

I. What concept stood out to you?

The section chosen for reflection was chapter 8: Healthy Relationships Move You toward Spiritual Maturity. This concept stood out to me because of many recent events in my life that have challenged me to both examine and explore the nature of family and community as they pertain to God's church and the body of Christ.

II. What impact does it suggest for you personally?

God is endeavoring to change many of my own dysfunctional habits. These habits have prevented me from experiencing community in a satisfying way at times in my life. I have felt rejection, loneliness and distrust many times in community relationships. Often to compensate for these fears, I take control of community situations or abandon them entirely. The Holy Spirit is working with me currently to change these destructive habits and help me to resolve my long standing reservations regarding my place in God's family. One major aspect of this work has been to seek a spiritual director and to allow myself to be under the authority of this person's leadership.

III. Where do you disagree with the author? Agree?

The author is compelling and on target in his views on the need for Christian community. The perspective from which he enters into discussion of the importance of community, while it fits into the concept of this text as a whole, is somewhat narrow to the full need of both the 'healthy' and the 'damaged' in their need for community. Everyone needs community and the omission of any reference to Matthew 22:37-39 appears to be a misstep.

“Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'”

The command to love others places us all within the context of community whether we think we need it or not. In my experience, those who believe themselves to be healthy sometimes need to be reminded that living in community is not simply encouraged for our own healing or benefit, but also as a command to live by.

In fact, each of the author’s ingredients of a healthy spiritual community would have been well served to be bounded by scripture references. Each brought to mind an aspect of Christ’s own community as He lived among men. Other than the first ingredient, A Christ Centered Community, none of the other sections contain specific scripture references which in my opinion weaken the strength of the author’s assertions. This is a shame because these are strong sections with much relevance to the church today.

I agree wholeheartedly with the author on the ingredients of a healthy spiritual community. Christ Centered, Spirit Filled, Grace Empowered, Vulnerable, Available, Praying, Celebrating, Serving and Accountable are as good a list of priorities as I have ever seen for the body of Christ to seek. Growing in love for God and each other and following God’s will seem inevitable for a community with these traits.

IV. How should this concept be translated into practical ministry?

George Barna in his book The Power of Vision encourages ministry leaders to capture and apply God’s vision for your ministry. Without men such as Dr. Wardle encouraging God’s people to contemplate what it truly means to strive for a healthy community of believers in our present age, how clear would this vision be?

This chapter both affirmed and expanded my thinking in an area of ministry that has been deeply troubling me as of late. How can people be brought together in our time, to grow together, to love each other and in so doing to be a people whose love for each other brings glory to God? Dr. Wardle begins with a personal concept of discipleship and expands this to a Christian community in a heartbeat; taking the reader from where he or she is to a summit that overlooks what the church should be. This shows us that the ideal community begins with two willing people and grows from that point.

The list of traits here should be used as a checklist; much like a doctor utilizes a growth chart for a child. I often look to lists such as this to gauge the quality of my relationship with my wife and the tone of our home and then expand my scope from that smaller frame to my relationships with family, friends, the church and my workplace.

Indicators of good and healthy community are needed in our homes, workplaces and most of all the community of believers. Dr. Wardle begins with his family and moves outward. This is a worthy format to be emulated by all who are seeking to build community and the vision brought forth here should be applied for the Church.