

WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY?

What kind of community?

The other week my pastor gave me a book!

I won't tell you what it's called, in case you go out and buy it—it's not a very good book and I wouldn't want you to waste your money on it—but it's all about the church community, and the role of that community in advancing God's purposes.

For my pastor, however, I think it had another purpose—to send me a message, that *“Norman, you need to stop being so individualistic, and start bonding into the community a bit better.”* Well, that's fine. Actually I'm a total believer in church community. I'm all for it—though I don't think my pastor realizes that. But it all depends what kind of community you're talking about.

So that got me thinking about different kinds of communities . . .

The first community that came to mind is the one based on the general philosophy of **“How useful are you to me, or to what I'm doing?”** This is a kind of a corporate model of community. It brings to mind the infamous strategy of Jack Welch at GE who every year would cull the least effective 10% of his employees. Just identify them, then sack them.

That may well be an effective strategy for maximizing corporate profits. And if you're a church leader in a results-orientated church it might even seem a sensible option in the drive to convert more people, grow the congregation etc. It's a common enough strategy in churches. Not so long ago I listened to a sermon by a visiting speaker in a large local church here on the subject of church growth, and the gist of it was: **“identify all the most talented individuals in the flock, and advance them.”** This looks like sound common sense except for one big problem—it's the exact opposite of what Jesus and Paul told us we should be doing.

Now just to avoid misunderstanding, Jesus and Paul never advocate mediocrity. Paul in particular was a great advocate of hard, conscientious work. If people are given a task to do, and they fail to do it due to laziness, disinterest, or whatever, then they have to be replaced; **but . . .**

what Jesus and Paul seem to be advocating is a community that is not based primarily on talent. The whole *“more talent gives us better results”* model should be out the window. For the simple reason that **we are not called upon to produce results**—not primarily anyway. What we are called upon to do is to love one another—that's all. The question of results or not results is not our problem, that's God's problem (if problem it be). If we can love one another, truly from the heart, in deeds as well as words—and that has to reflect in our church structure—then God will give us all the results we can handle.

At this point, I'm looking up at the sidebar and thinking “Yes, Jack! I think you hit the nail on the head!

I'm not knocking Jack Welch! While researching this (checking the spelling of his name actually) I came on a page of Jack Welch quotes. It included this one:

Giving people self-confidence is by far the most important thing that I can do. Because then they will act.

Now that, I like!

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- Love one another in word and in action;
- self confidence to follow;
- then the results look after themselves.

Jack Welch as a church consultant? Stranger things have happened!