

COMMUNITY

INTRO: In a recent survey I read, by Barna Group, I saw an astounding statistic. It stated that 40% of adults 18 and over were still longing for at least one deep relationship. That is, two out of every five people were hoping to find just one person that they might be able to connect to. Just one other person. Loneliness is all around us. Yet so few people are ready to fess up that they still don't fit in. I can't help but think this morning that of the 250 people that will show up here today, as many as 100 people are going to affirm silently that they have that same feeling of loneliness eating away at them. But just before those who are satisfied in their relationships begin to tune me out, I want to propose that that this problem may not just be an individual problem, but a problem with Community.

So this morning's subject is going to be an investigation into what Biblical Community is.

PRAYER:

Many people know what community is: A group of people who live in a geographical area. But then have no clue what Biblical Community is, let alone how to define this. "A group of people living during the Bible times?" What is Biblical Community then? Some other ways to describe this are: The family of God, the church, fellowship of believers, affirming belief in Jesus Christ, and the bride of Christ.

All of these denote a sense of oneness or unity. Simply put, we NEED community. We need to be united together with other believers for encouragement and support.

Every Sunday when I come here, it is my habit to ask God, "God are you pleased with this gathering?" **Ephesians 5:10** says, *And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* I wonder if the Sunday service is the answer to the longing for community that we all need? Start with worship, greeting, communion, homily, offering, announcements, then home? If you have never asked yourself this question NOR plan to, I would like to present you another option:

In lieu of Pastor Bob's sermons I want to give you **Satan's Wiki: Top 5 Ways to kill Community.**

#5 Avoid hypocrites – Analyze people and assume the worst. You've heard stories about Christians. There are a ton of hypocrites in the church. Don't admit that sometimes you sin either. Just get quickly offended when you see some kind of inconsistency. Then when all is said and done, make a general assumption about all Christians/churches and say they are all fake. Lastly, commit to never going back because prolonged exposure to hypocrisy can be deadly.

However, if you can't find any hypocrites, try step #4.

#4 Hold high expectations about forming community easily and quickly – Attend only Sunday morning or even better every other Sunday, but always leave immediately following. Make sure to not make eye contact either, they might say hi and make you feel welcome. If you have some staff or ushers greeting you, don't count that as authentic, because after all that's their job and they are supposed to do that. If you happen to find yourself in a group outside of Sunday, say a small group, make your expectations even higher. After all, it's a smaller group, so they should all really make you feel extra special. Then after attending twice and the contemplation of another, decline and conclude that this community of believers did not welcome you at all. Maybe go on the offensive and write a nasty note about how unfriendly and cliquy everyone is because after your attempt to fit in, you still feel lonely. Fret not, if none of this works, just resort to assuming that the person who invited you is a hypocrite and get out.

#3 Make it all about you and what you want – Key words: "CHURCH SHOP" or if you misheard me, "CHURCH HOP" which is equally as effective. Never commit to a church community that you don't

100% love. Wait till you find the best one. You have so much to consider too. Look at the facade of the building, if it's dated don't bother visiting. If there are not ushers "exuberantly spraying out 'Good Mornings'" strongly reconsider attending. A helpful note would be to make a mental or literal checklist of all the things you want...I mean NEED...in church community. Big entry ways, complimentary coffee and literature, comfortable chairs, soft music upon entrance, EXTRA friendly people, powerful worship music, a message that makes you laugh and maybe well up a time or two. Avoid churches where the message makes you feel convicted about sin or not tithing. These are definitely the red flags of manipulation and control. Don't feel bad about being picky, after all that's why there are so many churches, so you can pick the one that makes you happiest. Lastly, don't forget to make your decision considering the people that attend there. It's best to find people that think like you, talk like you, and enjoy the same hobbies as you. That way you'll get along great with everyone. Once you have found the perfect church, don't feel pressured to attend every Sunday. It's all about what you feel so when you wake up it's up to you whether you will attend or not. But if this isn't enough, consider option #2.

