

***On May 3rd, 2015
Matt Hershey (Church Pastor),
Dennis Brubaker (Elder),
and Sheri McCumber (Pastor of Nurture and Care)
wrote letters to the body of believers
at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship.***

***These letters each contain their own unique style,
as diverse in voice from one another as the authors are.
Yet their unity in grace,
whether through encouragement or caution,
is apparent.***

***Test everything;
hold onto what is good.
Whoever has ears,
let them hear.***

FROM: Matt Hershey

Dear Cornerstone,

I have to admit, this is my second attempt at writing you a letter. For my first attempt I sat down at my computer and started tapping away. After one single-spaced page I realized that I was more typing another sermon to you or writing a paper for an assignment, than I was writing a personal letter. I set out on a journey to find lined paper-which wasn't the easiest task-to write you a "real" letter. So, here it goes. Pardon me if I stumble over my own handwriting, it isn't the easiest to read.

Cornerstone, we are blessed to have one another. We are a part of something, together, that God is doing among us-in our own hearts, and in our community. If you are like me, you don't realize how special this bride is, until you step out into your family, or your neighborhood, or work place. There we find things to be a bit different. I know that when I interact with you, corporately and as a unique individuals, we have something together that doesn't exist in a lot of places. I feel blessed and saddened as I think of this reality.

We have a trust that I don't experience too often "out there." You've loved me and allowed me to love you, as we've loved one another in ways that make the world take notice. Do you know what I am talking about? Have you felt it? Experienced it like I have? I hope so!

Seriously, when I talk to ministry partners and friends from seminary, I am reminded how God has blessed me to be here...with you! The carnage and brokenness in my ministry circles is disheartening. This place is special. My friends and colleagues

remind me, many of whom have not experienced this body directly, how special of a place it is. It is a place of Truth, of love, a place where the Spirit is alive and real! Where healing happens and where we have, together, helped one another discover Jesus!

Don't get me wrong—this church, this body, this bride, is not perfect. We all have been hurt. Relationships are hard, and water is wet, these things are unavoidable. I've said or done things that have hurt some of you. We've all created or opened old wounds in our brothers and sisters in some way, shape, or form. This is to be expected-but not settled for. Together, one on one or in small groups, we've walked out the healing process, where Jesus has revealed himself to be who He says that He is, was, and forever will be. How great it is to see Him in the midst of and on the backside of healing. If your pain is raw, stay in it, Jesus is healer. Let's continue to walk as ones who believe in the power of the cross, who believe not only in His resurrection but in our own transformation through His blood. We cannot give up hope in this most primitive belief embedded in our spirits, as image bearers. He heals, He changes, He creates, He transforms. This is worth hoping in, together!

Cornerstone, it is easy for us to take ourselves too seriously. Don't get me wrong or misunderstand—we have a Father who takes us very seriously. We are dear to Him. What I am trying to say is, there is a bunch of stuff that is out of our control. Whether that stuff that we can't control includes past or present hurts of many forms, physical pain, anticipation of an event, the right job, the right person that never seems to come when needed, the disobedience of a child that we had hopes for, the desire for a healed marriage, or to be married. We each have our painful spots, that, no matter how hard we try, we can't control. Oh, we do our best, and we are so, so creative. If I just read this or believe that, say this or don't say that.

If I live here and not there, or get enough money. If I parent perfectly, or pray enough, or read my Bible this much more, or work harder...This pain will go away or my fear will evaporate...But, it doesn't. We take ourselves too seriously, in that we think we can manage this stuff ourselves. We often encourage God's participation, but on our terms. This doesn't mean that we lock ourselves in a room, pull back the foot rest on the lazy boy and wait.

No! We lean into the hurt, into the pain, into the broken relationship, and it is there that our Father welcomes us home into His arms. It is in that moment when we see things through His eyes and not our own. It is then when we can love someone who has hurt us by loving them through the cross. This is when we can set aside judgement, leaving that to the Judge, and extend grace, oh so vulnerable grace. This is when we can forgive because the One who forgave is holding us.

