

Today I am beginning a new sermon series and it is based on six practices that I believe can help draw us closer in following God. Six practices that I believe can draw us closer in following God. If you have been here for the past few weeks you know that I have been preaching a series on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians and that I committed to using this week and next week to conclude that series.

I am still preaching from texts from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians today and next week. But I am overlapping the end of that series with the beginning of this next series. This very important series on six principles which, I believe, draw us closer to following God.

We have been talking at Session meetings about what it means to be a stronger follower of God. About how the way forward for us as a fellowship of believers and the way forward for us personally in our faith journeys is to place our trust in following God. To seek to be better followers of God. Because ultimately, humans will always fall short whereas God will always be faithful.

Before I share the six practices to becoming better followers of God, I want to talk briefly about what it means to seek to follow God. If you type “leadership” in Google or go to a bookstore or check out books on Amazon, you will find lots and lots of books on leadership. My bookshelf in my study has several books on becoming a more effective leader.

But what I have come to believe is that as Christians our primary task is not to become so focused on ourselves as it is to be focused on becoming better followers of God. We are not to be so focused on becoming better leaders as we are to become better followers. Better followers of God. Our responsibility as Christians is to become better followers of God.

Now that may sound basic. But many of us have adopted an attitude that our faith is dependent on what we do and what we can accomplish. We place ourselves in the role of being in charge or we look to someone else to feed us spiritually. But I have come to accept that our responsibility as Christians is to trust God to be in charge and to seek to be better followers of God. Our responsibility as Christians is to trust God to be in charge and seek to be better followers of God.

So how do we do that? I have been working with the Session on coming up with six practices that help us to become better followers of God. These six practices are printed on the front of your bulletin.

So what are the six practices? The six practices are these. To follow God and to learn to listen to God and to learn how to be open to God's will in our individual lives and in our lives as a faith community, we need to be participating in these six practices.

These six practices are: worship, study, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, serving others, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. (Repeat)

Today we are focusing on one of these 6 practices. The first practice we are examining today is the practice of fellowship with other Christians. Today is a natural day to focus on this practice because after worship today everyone is invited to fellowship with one another by joining in on a picnic and enjoying a game of kickball.

So today we are doing something much more than having fun and eating. Today we are invited into a way of becoming a better follower of God. Our play has purpose. Our play today invites us into a stronger relationship with God by developing a stronger relationship with other Christians.

So is having fun with people in church all that is involved in sharing fellowship with other Christians? Paul in what we are about to read would say “no.” Paul would say that building up fellowship with other Christians goes much, much deeper.

Let us read what Paul wrote. Paul is writing to a community of faith that sometimes he gets along well with but at other times they have some real problems with each other. Let’s read today’s lesson to find out what he says to them about how real fellowship occurs.

### **Read 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:16-6:13**

For Paul, true Christian community comes through reconciliation. True Christian community comes about when Christians reconcile with one another. But we know that in our world, reconciliation is a hard thing to do. It is hard to reconcile with others who we feel have wronged us in some way. It is hard to try to overcome brokenness that exists between us and others. It is much easier to just let relationships remain broken and blame others for those broken relationships.

But Paul is very clear in what he says in this letter. If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has passed away. One becomes new in Christ. And what did God do when we broke relationship with God? Christ humbled himself and became a slave, according to Paul. Christ humbled himself so that we would be reconciled to God. And since Christ has shown us that example of reconciliation, we are to be reconciled to one another.

I am going to brag on someone here today. He’s not going to like it but this is his last Sunday here so he can deal with it. As many of us know, Steve Dobbins will be leaving next week and moving to Ohio. Steve has given so much of himself around this place. We see physical signs of Steve’s gifts when we see the sound room, we see this chancel area, we see the video projector. There are so many ways that Steve shared his talents around here.

But I told Steve at the Session meeting that there is one of his gifts that I admire more than all of the others. As good as Steve is with being an incredible construction genius, that is not what I most admire about him. I am going to out Steve a little bit here.

But like I shared at Session, Steve is one of the most liberal people I know politically and theologically. Labels are not good but I think Steve will claim that label for himself. But anyone who has watched Steve knows that the most politically and theologically conservative people around Steve have nothing but the greatest respect and admiration for him.

I have watched Steve work with and be friends with the people that are as opposite to him politically and theologically as one can probably be. But most of those people love and admire and respect Steve. Steve Dobbins is a model for all of us about how to not let differences define us but to instead seek out what unites us.

Steve is a model for us for how to be community with one another and how to participate in real reconciliation. We will miss you Steve but you leave us with a great model as you begin the next chapter of your life.

In a little while we will be invited to the communion table. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that if you are not reconciled with your brother or sister, you are to seek out your brother or sister before you bring your offering forward. You are to seek to reconcile with them before you present an offering.

Everyone is invited to the table to share communion. As you come forward for communion today or have communion brought to you, I invite you to pray for a relationship in your life that needs reconciliation. And then I invite you to seek to reconcile that relationship however you need to do it.

When we take part in reconciling with a brother or with a sister or with a neighbor or a former friend or someone in the church or someone who used to be in the church then we are participating in a very important spiritual practice.

True fellowship with other Christians means finding ways to reconcile with one another.

Blessings in your attempts at reconciliation. AMEN.

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-Given: August 24, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)