

Good morning everyone. Our Base Camp topic this week is Community. We have been learning that God's perfect plan for us is to walk this journey called life with certain essentials. Over the past few weeks we have learned about some essential tools for the journey as followers of Christ. We have learned about the essentials of prayer, worship, the role of the Holy Spirit, faith, the Bible, and the Good News that Jesus saves us. Today we will learn that God does not intend for us to make the journey alone. We are created to make the journey through life together joining in this wonderful thing we call Biblical Community.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 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 2:37–47).

Every human being craves a place to belong, a place where we connect with people we identify with. We have a built-in desire to be with people who have similar values, similar interests, and similar life experiences. We desire a place where we are understood and accepted, where we can be ourselves and not experience rejection.

I've learned over the years that there isn't just one way to experience community. A friend invited me to round one of the Warriors playoff game this year. There we were surrounded by 20,000 of our closest friends. We all put on the golden "Strength in Numbers" t-shirts and the ushers hand us these blow-up soft sticks for us to bang together. There we were—two guys in our mid 50's—standing up banging our sticks trying to disrupt the concentration of the other team shooting free throws. We were a sight for sure! Then when the Warriors would surge all of my 20k friends would stand and cheer and we would high-five each other and it felt good. We had something in common that night.

We all felt like we belonged and we experienced a tinge of that connection in community that God designed us for.

I think most of us can say that we also experience a kind of community when we connect socially in smaller settings through parties with friends, participate together in sports we love, in hobbies we enjoy. Some of us would attest that their social media has helped them experience a kind of community they couldn't have otherwise. Others of us would attest that they love those social connections they find face-to-face in groups at church, where mid-sized groups gather together around similar interests, passions, and common struggles, and quite often around similar stage of life issues. These kinds of social connections can sustain us for the journey. I know many of us have experienced community through a smaller more personal community group experience, or at their Women's Bible Study table, or Men's Fraternity tables where we gather to grow spiritually and we see God working when we study God's word, pray, share, care for and serve another.

And I know many of us experience community serving together here at church or out in the surrounding community. It's amazing the community connections that happen when we serve together. My youngest daughter is working alongside many Christian college students at Mt Hermon Christian Conference Center this summer. She is having a blast. We hardly see her. She only came home once and that was for Father's Day. It's the most fun summer job she has ever had, and likely the lowest paying summer job she has ever had too! But her experience is priceless. She is satisfying her God-given craving for community.

Some of us have experienced deeper more intimate community that can only be with one or two others in your life. I have experienced community with a couple of guys in my life that I give the right to ask me tough questions about my life, my marriage, my thought life... What is my point? There isn't just one and only one way to connect in community. All of these levels of connection are meant to happen in a very spiritual and powerful way through this amazing institution that God created called the local church.

The book of Acts describes the creation and establishment of the local church. To give you a little context, the local church began to grow at an amazing event called Pentecost. It happened one day in Jerusalem soon after Jesus ascended to heaven. Acts chapter 2 describes that the entire church—likely about 120 devout people from every nation at that time gathered in a room in Jerusalem—were aware. At least 12 languages were represented in that room, so conversation must have been difficult.

Then the Holy Spirit shows up in a mighty way, like the sound of a mighty wind filling the entire house, and the Spirit appeared as fire and rested on each one of them and filled them and began to speak in each other's native languages. They spoke about the mighty works of God. Some thought they were drunk. Peter stood up and corrected them and quoted the prophet Joel saying that in the last days, God would pour out his Spirit with power.

Then Peter—who a short time earlier had denied and abandoned Christ out of fear—stood up, filled with the Holy Spirit, and boldly preached a sermon to the large crowd that had gathered in the city. He preached Christ and him crucified and said,

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (verses 37–39).

Peter is saying put your faith in Christ as the one who can forgive your sins. Your genuine faith in Christ will lead you to repent and turn from your former life and follow Christ. And Peter tells them to get baptized. No matter whether you are the most religious Jew or the most paganist pagan, or the nicest sweetest Gentile, he says repent and be baptized every one of you; respond to the call and accept Jesus Christ who saves you from your sins. God called many to himself the day Peter gave his sermon. And the church went from 120 to... take a look in verses 40–41.

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Three thousand? You might say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day. Its teachers were the apostles who were eyewitnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its students were these three thousand kindergarteners who had just been enrolled. How did they baptize three thousand? When I was in Jerusalem years ago, we stood among the temple ruins in the ancient city and there were these rock structures about the size of hot tubs outside where the temple was located. They were ceremonial baths called Mikvuhs. There were dozens of them. The ancient Jews would purify themselves by washing in the Mikvuhs before they could enter the temple to worship. And here God was using these Mikvuhs to baptize 3000 new believers into a new community called the church.

I don't think the apostles had any idea when they woke up that morning how many lives were going to change that day. You can almost hear them asking, “What do we do now? We have no nursery, no coffee bar, no sound system, no budget. How could the church possibly work without those things?”

