbside finds ) that we needed in this home – everything from my bed, a comfy chair for the guest room, a small dining table for the living room, a lamp and table combo, a coffee pot, a blender, an iron and ironing board, a bureau for the guest room, a can opener, etc.!! Miyuki also gave me her single bed for the guest room.
10. Bing’s friend had stored several items for us since our Easter visit and Bing brought those over to the house and then this week hung all our pictures and stained glass.
11. Several people brought some staples and a few items from Whole Foods that I found the next day – everything from boxed cereal to lunchmeat to organic cauliflower😊).
12. Thanks to this team by Wed. evening the 23rd all the beds were properly assembled, made up and ready for Hanny, Keith and I to go to sleep in our new quarters tired & happy.
13. Two days later Sarah Swygart, who used to be our church administrator and a supporter of the church, came for the day and she and Hanny unwrapped many of the kitchen things. They also had hours to share their common challenges and joys as counselors and we prayed for each other as we enjoyed a luncheon together. We also took trips to the hardware and grocery stores.
14. Because we needed to reconnect with our doctors, Keith and I each had appointments that second week before we had a caregiver. Luke took us to my doctor’s appointment, and then 2 days later Bing took us to Keith’s appointment.
15. On the second Sunday afternoon in Wheaton Kun and Yandan came and took us grocery shopping and a needed stop at Ace Hardware.
16. Luke and Ruth and almost 5 year old Gabriella, the family we will be living with, have been so helpful and accommodating. Keith and Gabriella have been precious as they interact together. She gives Keith joy, and Luke and Ruth have worked hard to help us set up the kitchen together and make each part of our new life together smooth and enjoyable.
17. Evan has come for our third week in Wheaton and helped me get my car registered back in Wheaton with the proper title and license plates etc. No small feat, if you know the DMV process. Last night he was even playing on his guitar in the guest room and little Gabriella came downstairs with her Mom and they had a sing-a-long as Evan played all kinds of happy, little choruses – including Jesus Loves Me!
18. Last week Carmen Gunderson, my prayer partner who is home on a 3 month furlough from she and David’s mission work in Niger, W. Africa, came and we had a special prayer session out on the front lawn. This week I had a similar time with Lanie Van Wyk, another dear friend from our College Church Cultural Connection days, and then a luncheon yesterday as Sarah came back and she and Keith and I and Evan all had lunch out on the front lawn. All friends who are part of our broader community and very dear prayer partners from past years.

The list could go on. That’s the amazing truth. But can you see all the different “one anothers” that were lived out in our moving-in story and how many different roles people had in making our transition to Wheaton possible? Practical love that is meeting our practical needs!

Many of these friends are now giving the on-going support we need in this new chapter of our lives. For us it is quite literally a matter of survival, (As the old saying goes, “I can get by with lots of help from my friends.”). But more than that, our Body Life together enables us to thrive here.

A final puzzle piece to put in place is the future of ministry possibilities. Our expectations of an international grad student ministry in Orlando didn’t materialize. But here in Wheaton we are again within walking distance of the Wheaton College/Grad School and my connections are already firmly established. New international grads come back to the campus next month, so we will see the people the Lord will lead us to whom we can welcome, encourage, disciple and journey with as another extension of His church experiencing Body Life. Praise Him!! And great gratitude to all those who have made our transition possible! Amen.

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