

houseChurch Material

Jesus Wants You not Only to Believe but also to Belong

Scripture

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Questions for self-application and group-discussion

1. Why do humans need community? Why is this a universal and innate necessity? How would you experience life if you lived alone in a solitude?
2. How do you feel about this statement, "You are called to belong, not just believe?" Then why do we resist belonging? What are the costs if you really wanted to belong in a community? Why does this need both attract and repel us?
3. What are some adjectives you would use to describe the First-century church written of in this passage? What was important in the believers' lives together? How would these activities become meaningful not just for Christians but for all people today?
4. The word "devoted" in verse 42 means to be "persisting tenaciously in." List the four celebrations they devoted themselves to in verse 42 and give specific descriptions to each. What do you think might be significant about the order of this list?
5. Do you belong in a community where you devote yourself to the Apostles' teaching, namely the Gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, what difference is it making in your life today?
6. Do you belong in a community where you devote yourself to prayer? If so, what difference is it making in your life today?
7. Do you belong in a community where you devote yourself to fellowship? If so, what difference is it making in your life today?

8. “The breaking of bread” refers to the Holy Communion, a Christian sacrament that only the church is allowed to administer. This means that the house churches were functioning as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, with an organic authority of church. Do you belong in a community where you devote yourself to the breaking of bread? If so, what difference is it making in your life today
9. What is the result of these celebrations in verse 47? This is the acid test if your community is truly engaging in the four celebrations, alive in the power of the Holy Spirit. Why or why isn’t this occurring in your community?
10. Now, how do you feel about this statement, “You are called to belong, not just believe?”

Prayer

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Day 1

True Community Requires Confession

Adapted from <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/daily-hope-with-rick-warren/daily-hope-with-rick-warren-march-5-2017.html>

Scripture

John 3:16-21 (NIV)

16For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Our sin hides in the darkness and whispers to us that it should remain unknown. And when we keep it in the darkness, it spreads within us like a toxin, eventually seeping into our fellowship with each other.

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation."

This is why Jesus calls us to confess our sins to one another. It allows the light of the Gospel to enter the darkness and seclusion of the heart. By confessing our sin in the presence of another, our self-justification crumbles away and our sin loses its power over us — and the community.

We are no longer alone in our sin, and those in our fellowship can now bear the sin with us, strengthening us when we face temptation and helping us to see that our sin reveals a place where we still do not trust God.

Each one of us must remember that we belong to a fellowship of sinners who live within the grace of God, so we need not fear confession because it brings us back into alignment with

God. In a community submitted to Jesus, our confession should bring us into greater intimacy with each other. How does it do that?

- Confession deepens our relationships, allowing us to be transparent with one another (Proverbs 24:26).
- Confession keeps our fellowship open and authentic, freeing us to speak the truth in love as we practice remarkable integrity (Ephesians 4:15; Titus 2:7).
- Confession keeps us sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance and helps us battle deceptions that corrupt our lives in Christ (John 16:13; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Day 2

Community Is God's Answer To Defeat

Adapted from <https://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/full-post/community-is-god-s-answer-to-defeat1>

Scripture

1 Peter 5:1-11

1To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

5In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”^a

6Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

11To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

"You need a community of people who are saying to you: 'We'll be with you when you're going through the tough times. We're not going to let you get discouraged or depressed.'"

Each one of us needs other people to watch out for us - to defend us, protect us, and help us stay on track. In the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul tells us that we should look out for each other's interests, not just our own. What a counterculture verse! In America today, it's all about me - my needs, my interests, my wants, and my ambitions. But Paul teaches us to look out for others too.

Did you know you have an enemy far more destructive than any terrorists? You have a personal enemy who wants to defeat you. His name is Satan. He wants to bring problems into your life, to ruin your relationships, and to hurt you as badly as he can.

Why does he want to hurt you? Because he wants to hurt God, but he can't - so he goes after God's children. On your own, you will never win against Satan. But when you have other people to watch out for you and help you, you can be victorious.

Here's good advice from Ecclesiastes 4:12: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves" (NIV).

Does anyone have your back? Is anyone defending you - watching out for your spiritual welfare? You need a community of people who are saying to you: "We'll be with you when you're going through the tough times. We're not going to let you get discouraged or depressed."

Community is God's answer to defeat. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him" (NIV).

Remember: You can try, but you can't live life well on your own. We all need other people - to walk with us, to work with us, and to watch out for us.

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Day 3

The Connection Between Generosity and Community

Adapted from <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/daily-hope-with-rick-warren/daily-hope-with-rick-warren-september-3-2016.html>

Scripture

Acts 4:32-37

32All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

When we're generous with each other, we draw closer to each other, and that creates community.

