

Engaging God Through Community and Connect Groups

Message 3 of 6 in the series: "Engage: Participate, Join, Get Involved, Take Part"

A. God wants us to have community and experience relationships with others.

"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them... Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'"

Genesis 1:27 & 2:18a (NLT)

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. **But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.**" Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT)

B. The beginning of the Church paints a vivid picture of the community God wants for us today.

"**All the believers** devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer... And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together **at the Temple** each day, met **in homes** for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved." Acts 2:42 & 44-47 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! The size of the relational environment determines the depth of the relationship. "I am writing to God's church **in Corinth** and to all of his holy people throughout Greece." 2 Corinthians 1:1b (NLT)
"...to the church that meets **in your house.**" Philemon 1:2b (NLT)

C. If we engage in community, our lives can be radically transformed, and we can experience the blessings/joy/godly benefits that God provides for those who pursue life together.

"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. **Enjoy the companionship** of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." 2 Timothy 2:22 (NLT)

1. Community allows us to connect with others. "...But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit... All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it." 1 Corinthians 12:13b & 27 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! We must not confuse interaction with connection, which requires a deeper foundation. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:11 (NLT)

2. Community provides the opportunity and resources to care for each other's needs. "Our people must learn to do good by **meeting the urgent needs of others**; then they will not be unproductive."

Titus 3:14 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. "This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other." 1 Corinthians 12:25 (NLT)

3. Community enables us to live on mission with a purpose greater than ourselves. "...you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! We must not underestimate how important our purpose is in God's plan. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." John 20:21b (NLT)

4. Community encourages and requires us to grow in Christ. "Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Ephesians 4:15-16 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! If we are growing in Christ, our lives must have Christ at the center. "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

D. Godly community will change our lives, and it offers the proof that can change the people and world around us.

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another **will prove** to the world that you are my disciples.”

John 13:34-35 (NLT)

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that **the world will know** that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” John 17:22-23 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Our actions speak louder than our words. “Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.” 1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

QUESTION- Does God really want me to join a Connect Group?

“You must warn each other every day, while it is still ‘today,’ so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.” Hebrews 3:13 (NLT)

“Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.” Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. How does being created in God's image reveal our need for community?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT). Why is facing trouble alone “real trouble”? What is a time when you had to deal with trouble alone or a time you had the support of others?
3. How closely does your Connect Group resemble the community described in Acts 2:42-47? Where are there similarities and differences? What is one specific step that your group could take to develop this type of community?
4. Community allows for true connection with others. What is the difference between interaction and connection? What is necessary for a group to move beyond interacting to connecting on a deeper level?
5. Discuss the following statement: “Connect Groups are small enough to know, but big enough to care.” What are the potential pitfalls of trying to care for needs by yourself?
6. In what ways is your Connect Group fostering a vision beyond the members of your group? How is your Connect Group making a Kingdom impact on the lives of others?
7. How has your Connect Group helped you to grow in your relationship with Christ? How do relationships with others challenge us or require us to grow deeper in our dependence upon Christ?
8. Why do you believe our love for each other and the unity among the church is such a powerful testimony about Jesus to nonbelievers? How do we demonstrate our love and unity so that people who don't attend church can see or experience it?