Then we read about what happens next. The Holy Spirit guided these apostles to set up certain practices and core values that were to be observed by this new community of believers, practices and core values that would define their new community—a

new biblical community where each who joined in could grow deeper in their faith and reach wider into their ancient world. And these same practices and core values connect us in biblical community so that we might grow deeper and reach wider into our modern world because...

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (v. 42)

It's interesting that when the Holy Spirit entered these baby Christians, they became learners. They sat at the feet of the apostles, hungry for instruction. We cannot experience biblical community without the teaching and learning of God's Word. The Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and they became teachers. These baby Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit and they became learners.

Today we have the Apostle's teachings recorded in the New Testament. We study the Scriptures here on Sundays, in our bible studies, our community groups and in our kids' and youth classes. And we study them at home. That word “devoted” is a present tense. It means they continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. We are to continually, regularly, even daily spend time in the Word. If we want to be a healthy church we need to be a church of the Word.

So how does this look in the context of community? Think of a time when God's Word was taught and it was just what you needed. Chances are good that you didn't wrestle with how to apply that truth alone. You wrestled through it with someone. We are designed to wrestle with our challenges together, not alone. We are designed to hear, learn, interpret and apply God's Word together, not alone. Others are to walk with us to help us to see God's Word as wisdom when we need wisdom; as power when we are weak; as encouragement when we are discouraged; as hope when we are on the brink of despair; as life when we are facing death. It's the living word of God. We need to devote ourselves to it.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (v. 42)

The word “fellowship” has become so overused that its original meaning can get blurred in our minds. I don't think God had in mind for us to describe fellowship as any conversation Christians have with other Christians. Let's not define a conversation between Christians about a sale at Banana Republic or who got the best deal in the NBA draft as fellowship even if we enjoyed the experience. Let's not miss the point of the word.

The original Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. It expresses what we SHARE IN together. Those things we have received together is what we have in common. The most precious thing we SHARE IN is our connection with the Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. When we share together in him all differences will melt away. That's why the church is the first institution in history to bring Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, white and blue collar, healthy and unhealthy, young and old, and every race together.

A church on our peninsula should look like a typical day at the Department of Motor Vehicles. At the DMV we are brought into

an immense cross section of people. Where else can you find a person registering his Tesla standing in line behind a person registering his beat-up scooter? This sort of fellowship can be uncomfortable at first, but biblical community unites. It goes to battle against anything in this world that divides us.

So because we devote ourselves to what we SHARE IN, we discover that we get close to one another. We want to spend time together. We become friends, and doing life together becomes the new normal and shopping and football stories do happen, but biblical community takes us to our deeper needs for the social, personal and spiritual connections we all crave.

But *koinonia* is not just something we SHARE IN. It's also something we SHARE OUT. When the Spirit enters us and we join this New Community, and as we spend time together, we soon become aware of the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs around us. And the Spirit will prompt us to exercise mercy, generosity, or encouragement—whatever is needed—to those around us.

Something else happens when we SHARE OUT. As we grow in this New Community we realize that money and possessions no longer define us. We are defined by meeting needs, responding to those in need. I am so proud of how our church community contributes to our Special Needs fund. This fund is used to practice *koinonia* by meeting short-term financial needs of those in our church community.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (v. 42).

What does it mean to be devoted to breaking of bread and prayer.? The breaking of bread means that they practiced Communion or the Lord's Supper, which they practiced in the context of a meal called a love feast. Regarding prayer, Luke the writer of Acts, doesn't have private prayer in mind here. These are the group prayers of God's people gathered together in community. Communion and prayer defined their worship. Look at the next few verses. These verses give us a look at the whole picture when this new community devoted itself to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 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, (verses 43-46)

I'm trying to picture this. It says many miracles were performed by the apostles. One of the ways God authenticated the teaching authority of the apostles was through God allowing them to perform miracles. These new believers hadn't seen anything like this in the religions of their day and they were filled with awe of what God did through the apostles. The apostles could say, "Since you saw me heal a blind man this morning, now will you listen to what I have to say?" Had anyone in Jerusalem ever seen anything like this? As they SHARED IN they also SHARED OUT with generosity to the point of selling their stuff to give to anyone who had a need. This New Community was compassionate. They cared

enough to understand the needs people around them had. They cared enough to serve. No one forced them to sell their stuff. This wasn't a treatise for a type of communism; it was a treatise for the purest form of Christian charity. They understood that God had been generous with them, so they were led to be generous to those who had need.

This new community continued to worship together in larger groups in a more formal way in the Jewish temple with the priests, sacrifices and prayers. But they also participated in informal meetings that took place in homes. They didn't go to church; they lived it "day by day." They had communion in their homes and they ate meals together. Don't underestimate the importance of meals together to strengthen community. Think about what can happen over a meal. People serve each other, they show hospitality to each other by opening their personal space and inviting others to eat good food with them. There is nothing like being in another home with believers and having a meal together—laughing, praying, crying, talking, sharing. We see people in a new light because this kind of intimacy creates vulnerability. If being in homes with other believers isn't part of your Christian experience, you are missing out. Biblical community is intended to bring joy.