#2 Don't reach out or be vulnerable – Let's just say you are shy (even if you are not), simply tell yourself you are. You are in a new environment so make everyone approach you. Even if you've attended for months, your main objective should be to sit passively awaiting for people to greet you. If any Sunday does not meet your quota on 'hello's,' and you leave disgruntled blame everyone else. Reflecting on #3 is helpful in this step – you wanted an extremely friendly church and you deserve it. Then when you have convinced yourself that you should not have to say hi nor be vulnerable, blame the church for not being a friendly and since that violates step #3, you have a safe excuse to never return. When people do engage you in a conversation only give one-word answers. Make sure to send as many uninterested signals as possible. It can start with not making eye contact, and a smooth transition to the limp noodle handshake. Make sure to never speak up, just give quiet grunts and unintelligible mumbles that require a closer proximity on the greeters' part. This is sure to add a real sense of awkwardness and an easy out to never going back. Even if you're a regular attendee, the same things can work for you to make sure that you don't connect to many people. Just seem uninterested like they are the last person on earth you'd like to be talking to. Still if none of these work, #1 is the answer for you.

#1 Get as Busy as Possible – This should come naturally to just about everyone. You can have good intentions about becoming a part of a church community, and at the same time God will understand if you don't have time. Community is not required for our salvation, really, you can worship God anywhere, so don't allot enough time to meet together. Resist the urge to cut things out of your schedule that you don't need to be a part of. You've only got one life, so fill it full then you will be satisfied cause staying busy does wonders for that loneliness inside. Also wear yourself thin by not making time for yourself that way when Sunday morning rolls around, it is so nice to say, "I'll just sleep in. I need it."

Oh, and if you have kids it gets even better too. You can fill their lives up as well and make it your personal mission to be their taxi to and from every activity in academics, sports, and after school programs. It is after all, the best remedy to a child's rebelliousness. Prioritize their life for them because they don't know any better. Silently teach them through your busyness that their only chance to be successful is to be productive with all their time. Therefore, church activities, small groups, retreats, and gatherings can only occur when things slow down. But let's be honest, we know things won't slow down. Then when they move out and grow up into your example of community, it will be seen loud and clear. It's not that important!

Now I know no one is out there planning up ways to kill community, but it is amazing the things we will say to ourselves if we don't like so and so. We will kill Biblical Community before it even has a chance to start.

So is the remedy to all this to simply plug into a Sunday service (10 or 12) and then faithfully attend and be nice to everyone? NO!!!

As I sat pondering some of these questions in Kaladi's, over a good cup of Joe, I picked up my cup and read what was written on the sleeve. In bold red letters it was written "Catalyst for Community." I kinda chuckled to myself thinking, "This is a catalyst for community?" That is lame. I don't feel any community here. I'm sitting alone by myself drinking coffee, reading, and typing on my laptop. The only community that is here is in the cliques of each table.

Hold that thought and think of Sunday morning. We come here on Sunday morning the "catalyst" so to speak for Community. But Sunday morning is just a spring board. We come here to meet together on the common bond of worshipping Jesus Christ or inquiring about Him. It is just the spark, the platform for further community to be built. Community can be fostered here but it is not as effective as a smaller setting. What if I were to challenge you to pray with your neighbors on your right and on your left, in front of you and behind you? Would you feel uncomfortable? You've just proven my point. Sunday is just a Catalyst for Community. It will begin on Sunday morning but it will also die on Sunday morning if this is all one seeks for Community in.

Illustration: Before we move on consider what a river is and what defines it. At first thought, many might presume a river is best defined by water moving downhill. But I disagree. I believe that the defining point of a river is the banks. Because without the banks, that river morphs and rolls over anything in its path.

Much like this river, are you and I. We are headed in one direction and without banks holding us to a path, we can wander all over the map. But this study on Community will give a lot of purpose as to why we meet together and why we should seek community. It's not for more friendships. It certainly happens, but it's should not be the main reason.

