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Sent: Friday, September 30, 2005 12:08 PM

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Subject: Sorry so late, but quality is what matters

40 Days of Community

A Set of Thoughts, Ideas, Questions and Ponderings
Submitted for your Digestion
September 30, 2005 Day 6

Introduction: We are all in “*this*” 2gether. No one is getting out alive. As we explore what it means to be in community through Rick Warren’s better together it is essential that we tailor make this study to fit our communities. This devotional is meant to be a conversation starter. It is personal musings on the daily readings’ subject. If another author is not noted then the opinions expressed are those of Jodi Haier and only reflect her understandings and her journey. If you do not wish to receive a devotional a day for the next 40 days, please respond to this email with a thoughtful “no, thank you” ” **Instead of just forwarding this *please* send people’s email to me. I am not trying to be a control freak but I want to know where God’s going with this. People viewing this on the webpage can contact the webmaster with any comments. THANKS! Jodi**

Fellowship 2gether: “cultivating a life in common”

(1Cor 1:10) We are all storytellers in our own fashion. There is a young man that continually shares a yarn about a teacher that threw spaghetti against the walls of his church. Well, as you may have guessed I am that woman. We were raising money for some team by throwing a spaghetti dinner. I was in the kitchen of the Stittville UMC and in charge of cooking the pasta. It was early in both my marriage and my teaching career. I still believed that I knew a whole bunch about everything. Well the young man came to the kitchen window and asked when the next batch of pasta would be ready. I lifted a spoonful of spaghetti and asked if he could tell if it was done. He answered that he didn’t know that’s why he was asking me. I told him with surety that the only way to really see if pasta was done was to throw a strand against the wall. If the strand stuck it was done. He said, “Throw away!” I did. The pasta was done. Soon it was plated and everyone was served not only with the tasty pasta but with the story as well. Soon people were staring in the window to see if that crazy woman was going to start a food fight with herself in their kitchen.

Part of having a life in common is sharing the same stories. Inside jokes are very powerful. When they move from being entry codes into a club to being shared tales of values and experiences, they can create community. Sharing stories are part of the cultivation process. However, creating new stories to share is a sign of health. What story will your actions tell about your journey?

Grow 2gether: “accepting, affirming, and advising”

(Rom 15:7, 1Thess 5:11, Col 3:16) It has always shocked me when people have come to me for advice. I keep trying to see what about my life would compel someone to ask for advice. When I was in my 20’s, parents would ask me what to do with their 10 year old. I was fresh out of college. I wasn’t even married. When I was in my 30’s, I still felt unprepared to advise people regarding how to deal with their estranged spouse or their delinquent child. Now I’m 40

(And SOOOOOO mature) and people seek my advice on a broad expanse of topics and concerns. Now I know that I know nothing about anything for sure. What can I offer the people in my group? What about my spiritual journey prepares me to advise others about theirs? The only thing I know for sure is that God loves me and God loves you. We can discover what the Bible says to do. We can explore everyone's experiences to determine what to do. Rather than us advising each other, like children playing hide-n-go seek in the dark, why don't we listen for God's advice? Seek God's hand in the midst of our struggle. Feel the movement of the Holy Spirit in and around us. Perhaps it isn't so much advising each other from our individual wisdom but focusing each other on the will of God as it is presented.

Serve 2gether: “working 2gether with 1 heart & 1 purpose”

(Phil 2:2)

SERVE: noun: the act of putting the ball or shuttlecock in play (as in tennis or badminton)

Webster's Intermediate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1977.

What if God is an avid tennis player and to serve means something entirely different than what we've thought? When you serve the ball it needs to be in bounds and over the net. It also needs to be in the correct part of the court. The ball needs to be of use, it needs to answer its purpose. (A paraphrase from the dictionary) Notice who has the power after the serve. That's where the phrase “the ball is in your court” comes from.

When we try to meet the needs of others through service do we ever serve them the ball? Is each of our serves an ace, incapable of being returned? What would service look like if our serve was able to be returned? I am not talking eye for eye, here. What if we gave all of God's love away (which is impossible)? Imagine that the receiver's only choice was to respond in kind.

