

Alleluia

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Overcoming a Divided Heart

Dan Almeter



One could arguably state that the theme of our recent full community retreat was, "A Divided Heart". Dr. Christenson opened the retreat by putting into context the vision to which we are all called. We were created out of nothing, created by Love, by the Trinity, and created in His image as male and female. Our original parents—Adam and Eve—lived in perfect love/union with God and each other. Despite the fall, Christ has won for us the right and grace to be restored to that perfect level of communion and union with Him and one another.

Larry Christenson pointed out, that the level of love and union we are called into is so amazing that it is almost incomprehensible. This he pointed out in 2 Pet. 1:3-4. "That divine power of His has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety through knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and power. By virtue of them He bestowed on us the great and precious things He promised, so that through these you have fled a world corrupted by lust might become SHARERS OF

THE DIVINE NATURE."

We owe our very existence to God who created us out of love. And our existence as an Alleluia people is totally His gift to us. But because of our fallen nature, we aren't able to see clearly how much God loves us, how hopelessly in love He is with us, how crazy mad He is for us—both individually and as a people. Like Adam and Eve, we get convinced that His love is not total, that we can't 100% trust Him—only 99%. Maybe He is holding back a little, or punishing or judging us for our sinfulness. But those are lies of the enemy—the same enemy that convinced Adam and Eve that God was holding back His very best.

And so, like Israel in the book of Hosea, we also can divide our hearts between God and other idols that we believe will give us happiness, will fill in what we think God can't or won't.

Though Dr. Christenson didn't state this, I believe there are varying degrees of a divided heart. We all suffer from it—some more than others. Gomer in the book of Hosea, certainly had a real bad case of divided heart. But we all have one degree or another

of this heart disease.

Classical spirituality calls it "Detachment." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind." (Lk. 10:27) If the heart is occupied with any inordinate attachment, anything that is not in conformity to the will of God, or not consistent with the love of God, then we suffer from a divided heart.

And we have a perfect guide to know if our heart is divided. It is called Scripture—the very Word of God who shares His heart of love—the love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the Lord has invited us into this same love and way of relating to Him and to each other. So quite simply, when we act on what God says in His word, we return to God all the love that He deserves with a whole heart. For example:

"Bear with one another lovingly" (Eph. 4:2b).

"Never let evil talk pass your

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Love God With an Undivided Heart

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lips." (Eph. 4:29a)

"Let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others' interests rather than to his own." (Phil. 2:3-4) "Anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his thoughts." (Mt. 5:28)

"Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors." (Mt.5:44) "Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be." (Lk. 12:34)

This quick sample list of how to love the Lord our God with our whole heart—and our neighbor as ourselves—is why the Lord gave us the Scriptures. It is His love letter to us

and His blue print of how we can love Him (and everyone) without a divided heart. It is God's plan to show us how to avoid idolatry—a divided heart.

None of us is perfect; we are all sinners. But that cannot excuse us from striving with our whole hearts to love God and one another. "Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself." (Eph. 3:18-19) If we remain content with a divided heart, we risk developing a hardened heart—ultimate rebellion against God and His Word.

God created us. He has a blue

print for our lives because He is so in love with us—both individually and as an Alleluia people. I pray that we can all open our hearts completely to the depth of this love. I close with a portion of the prophetic word given to us over the retreat by Mark Wilby:

"The Lord is here and He is speaking to us, not to condemn us, not to criticize us, but to awaken love in us. The words He is speaking to us may seem as plain as dirt but there are diamonds in the dirt. The Lord is speaking to us and He wants us to cherish His words and He wants His words to activate love in us. He is wooing our hearts with His love and He is using plain language and simple images to enkindle love in us."

Dan Almeter is an Elder of the Alleluia Community, responsible for teaching and formation programs. He is a licensed marriage and family counselor and has recently retired from the Georgia Department of Social Services where he was responsible for adoptions. He has been a Full Covenant member of Alleluia since 1978. He and his wife Marie have six children and eight grandchildren and live in Augusta, Georgia, where they attend St. Joseph Catholic Church.

