

RESETTING LIFE'S COMPASS
Becoming Christ's Community

2 Corinthians 5:14--6:2

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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Bill Hybels tells the story of interviewing the great Christian writer and thinker Dallas Willard. Dallas was known as always joyous and positive. So Hybels asked him, "Does anything ever get you down?" "I'll tell you what gets me down," replied Dallas. "It bothers me that Christ followers require so much prompting and cajoling to do God's work...I know pastors who must beg people to show up for events. They must beg people to use their God-given spiritual gifts to further His Kingdom. Churches spend thousands of dollars producing emotional videos to move people to care for the poor..." [*Simplify*, by Bill Hybels, pp. 214-215].

Notice how far this description of the believer's life is from what Paul described in our text. The love of Christ motivates us (v. 14). The compelling power of our message--Christ brings real change to life (v. 17). How did we get here, so far from that? Perhaps because we thought we could do this by ourselves. We need to reset our compass, becoming a community, not a collection of individuals.

Notice how many times the words "us" appears in our text. "...God settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationship with each other....God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them" (vv. 18, 20, *The Message*). A few verses later, in 6:1, Paul says, "W work together with God, so don't turn this reconciling work into a joke!" (my translation of "in vain").

The Corinthian believers were known for their bickering, their individualism and their focus on their differences. Paul says we need each other in the church. And if in the Cross, God could forgive our sins, then we can surely be reconciled to each other. If God can reach across a vast canyon, we can surely reach across a tiny ditch.

By the way, here is our church's mission statement. See how you think it measures up to our sermon text. ***To honor and worship God by being an inclusive and diverse family of faith, sharing the love of Jesus Christ and empowering disciples.***

But now I want to bring all this down from the clouds into our daily life. Here is one way we can practically set our compass and become the community of Christ. This whole series has been about priorities, calendars, time and life management, right? So here it is. We have to spend time together, getting to know and trust each other. We have to show up. For small groups, for worship and for work projects. We can't be the absentee body of Christ. Look at this verse.

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). This verse has always felt to me to be the practical version of 2 Corinthians 5:14--6:2. They must have had the same problems with priorities in the first century church we have in ours!

Now, I don't want to go all legalistic on you. No guilt. We all have to miss church sometimes. But how do we become community if we only show up sporadically? And if you are absent, it not only impacts God and yourself. It is also unfair to others. Something--someone--is missing. It's like working on a jigsaw puzzle and someone takes a key piece and walks out the door.

How can we do the reconciling work with each other and our world if we don't show up for duty? Recently, I had the joy of connecting one of our trained Stephen Ministers with a care receiver. Nothing revs my engine as much as connecting a believer who has ministry to offer with a believer in need. One of the key principles of our Baptist heritage is the priesthood of each believer. We need what each offers. We're going to get from church only what we put into it.

Bill Hybels has a simple exercise to help us get more regular in church participation. Here it is. Put it on your calendar! Take your pencil, your Outlook program, your whatever and write it in: "Attend Church!" Block it out! Then when something else comes up, say, "No, I have a prior commitment." In other words, we don't decide Sunday morning if we're going to church. We make that commitment long before the day arrives, so it's already decided.

WE are ambassadors for Christ. Not I AM an ambassador. God has given US this work, not given ME this work. You know what I've decided? We need spiritual HOV signs set up the moment one comes into the faith. As followers of Jesus, we are not allowed to travel alone. The purpose of HOV signs (high occupancy vehicles) is to allow a lane for those with two or more occupants. The goal is to move more people, not more cars. In God's Kingdom, it seems we have lots of individual cars trying to do it alone. But here's the truth. When we come to Jesus, we come to each other.