As we serve together, we have to check many things. Is our ball over the net? Is our service leaving our side (our understanding) to embrace the other side? Is our ball in bounds? Are we serving in an area that makes sense that is “in play”? Is our ball placed where it can be returned? Is our service giving power to the receiver? It is not difficult to imagine God in pure white. It is a little disconcerting to imagine God in the little tennis dress with the headband and wrist-bands. We either need to change our image of God or rush the court and serve the ball ourselves. Remember to grunt real loud.

Worship 2gether: “come 2gether in my name”

(Matt 18:20) Our church is strange. Family units do not necessarily sit together. Babies are passed around like everyone owns them. Sometimes a pew looks like a daycare center, with toys, books, and snacks. For every 10 kids there usually are 2 – 3 adults as well. There are people who dance in their seats with the Tambourine dancers, drum (on and off beat) with our percussionists, sign with or without our signing choir and pray whenever the spirit strikes them. People get up and move to someone who is struggling to provide comfort and support. A sneeze receives more than a “bless you.” It receives tissues, and a cough lozenge too. You may even receive over-the-counter anti-histamines. It is amazing that we are not one giant germ factory the way we interact. The band is not cloistered away from the rest of the congregation. When they rise to lead us in song, they take the spirit of all those around them, from every corner of the sanctuary.

And yet, we are creatures of habit. We sit in the same sections. We expect the same worship rhythm every time. What if service didn't start with 3 songs and a greeting? What if it went longer or significantly shorter? What if instead of pews we found circles of chairs or futons? What if the style changed to rap or chanting? What if we prayed our silent prayers out loud?

I pray that the community that is created through worship is less about style and more about God moving amongst us. It isn't enough to be thankful for the community we have, we have to prepare for its growth and change. The time is coming when our beliefs about worship will be challenged. Our church is strange; I think it will be ready.

Reach Out 2gether: “get others to believe”

(Phil 1:27) What is the difference between a three-year-old saying “The sky is falling” and the President of the United States saying, “Due to atmospheric pollution and cosmic radiation the troposphere's proximity to the mantle of the earth is diminishing?” (Besides clarity that is) Both of them are saying that the sky is changing position in a noticeable way. You would respond differently to each. You would reassure the child and probably discount the claim, making up an excuse or explanation. You would look to the President for advice or an action plan.

I'm confused. I believe that we need to have a life that makes our testimony about God's love credible. It's not

enough to spout scripture and shout, "REPENT!" We haven't created authority through the convictions of our life. And then Jesus reminds us to have faith like the children. To simply state and accept that God is love and God loves me. In our journeys, how can we be both President and 3-year-old? Good, now you're confused too. I think true evangelism starts when we accept that both realities can co-exist. Your life will show God's Authority. Your faith will show your child-like wonder and acceptance. Now, who wouldn't listen to a three-year-old President? (Insert favorite political joke here)

Biloxi-Bound Prayers

GOD- How can you create and let everything be destroyed? How much suffering can a human heart endure? How can we work all day mucking out a house and still have the strength to look next door at a house in worse condition? How can we sing a song of praise when the air is so hot we cannot even breathe? What can we pray for? How can our prayers make a difference if they do not move Your Hand?

God- You are big enough to take my anger, to take my shouts of frustration and bitterness. You are gentle enough to soothe my aching heart. You are big enough to reach the unreachable and touch the untouchable. You are big enough to comfort a family that has nothing but a shell of a home. Your wisdom can lead people towards a better life. Your Holy Spirit can change the situation from recovery to restoration.

God- I am small. I have my prayers to you. I have my support of projects and plans. I have my family and friends. Is this enough? Is this enough to offer hope to those who can no longer cry out because the words will not come?

God, I am small. My prayer is Big. My hope is in You and Your Body. After all, You are the only source of hope we've ever had. We pray all in Jesus' name who understands the suffering and knows how to bring Your Care.

AMEN.