

Uncomfortable: The Awkward & Essential Challenge of Christian Community

“Uncomfortable Commitment”

[Acts 2:42-47](#)

Before Suk-Hwan and I started to date, I had a few things I was looking for in my future husband. If I was ever going to marry someone, my husband would have to be a handsome man with a gorgeous singing voice. I dreamed of falling asleep in his arms every night, listening to him serenade me with his songs. Since I was the oldest child in my family, I thought it would be better if my husband was not the oldest; I wanted him to be someone who could listen more than talk; He and I would have to share common food preferences and interests. And, very importantly, he would have to be someone who never forgot his wife's birthday or wedding anniversary.

So, did I marry my dream husband? Well, Suk-Hwan was not any of those things that I had in mind for my future husband. He did not have a gorgeous singing voice, I do not remember ever falling asleep to his lullabies for me. My husband was not just the first but was the only child of a strong-willed, single mother. He is a one-hundred-percent extravert who loves to talk more than listen. And while I like vegetable dishes, he is a meat-lover. And guess what? Remembering my birthday and our wedding anniversary has never been his strength!

Obviously, I married someone who I had never imagined being with. However, the more I got to know Suk-Hwan, going through many seasons of life together, the more I became convinced he was the best husband for me. And, I turned out to be the best wife for him, as well. We were not the couple whose personalities and backgrounds were perfectly matching. But, our differences have both complemented and stretched us to make us who we are now.

Of course, compatibility matters when it comes to finding a spouse. But, for a marriage, there is something more important than compatibility. It's commitment. Through the wedding vows that are exchanged between you and your spouse, you promise to always love and cherish each other, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. The expectation is that you will both keep the promise, going through different seasons of life together. And, it's hard work! Picking the right person to marry is like a warm-up exercise for the real challenge of marriage.

Of course, there are times when a break-up is unavoidable and can be justified. No one should endure violence and abuse. No one should be told to stay in an abusive relationship for the sake of keeping their wedding vows. Except in those circumstances, you are to embrace the challenge of being committed to upholding your marital covenant, no matter how imperfect your marriage is.

Likewise, being part of a healthy church requires one's commitment, and this can make you feel uncomfortable. Too often, people leave a church when conflicts arise and things get challenging. People are reluctant to join a church because they feel uncomfortable with the commitment they are asked to make as a

member. But, as we have learned over the last three Sundays, discomfort is not something to be avoided but rather embraced in the life of the church. As Brett McCracken writes in his book, *Uncomfortable*, “To be a community of Jesus followers is to trade a comfortable, me-centric existence for danger, difficulty, and discomfort of all sorts.” (p.43)

Then, what uncomfortable commitments are we talking about here? What did it mean to be part of a church for the first Jesus followers? Today’s scripture reading says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. The early Christians were devoted to meeting together. Nowadays, starting with our Sunday worship, most church gatherings are held weekly or less. In comparison, the early church’s gatherings were daily meetings. They met not only in the temple, a public space, but also in their private homes.

Specifically, there were 4 things that they devoted themselves to whenever they gathered together. **First**, “the apostles’ teaching.” In other words, they were serious about being discipled. The mission of our denomination is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And, making disciples requires both teachers who are committed to teaching and students who want to learn. People became Christian believers by confessing their sins and being baptized. But they did not stop there. They continued seeking to grow in their faith by devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching.

Are you growing spiritually? If you cannot answer this question with a “Yes,” I invite you to do something about it. There are opportunities for learning beyond the Sunday worship service: we have Adult Sunday School class before worship; Tuesday morning Bible Study; Wednesday morning Bible Study; Men’s Study group on Thursdays. And, I am still hoping to be able to start a second Covenant Bible Study group on Tuesday evenings in the month of October.

Second, they devoted themselves to “fellowship.” Today, this is a word everyone likes to use in church, and it is always associated with food. But, fellowship for the early church was more than just sharing food. It meant sharing relationships among believers. It meant serving one another. Verses 44 and 45 say, “All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” In other words, all were included, and no one was left out.