Man Plans, God Laughs

By **Bill Conkright**

I came of age in the '60s. It's not something I'm proud of, but there it is. It was a time that I felt free to indulge my flesh and basically run amuck. There was, however, one glowing moment in the midst of my downward spiral of backsliding paganism. That moment was when the Lord took pity on me, wed me to the ever-lovely Dian, and began to use this combination to pull me up by the ear from the miry pit. And it worked pretty well. From my present vantage point of 70 plus years, I can testify that the me of today is nowhere near where the me of then was headed.

But there is one area, which has always given me problems—my thoughts were not doing my Christian walk any good. To make matters worse, I couldn't get rid of them. I would

rebut them and strain to redirect my thoughts. But it was of little use. They were lurking around waiting for me to stop straining so that they could come back.

And then came our last community retreat. As part of our preparation, we were asked to read chapters 5 and 6 of Larry Christenson's book, "The Renewed Mind."

I read chapter 5 in which Larry told the reader to stop straining and let God do the work when it came to cleaning up our thought life. He even gave us the words to say to Satan, "Take That To Jesus!"

I thought it was a bit simplistic



and probably wouldn't work because there was no warfare on the part of the person who had the problem. And so I put it aside.

Later that day I had another of those thoughts. As I prepared to do battle with the thing in my mind, I remembered Larry's solution to this kind of unwanted thought and so I said, "Take that to Jesus!"

GONE!!!

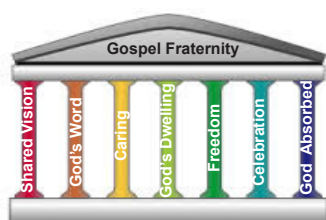
The thing was just not there. I looked for it and could not find it anywhere. This was amazing. No strain, no work, just:

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7 Essential Pillars to Living Gospel Christian Community

By Dan Almeter

In his book, *Caring: A Biblical Theology of Community*, written in 1973 (same year Alleluia was founded) Fr. Tom Dubay sketches out in detail the seven pillars that make up the framework of a Gospel fraternity. His opening chapter summarizes these pillars and the rest of the book goes into much detail on each one. This book is almost like a blueprint of what Alleluia Community is called to be, and so the Elders felt it would be worth giving a quick review of these seven attributes to see how we are measur-



God Laughs

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BAM! Gone!!!!

And it's been that way ever since—no more troubles or guilt or anything. The moment I recognize the thought, I just tell Satan to take it to Jesus and it's gone!!

And here's an added benefit from this way of dealing with a bad thought life: I've begun to recognize sneaky little thoughts that slipped in and hid in my mind. With the big bad thoughts out of the way, the light is shone on them. And I can clean them out as well.

And so, feeling fresh and with a well-scrubbed mind, I thank God for His love and for Dian and her taking a chance on me, and finally, for Larry Christenson's simple little way that works!!!!

ing up, individually and as a people.

Pillar #1—Shared Vision and Burning Pursuit

"At the core of communion is vision. Only people who see deeply together can be deeply one together. Civility, politeness, even cordiality do not make community.... Community happens only when men and women have a vision together and together pursue it. The more consuming the vision, the deeper the community."

Pillar #2 — A People Gathered by the Word

"The New Testament writers are agreed that the word of the Lord makes their community to be what it is. The disciples are united by their love for the faith. (Phil. 1:27) It is their sharing in the light cast by God's word that causes their fraternal oneness.... (I Jn.1:3,7) Active and powerful and cutting as a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12) this word transforms any human group that will listen to it and interiorize it.... This people must, therefore, not only be gathered by the word; it must be immersed in it. The community of Jesus lives by the word, is changed by the word, is saved by the word."

