

Launch Out into the Deep: Shipmates

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch
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This morning we continue our series of messages entitled Launch Out into the Deep. Many people spend their spiritual lives going in circles in the shallow pond. Jesus invites us to launch out into the deeper experiences of life with him. If we are going to go on this voyage with Jesus, we have to decide who is going to be the captain—who is going to steer the ship of our lives? Are we going to be in control or will we let Jesus take control and guide our lives where he wants us to go? We also have to decide if we are going to be a passenger or if we are going to join the crew. Passengers just receive. Crew members give. The deeper blessings come when we begin to serve God and others. When we launch out into the deep we are called out of our comfort zone. It is safe and secure tied up to the dock or staying in shallow water. But the great adventures of life occur when we launch out into the deep with Jesus. One of the things that the Bible makes clear is that we don't make this journey alone.

Acts 2:41-47

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Horses are herd animals. They do not like to be alone. When Margaret and I ride a couple of horses off our property sometimes, one horse is left alone in a pasture. That horse often shows signs of being upset. He will run back and forth along the fence watching as we ride off. He will call to the other horses. The ones we are riding will call back to him to assure him they know he is there and they wish he was with them. Horses know that there is safety in numbers. They feel vulnerable when they are alone. Horses were created to be in herds and not alone.

Human beings were also created to be in relationships and not alone. When we launch out into the deep, we do not go in a kayak—a one person boat. We go on a ship with Jesus as our captain and other shipmates as a part of his crew. We are made for companionship. We are wired that way just like horses are. We see this in the creation account in Genesis. God looked at Adam and said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” God created Eve to be Adam’s companion. Jesus said: “Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them.” We experience Jesus in ways together that we do not experience him alone. The church is God’s idea. It is not the invention of man. The Bible calls the church the body of Christ in the world. Each one of us makes up a part of his body. We are incomplete by ourselves. If we are alone in our Christian life, we are like a hand severed from the body. We are very limited in what we can do and we will not live long without being attached to the whole body.

There are over thirty verses in the Bible that contain the phrase “one another.” “Encourage one another.” “Pray for one another.” “Love one another.” We need each other.

If we are going to launch out into the deep, we need others on the ship with us. To develop these relationships requires that we make some effort. They do not just happen. Many people have a lot of acquaintances, but they feel a deep sense of loneliness. We need people in our lives who are more than acquaintances. We need companions, friends. Do you have someone you can talk to about anything that is happening in your life? Do you have someone with whom you can be real and take off the mask? Can you think of someone you could call at 3 o’clock in the morning when the wheels come off and you need someone to talk to? Can you think of someone who would call you at 3 o’clock in the morning?

These relationships don’t just happen. They come from spending time together and sharing life. We offer many ways for you to connect with others and begin to develop these

relationships in Sunday school classes, small groups and ministry teams. All the church can do is offer these opportunities to you. We can't make you participate. You have to make the effort to join a group.

Within those groups you have the opportunity to develop friendships. How does it happen? We've all heard the cliché: "The only way to have a friend is to be one." That is profound truth. Friendships are two-way relationships. Some people get into a relationship and dominate all the conversations. They do all the talking and never ask questions or listen to the other person. Then wonder why they haven't made any friends. Some people only talk about how great their life is. They talk about all the things they have bought and the places they have gone. If you mention something to them, they can't wait to tell you that something they have experienced is better. It is hard to relate to a person like that because they don't seem real. They don't seem to have any problems. Consequently no one gets real with them. On the other hand, there are people who tell you nothing but their problems. Every time you see them it is "woe is me." They repeat the same problems over and over. They never seem to have anything but problems. They are very draining to be around. And they wonder why they don't have any friends.

Friendships are two way relationships. We share joys and struggles with each other. We listen as much or more than we talk. Friendships are built when we begin to ask the crucial question: "How can I bless this person? How can I serve them?" When we begin to serve others, there will be some persons who will reciprocate, and those folks become our friends. Others will take and take and not reciprocate. They will remain acquaintances but not friends. Giving means taking a meal to someone who just got out of the hospital even when we are too busy to do it. Giving means calling someone who lost a loved one even when we don't know what to say. Sometimes people ask why people are not there for them during a crisis

and I wonder: were you ever there for someone else when they were in crisis? To have a friend we have to first be a friend.

