

## **WHAT IS BIBLICAL COMMUNITY? By Matt Chandler**

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The God we worship is a God Who has eternally existed in community. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have dwelled in perfect unity, love and joy before and throughout time. This triune God created humanity as the chief of His creations for the display of this relationship.

In the beginning it was written that "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Man was walking in the garden with God and without sin and yet such a relationship was not ideal. It was not in accordance with the purpose of the Creator for the creature.

We read in the Gospels that among Jesus' final words before the cross was a prayer for the unity of His people, a unity expressive of the unity found within the godhead (John 17:21-22).

We know from the testimony of the early church that community was the natural result of the Spirit's influence upon the Church (Acts 2:42-47).

It is apparent that community is not some peripheral Christian teaching but is central to the outworking of God's purpose in the world. God is glorified when He is properly reflected; by dwelling in unity, we rightly image our communal Maker. In being obedient to this calling, The Village Church urges each member to be deeply involved in the lives of others, to "do life together." Unfortunately, we have not always done a great job of explaining exactly what this phrase means. This paper will serve as a short introduction to the topic of biblical community and what it is that we mean when we commend "doing life."

Our hope for us is not that we would simply hang out with each other, but rather, that we would engage in a battle for deep and abiding relationships within the body. We find the following characteristics to be particularly indicative of biblical community:

### **1. Love**

Love can be a rather ambiguous term. We love our wives, our children, our dogs, Mexican food and the Dallas Cowboys. Surely we do not mean the same thing in each use of the term.

Five times in letter of 1<sup>st</sup> John, the apostle writes that believers are to love one another. However, he does not leave the command in ambiguity. Rather, he qualifies the command by showing that love is best represented by the sending of the Son to die for our sins and thus is inherently sacrificial (1 John 3:16-18). Let us love in truth and deed and not merely in word. Love which is not sacrificial is really not love.

### **2. Consistency**

The early church pictured in the book of Acts met daily to encourage each other and worship together. Hebrews 10 tells us to not neglect meeting

together as some are in the habit of doing, while chapter 4 tells us to exhort one another daily. A clear Scriptural admonition exists toward long lasting relationships and deeply consistent presence in the lives of others. Occasional or infrequent gatherings do not capture the spirit of the text.

### **3. Worship**

The early church spent its time in engaging in celebration of the Lord and the remembrance of the gospel through the means of grace which were provided. We therefore find it essential for biblical community to be about the pursuit of the Lord through the Lord 's Supper, prayer, singing and the reading and teaching of the Scriptures.

### **4. Authenticity**

People who gather together and yet do not truly know each other cannot rightly be called a community. The Bible commands the confession of sin, struggles and praises, which is evidence of a life of transparency. This characteristic also bears with it a commitment to engage in the proper means of fighting back sin for the good of the sinner, the health of the body and the glory of the Lord. Oftentimes such a dedication to put sin to death includes the proper and godly use of the steps of discipline as outlined in Matthew 18.

Given the characteristics of community, what are the practical implications? While the list could be quite extensive, a large number of the requirements could easily be seen by doing a thorough search of the dozens of "one another" passages especially within the New Testament. Such passages tell believers to:

- Love one another (John 13:34, 15:12)
- Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Comfort and agree with one another (2 Corinthians 13:11)
- Serve one another (John 13:1-20; Galatians 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Be honest with one another (Colossians 3:9)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Confess to one another (James 5:16)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)

The Village wants its members to live Christianly. We want to be distinct in the way in we work, speak, think, rest and play. We want to do those things which glorify our gracious Lord and Savior. To properly reflect His communal nature and to follow His communal commands, we must as a people engage in fellowship which is sacrificially loving, consistent, worshipful, and authentically transparent. In this way, we seek to "do life together."