

## “Community”

By: Doug Warren

### Why do we need one another?

January. The garage door opens just long enough for your neighbor’s car to drive her in and then closes. It may be all you see of her for several months. It is winter and the challenges to community can make it difficult not to socially hibernate. But it is important to resist this temptation for more than just avoiding seasonal affective disorder. God has created us as social creatures.

Let me first acknowledge that while all of us share a need for relationship, the ways that is manifested individually vary greatly. Let me give one example of some of the differences. Most of us are familiar with the distinction between extroverts and introverts at least on the surface. But surface knowledge can be misleading. An extrovert commonly understood as your “people person” is not the only one who needs other people. Introverts need people too, just in different ways. The real issue of the “verts” is whether group dynamics are energizing or draining. As different as these two types of people are in how groups affect their energy level, they have a common need for relational connection.

Another misconception is that relational needs are all about having one or more good friends. While this is a critical component, it is only part of the picture. What we need is the web of relationships found only in community.

What we find in the gospel of Jesus is that God is not concerned just about individuals, but about a people. His relationship with us is simultaneously both personal and collective. Unfortunately, folks often emphasize one of these truths to the exclusion of the other. For instance many in the conservative church have so stressed the personal relationship with Jesus that they have neglected the broader body of Christ. This kind of “Jesus and me” approach does a good job of encouraging individual pietism, but historically has done too little about the community. On the other end of the spectrum, liberal churches have emphasized the collective relationship so much that too often personal holiness is ignored entirely.

Jesus makes neither of these errors. He calls his followers into a personal relationship with Himself that radically transforms our relationships with everyone else. The disciple John, closest to Jesus as a friend, recounted His heart this way, “How can you claim to love God whom you cannot see, if you do not love your brother whom you do see?!”

What we all need, regardless of the differences in our personalities, is to have trusting, authentic, self-sacrificing relationships with one another. It is what the Bible talks about as peace. Not only the absence of conflict with one another, but abiding joy in knowing one another and being known without fear. Intimacy is difficult enough to work out just

with two people—ask anyone who has ever been married. So how do you get that with a whole group of people? That is what the gospel goes on to show us.

Jesus came not just to save individuals, but a whole community—His people. All those who would become sons and daughters of Abraham by sharing his faith in the God who has promised redemption from this broken world. But these people are not just a bunch of individuals, they are related to one another, intertwined in this web of relationships we call community. If you have Jesus as your older brother and I have Him as my older brother, then we are siblings. And not only do we share a common need for Christ, but He has made us to need one another.

All the brokenness and difficulty in trying to live in this kind of relationship point to our need for Jesus to restore what was lost in the fall. Once Adam and Eve sinned they immediately began blaming one another (and God) and lost the intimacy for which God had designed them. The promise Jesus came to fulfill is not just punishment avoidance; it is restored intimacy with God and one another.

If you know that peace, then do not be content to stay cocooned this winter. Reach out and build bridges with your neighbors. If you have not yet discovered what it can be like to be accepted and loved with complete honesty and integrity, maybe today is the day for you to ask about how Jesus makes that possible.