

Introduction to series, Building Community

- Next 3 Sundays we will look at what community means
- Some important aspects that the Bible teaches about Christian community
- Learn how to grow in community with one another, and strengthen the community of New Day Community Church

Romans 12:1-5 NKJV *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

Illustration of community – start with a couple stories...

- Visiting Cedar Campus
 - Cedar campus at 20 vs. Cedar campus 33
 - Same physical place
 - But I was invisible, like a ghost
 - Decided to renew connection with CC by going to family vacation week
 - Last year, up the level by volunteering for several weeks – now I have more connection/community than the students – I'm part of the team
- TACF
 - I had been completely changed by the ministry at TACF, and had attended many conferences, usually with others from here coming along
 - But for some reason I was at a conference alone
 - Didn't know anyone even though there were thousands in the same building
 - I felt invisible
 - Started talking to someone that I had seen there many times, and in the middle of the conversation he sees someone behind me and begins to interact with that person and actually walked away from me... while I was in the middle of a comment
 - I was in the middle of a community, but I was not part of that community, because I had no connection, no functional interface with it – I had no relationships within that assembly of people – so I felt disconnected because I was not connected!!!!
 - How I responded
 - Well, in the moment, I whined – mostly to myself, but I realized, hey – none of these folks even know who I am
 - I didn't get mad at them, or blame them, or belittle myself
 - I got more involved
 - Instead of just attending the big conferences, I started purposely going to the smaller meetings
 - I found ways to help out, when I was there
 - I initiated contact with others outside of the meetings – I had lunch with a few of the other pastors, sent out some e-mails, went to some of their events

- Next thing I know I was asked to do something at one of the conferences
 - I said yes, even though it wasn't convenient
- Later I was asked to go with Fred Wright to the Ukraine
 - I said yes, even though it was going to cost a lot
 - I didn't have the time
 - I didn't really feel I had anything to offer
- All of these things, and many others, led to me forming many deep relationships with others at TACF and in Partners In Harvest
- Now when I'm at conferences, I never feel isolated or alone, there are always people that I have a connection with, and in fact now I am one of the most connected people there
- That's community

What is community?

Wikipedia: A **community** is a social group of [organisms](#) sharing an [environment](#), normally with shared interests. In [human](#) communities, [intent](#), [belief](#), [resources](#), [preferences](#), [needs](#), [risks](#) and a number of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the [identity](#) of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness.

The word community is derived from the [Latin](#) *communitas* (meaning the same), which is in turn derived from *communis*, which means "common, public, shared by all or many"^[1]. *Communis* comes from a combination of the Latin prefix *con-* (which means "[together](#)") and the word *munis* (which has to do with [performing services](#)).

- Two aspects are particularly relevant
 - We "perform a service together" every Sunday
 - Also applies/implies serving together – as a definition of [community](#)

Webster's Dictionary: fr. common "belonging equally to more than one, or to many indefinitely."

- Think of this, not in terms of an object, such as a common "meeting place" or common purpose
- But in terms of one's personal identity
 - As part of a community, "I belong equally to each and every one else in that community"
 - The early church lived this way out of necessity due to persecution
 - **Acts 2:44-47** NKJV *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in **common**, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*
 - Of course, this idea can and has been abused
 - Community doesn't mean communism
 - Community doesn't mean conformity
 - Community doesn't mean cliquishness or exclusivity

In Psychology...

In a seminal 1986 study, McMillan and Chavis identify four elements of "sense of community": 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. They give the following example of the interplay between these factors:

Someone puts an announcement on the dormitory bulletin board about the formation of an intramural dormitory basketball team. People attend the organizational meeting as strangers out of their individual needs (integration and fulfillment of needs). The team is bound by place of residence (membership boundaries are set) and spends time together in practice (the contact hypothesis). They play a game and win (successful shared valent event). While playing, members exert energy on behalf of the team (personal investment in the group). As the team continues to win, team members become recognized and congratulated (gaining honor and status for being members). Someone suggests that they all buy matching shirts and shoes (common symbols) and they do so (influence).

- Membership
 - You and others need to know in some way that you are “a part” you are one of the “us” and not one of the “them”
 - This is communicated in many ways both formal and informal
- Influence
 - Is obtained by taking on responsibilities
 - If you want to grow in influence within any community you take on responsibility within that community, as your responsibility increases so will your influence
 - Power (social, financial, physical, etc) can increase influence, but that is not increasing community, but rather manipulating community...
- Integration & fulfillment of needs
 - As we increase in our level of being integrated within a community
 - We both meet the needs of others
 - And experience our needs being met
- Shared emotional connection
 - Emotional connection is the currency of community
 - It is the element that enhances all of the others elements
 - Without the emotional connction, we feel like numbers, or objects
 - With a healthy emotional connection we feel like members, or individuals

Biblical Community:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Life Together says, “**Christianity means community** through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.”

- Wow... “Christianity means community”
 - Without community you do not have genuine christianity
 - You cannot be fully “Christian” apart from having and living in community
 - This is a radical application that faith must be personal but cannot be private
 - Faith -- bibilcal faith, faith as defined in the Bible, expamplified by Christ and the early church and experienced in Christ and by His spirit – must be experienced within the context of community
 - The world want to force us to keep our faith private – to not allow our faith to bear influence in the public sphere – but faith cannot and should not be private – hidden and cloistered
 - It must be personal – not impersonal, or institutional – that is a mistake made by the church often throughout history.
 - But it must be a personal faith lived out publically in community
 - Otherwise it is not a biblical, healthy or good

Jesus said in **Matt. 16:18**, *“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*

- ekklēsia *ek-klay-see'-ah* -- a *calling out*, that is, (concretely) a popular [public] *meeting*, especially a religious *congregation* (Jewish *synagogue*, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both): - assembly, church.
- Jesus stated purpose was to “build” a community
 - “Called out” -- those set apart from the rest, this community was to consist of individuals that responded to the call of God in Christ and stepped out of the community of the world and became part of this new community based on faith in Jesus
 - A “popular” or public meeting, a religious congregation – this is not something hidden, personal or private – the word by definition means a public gathering
 - Christian community of members (earthly & heavenly) involves the idea of membership, of being joined in concrete and meaningful ways (we'll talk more about this latter)
 - Which brings us back to the opening text...

Romans 12:5, *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

- *Individually*: we are each unique individuals; we have not nor do we aspire to lose our individuality
- *Member*: we belong to one another, like the pieces of a puzzle, each unique, but in our individuality we fit together to form a bigger whole as members of the body
- *One body in Christ*: we are one in and through our relationship with Christ. That relationship is the unifying factor – Christ is the mediator. There are many communities (both good and bad) but the church is the One community formed solely through shared relationship and identity with Jesus Christ
- There is a spiritual reality
 - It is something we are, not something we should be, or will be...
 - It is not something we need to fabricate, or strive toward
 - We must understand that through Christ we are one...
 - And out of the spiritual reality of oneness through and in Christ, we have community

Application

- Think about community, and how we as a church are a community
- Evaluate your level of “belonging equally” within the context of the church.
- How might you grow through the 4 ideas of community
 - Membership – how your identity is communicated?
 - Influence – what is your part to play, what responsibilities do you carry
 - Integration and fulfillment of needs, are your needs being met, are you meeting other's needs – is your life integrated?
 - Shared emotional connection – finally how well connected are you emotionally?

Over the next two weeks we'll look deeper at the Biblical ways to live out community.