

CHAPTER 16

Biblical Community

KEY IDEA

I fellowship with Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, in the life of others, and in the world.

KEY VERSE

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved
- Acts 2:44-47

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

Before we even get started, what do you picture when you hear the term "Biblical Community?"

Too often we experience faith in a solitary way. We rarely think of it in terms of "us" and "our," and frequently see it as "me" and "my." But we can't mistake these Western, individualistic values for biblical values.

> The Bible is clear that living in community with other believers is irreplaceable in the Christian life.

Christian community is simply sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of private lives and beyond the superficial social contacts that pass for "Christian fellowship."

> The biblical ideal of community challenges us to commit ourselves to life together as the people of God.

We read in the Gospels that among Jesus' final words before the cross was a prayer for the unity of his people. (John 17:21-22 -- ²¹ *I want all of them to be one with each other, just as I am one with you and you are one with me. I also want them to be one with us. Then the people of this world will believe that you sent me.* ²² *I have honored my followers in the same way that you honored me, in order that they may be one with each other, just as we are one.*)

First Corinthians 12 says that we're all interconnected as the body of Christ, and so it's not possible to be free-standing, isolated entities.

> It's not possible to survive without each other.

Do you think it's possible to isolate ourselves from a Biblical Community and still find victorious living in our Christian life?

- > There is good news and bad news regarding this:
 - < The bad news is that living in community requires sacrifice.
 - < The good news is that we can survive and thrive in community.
- > We need to have permission to be ourselves within community.
 - < Many of the troubles that come up in community seem to come from our brokenness and insecurity. Much of this happens because we ultimately think we're on our own and that we can survive that way.
 - ^ However, we can't survive that way. When the body works together, there is great power to heal, restore, and renew.

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

From the beginning, God designed and hardwired us for community.

See Genesis 2:4-25 (pgs. 252-252)

God made man "in His own image" (Gen. 1:27).

> He formed him from the dust of earth, breathed into him the breath of life, and made him a person capable of interacting with his Creator. (vs. 7)

God had prepared a perfect environment for man's health and happiness. (vs. 18)

> He had created man with abilities to enjoy the world around him and to communicate with his Creator. But something was missing.

< Man needed a person, another human, to be a companion to him, and God met that need.

< God moved to complete his creation of the universe. He fulfilled man's need for a companion.

The woman was a person made in the image of God as Adam was. She would be a helper-companion that God knew he needed.

> They could relate to each other physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

FROM CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY: Genesis 2:18

The word "helper" in this section is not a demeaning term at all; in the Bible it is used most frequently of God (Ps. 33:20; 70:5; 115:9). When God helps people, it means he does for them what they cannot possibly do for themselves. In this context the word indicates that the woman would supply what man lacked and, by implication of the Hebrew behind the phrase, "just right for him," that he would provide what she lacked.

Community is not a "nice-to-have" addition but an essential experience for living a godly and healthy life. God has intended for humans to have rich, life-giving relationships with each other; relationships energized and motivated by the actual presence of God among them. Adam and Eve experienced this

perfect ideal in the garden. But their rejection of God's vision for life together caused humankind to be escorted from the garden and out of community with God. This separation from God and the presence of sin in every human being's nature is a perpetual challenge to creating strong community. But it is clear from God's Word that people were not meant for separation and isolation.

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 (CEV)

⁸ For example, some people don't have friends or family. But they are never satisfied with what they own, and they never stop working to get more. They should ask themselves, "Why am I always working to have more? Who will get what I leave behind?" What a senseless and miserable life!

⁹ You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. ¹⁰ If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble. ¹¹ If you sleep alone, you won't have anyone to keep you warm on a cold night. ¹² Someone might be able to beat up one of you, but not both of you. As the saying goes, "A rope made from three strands of cord is hard to break."

FROM TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

Two are better when it comes to walking. Roads and paths in Palestine were not paved or even leveled, and the fields had many hidden rocks. It was common for even the most experienced traveler to stumble, perhaps break a bone, or even fall into a hidden pit. How wonderful to have a friend who can help us up (or out). But if this applies to our physical falls, how much more does it apply to those times when we stumble in our spiritual walk and need restoration? We should be grateful for Christian friends who help us walk straight.