And another thing: We don't graduate or mature out of the need to be in community. Community is an essential and permanent tool for the journey [picture shown]. I have a picture here that was taken this past 4th of July at a family cabin in Northern Wisconsin. Julie and I were in community with these dear friends for many years. Every 4th of July we have a reunion and this community meets to eat, play, and share. As I look around this happy picture on our balcony, I am reminded of the special bond we have as Christians, but I also see that community can be messy. I know these people well. In this picture some of us are in recovery for addictions. Some of us have been in bondages to self-image issues. Others of us suffer physical pain every day. There are cancer survivors and those who are grieving the loss of loved ones no longer on that deck due to cancer. We have marriages there that have had their seasons of difficulty.

When I think about it, we have bled emotionally on each other over the years. This group can attest to the fact that community isn't going to be clean and sterile. Authentic biblical community can be messy. We can't romanticize it.

I was reading a novel by author John Steinbeck on my vacation. Then I read an article on Steinbeck the man. It said that Steinbeck was lonely because he liked people better in his mind than he did in person. Can you relate to that? Doing life together is hard because life is hard. It reminds me of the pastor who said, "Ministry would be great if it wasn't for all the people." Thank God we have the Holy Spirit as we seek to do life in community. I know for me it just wouldn't happen without the grace and mercy of God in my life and the lives of those I am called to do life with.

- This passage teaches us what matters—the apostle's teaching, fellowship, worship and prayer.

- This passage teaches us who matters—it's not you, it's not me that matters; it's we that matters. Everyone was engaged. They took care of each other's needs.
- This passage teaches us the "when" matters too. Early Christians had continual day-to-day experiences. Healthy churches do church almost every day.
- This instruction ends by showing us that community not only grows us deeper, it lets us reach wider.
...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (verses 46b-47).

Biblical community draws attention to itself. Why? Because it's unusual to see. And because it's attractive and because it's contagious, our surrounding world can't help but observe biblical community and like what they see. Biblical community not only allows us to grow deeper, it allows us to reach wider.

There is a favorite picture of mine because it speaks to the idea of the legacy we can leave for the next generation. It's called Caesarea Maritime. This is a small harbor north and west of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast called Caesarea Maritime. This is where this biblical community that started in Acts 2 reached wider into the continent of Europe. It was from this place that the biblical community in Acts commissioned their missionaries to leave their homes, their communities and get on board leaky boats and set sail on open sea to plant churches on a new continent. That was the legacy these first century Christians left for us as many came to faith in Europe through these missionary efforts.

Then centuries later, European Christians left their community and boarded more leaky boats and sailed across the Atlantic to the Americas and then from the east coast they got in wagons and headed west planting churches across this country until they arrived on the west coast. This is the legacy we enjoy from our forefathers and mothers in the faith today. Without the legacy that began at Caesarea Maritime we would not know Jesus Christ and we would not know biblical community.

In a couple of months we as a church are going to celebrate CPC's 50th anniversary. We are going to spend some time looking back and remembering fondly the legacy left by faithful people from CPC over the years. A legacy we have enjoyed that has allowed us to grow deeper and reach wider. At this fiftieth anniversary, we will also spend some time looking forward and have a chance to imagine a legacy we might leave for the next 50 years to bless our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren so they might grow deeper and reach wider.

What about 50 years from now? This week I tried to imagine the kind of pictures the next generation would display at CPC's hundredth anniversary. What would be our picture that will inspire

them? What will be their Caesarea Maritime picture? I imagined the next generation 50 years from now looking at a picture of 115 of us serving this week to bless 300 kids, and welcoming 100 kids and their parents not from our church, while we enjoyed the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing pictures of our greeting, coffee, parking, and ushering teams practicing biblical community by showing warm hospitality and welcoming guests and helping them find their way to escape loneliness by finding rich community at our church, while we enjoyed the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing pictures of our children being cared for and taught by loving adults in our nursery, elementary, middle school and high school. I see the next generation thanking God for the foundation they were given as they see pictures of our teachers who served faithfully knowing they were leaving a legacy for the next generation while they enjoyed the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing a picture of a CPC community group serving the community by cleaning up a house for someone in need in our neighborhood while enjoying the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing a picture of teams being sent out from our community to partner with our civic leaders to team up to meet needs in our neighborhood schools and poorest areas around us while enjoying the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing a picture of teams being sent out to minister to day laborers right here in San Mateo while enjoying the favor of all the people.

I imagined the next generation 50 years from now seeing pictures of teams being sent out to Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Ukraine, China, India and Greece to help spread the good news of Jesus in far away places while we enjoy the favor of all the people.

I imagine the next generation 50 years from now seeing pictures of a new community of CPC'er's committed to reaching wider into downtown Redwood City and enjoying the favor of all the people.

I invite all of you to accept the challenge to engage in biblical community at CPC and go deeper and reach wider. We will leave a legacy that matters for eternity. Our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren will rise up and bless us as they too enjoy the favor of all the people.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.