Someone from my church sent me a letter once that read: "My neighbor asked if he could borrow my ladder, and I said of course. I later learned that he already had one of his own. He didn't need to borrow my ladder; he just used it as a way to build our relationship. When he borrowed my stuff, it made me feel that I was needed, and I liked that feeling. I've now learned to do the same thing with my other neighbors. Another neighbor has a shop vac, and I borrow it every Friday night to clean my car with my son. In fact, now Roger leaves it out for me. I told Roger recently that I could afford to buy my own shop vac, but I just like the interaction of borrowing his. Roger asked me to please not buy one for myself. He had learned to see the connection between generosity and community."

The Bible says in Matthew 6:21, "Your heart will be where your treasure is" (NCV). In other words, whatever you put your time, money, and energy into is what's going to attract you. So any time I'm generous with you or with the poor or with anybody, that's where my heart tends to

go. Every time I give to God, it draws my heart closer to God. And every time I give to you, it draws my heart closer to you.

The first Christians were famous for their generosity. Acts 4:32 tells us that “the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul ... all things were common property to them” (NASB). They were a family. Their sharing was voluntary. It wasn’t communism. Communism says, “What’s yours is mine, and I’m going to take it.” Christianity says, “What’s mine is yours, and you can share it with me.”

As a parent, do you enjoy watching your kids share with each other? Of course you do. One of the primary lessons of life is learning how to share. When you see your kids being unselfish, you’re very happy about that.

God is the same way! When God looks down on us and sees us being generous with each other, he goes, “That’s my boy! That’s my girl! They’re doing what I want them to do,” because God is generous, and he wants us to become like him. Generosity creates community.

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
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Day 4

The Power In Group Witness

Adapted from <https://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/full-post/there-is-power-in-group-witness>

Scripture

John 13:1-5, 12-16 & 31-34

1It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

12When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

31When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.

32If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

33"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

34"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

A new command I give you: Love one another.

Each of us has a life message that God wants us to share with the world. Sharing the message is part of our life's mission. When we share that message with other people, it's called witnessing.

There is great power in group witness. Just like a soldier is never sent out by himself, God never meant for us to do our mission alone. He says we should go out together to witness.

In fact, God says that we witness best to people who don't know God when we love others who are already in God's family. In John 13, Jesus tells us that our love for each other proves to the world that we are his disciples. People are impressed when Christians genuinely love each other. It proves to the world that they are in the family of God.

In 2 Timothy 1:7, we're told how we are supposed to witness to people: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (NIV).

Have you been timid and fearful in your witness? God's answer to fear is community — having other Christians stand alongside you in witness.

Seriously consider this question: Is anybody going to be in Heaven because of you? If you work together to witness alongside other Christians, you'll be able to say, "Yes! Somebody's in Heaven because of me."

Philippians 1:27 says, "I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel."

Do you witness with other Christians in one spirit — when you're so unified that it's almost like you're one person? This is the kind of relationship God wants us to have with our fellow Christians. We all need each other. God wants to use us to witness for him, but he wants us to do it together!

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
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 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Day 5

With Fellowship, Size Matters: Smaller Is Better

Adapted from <https://www.crossmap.com/blogs/with-fellowship-size-matters-smaller-is-better.html>

Scripture

Psalm 133 (NIV)

1How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
2It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
3It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

“How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together in harmony!”

God intends for us to experience life together. The Bible calls this shared experience fellowship.

Today, however, the word has lost most of its biblical meaning. “Fellowship” now usually refers to casual conversation, socializing, food, and fun.

The question, “Where do you fellowship?” means, “Where do you attend church?” “Stay after for fellowship” usually means, “Wait for refreshments.”

Real fellowship is so much more than just showing up at services. It is experiencing life together. It includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting, and all the other “one another” commands found in the New Testament.

When it comes to fellowship, size matters: Smaller is better. You can worship with a crowd, but you can't fellowship with one.

Once a group becomes larger than about 10 people, someone stops participating — usually the quietest person — and a few people will dominate the group.

Jesus ministered in the context of a small group of disciples. He could have chosen more, but he knew 12 is about the maximum size you can have in a small group if everyone is to participate.

The Body of Christ, like your own body, is really a collection of many small cells. The life of the Body of Christ, like your body, is contained in the cells.

For this reason, every Christian needs to be involved in a small group within their church, whether it is a home fellowship group, a Sunday school class, or a Bible study. This is where real community takes place, not in the big gatherings.

If you think of your church as a ship, the small groups are the lifeboats attached to it. God has made an incredible promise about small groups of believers: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:20 NASB).

Application

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