Community is a place where we teach each other and hold ourselves accountable to each other.

> When we hear what God is teaching others, it teaches us too.

> When we submit to the guidance and examination of other believers, it forces us to grow and be accountable to our commitments.

FROM NAIPRESS

Ignoring the (power of accountability) is one of the main reasons many small groups never really experience Christian community. They prefer to remain superficial, inadvertently, perhaps, they enter into a pact of mediocrity in which they tacitly agree to let all members "mind their own business" and not to hold people accountable either to each other or to the teachings of Christ. It's a great loss, for when we refuse accountability to the community, we not only fail to grow, but we put ourselves in grave danger.

Christian accountability is an element that needs to be given and taken carefully. It is a valuable tool for Christian growth and community, but can also run the risk of misuse. Consider the following:

> In order to establish Christian accountability, there needs to be trust.

< Developing trust is a slow process and it takes time to develop and grow.

< As people meet together to share, they begin to establish a rapport with one another.

^ Active listening is essential to developing trust. (James 1:19)

^ A non-judgmental attitude is another essential element. We can be accepting of an individual while being discerning of the situation. (Matthew 7:1-2)

^ Caring for each other is also essential. (1 John 4:21)

Below is a section taken from PATHEOS.COM by Jack Wellman regarding Psalm 133:1 -- "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" It should make you think about how we treat each other in community and what our treatment of each other – good and bad – does to God.

"I heard about a large church in Dallas, Texas that actually divided because they couldn't agree over the color that the carpet should be in the sanctuary. How do you think Jesus felt about this? I heard an analogy once and it went like this: The bride came down the aisle but something was dreadfully wrong. She had a sleeve of her gown that was torn, she had a black eye, her lip was bloodied, she walked with a limp, she had an arm in bandages, and her hair was a mess. What is the analogy? There you go...the Bride of Christ has been fighting again! Sometimes Christians do not act like Christians..."

< Accountability involves a willingness to open yourself up and share sensitive or personal information. This is why trust is so imperative. If you sense trust, you are more open to share your innermost thoughts without concern of betrayal.

> The Bible speaks of Christian accountability.

< Christians have a personal accountability: God holds us accountable. (Romans 14:12)

< Christians are also accountable to one another.

^ In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we read that Christians are all part of the same body - the body of Christ - and each member needs or belongs to the other. This Scripture suggests the importance of strong accountability between Believers.

} It is important for every Believer to have at least one other person in which to confide, pray with, listen to, and encourage.

^ Galatians 6:1-2 gives a helpful principle. If your accountability friend has done something contrary to the Bible, you are called to confront him gently, forgive him, and comfort him. It also admonishes you to consider yourself because no one is above temptation."

^ Another aspect of Christian accountability is encouraging each other to grow in spiritual maturity. (Hebrews 10:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In order to sustain life-giving community, God must be the center. After delivering the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the Lord informed Moses of his intent to be with his people in a tent known as the tabernacle.

FROM Exodus 25:1-9 (CEV)

The LORD said to Moses: ² Tell everyone in Israel who wants to give gifts that they must bring them to you. ... ⁸ I also want them to build a special place where I can live among my people. ⁹ Make it and its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

God was about to fulfill his promise to be Israel's God by coming to the camp of Israel to dwell with his people.

> In order to do this God needed a place for his glory to dwell and servants to minister in that place. So he had the Jews build the Tabernacle and appointed the tribe of Levi to serve.

God's presence would be represented by the ark of the covenant — an elaborate box containing the Ten Commandment tablets, a gold jar filled with manna and Aaron's staff. The ark was placed in a special

room in the tabernacle called the Most Holy Place, which was sectioned off by a thick curtain. While Moses and the Israelites were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, they finished the building and preparation necessary to set up the tabernacle.

See Exodus 40:1-35 (pgs. 253-255 in BELIEVE).

The Tabernacle identified Israel as the people of God and set them apart from the other nations. The Tabernacle was consecrated by and for the glory of God.

> Other nations had sacred buildings, but the Tabernacle was for the presence of the glory of God to meet with his people.

