

GET TO KNOW YOUR SPIRITUAL FAMILY

While doing some personal reflection some time ago it struck me that out of a local church of around 70 or so people in Brisbane there was a sizeable portion of our local church that I barely knew at all. Back in the old WCG days when we had 500 people attending here each week in Brisbane South that wouldn't have been a problem. I felt however that God would expect more from me than that and so I committed to a two step plan to improve that situation. How about you? If you reflect on it, is there a sizeable portion of our local church that you barely know at all? If so, what can we do to improve on this situation?

Tonight what I would like to do is stir us to action to be more proactive and not just reactive in getting to know people in our local church in both a wider and deeper way.

In showing love to others in our spiritual family there are two broad ways where we can do this. One way we can do this is in an ad-hoc or reactionary way. We'll respond to other people when they approach us or just hang out with those we feel comfortable with without pushing ourselves beyond our comfort zone. This is one way we can show love to others in our spiritual family. The other way is to take a proactive approach where we plan our efforts to show friendship and give to others and consciously make an effort to go beyond our comfort zone in getting to know others better.

I would submit to you that, like most endeavours of life, if we only take a reactive approach then we'll only be half as effective compared to if we take a proactive, planned approach.

Jesus encouraged us to go beyond our personal comfort zone when He said in the Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6:32 "But if you love *only* those who love you, what praise is it to you? For even sinners love those who love them."

Tonight I have two simple suggestions to offer that will help us get to know our spiritual family in both a wider and deeper way.

The first suggestion is make it a goal to get to know one person each week. That could be getting to know one person you've not spoken to before or it could be getting to know someone you already know but a lot deeper if you barely know them.

For some people this comes easier than for others. I know I find it a struggle and challenge at times because I am naturally shy and introverted but it is well worth it. When I was still a teenager and perhaps more zealous than I am today I was particularly convicted by the verse in James 1 that speaks of pure religion being to visit the widows and orphans.

Some of you may remember the old Worldwide days when we used to meet at Mansfield High School where about 500 people used to attend each week. To the left of the canteen where tea and coffee were served there would be a whole row of seats for the many elderly who used to attend. I made it a goal to try and get to know as many of those elderly who used to sit there after church as I could. It was quite tough at first but as I kept at it I developed some good friendships with them and it was worth the effort. When you are young it's quite easy to hang out with your peers most of the time but for any of our younger guys here tonight it is well worth getting to know and learning from the elderly people in our church areas.

Not being connected with any physical families in the church and being a single at my age I find myself more aware of those who come along who are on the periphery. If you have an awareness of such people perhaps you could take on a role like that of a fullback in rugby league. If others in a team all miss someone it is the fullback's role to act as the last line of defence. Perhaps you can befriend and help those who slip through the cracks and are missed by others in the church.

In Proverbs 27:23 we read: "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks." Our spiritual family is the flock of God and we should be diligent to know where people are at in their lives amongst us. If we don't make the effort to get to know others and touch bases and find out what's happening in their lives how are we to know what their needs are? Some people are guarded and will only share their deeper concerns with those who prove by the time that they willing to invest that they care enough for that person.

My second suggestion to get to know your spiritual family is make the most of giving hospitality. This can take two forms. This could be get togethers and activities you arrange with others out and about. The other way we give hospitality is inviting people into our homes. Such activities and times we have people over for dinner provide a great opportunity to get to know different people who we have never engaged in real conversation with or get to people we don't know well a whole lot better.

Having people over for a meal in our homes allows us to go deeper beyond casual small talk and really get to know people in a more intimate way. I know from the times that I have invited people over for dinner that you get to know them in a much deeper way than simply chatting with them at church. Hospitality not only helps you to bond better with others but is a great way in which you can serve others as we are regularly encouraged to do in our christian walk.

So tonight we have looked at two suggestions to help get to know our brethren in the church better. The first one is making it a goal to get to know one new person each week and my second suggestion is using hospitality to get to know people in the church we don't know or barely know a whole lot better. God tells us to be diligent to know the state of your flock. I hope that I have inspired you and stirred up to take up the challenge and have a more planned, proactive approach in getting to know your spiritual family.