So before we begin to talk about the 5 things essential to Biblical Community, we must first start with what it is, as described in the NT.

Realizing what Community is creates incentive for how Community should function.

It's like at the Fall Retreat coming up: We are going to be dealing with how right thinking precedes right living. That's my only plug this sermon for the Fall Retreat I promise.

So what does the NT call the Church Community? Some might say a homogeneous mixture, or a loaf of bread, or even a vine. But none of these are as descriptive as we read about in **I Cor 12:12-13**:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

We are a Body or as some put it the Body of Christ!

Transition: So as we've seen, Community is more than just a mixture of people, we are tied together in the picture of a body. With this in our mind, we can begin with:

5 things that are Essential for Biblical Community

Please turn in your Bible's to **I Cor 12:14-17** or if you don't have a Bible, you can follow along with the power point.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16

And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is there are many parts, yet one body.

The first point to understand is that in Community **We will be different**

Observations:

From this passage we see that a healthy body/community is sustained by different members with different gifts/talents.

In Paul's day some people began comparing themselves with other people and what they were capable of, and because of their differences, concluded they should not be a part of that body of believers.

Paul encourages people with this mindset, "I'm different" to contemplate a healthy body. Without diversity in a body, it could be lame, mute, deaf, or blind.

Therefore, you are NEEDED!!!

What about you? Have you been drifting from church to church looking for a place to blend in and find commonality? What's your story? If your thinking has been plagued with, I just don't feel I fit in, this verse is for you. It's okay to be a little different, because there must be diversity.

Yes, belonging is something that we seek, but it should not be the prerequisite to getting plugged in and actually trying. We should strive to expand our community with no preference or bias toward any personality. Jesus Christ is the foundation, but beyond that, allow God to form it, welcoming others with open arms.

Transition: So we can agree now that we will be different, but unfortunately difference can breed a world of potential problems...that's why this second point is so necessary.

Turn in your Bibles to **Col 3:12-14:**

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

The second point to understand is that in Community **we must love each other**

Observations:

There are a lot of things that are required of us in our interaction as Christ followers. We must be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, long suffering, and forgiving.

Above all these is the quality of love. Love is the glue to any array of differences in Community though.

Peter put it another way in **I Peter 4:8:** *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

At first glance this verse might perplex some. How could my love cover over sins? The answer is that when we love each other something happens. Our love actually "covers" their sins. For example, Every time I talk to so and so, they gossip about everything, therefore, I will love them in spite of their flaw. Many might read Peter and say, that it could mean overlook, but I say that is a poor interpretation. Loving others does not simply encourage us to tolerate each other and put up with or overlook flaws, it supernaturally empowers us to honestly love throughout all times of life.

Test yourself in this. When you get around that one person who, God bless them, but drives you up the wall, are you spending your energy just suppressing your irritation? Or do you find yourself honestly loving them, desiring that they would continue growth in Christ? Without love, true Biblical Community will never happen, it must be there.

Have you ever been wronged therefore you justify you're your apathy towards someone? Is this going to fix anything or promote healthy community?

Illustration: When Karys and I got married, we were welcomed by our community of neighbors by way of someone lifting our doormat. I got to be honest and say this: I was kinda jaded for a bit. It wasn't even a week living there and someone saw our welcome mat and ironically "welcomed us" by taking it.

I had to make a choice that day. Forgive whoever did it and move on, loving my neighbors and praying for them or bury my resentment in seclusion. I had to give it to God and move on. But I will tell you this, nothing stops me from looking on the neighbors door step to see if my welcome mat shows up.

The same is true for our Community here in Christ. Are we going to let one time where we got burned keep us from future relationships or restoring broken ones? It's time we commit to healing our body by committing to love each other.