About five hundred years later, the Israelites built a temple in Jerusalem to replace the tabernacle with a permanent place where they could meet with God.



In the New Testament, God's presence among his people changed. Simultaneous with the death of Jesus on the cross, the heavy curtain hanging in front of the Holy Place that quarantined God's people from God's presence was torn from top to bottom. The presence of God was no longer isolated to this small room in the temple. Forgiveness of sins was now available. Paul instructs us on the new "temple" for God's presence.

Ephesians 2:11-22 (CEV)

¹¹ Don't forget that you are Gentiles. In fact, you used to be called "uncircumcised" by those who take pride in being circumcised. ¹² At that time you did not know about Christ. You were foreigners to the people of Israel, and you had no part in the promises that God had made to them. You were living in this world without hope and without God, ¹³ and you were far from God. But Christ offered his life's blood as a sacrifice and brought you near God.

¹⁴ Christ has made peace between Jews and Gentiles, and he has united us by breaking down the wall of hatred that separated us. Christ gave his own body ¹⁵ to destroy the Law of Moses with all its rules and commands. He even brought Jews and Gentiles together as though we were only one person, when he united us in peace. ¹⁶ On the cross Christ did away with our hatred for each other. He also made peace between us and God by uniting Jews and Gentiles in one body. ¹⁷ Christ came and preached peace to you Gentiles, who were far from God, and peace to us Jews, who were near God. ¹⁸ And because of Christ, all of us can come to the Father by the same Spirit.

¹⁹ You Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God. ²⁰ You are like a building with the apostles and prophets as the foundation and with Christ as the most important stone. ²¹ Christ is the one who holds the building together and makes it grow into a holy temple for the Lord. ²² And you are part of that building Christ has built as a place for God's own Spirit to live.

With his resurrection, Christ brought about a new unity of Jew and Gentile.

> God had put a difference between Jews and Gentiles so that his purposes in salvation might be accomplished.

< Once those purposes were accomplished there were no more differences.

< The Resurrection accomplished the purpose that was intended and the differences erased forever through reconciliation. (Reconcile means "to bring together again.")

^ It was all a part of the plan that is continuing today to bring fellowship back between God and humanity.

^ Jesus Christ has united Jews and Gentiles in the Church.



KEY QUESTION: How do I develop healthy relationships others?

THE NEW COMMUNITY

After the resurrection of Jesus and before his ascension back to the Father, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As promised, the actual presence of God descended on the new temple — believers in Jesus Christ. With God’s presence dwelling in the hearts of believers, their potential for vibrant community with each other escalated.

Acts 2:1-4 (CEV)

2 On the day of Pentecost all the Lord’s followers were together in one place. 2 Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting. 3 Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there. 4 The Holy Spirit took control of everyone, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak.

NT Pentecost pictures the formation of the Christian Church.

- > At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to dwell with the believer, in order to unify the believers.
- > The baptism of the Spirit means that we belong to the body of Christ.
 - < The baptism involves all other believers—it makes us one in the Body of Christ.
 - > The fullness of the spirit means our bodies belong to Christ.

Acts 2:42-47 (CEV)

42 They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together. 43 Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. 44 All the Lord’s followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. 45 They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. 46 Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, 47 while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved.

The believers continued to use the Temple for their place of assembly and ministry, but they also met in various homes.

- > The large number of converts needed instruction in the Word and fellowship with God’s people if they were to grow and become effective witnesses.
- > The church was unified. The members loved each other and served the Lord together.

Acts 4:32-37 (CEV)

32 The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other. 33 In a powerful way the apostles told everyone that the Lord Jesus was now alive. God greatly blessed his

followers, ³⁴ and no one went in need of anything. Everyone who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money ³⁵ to the apostles. Then they would give the money to anyone who needed it. ³⁶⁻³⁷ Joseph was one of the followers who had sold a piece of property and brought the money to the apostles. He was a Levite from Cyprus, and the apostles called him Barnabas, which means “one who encourages others.”

The new baptism of the Holy Spirit had created a deeper unity among the people.

> There was a great desire to sacrifice and share with one another.

