

True Community

Introduction

There is a fundamental difference between **attracting an audience** and **building a church**. God wants to bring people into a *spiritual family*, not merely a weekly service. New Testament Christianity wasn't a meeting, it was a *lifestyle*. It wasn't something institutional or hierarchical; it was *relational*. It is more than a feeding station or a "fast food" store. People in the Bible were *devoted to one another*. They gathered corporately in the *temple* and then they shared their lifestyle from *house to house*. People in the world today are empty, lonely, fearful, and confused. The challenge of the church is to represent a new society where people are genuinely sharing, helping, and personally concerned for *one another*. In the second century, the ancient church father, Tertullian, wrote his apology and he mentioned how Christians shared not merely meeting together, but a total way of life. His classic comment was this: "*see how these Christians love each other!*" That still stands as a testimony to God's intention for our generation. If the body of Christ is going to recover a visible testimony on the earth (one which, once again, turns the world upside down) we're going to have to get back to the basics of *relating to one another* as God intends.

I. Understanding the people

- A. Reaching the people of our generation is crucial if the Church is to have an impact on today's society. The apostle Paul lived in a unique society in his generation where he recognized the need to be relevant to the people of his world.

Romans 1:14-15

"I am obligated both to the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome." NIV

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself **a slave to everyone**, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings. **NIV**

- B. The characteristics unique to our world:

- Cynical
- Secular
- Fickle
- Lonely
- Detached
- Distracted
- Experience-oriented
- Action-oriented
- Options-oriented
- Excellence-oriented
- Pragmatic
- Non-joiners
- Relational
- No absolutes
- Relativism prevails
- Visionless

II. The answer for our generation is the demonstration of authentic New Testament Christianity found in a “community” of believers.

A. The Church is:

- A community of God’s redeemed people, bound *together* in covenant love; in fellowship and partnership with compassionate spiritual leaders.
- A community manifesting peace, holiness, and family fidelity expressed through revered fatherhood, cherished women and motherhood, with secure obedient children.
- A community where loving correction and instruction produce healthy growth and maturity; where dedication to excellence produces the finest results in arts, crafts, trades and commerce to provide prosperity and abundance for all its members.
- A community of faith, worship, praise, and selfless ministry manifested both individually and corporately through the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- A community where all life is inspired and directed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ and is lived to His glory as a witness and a testimony to the world.

Arthur Wallis:

“Community is the very essence of the church and the very lifestyle of the kingdom. **The church IS community.**”

Consider the following Scriptures on early church community...

Acts 2:42-47 – “together” (3x’s)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were **together** and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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. **NIV**

Acts 4:32-35 – “shared”

All the believers were **one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. **NIV**

Hebrews 10:24-25 (Jerusalem Bible)

Let us be concerned for **each other**, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage **each other** to go; the more so as you see the Day draw near.

B. Church is defined as “the called out ones” (Greek – *ekklesia*).

Acts 7:38 – “church (ekklesia-assembly) in the wilderness”

They were called out “**together**” as the church:

Acts 2:44 – “All the believers were together...”

Acts 12:12 – “many were gathered together praying...”

1 Corinthians 5:4 – “when you are gathered **together**...”
1 Corinthians 11:18 – “when you come **together**...”
1 Corinthians 14:23 – “if the whole church comes **together** in one place...”
1 Corinthians 14:26 – “Whenever you come **together**, each of you has...”
Ephesians 2:21 – “In him the whole building is joined **together**...”
Ephesians 2:22 – “you are being built **together** to become a dwelling...”
Ephesians 4:16 – “From him the whole body, joined and held **together**...”
Philippians 1:27 – “Stand fast...in one spirit, ...mind, striving **together** for the faith”
Hebrews 10:24-25 – “Let us not give up meeting **together**...”

C. The Christian community carries the idea of being “others” centered.

Philippians 2:1-4

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. NIV

There are over **40** “**one another**” commands for **authentic** church community:

- **accept** one another as Christ accepted you (Romans 15:7).
- **agree** with one another (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 4:2).
- **bear** with each other in love (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13).
- **carry** each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- be **compassionate** to one another (Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 3:8).
- Have equal **concern** for each other (1 Corinthians 12:25).
- **confess** your sins to each other (James 5:16).
- **consider** others interests besides your own (Philippians 2:3-5).
- be **devoted** to one another (Romans 12:10).
- **encourage** (build up) one another daily (Hebrews 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- **fellowship** with one another (1 John 1:7).
- **forgive** each other as Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
- be **gentle** with one another (Ephesians 4:2).
- **greet** one another (Romans 16:3-6,16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14).
- offer **hospitality** to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9).
- be **humble** toward one another (Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8; 5:5).
- **honor** one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10).
- **instruct** (disciple/teach) one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16).
- be **kind** to one another (Ephesians 4:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:15).
- **live in harmony** with one another (Romans 12:15,15; 1 Peter 3:8).
- be **like-minded** toward one another (Romans 15:15,16).
- **love** one another *as Christ loved us* (John 13:34; 15:12).
- **love** one another *deeply, from the heart* (1 Peter 1:22: 4:8).
- have *sincere love* for one another (1 Peter 1:22).
- **keep on loving** each other (Hebrews 13:1).
- **mourn** with those who mourn (Romans 12:15).
- be **patient** with each other (Ephesians 4:2).
- live in **peace** with each other (Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).
- **pray for** each other (James 5:16).
- **rejoice** with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15).
- **serve** one another in love (Galatians 5:13).
- **speak** to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 4:15; 5:19).
- **spur** one another toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

- **submit** to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21).
- **wait** for each other (1 Corinthians 11:33).
- don't become **conceited** toward each other (Galatians 5:26).
- don't **deceive** (lie to) one another (Colossians 3:9).
- don't **divide** one another (Proverbs 6:19; 1 Corinthians 12:25).
- don't **destroy** each other through backbiting (Galatians 5:15).
- don't **envy** one another (Galatians 5:26).
- don't **grumble against** each other (James 5:29).
- don't pass **judgment** (condemnation) on one another (Romans 14:13).
- don't **provoke** each other (Galatians 5:26)
- don't **slander** (speak evil) of one another (James 4:11).

III. Summary.

- A New Testament **Community** is the answer to our relationally detached society.
- The world must see the church as a family that is "**others**" centered.
- The world will see Jesus when they see Christians **love each other** the way Jesus loves us.