Our theology cannot save us. Our work cannot save us. Our money cannot save us. Our kindness cannot save us. Our fear certainly cannot save us. God saves us! Cornerstone, God is saving us!

Love,

Matt

FROM: Dennis Brubaker

To my brothers and sisters at Cornerstone,

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. You are my family. I trust my life has impacted yours. I know many of yours has impacted mine.

I want to encourage you, your faith, your prayer covering and your grace is being spoken of near and far. You should feel good about that. That is noteworthy, not in a proud sort of way but in a Genesis sort of way. Where at the end to the day you can say” that is good”. These kinds of things are what equip us to be instrumental to bring transformation to our city and our region. We all have been given gifts by God, use yours in the measure it was given. Be faithful in the little things as in the big.

I also want to encourage you, I think as a body we are way less judgmental and way more loving than we have been in the past and that is a very good thing.

I encourage you to spend time in the Word so you are well grounded and can recognize and discern when our culture is promoting something contrary to the scriptures.

The culture of the world is promoting a lot of fear about what we eat. Are we to steward our bodies well? Yes. But as a church we are not called to a spirit of fear. As I search the scriptures I find that a person is not made unclean by what they eat, for food goes into our stomachs and then passes from our bodies. Rather we are made unclean by what we allow into our minds and what comes out of our mouths. I would encourage you to spend less time on cultural diet fads and more on stewarding your media intake because our minds can be polluted by movies, music, television news shows, etc.

The culture of the world is so materialistic; don't get caught in the trap of materialism. Possessions do not bring happiness. They rob us of our time and we become slaves to our stuff. You don't

need everything you think everyone else has. If you knew the price they paid, you would not want it. Choose instead a simpler life; it has many rewards and more time. Strive instead to live a life that is full of the fruits of the Spirit as in Galatians 5, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. That is a good life!!

Some of you may feel hopelessness and defeat. It is time for that to change and to let Jesus reign, then you will see change!

Change that is not temporary, but permanent.

Change that is not binding, but freeing.

Change that is not boring, but exciting.

Change that is not costly, but rewarding.

Change that is not of us, but of Christ in us.

I pray that for all of us.

Now to you men, lead your families well. Be in charge at home; love your wife as Christ loves the church. That is the best gift you can give your children. Your role as father is much more than provider; it is also protector and not just physical but, spiritual as well. Pray for your family and let them know you are praying.

And now to you women, respect your husband's even in their short comings. You should be their biggest encourager. Know that you have the power to tear down your house or build it up with your tongue. Never talk negatively about your husband to other people. If you have had a bad example in your home growing up, there are many women here at Cornerstone who have a beautiful spirit who can help you.

I say these things not to beat anybody up or even make you feel bad but to help you be all that you can be. I also confess that I am not without blame and struggle in many of these areas myself.

On a personal note, most of you know of my health struggles. I thank you for keeping me and my family lifted up in prayer as we sort out our options, My only request is that God be glorified in my weakness.

I love you all.

In Christ,

Dennis

FROM: Sheri McCumber

My Dear Family of Faith at Cornerstone,

You are a loving, gentle and accepting church but you are so much more than that. You are Priests. Cleansed unto God for His holy service. You are Beautiful. But it is not your *own* beauty; you radiate the beauty, life and love of The Beautiful One. You carry His mark, His imprint, may that glory return back to Him first and primary, but then may you also radiate and shine forth His Love from the overflow within you. May you shine beyond the façade-al masks we can often wear in the moments we think we need them, Sunday mornings, when we are around other Christians, we know what to say or not to say. May we be so deeply touched by the transformative Love of Christ that there is no need of masks for different occasions. There is only the love and compassion and truth of Christ. –Be you, in Christ.

You are anointed by God for great things. You are a part of something much larger than yourself. We are diverse, all coming from various walks of faith, and experiences and we are all continually growing in our personal relationships with Jesus. It is time Cornerstone. Time to agree with God in His great love for you. No more doubting, questioning, pushing Him away or discrediting yourselves. Allow His glory within you to return back to Him. Let us lay aside our proclivity to becoming self-focused, gazing only at our needs, our hurts. We are not victims of those around us, ourselves, or our lives. Let God raise our heads to see HIM. No more downward gazes; gaze into His eyes. He is the only true safety one has.

It is time to yield and receive. Time to surrender all to the cause of Christ. To no longer weigh yourself down by the distractions

of envy or selfish ambition. When you, Cornerstone, can receive who you are in the Kingdom and your God-given role, your heart will then rejoice when another part of the Body receives goodness from the Lord.

It is time that we shift our view and our language to honor the Bride of Christ. Has she strayed and grieved the heart of God for centuries, yes, but anyone can point the finger at the Church and her failings. Rare is the one that can join her and say “I am a part of her – not just her glory – but also her shortcomings.” Being the Bride of Christ, we are clean before Him; now live like it. It is time to see ourselves accurately and live like the children of God that we are.

Grow in your personal intimacy with God as your husband. I have a spouse, but he does not fill all of my intimacy needs. No, no, no. The older I get the more I realize just how much I need the voice of God, the touch of God and the eye of God to see me outside of whatever intimacy my spouse gives me.

As we continue to walk the definition God is laying before us regarding spiritual family, we will still never be enough for each other and our needs. We will hurt one other; it is guaranteed. It is what we do with the hurt we cause, that is the point; living honestly, openly before God, ourselves and others will bring alignment and righteous living.

This house, this home, this place of worship, this tent of meeting is not established to serve the entitlements of man but to esteem the Glory of God. A holy God. This tent is a holy place because the very Living God resides here.

Fear. Reverence. Deep and abiding awe of the Holy One. The One who has stood the test of time. The Supreme God, who bows to

no other. The One that walked from the cool grass of the garden, to the waters of Egypt, to the dirt of Galilee, to the 21st Century. He is the same Jehovah. The same Lord of Hosts. The Lord of the angels armies. The Great I AM. The Alpha and Omega. The Everlasting. May we bow at His feet and be amazed. May we bow at His feet in the Throne Room and gaze at His Glory.

This is my prayer for myself, for us together and the Body of Christ at large:

Father, when it is all said and done we trust you. When the dust settles at the end of the day, months, years, our very lives; we trust you. Come what may, we trust you to never leave us.

God, work in us. We are desperate for your touch. We hurt, we ache, we long for things that may never come to pass that you as God could very easily do but you are not held, tied, constrained by any man or their desires, longings, cries. For you see beyond, you see what we cannot see. We must not slip into the deceitful cavern of “if I just serve you long enough, if I just work hard enough, if I just receive your love enough, if I just seek you diligently enough, if I can just please you enough, if I could just have enough faith; you will show yourself, you will give what I desperately long for.” –“I just, I just, I just”...it’s a rabbit hole leading to ourselves. God, you are not a cruel God who holds out on His children, where you dangle goodness in front of them and then pull it away saying, “nah, just kidding, that’s for someone else.” No, no, no! This is NOT WHO YOU ARE, God of Mercy, God of Love, God of Justice. In death or life you are trustworthy. In sorrow or joy, You are trustworthy. In heartache so great we feel we cannot breathe, you are trustworthy. In peace so surrounding, you are trustworthy. But all, all of it God, lands back on you. Whether it’s the sorrow that is too much to carry, or the joy so

blissful it is all back to you. You are all we have in life, and by all—not a last resort—kind of all, but a **YOU ARE EVERYTHING**. Trust in God is something that sounds good and we can all say, and many use it as a “nice, feel good thing”, but what does it really mean? –To Trust.—I will leave that for you and God tackle together. Dig deep.

God you are the very reason for our existence, may our lives bring Glory and Honor to You the King of Kings. Forever and ever. Amen

Sheri