What would it take to experience the kind of Christian community that Acts talks about? The Bible gives us a picture: (Points taken from CRUPRESSGREEN.COM)

1. DEVOTION TO CHRISTIAN TEACHING: Above all else, Christian community needs to be Christian. It should not be just Christian in name, or a group of people who just happen to be Christians.

> There needs to be a commitment to studying Biblical truth.

> It is within Christian community that God intends for us to grow in our relationship with Him.

< Learning to apply Christian truth to our lives isn't just a personal exercise; it is an act of communal worship.

> Without devotion to Christian teaching, Christian community is over before it begins.

2. FELLOWSHIP: Foundational to community is commitment to fellowship.

> This commitment is more than just showing up at small group or church once a week.

< Commitment to fellowship requires us to be a meaningful part of other Christian's lives.

^ We should have non-Christian friends, but if most of our closest friends aren't other Christians, we need to reassess our friendship circle.

> We see from Acts that fellowship doesn't happen accidentally.

< Sharing meals together, giving generously of our possessions, visiting other Christians where they live, is the result of intentional planning.

^ Without intentionally spending time together, and a conscious commitment to fellowship, community will never happen.

3. CONTINUING IN ONE MIND: The early Christians “continued in one mind.” We also need to continue to be united together throughout the Christian community.

> Unity among believers is so important that Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “I pray also for those who will believe in me.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me...” (John 17:20-23).

> Jesus actually connects unity to the effectiveness of our witness to the world around us.

> Acts finishes the description of the early, united, Christian community with, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day...” (Acts 2:47).

> A united Christian community is attractive to outsiders.

> Unity has always been an elusive goal. Even in Biblical times, we are shown a whole range of problems that undermine Christian unity. Most of these problems are still around today in some form.

< The Corinthians were guilty of disputes between them as members claimed their primary loyalty to different teachers (1 Cor. 3:1-9).

< Racial and economic prejudice challenged the oneness of the early church (Eph. 2:11-22, 4:1-5, and James 2:1-6).

< Disunity also came from overzealousness in minor issues (see Romans 14:1-23).

4. SINCERITY OF HEART: “Being of one mind” is needed for community, but an even deeper requirement is the sincere openness of our hearts.

> This is a kind of vulnerability that is rarely found outside of Christianity.

> Insincerity is natural for all of us who live in this fallen world.

< It’s just easier to be insincere, to hide, and to subtly deceive by keeping people at a distance.

> If we are to grow in our Christian walk, and if we want to overcome sin in our lives, we need to communicate the true state of our hearts in Christian community.

< This forces us to be honest with ourselves while providing an atmosphere of loving accountability.

5. PRAISING GOD: Praising God together can be one of the most enjoyable parts of community. This is more than just singing or prayer; this is worship together.

> As we share what God is doing in our lives, it encourages the entire community and brings glory and honor to God.

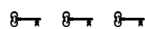
> As we take time to praise God for who He is and to thank Him for all that He has done, God naturally brings the community closer together.

6. EVANGELISM: The goal of Christian community is not just that we can enjoy the blessings of God together, but also that we can develop a place that is attractive to non-Christians.

> Unfortunately, rather than welcoming newcomers, many Christians develop closed, cliquish communities.

< Most people who are antagonistic towards Christ, base their opposition on negative experiences with Christian community (or what they think is Christian community).

^ If outsiders experience Christian community as a place where intimate, meaningful, loving, welcoming, God-Centered relationships happen, it will help remind their hearts of all that they are missing and bring them closer to Christ.



During the first century it proved difficult for many Jewish converts to overcome the pressure and persecution they received from other family members who remained in Judaism. The author of Hebrews wrote that letter to these believers to convince them of the superiority of Christ over the law and to encourage them to lean heavily into their new community of faith to persevere.

Hebrews 10:19-25 (CEV)

¹⁹ My friends, the blood of Jesus gives us courage to enter the most holy place ²⁰ by a new way that leads to life! And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself.

²¹ We have a great high priest who is in charge of God’s house. ²² So let’s come near God with pure hearts and a confidence that comes from having faith. Let’s keep our hearts pure, our consciences free from evil, and our bodies washed with clean water. ²³ We must hold tightly to the hope that we say is ours. After all, we can trust the one who made the agreement with us. ²⁴ We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. ²⁵ Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord’s coming is getting closer.