Transition: Thirdly, after understanding the answer to diversity is love, let us turn to **Heb. 10:24**

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works

In many translations, much like the one I'm reading from, the exact meaning of this verse is a little cloudy. Many would read it this way, "The object we are considering is HOW to stir one another up." But this is not the main thrust that the author is trying to get across. When you look closely at the Greek, you will see that the object receiving consideration is not how to stir each other up, but rather ONE ANOTHER. So when we look at it plainly he is saying, Let us consider...one another.

So, The third point to understand is that in Community **We must consider others:**

The simple statement might not resound within you yet, but what I want to draw on is far reaching into the heart of Community! We must break free from the tendency to think only of ourselves. "I want someone to talk to me." Maybe just maybe the reason why there is so much loneliness is because there is so much self-consideration. Maybe it's always looking around and seeing that everyone else is connecting and I have no one. There is not enough reaching out, consideration of others. After all it is uncomfortable to put yourself out there and risk being rejected. But what I'm saying to you is, quit considering only yourself, shed your wants long enough to reach out and consider others.

If our consideration is merely just a process of what can stir people's hearts, it could be a dangerous line between fake and for real. And besides, no one wants to be a plan of action, project, mission, or something to be pitied. People want to be people, not some goal to attain. So to miss the thrust of this verse is to say, I'm going to consider a technique, formula, or method. When the author is in fact saying, consider people, study people, learn people.

Maybe it hasn't set in yet. Oh that you would put your mind into the consideration of people. Dedicate time to observing people. It's not some awkward endeavor like me at the zoo with a notebook and a camera. This is just being around people. I know some of you here pretty well, and because I have studied (considered) you, I am now able to see that something is a little different. You aren't quite yourself today. Then I can approach and honestly ask them what is going on. I can stir them up to love and good works. Rather than being so engrossed in my method of encouraging that I miss an opportunity to encourage. If we never learn to study/consider each other, we will never stir each other up.

Consider Paul to the Romans:

Romans 12:10b NIV *Honor one another above yourselves.*

NASB *give preference to one another in honor.*

Won't you commit with me this morning to a new pattern of thinking. Drop the assumptions, drop the judgment, drop all your preconceived notions and commit to the responsibility of considering others!

Let's read on in **Hebrews 10** verse **25**:

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.***

The fourth point to understand is that in Community **We must regularly meet:**

Community cannot happen without a committed desire to regularly meet together. I'm not just advocating for a Sunday event, but as much as one can. Choose a small group that you can deepen in your relationships with each other. It is essential for the Community that we need to build.

As is the habit of some: Even back then, many people were too busy, forgot, or didn't prioritize community. Don't let that be you. Commit today that you are going to try harder and being an active member in the Body of Christ.

Even if it is just to commit to stay after the Sunday service, do it.

Commit to be considering others.

Commit to meet with a small group

Some of you here might be thinking there is nothing for you or there is no one your age. It might even be that there isn't a group that meets when you are available. My challenge to you is to not wait till something opens up, give it a go and start something. See what happens. Step out in your considering others and see if God will not bless your endeavor. There is so much need in the Body of Christ, the Biblical Community. There are so many mentoring needs out there for youth, college, newly married people. Have you considered all options how you might better serve others? Read **Acts 2** sometime, it'll change the way you look at Community.

The fifth and final point to understand is that in Community **We are obligated to one another**

The body of Christ, the Community at Baxter Road, the Church has an obligation to each other. Let us not neglect each other.

As the worship team comes forward it is my heart that you heard from God this morning considering the level of Community that each of us is experiencing.

CONCLUSION: It took Paul seeing Jesus appear before him to realize he was going the wrong direction, maybe today was that wake up call. I've been making Community about me. I have not been making it a priority and trying to build Biblical Community like I should. This morning before we sing this song in closing I want to ask if you would please stand with me and close your eyes. If you are like me and see how Community has strayed from the way that God desires it, I want you repeat after me out loud in prayer to God. If you feel led to raise your hands as we pray, please do so. "God I surrender to you. In order to consider others. Encourage others. Love others. And find meaningful Biblical community. Give us a heart to do this. We love you. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen."