

SESSION 1 | Compelling Community: What is it?

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I. INTRODUCTION

- II. **Reflect:** How does the world around us define community?
- III. We must look to God's Word to tell us **what** community is, **why** we should pursue it, and **how** we can foster and guard it

II. TOWARD A DEFINITION

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Ephesians 2:13-22

- a. God created us **FOR** a kind of community we don't naturally experience
 - i. Created in the image of a communal God who has eternally existed in a relationship of perfect unity (Gen 1:27)
 - ii. Gen 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone..."
 - iii. Sin shatters relationship with God and one another (Gen 3)

- b. Jesus brings us **INTO** community with God and one another through the gospel
 - i. Supernatural breadth and depth

Lk 7:47, “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

1 Jn 4:19–21, “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

“Having stripped everything else away, this is the iridescent, radioactive core of supernatural community in the local church. Supernatural forgiveness drives supernatural love.” – Dever & Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*

- ii. Visible shape with clear borders (church membership)

- c. **Biblical community is** _____

III. IMPLICATIONS

- a. Biblical community is a gospel phenomenon, not a demographic phenomenon

“Many relationships that naturally form in our churches would exist even if the gospel weren’t true. That’s good, right, and helpful. But in addition, we should aspire for many relationships that exist only because of the gospel.”

Dever & Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*

- b. The root of biblical community is our shared identity in Christ, not our felt needs
 - i. Something we are more than something we do
 - ii. To live the Christian life in isolation is to live in denial of who God created and saved us to be
 - iii. **Reflect:** How might our practice of community change if we think of it as an expression of our identity in Christ?
 - 1. Lifestyle v. event
 - 2. Blessing v. obligation
- c. The gospel grounds our practice of community in calling-based commitment, not comfort-based convenience
 - i. Community publicly begins when a local church affirms our union with Christ through baptism and membership, and is expressed in an ongoing way through participation in the Lord's Supper

“When a person is baptized, he or she is making an upfront commitment to follow Christ – and much of that is a commitment to love other believers. Church membership attaches that general commitment to a specific group of people. Your commitment to them doesn't stem from feelings of attachment or comfort or belonging (though I hope those feelings follow). Instead, it's a commitment you make because doing so is part of following Jesus.”

Dever & Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*

- 1. Love one another deeply and sacrificially (Rom 12:13-16)¹
- 2. Assemble regularly with one another (Heb 10:25)
- 3. Encourage one another (Heb 10:24)
- 4. Guard one another (Heb 3:12-13)

¹ This list comes from *The Compelling Community* by Dever & Dunlop, pp. 56-57

- ii. A commitment to one another in response to God's commitment to us in Christ is the only foundation that enables genuine relationships to thrive

IV. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE

- a. Community is not an end in and of itself; it exists to make much of Jesus by demonstrating the life-changing power of the gospel

Jn 13:34–35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

1 Peter 2:9–12, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

- b. The gospel advances more through attractational communities than attractational events, especially in a post-Christian culture

“The Christian community demonstrates the effectiveness of the gospel. We are the living proof that the gospel is not an empty word but a powerful word that takes men and women who are lovers of self and transforms them by grace through the Spirit into people who love God and others. We are the living proof that the death of Jesus was not just a vain expression of God's love but an effective death that achieved the salvation of a people who now love one another sincerely from a pure heart.”

Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*

“Community is for us a declaration of the overwhelming love of God, a tangible proclamation of the reconciling work of the cross.”

Brad House, *Community*

- c. The goal of community is not to meet my felt needs, but rather to show the world what Jesus is like

“When fellowship, care, or belonging becomes the focus of our communities, we elevate people and their needs over the kingdom. In doing so, we create people who begin to believe the purpose of the church is to meet their needs. In essence, we create consumers...Our primary purpose in community is not that our needs are being met, but that Jesus would be lifted up. It is not that we aren’t blessed by the love we share for one another, but that we experience our greatest joy when Jesus is most glorified.”

Brad House, *Community*

V. REFLECTION:

- i. Where are you tempted to approach community in the church more as a comfort-driven consumer than a commitment-based builder?*
- ii. How might your practice of community change if you really believed the ultimate purpose is to make much of Jesus, not meet your felt needs?*