Fellowship with God must never become singular and selfish. We must also fellowship with other Christians.

> Note in verse 24 that the emphasis is not on what a believer gets from the assembly, but on what he/she can contribute to the assembly.

> Our faithfulness in church attendance, spiritual leadership, service and ministry encourages others and spurs them on to do good.



KEY IDEA: Fellowship with Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, in the life of others, and in the world.

FROM THYME: ACE, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

Christ's vision is that you will become an integral part of his grand body of believers, ushering in his kingdom around the globe by being grafted into the lives of a local body, making a difference right where you are. The ministry you do for a neighbor truly does impact the world as all believers join in obeying Christ. ... The practice of biblical community reinforces both our belief in our identity in Christ individually and our belief in the church to, together, be his hands and feet to the world.

MARKS OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Biblical community engages everyone in the community to use their gifts, resources and time in unison to accomplish a task important to the plan of God. The Israelites returned from 70 years of captivity and were rebuilding their lives under the reign of God. Nehemiah returned to spearhead the rebuilding of the wall around the city to protect them from bullying from the surrounding nations. Everyone in the community, including children, was called to help with this massive and important project.

See Nehemiah 2:11-3:32 (pgs 258-261 in BELIEVE).

Summary of story:

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to inspect the broken-down wall around Jerusalem. He found it in much need of repair.

After the inspection, Nehemiah called the people together and reviewed the problems he found. He reminded them of the condition of the city, along with its broken down wall and burned gates and urged them to rebuild the wall in order to restore the honor of God's people.

During the rebuilding project the Jews met with ridicule, mocking and threats, but Nehemiah refused to quit re-building.

This was an enormous project. Those who worked on it came from many places, from differing professions, and included both men and women. Nehemiah enlisted the help of many different types of people. He divided them into work crews and appointed each crew to work on a different section of the wall. Many were needed to work together in unity in order to complete the project God had sent Nehemiah to oversee.

The greater tasks of the Kingdom need to be done together in order to be done right.

The wall in Jerusalem was built so quickly because the Biblical community pitched in and made it happen. In the New Testament, Jesus modeled the attitude and life of the new community he was forming through the first disciples. Those in Biblical community seek to serve, not to be served. (See John 13:1-17 pgs. 261-262 in BELIEVE)

One of the marked differences between the church and the rest of society is the call to live for others. Throughout the New Testament followers of Jesus were urged to look out for “one another.” When the early Christians did this in faith, it created an irresistible attraction for outsiders to belong to the family of God.

The following characteristics describe Biblical Community:

1. Love -- Five times in 1st John, we read that believers are to love one another.

> This command is exemplified by God sending his Son to die for our sins – the sacrifice he made for the community. (1 John 3:16-18).

< We must love in truth and deed and not merely in word.

< Love which is not sacrificial might not really be love.

Love is not the only “one another” Biblical admonition that is given to the community. Christian maturity takes time, and it takes our brothers and sisters in Christ. Below are some of the “one another” passages within the New Testament. This list just scratches the surface, but it is enough to remind us that we need the community of faith to grow up in Christ.

- 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)

2. Consistency -- Hebrews 10 tells the believers to not neglect meeting together regularly. The early church in the book of Acts met daily to encourage each other and worship together.

> Occasional or infrequent gatherings were not going to allow the consistent relationship building that God required. Encouragement was to be a daily practice. (See Hebrews 3:13)

< Scripture is clear in showing there are lasting relationships and deeply consistent support in the lives of others in true Biblical Community.

3. Worship -- In Chapter 11 we studied about the importance of Worship.

> Much of worship is meant to be practiced in community. The Bible encourages us to gather with other believers to encourage one another, pray together and remember God’s love for us.

> Biblical community is 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 should not be called a community.

- > There needs to be confession of our struggles, and praises in our blessings, growth and accomplishments. This is evidenced in a life of open genuineness.
- > This part of Biblical Community can be tricky as we open ourselves to be vulnerable. But it is also necessary to obtain the guidance and support of those in your community.
 - < It may include discipline (see Matthew 18).
 - < It may include releasing wants and desires that will ultimately harm you and your community.
 - < It may include following some hard, but wise counsel.

On pages 262-264 of your BELIEVE book are several scripture verses relating to Community. Let's look at them.

Romans 12:4-5 (CEV)

⁴ A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use. ⁵ That's how it is with us.

There are many of us, but we each are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another.

A lot of times we look at the gifts of other people and the way God made them and become critical – until we finally come to the point where we understand that there are many members in the body—each one with a part to play and a function to fulfill.

Romans 12:10 (CEV)

¹⁰ Love each other as brothers and sisters and honor others more than you do yourself.

Love is like the circulatory system of the spiritual body that enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way.

- > It must be an honest and humble love.

Romans 13:8 (CEV)

⁸ Let love be your only debt! If you love others, you have done all that the Law demands.

“Love each other” is the basic principle of the Christian life.

- > When we practice love, we need no other laws because love covers them all.

Romans 15:5-7 (CEV)

⁵ God is the one who makes us patient and cheerful. I pray that he will help you live at peace with each other, as you follow Christ. ⁶ Then all of you together will praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Honor God by accepting each other, as Christ has accepted you.

We need to let people have space as we show them grace, as Christ did.

- > Something happens when we hear and study the scriptures together. There is a oneness of mind that takes place—even if we differ on certain interpretations or applications.

Romans 15:14 (CEV)

¹⁴ My friends, I am sure that you are very good and that you have all the knowledge you need to teach each other.

Paul encourages Christians who have a greater maturity and wisdom to give one another practical, real-life wisdom and counsel.

Galatians 5:13 (CEV)

¹³ My friends, you were chosen to be free. So don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to serve each other with love.

The commandment “serve one another in love” has a type of formula:

- > Liberty + Love = Service to others; Liberty – Love = License (slavery to sin)

- < The liberty to which we're called is not liberty to sin, but liberty from sin.
- < We are to take this liberty we have to serve one another.

Galatians 6:2 (CEV)

² You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand.

Remember the law of Christ? Matthew 22:36-40 – to love God with all you are and love your neighbor as yourself.

> Everyone in the church has gone through or will go through trials, sorrows, and sufferings and the fact that they have enables them to minister to those who have or are going through the very same thing.

- < Misery does love company but isolation makes the person experiencing the sorrow have too much to bear on their own.

Ephesians 4:2 (CEV)

² Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other.

Paul calls for us to be humble and gentle. When we put on these two characteristics we can be patient with others. As we develop patience, our love flows more freely.

Ephesians 5:21 (CEV)

²¹ Honor Christ and put others first.

In other translations we find the words “submit to one another”. Submission has nothing to do with the order of authority. It governs the operation of authority.

> We are not to throw our weight around, or seek to become great at somebody else's expense.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 (CEV)

⁹ God doesn't intend to punish us, but wants us to be saved by our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ Christ died for us, so that we could live with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes. ¹¹ That's why you must encourage and help each other, just as you are already doing.

THE PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA WERE SO CERTAIN THAT JESUS WOULD RETURN IN THEIR LIFE-TIME THAT THEY BECAME WORRIED ABOUT THE BELIEVERS WHO WERE DYING BEFORE THAT HAPPENED. PAUL WROTE TO ENCOURAGE THEM IN THE FACT THAT THOSE WHO HAD DIED WERE STILL UNDER THE PROMISES.

The return of Jesus is eminent. But while we are waiting we can gain encouragement in knowing that those who have died experience life in Christ.

> This message of hope is to be shared as we comfort each other with its thought.

Hebrews 13:1-3 (CEV)

¹ Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should. ² Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it. ³ Remember the Lord's people who are in jail and be concerned for them. Don't forget those who are suffering, but imagine that you are there with them.

As Christians, the Hebrew people had been rejected by their friends and families. But the deepest kind of fellowship is not based on race or family relationship; it is based on the spiritual life we have together in Christ.

> Church fellowship must be based on love for Christ and one another.

