

Session One: What is community?

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friend." - John 15:13

What is community to you? Pause for a minute and write down your own definition.

Community is: _____

Personally, community is a group of people who fellowship with one another. Community has the base of common interests whether religion, characteristics, likes/dislikes, hobbies, or personality types. They're the people who will lend an ear when you need to talk, but respond with honesty no matter what. True biblical community lifts you up and encourages you to be who God has called you to be.

Let me be clear: there is a difference in friendship and community. Community creates friendships. Not all friendships create community.

A strong community will cultivate friendships based on honesty, vulnerability and intentionality. While sometimes, friendships are solely based on surface level similarities. Community has the courage to speak truth over what you want to hear whereas friendships may just tell you what you want to hear.

The relationship I was in before I met Taylor was unhealthy at best. For months, I ignored red flags until some people in my community finally sat me down and told me it was time to move on. This was a hard truth to hear, but I needed it. When Taylor and I met and began dating, I was so nervous the same thing would happen again. Not wanting to get too invested and face heartbreak again, I asked my community that knew Taylor their thoughts on him and our relationship. While ultimately I had to pray through this phase, my community could see things I couldn't and shed light to positives or negatives. Fortunately, they saw the good in him that I did. In both scenarios, God used my community to openly and honestly share things I needed to hear. They saw how Taylor helped me move closer to Jesus and step into my calling.

Jennie Allen said it best: “[Biblical] Community is how we fulfill the charge to love one another, and encourage each other toward the upward call of Christ.”

Now that we know what community is, why do we even need it?

When God created man in His image, He said it was very good (Genesis 1:13). But as we read in Genesis 2, God says, “it’s not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper for him.” As God is three in one, He is never alone. If man is made in His image, then we too do not need to walk through life alone. I imagine if God recognized the need for community and companionship in the beginning of creation, there must be some weight to it.

Going deeper, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.”

Fortunately, scripture has a lot to say about friendship and community, but I think the need boils down to this: we are all a part of the body of Christ, made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12). Every part is needed for a specific purpose which allows the body to work together. No part is more important than the other.

If we're all a part of the body of Christ, when one part struggles, the body struggles. When one part excels, the body excels. "The parts of the body will not take sides, and all of them will take care of one another (1 Cor 12:25)." God has uniquely created us with different skills and passions to make up the body of Christ to fulfill a purpose together: make disciples of all nations by loving Him with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

I think back to my season of engagement: all the excitement, preparation and pre-wedding jitters. The men and women involved in our wedding loved, served and equipped Taylor and I as we prepared for our special day. Throughout the engagement process, my core community of women frequently checked on me, asked how they could help, and offered advice when I needed it most. Their willingness to simply be there in the process resonated with me, as Paul describes a community that works together thrives together. Each person involved used their gifts to selflessly love us as we started our lives together. Without these individuals, Taylor and I would not have been as prepared for our wedding and the marriage that followed. They guided and advised us to grow together for His glory, praying over us and walking with us through the ups and downs of engagement.

Community exists to offer fellowship: bearing each other's burdens, sharpening each other, and loving one another as yourself. Biblical community offers companionship in lonely seasons, provides accountability when facing temptation, supports on the most difficult days, and rejoices with new seasons.

Going Deeper:

What are your goals for this study? _____

How do you find Biblical community that aligns with His word? _____

What are characteristics of a good friend/community to you?

What are your expectations when it comes to community?

Read: Mark 2:1-5, Romans 12:4-5

Reflect: _____
