



ATTENTION LADIES!!!

Important Women 2 Women Meeting

Ladies, please make plans now to clear your schedule so you can come be a part of a special Women 2 Women meeting on Monday, January 23, at 7:00 p.m. at the church. The Women's Ministry Team would like to facilitate further discussion regarding issues that were raised at the ladies retreat in November (see article below), so that we can share our hearts in a positive way as we seek the Lord on how we can better love and serve each other and our church body. *The input of every woman (whatever your age or stage in life) is important to us.* If you have not participated in women's meetings or events in the past, this is a great time to jump in and let us get to know one another better.

Thoughts on Loving Well

During the recent Women's Retreat we focused on the topic of "Loving Well" through video sessions by Bible teacher Beth Moore. We talked about embracing the truth that we are well loved by God, and the importance of soaking up that perfect love He pours out on us. We also talked about how, in drawing from that well of God's perfect love for us individually, we are enabled and energized to love others well - those who are a joy, those who test us (our testy), our enemy, and the stranger. I think God may be testing us on what we have learned

I have been troubled in my spirit since the last day of the retreat when several ladies expressed feelings of disconnection and isolation within the body. This is not the first time I have heard such comments from within the Berean body, and I can certainly identify with those feelings, having experienced them for most of my life and still struggling with them more often than I would care to admit.

My first thought (when the issue was raised and implicated me) was to be defensive and say that maybe some are being too sensitive - get over it and get out there and start connecting... testy! My second thought was to repent of my first thought... which I did. I feel the need to address the issues that were raised even though I feel completely inadequate to do so, because we need to grow together and learn how to love each other well. And I think we need to talk about it in a way that brings healing to our hearts and glory to God.

A Christian women's magazine says that 42% of all Christian women polled said they often or constantly feel lonely. If you don't know what it's like to feel alone in a crowd - even a familiar crowd - then you probably should stop reading now and make better use of your time. I wonder if our culture is well on its way to perfecting the art of "not loving well", and connecting only on a purely superficial level. Our relationships (as Beth Moore stated) often run "about a mile wide and an eighth of an inch deep." Someone may have hundreds of "friends" on Facebook and Twitter, but studies show the average number of close friends people have continues to decline. People get together less often than in the past to talk, eat, play games, etc. We are spending less and less "face time" with each other. Visit Panera or Starbucks and look at all the people being "alone together". It seems we both crave and fear true connection with each other.

I don't have easy answers but, as someone who has struggled over the years to make connections for various reasons, I think I can speak to about what I have experienced personally and what God is teaching me.

1) MY NEED TO CONNECT TO GOD

I have found that when I am abiding in Him, pouring out my heart and letting Him address the issues of my heart, He brings healing and intimacy of relationship - both with Him and with others. Marinating in my "loneliness" (or whatever my particular complaint of the day is) makes me very self-centered and not much use to anyone. Since I know the truth is that I am never alone, my "feeling" is a red flag to let me know there may be something I need to deal with in my heart. There may be sin I need to repent of, or maybe He is calling me to trust more radically and risk stepping out in faith. I have to press into and intentionally pursue a deeper relationship and knowledge of who God is and who I am in Him. I must hang on like crazy to the truth that He is love - perfect love. He meets all my needs, never fails me, never lies to me, never lets go of me, will not change His mind about me, will never leave me - I am never alone. Jesus experienced loneliness and rejection in a way I will never have to as my perfect and willing substitute to redeem me and free me from my personal pit of sin. He is the best friend I will ever have. No other relationship can compare with the completeness I experience in Christ. I have to make Him the "main thing."

2) MY NEED TO CONNECT TO OTHER BELIEVERS

Sometimes I don't like to admit it (I have a wide independent and cynical streak God is breaking me of), but I was created for community, and I recognize the longing for deep emotional connection, encouragement, and accountability. Even though I may "feel" otherwise at times, I am a vital part of the body of Christ by His design. If I am not fully engaged it affects the entire body negatively. I also have an enemy that is seeking to destroy me - or at least wound me and cause me to disengage from the fight. In my fear, I often try to bind my own wounds and retreat to the "safety" of isolation. My enemy seeks to disconnect me and tell me I am alone and I deserve to be - to accuse me, shame me, cause me to hide from God and from you. It is risky business to exchange hearts in a way that leaves me vulnerable. I might get hurt - no, I will get hurt. I must be good forgiver (ouch). I have to step out in faith and trust Him with the outcome (scary). And I must realign my priorities and make personal sacrifices of my time and energy to fulfill the call of God upon my life for His Kingdom purposes. I am finding that my family in Christ is a wonderful gift God has given to me out of His love for me.

3) LET #2 (MY FAMILY IN CHRIST) POINT ME BACK TO #1 (MY GOD) AS NEEDED (A LOT)

My desire and hope is that we women will learn in a deeper way what it means to love each other well and serve each other selflessly. I don't know exactly what that should look like or what the next step should be, but I do want you to know that you were heard and I would like to hear more of your thoughts on this and how we can better connect with each other as sisters in Christ. I would encourage you to be proactive - step out in faith. Find a way to serve. Ask God to help you make connections with other women. Attend women's events: retreats, cookie swaps, lunches, simulcasts, Bible studies, etc. Ask a godly older woman to consider mentoring you. Jesus says in the Book of John that people will know we are His followers because of the way that we love. This is what shows the world the heart of the Father in a way they can't deny. I pray that God will do a work in all our hearts that will amaze and draw those in who are seeking the warmth of genuine community, and the perfect love of our great God.

-Lori Morgan