Pillar #3 — Fraternity of Caring Brothers and Sisters

"One loves when he cares. And one loves to the extent that he cares.... We could even, it seems to me, translate some of the biblical uses of the term in this manner: you are to care for one another as I have cared for you... by this will men know that you are my disciples by how you care for one another... care for others as you care for yourself. Community happens when caring happens. Community happens when brothers and

sisters are concerned about the interests of the others." (Phil. 2:4)

Pillar #4—God's Dwelling

"In the divine blueprint, human community is not simply human. It was never intended to be. It is that, of course, but also much more. It is a group that is itself a favored locus for the Lord God himself. When two or three gather in His name, He is present in their midst. They become His temple.... To the very extent that we possess the Spirit of Jesus do we have gospel community.... Christian community is no inert mass. It throbs with life and prayer activity because it throbs with the Spirit."

Pillar #5 — Freedom

"The presence of the Spirit dwelling within the new community is a power presence, a presence that liberates the members to be full men and women... the more we love and live truth, nobility, goodness, the more we are at liberty.... Sin diminishes the person and necessarily, therefore, his freedom.... We are free fundamentally to the extent that we have interiorized the Gospel.... The more one is a man or woman of prayer, the more he is free.... Those who sing of freedom but carefully avoid speaking of submission and obedience to others are not speaking of Christian community."

Pillar #6 — Communion of Joyous Celebration

"The Christian ought to be an alleluia from head to foot, from tip to toe.... If celebration is a response to reality, a community is a place where the response especially happens.... Gospel community must be an allelu-

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7 Essential Pillars

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ia community.... Christian community is a group of persons who celebrate every day the marvels of their Lord and the Marvel who is their Lord."

Pillar #7—A people Absorbed in Their God

"These brothers and sisters are immersed in their God; they are a people of prayer.... Communion with the Father and the Lord Jesus in their Holy Spirit is a matter of fact the *raison d'être* (reason of being) of this people.... Even on earth the "one thing," the overriding necessity is a contemplative communion.... (Ps. 27:4) Christian community is a community of joy because it is before all else a community of prayer."

On our own power, we cannot live out Christian community according to this biblical picture. But with the Lord, all things are possible. May we continue to appreciate the miracle God has done in our midst and become an even brighter light to light up the darkness.

Angels Win GICAA East Region Volleyball Tournament!

Alleluia Varsity Girls defeat a tough John Hancock team: 25-17, 19-25, 26-24, and 25-18 to win GICAA East Region tournament! Great job ladies!

Practicing Random Acts of Kindness

By Barbara Harshman

Our busy, busy lives may leave little room for unscheduled activities, so random acts of kindness for the elderly or their caregivers should be part of our scheduled commitments. Allowing our children to be a part of this commitment is a teachable moment on which we want to capitalize.

Following is a list of ideas from which to springboard your own creative interactions. (You will want to ask permission ahead of time.)

1. Water their flowers/garden.
2. Return their library books.
3. Stop by with a board game to play.
4. Give a foot massage.
5. Drop off packages at the post office.
6. Clean their gutters.
7. Rake their yard.
8. Arrange for a housecleaning.
9. Bring a favorite movie and watch it together.
10. Do some holiday shopping for them.
11. Go grocery shopping for them.
12. Wash their car.
13. Send a card telling them how much you appreciate them.
14. Hire a geek to help them with tech issues.
15. Fix a leaky faucet.
16. Take a ready-to-bake casserole for their freezer.
17. Bake cookies for them.
18. Play cards with them.
19. Pick up their dry cleaning.
20. Send them a "thinking of you" card.
21. Read the Bible to them.
22. Call weekly to check on them.
23. Take them with you for a manicure or pedicure.
24. Give a blank journal.
25. Give a gift certificate to a barber-shop or hair salon.



Full Covenant member Evelyn Hamilton enjoys a visit at the nursing home from Ansley Dolin, daughter of David and Kelly Dolin