Hebrews 13:15-16 (CEV)

¹⁵ Our sacrifice is to keep offering praise to God in the name of Jesus. ¹⁶ But don't forget to help others and to share your possessions with them. This too is like offering a sacrifice that pleases God.

Doing good works and sharing is a spiritual sacrifice/offering.

Doing good covers a multitude of ministries. List some:

In order for the church to accomplish its full mission, all believers need to use the gifts God has given them to serve others. In 1 John, the apostle John emphasized the value of Christian fellowship. If we practice this quality and depth of fellowship with other Christians, we will accomplish God's purposes in our lives, in others' lives and in the world.

See 1 John 1:1-7; 2:7-11; 3:16-18; 4:7-21 (pgs. 265-267 in BELIEVE).



KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make **in the way I live?**

FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

“You become who you hang out with.” “Show me your friends, and I’ll show you your future.”

These are just two of a number of catchphrases that describe the impact of those with whom we spend the most time. The book of Proverbs contains many verses that attach the impact of our relationships to the development of our identity.

We fellowship with other believers to keep our relationship with God strong.

Biblical community will, first, keep our vertical connection — our relationship with God — strong. Nothing will hold us accountable and encourage us to follow Jesus quite like other Christ followers. The effect of us joining in the mission to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” is powerful. (Hebrews 10:24)

We fellowship with other believers to keep our relationships with others strong.

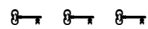
Biblical community is the optimum way to keep our horizontal relationships on the right and righteous path. Fellow Christians can help us strengthen our ties to those in the church and outside the church. We can together encourage and build each other up inside the body, while praying for and challenging each other to reach out to those who don't know Christ.

We fellowship with other believers to accomplish God's will on earth.

If you were going to rescue a person who had fallen off a steep cliff, you would want to be tied to as many people up on the mountain as possible, supporting you and holding you as you attempt rescue. As we minister and reach out to those outside the community of faith, it is necessary to stay tethered together for optimum success, lest we also fall.

Biblical community is the glue holding us together, through which we have opportunity to grow in favor with God and to keep our relationships right with others. Are you struggling in your

relationship with God? Do you find yourself simply wanting to love him more than you do? Are you finding yourself in continual dysfunction with those around you? Or do you desire to strengthen your relationships to a greater degree? Connecting to, submitting with, and walking alongside brothers and sisters in Christ can get you on the right track, while also keeping you on the path to God's truth and his will.



SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Christ is living in and through us (John 14:20; 17:23; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27), and we, in community, are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. As such we are commissioned and commanded to do the work of heaven on earth, and together, we have the incredible privilege of being participants in his kingdom coming and his will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

> This is how God has chosen to get his work in this world done.

What would happen to the world if we actually believed this? What would happen to the body of Christ if we believed it?

A way to get a good sense of Biblical Community is by encouraging everybody to share their story.

> This is a good foundation stone to healthy, biblical community.

> Without knowing people's stories, it takes much longer to build authentic relationships.

> Without sharing your own, it's easy to hide.

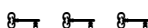
> Sharing your story, and understanding what expectations you and your community are bringing to the table help to establish right relationships within the community.

Community doesn't happen by accident. It requires commitment, time, patience, humility, and old-fashioned hard work. But, it is one of the best uses we can make of our time.

> Christians who are part of community tend to walk closely with God throughout their lives.

> Those who are isolated from community tend to make more and bigger mistakes, and are far more likely to give up on their faith.

> Let us commit ourselves to developing the Christian community in our church.



FROM PARENEOS.COM by Jack Wellman

Hebrews 10:24-25 "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."

A friend of mine was having a bar-b-que and I intentionally moved one coal over to the side. Eventually it started to die out and cool off. This reminded me of the need for each of us to "stir up one another to love and to good works" because if we are off to the side, by ourselves, we tend to cool off pretty quickly. For one thing, if we are living the Christian life as a solo act, who can we stir up to love and good works? Who would there be to do the same to us? When I put that dying coal back into the rest of the coals and stirred it up, it began to get hot again and glow. That is why the author of Hebrews said we should "not neglect to meet together"...but "encourage one another" and even more so "as (we) see the Day drawing near," the "Day" meaning the day of the Lord's return.