

Date: 09-08-2019
Series: Life Groups

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE GROUPS

(Selected Scriptures)

Bonnie Ware, an Australian nurse, has spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. As Ware walked with her patients through the final stages of their lives, she witnessed how many of her patients gained "phenomenal clarity of vision" as they approached death. Ware claims, "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again."

According to Ware, these are the top four regrets of the dying:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

Bonnie Ware added, "Health brings a freedom few realize, until they no longer have it."

2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

Ware observed, "This [regret] came from every male patient that I nursed."

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

"Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others Many [patients] developed illnesses related to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result."

4. I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends.

"There are many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying."

(Comments here about the start-up of our **Life Groups** and the importance of friendship.)

Title: The Importance of Life Groups (Prayer)

It's no news flash that friends make us happy, but Dr. Meliksah Demir, a professor at Northern Arizona University, has drilled down to reveal exactly what about friendship warms our hearts. **It turns out that companionship—** simply doing things together—is the component of friendship that most makes us happy. And the reason friends make us happy, Demir has concluded, is that they make us feel that we matter.

1. **Close friendships** are God's will for our lives

Proverbs 17:17-----¹⁷ **A friend loves at all times**, And a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24-----²⁴ A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, But **there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother**.

Proverbs 27:6-----⁶ **Faithful are the wounds of a friend**, But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

Proverbs 27:17-----¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron, So **a man sharpens the countenance of his friend**.

Jesus modeled this for us:

Matthew 11:19-----¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, **a friend of tax collectors and sinners!**'

And he called 12 men to Himself that He would pass the spiritual baton to just 3 or 4 years later! Jesus was the iron that was sharpening the iron that would take His words all over the world!

2. **Culture** makes friendship difficult

(Words here about grandma's street and the homes having porches--- vs. today when we have fences (sometimes eight feet tall) and automatic garage doors (kids today could not imagine a time when people had to, God forbid, get out of their cars to open the garage door!)

Americans don't do very well at friendship. In England, at least they stop twice a day for tea. We don't even do that!

Jesus said we need to be careful or:

Mark 4:19-----...**the cares of this world**, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in **choke the word**, and it becomes unfruitful.

Close friendships are part of that word that gets choked.

3. **Life Groups spur spiritual growth**

Last week I preached that self-discipline involves **determination** and **time** and I used basketball legend Dirk Nowitzki as an example. The determination he had to be great and the time he took to be great made a difference. And the same is true when it comes to small groups! Our Life Groups get us into God's Word and spur us on to dig deeper into the things of God. They motivate us to invest our time in eternal matters. And then when we come together, we can motivate each other through what we have learned and how God has changed us.

Hebrews 10:24–25-----²⁴ And let us consider one another **in order to stir up love and good works**,²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

4. **We never know when the bottom might drop out**

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10-----⁹ Two *are* better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls, For *he has* no one to help him up.

So often when people on the streets come and ask for help, I ask them if they have family or friends. And so often, people say, “We don’t get along,” or, “They won’t help me.”

How great it is to have a friend close to you that will help you than to have to call a flesh and blood family member that lives in another city or state. How great it is to know that you have friends you can call in the middle of the night if an emergency arises.

5. **Life is simply better when you have close friendships**

Proverbs 27:10-----¹⁰ Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, Nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; **Better is a neighbor nearby** than a brother far away.

“Better is a neighbor nearby” doesn’t just apply to emergencies. Over the years, there are so many memories of things we done together as a group

and the fun and enjoyment of those times together whether it was a cookout, Rangers game, movie, or whatever the activity was.

Chicago-area pastor Mike Woodruff said there are several reasons why people might choose to avoid a Life Group:

- (1) It takes time
- (2) It will cost you and you might rather have more money
- (3) You may be scared of being known

Pastor Woodruff said: “You think that if people knew the *real* you, they would walk away. It’s too scary to risk opening up your life. But that’s where grace comes in. That’s what’s so amazing about the way God has set this up. I understand the fear, but I’m here to tell you that there is freedom on the other side of this endeavor.

- (4) You may think that all is fine and you don’t need others
- (5) You would rather watch TV than work on friendships.

Woodruff quoted John Steinbeck who said he was lonely because he liked people better in his mind than he did in person. (You might be able to relate to that.)

- (6) You don’t know where to start

The place to start is right here, by joining one of our groups that start this week.

Closing story:

Stephen Mansfield tells a true story about a church and its ministry to men. For years the driving force behind the men's ministry was a man named Taylor. His ministry lasted for years, changing lives and impacting the community. But in the midst of a major transition within the church, Taylor got hurt deeply and he left the church. He wouldn't talk to anybody. People figured he'd come back eventually, but he didn't.

Finally, some of the men in the church took it upon themselves to reach out to him. After some discussion with the other guys at church they came up with a bold plan: they would set up camp in Taylor's yard—entire groups of men! So they set up rotating shifts and said they

wouldn't leave until Taylor came out. They had electric lines running from neighboring houses to power televisions. **BBQ grills worked** up some great food. They were in for the long haul! They even had big signs all over the place: "Taylor, come out." "We love you." "Taylor, we know you're in there."

Taylor didn't appreciate it. **He even called the police** on his former friends. As a matter of fact, the police showed up twice a day for almost a week. And every time they came, Taylor would come to the door to explain the situation. And every time the men camping in his yard would explode with cheers until Taylor finished his chat with the police and went back inside.

But on the sixth day, when Taylor opened the door for the police and the men exploded with cheers, **Taylor finally broke down** and started crying his eyes out. He sputtered how sorry he was, and then he came out from his porch and greeted the guys who had camped in his yard and refused to go away. Such is the power of committed, persistent friendship.

(Closing comments)