It is impossible for Christian believers to walk alone if they are serious about their spiritual maturity. By being together with other believers in the local church, we are made aware of our own strengths, as well as our weaknesses. It is in a community of Christian believers that we are instructed and corrected; It is here that we are encouraged and strengthened; we experience being loved and we also love those who are difficult to love; we forgive others and we are also forgiven; we use our own gifts to help and serve others and we are also helped.

We are not a perfect church. In fact, there is no perfect church, not anywhere in the world. But, through the relationships we have with one another in our imperfect church, we grow and mature spiritually and move toward the perfection God desires for all of us.

Third, they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Verse 46 says, “they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.” Here, the breaking of bread does not mean just celebrating the Holy Communion, but also includes eating actual meals together. Whenever and wherever they met, both

in the temple and at private homes, they ate together. This is proof of the important role that food played in the life of the early church.

With our lifestyle, it is impossible for us today to eat a full meal after our worship service. But, our Coffee Hour after our worship service is very important. We visit with one another and make new friends. Usually, there is always some kind of simple food prepared as different people sponsor this wonderful time of fellowship.

I urge you not to leave right away after the worship service, but to linger around in the Fellowship Hall for this time of light refreshments. And get to know people. Instead of waiting for someone else to approach you, introduce yourself to someone and get to know him or her. Plan to meet one person per Sunday and try to remember his/her name. Soon, you will realize that you know quite a number of people already.

And, once in a while, we are delighted to have more than just light refreshments. Next Sunday will be such an occasion, as we are going to celebrate an International potluck luncheon in celebration of World Communion Sunday and to kick off our Stewardship Campaign. I invite you to sign up if you have not done so yet. Just bring an ethnic dish to share and dress in a manner that represents your ethnic heritage. It will be a day of much fun and nourishment.

Fourth, they devoted themselves to prayers and praises. In other words, they were devoted to worship. Worship is so integral to the life of the church, that, when people say, "I am going to church," often, what they mean is that they are going to a worship service. In worship, we remember who God is and who we are to be as God's people. In worship, we come before God with our best gifts, in response to God's grace and mercy to us. In worship, we surrender ourselves to God. In worship, our eyes are opened to what God is doing in our midst. In worship, our souls are replenished and our hearts are renewed. In worship, we are empowered to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world.

So, I urge you to make every effort to come to worship every Sunday as long as you are in town and not down with sickness. In comparison to the commitment the first followers of Jesus had to make, worshipping together every single day, this is a piece of cake, isn't it?

The scripture says, in the community of the first Christian believers, they were committed to worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service, as they spent much time together, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. The first Christian church grew rapidly not because they had a special evangelism program but because everyone was fully committed to all aspects of their life together.

Like a marriage, being part of a local church calls us to be in a covenantal relationship with God and with one another. It requires us to make a commitment, which can be quite uncomfortable for many of us. But, this is what makes us who we are as followers of Jesus and as the church. So, remember that your church membership is not an entitlement but responsibility. Remember that you have made a promise before your church family when you joined Campbell United Methodist Church to support the ministries of your church by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness. Through your membership vow, God has placed you here at Campbell to serve, to give, to love, and to sacrifice for God's ministries.

Talking about the church membership vow always reminds me of an episode from one of the churches I've served. It was Sunday, and we were receiving new members. During the liturgy of receiving new members, I asked the people who were joining the church the membership vows one by one separately, emphasizing its seriousness. It generated some laughter in the congregation, and everything went well. But, after the worship service, the church council chairperson approached me and said, "Pastor, you almost blew it. You were asking them too much!"

McCracken asks these questions to us, churchgoing Christians (p. 185):

Will you commit to looking at church not in terms of what you can get but what you can give, considering how your presence with the body might encourage others and stir them to love and good works? Will you embrace the awkwardness and inconvenience and un-cool costliness of the uncomfortable church?

What is your answer to these questions?