The opportunity for friendships happens in a small group, Sunday school class or ministry team. Sometimes people tell me that they visited a group and they looked around the room and felt like they had nothing in common with the other people so they never went back. It takes more than one gathering to discover if you have something in common with others. In fact it takes several gatherings before you begin to discover that even people you thought you had nothing in common with have something to offer you.

There was a TV show on for three years in the 60's that is still seen in syndication TV over 40 years later. It is about a small group of people who on the surface seem to have nothing in common. Does this song sound familiar?

VIDEO CLIP OF GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

Gilligan did not have anything in common with the Howells. Ginger had nothing in common with Mary Ann. The professor had nothing in common with the skipper. Yet they became a community because they had one thing in common: they were stranded and need to help each other survive.

Like the folks on Gilligan's Island and like the horses, we need each other to survive in the deep experiences of life. We cannot do it alone. We even need people that we don't seem to have anything in common with. We even need the people that irritate us. The folks on Gilligan's Island experienced growth by learning to live with people who were different. Don't give up too soon on small group. Give it some time. Allow God to use the people—even the ones you have nothing in common with—to help you to grow deeper in your spiritual life. It is the friction of your differences that help you to grow.

The apostle Paul taught us that we each have different gifts. We have something to offer other people. Other people have something to offer us. None of us has all the gifts. We need share our gifts in order to grow. We need to work together because our differences help us to accomplish the work of Christ in the world that we could never do alone.

I can make some prophecies that I know will happen. In any small group you will get your feelings hurt. In any small group someone will disappoint you. In any small group someone will disagree with you. Those things are a part of any ongoing relationship—guaranteed. And I can also make another prophecy: in these groups you will hurt someone's feelings, you will disappoint someone and you will disagree with someone. If you want to avoid those experiences you will never have friends.

Friendships are forged in the midst of those experiences. We learn to work through those hard feelings and to forgive each other. That is when we begin to experience deeper relationships. The apostle Paul must have observed this in the churches that he visited. Listen to what he said to the Colossians about how to live together in relationship.

Col. 3:12-14

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Paul reminds us that it is in loving others as we have been loved by Jesus that we experience true friendship. It is in forgiving others as we have been forgiven that we experience true friendship. Jesus was asked how many times we should forgive someone—is seven times enough? He replied: “Not seven times, but seventy times seven.” Forgive others as many times as God has forgiven you!! Is there someone in this room or in your small group that you need to forgive? Someone who disappointed you or hurt your feelings?

Is there someone you need to call this afternoon and ask forgiveness for disappointing them or hurting their feelings?

The Christian life only begins when we ask Jesus to become our Savior. The goal of the Christian life is for us to become like Jesus. To love God with all our heart and to love others as ourselves. We cannot become like Jesus by ourselves. We can only become like Jesus in the context of relationships with others. Jesus is the ultimate forgiver. If we are going to be like him we need to let his spirit of forgiveness flow into us and through us to others. To be like Jesus we have to be in relationship with others. Jesus had a small group of twelve men who were quite an odd mixture of fishermen, tax collectors and religious zealots. By learning to work together and forgive each other as they had been forgiven, they launched out into the deep waters and changed the world.

Listen again to how they related to one another: “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” (Acts 2:42, 46)

They worshipped together at the temple and fellowshiped together in small groups in homes. If we only come to church on Sunday morning, we will never connect in caring relationships. If we only come to church on Sunday morning, we will never experience life at its fullest. We need to be in a group. I have grown because of the relationships I've experienced through a men's small group, Crown ministry financial study, Bethel Bible series and going on mission trips. Those experiences built relationships that have changed my life.

Take a look at the “Balance” insert in your bulletin. Pray about a group to connect with. Go to the group and stick with it even if you don't think you have anything in common with

“those people.” It will get you out of your comfort zone, but it will give you the opportunity to form friendships that can transform your life.

Let me just highlight a few: Divine Encounters is a group for younger adults. We will offer the Bethel Series which provides an overview enabling you to see the Bible as whole. There is a late night Men’s Bible Study. We have numerous groups for women. A Crown ministries group offers you the opportunity to learn what the Bible says about how to manage your finances. There are prayer groups, recovery groups, music opportunities. There is a study of the book called *the Servant* which will help with a biblical perspective for conducting business. On the back are several mission and outreach groups if you are more action oriented. We also will be adding a new type of group primarily focused on building community and forming relationships. If you would be interested in facilitating one of these groups sign up for “Small group basic training.”

There are abundant opportunities here for you to connect with others and form friendships that will transform your life and help you to become more like Jesus. Which one will you connect with?