

Okay, so picture this:

## The Message (MSG)

<sup>41-42</sup> That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

<sup>43-45</sup> Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

<sup>46-47</sup> They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

Now, does this sound like your experience of Christian fellowship? Gladness, sincerity, unity, generosity, awe, and wonder are all words that can be used to describe the experience members of the first Christian community enjoyed.

So, what words would we use to describe our own experience of Christian community?

Some of us would probably have to use words like boring, shallow, and disappointing. Others might use more positive adjectives like fun, nice, positive ... but what happened to the awe and wonder?

Let's take a look at some of the things we need to do if we want to experience the kind of Christian community that Acts talks about.

## **DEVOTION TO CHRISTIAN TEACHING**

The first aspect of Christian community is also the most obvious – it needs to be Christian. Not just Christian in name, or a social club of people who happen to be Christians, but there needs to be a commitment to studying Biblical truth.

It is in the context of Christian community that God intends for us to grow in our relationship with Him.

Learning to apply Christian truth to our lives isn't just a personal exercise; it is an act of communal worship. Without devotion to Christian teaching, Christian community is over before it begins.

## **SINCERITY OF HEART**

“Being of one mind” is needed for community, but an even deeper requirement is the sincere openness of our hearts.

This is a kind of vulnerability that is rarely found outside of Christianity. Insincerity is natural for all of us who live in this fallen world. It's just easier to be insincere, to hide, and to subtly deceive by keeping people at a distance.

It is also easy to treat your Home Group study just like any other small class that you might take at night school.

It is easy to come and engage intellectually without ever really letting our guard down and letting others see our heart.

If we are to grow in our Christian walk, and if we want to overcome sin in our lives, it is absolutely essential that we communicate the true state of our hearts in Christian community.

This forces us to be honest with ourselves while providing an atmosphere of loving accountability.

## **PRAISING GOD**

Praising God together can be one of the most enjoyable parts of community. This is more than just singing or prayer; this is worship together.

As we share what God is doing in our lives, it encourages the entire community and brings glory and honour to God.

As we take time to praise God for who He is and to thank Him for all that He has done, God naturally brings the community closer together.

## **EVANGELISM**

Although there are things our secular society dislikes about Christians, community is one aspect it wishes it could replicate.

It's unusual to see people who have deep, meaningful, other-centered relationships, and we live in a society that desperately wants those kinds of relationships.

The goal of Christian community is not just that we can enjoy the blessings of God together, but also that we can develop a place that is attractive to non-Christians.

Unfortunately, rather than welcoming newcomers, many Christians develop very closed, cliquish communities.

Most people who are deeply antagonistic towards Christ, base their opposition on negative experiences with Christian community (or at least what they think is Christian community).

If outsiders experience Christian community as a place where intimate, meaningful, loving, welcoming, God-Centered relationships happen, it will help remind their hearts of all that they are missing and bring them closer to Christ.

Community doesn't happen by accident.

It requires commitment, time, patience, humility, and old-fashioned hard work. But, it is one of the best uses we can make of our time.

One clear trend is that Christians who are part of community tend to walk closely with God throughout their lives.

Those who are isolated from community tend to make more and bigger mistakes, and are far more likely to give up on their faith.

For our own sakes, for the sake of other Christians, the sake of non-Christians, and for the great purpose of bringing glory to God, let us commit ourselves to developing the Christian community on this site which truly opens up to people around us. **It is growing communities of people that shows and points others to the reality of Jesus.**

When God first formed Adam from the dust, he was the only human on the planet.

*For all the women in the world that is why us men don't talk much, or we have what is known as the nothing box.*

Can you imagine how lonely he must have felt? But it didn't last long. God said it wasn't good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) and decided to give Adam some company—so He created Eve. **What a relief!**

And that was the first little **community** the world ever saw! Being it two plus three.

Now, 7.4 billion people later, it sure doesn't *feel* lonely.

People are everywhere! Even so, it's easy to get so wrapped up in our own lives that we don't take the time to really get to know others. We might mingle after the service or catch up in other places, but that probably isn't real, authentic community.

Here's the deal: It's important to spend time alone with God, soaking up His Word. But He didn't intend for us to live in isolation. He specifically designed us to crave—and thrive in—relationship with others. We're our best selves when we're experiencing life's highs and lows with other believers. **That means everyone, whether you're single or married, young or old needs community.**

Don't take it from me though. The **Bible** has a lot to say about this topic! Here are four reasons the Bible says community is so great.

### **1. Community is encouraging.**

Being in community gives you the chance to be around people at different stages of their faith journey—(Galatians 6:1-3).

**6** <sup>1-3</sup> *Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.*

That's awesome, because everyone has something to teach and to learn. In fact, it creates the ideal environment to be a Barnabas (friend), pursue a Paul (teacher), or train a Timothy (student).

What it comes down to is lifting each other up, learning from one another, and being the friend each of us needs. That's how Hebrews describes community:

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV).*

### **2. Community is fun.**

Community should never feel boring or forced. In fact, it should be the exact opposite. Psalm 133:1 (NIV) tells us, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

Our culture can sometimes portray Christians as a pretty boring bunch. But that couldn't (or shouldn't) be

further from the truth!

Believers can be goofy, witty and just really fun to be around. Yes, community has a higher purpose. But it should also be enjoyable!

### 3. Community attracts the Holy Spirit.

(Matthew 18:20). The Bible says the Holy Spirit is present whenever believers gather together. A great example of this was the early church of Acts, which made a habit of meeting together, eating together, and worshipping together. As a result, “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46–47 NIV).

Being in church on Sundays is definitely important. But if you want to be a Christ follower, be one every day in the context of *all* your communities. *That’s* where you’ll see ministry happen.

### 4. Community fosters love.

We’ve probably all been to a wedding where the officiant recited the familiar words of 1 Corinthians 13, which ends with, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Paul held love above *all else* in his letter to the Corinthians.

And he did the same with his letter to the Colossians: Colossians 3:13–14 NIV). **The Message (MSG)**

**12-14** So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. It brings unity.

**Community is life-giving**—and essential to following Christ. Scripture says that’s because we’re better together than we are alone (Romans 12:4–5). **Romans 12:4-6 The Message (MSG)**

**4-6** *In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn’t amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren’t.*

It can be hard for some of us to commit to community, especially if we’re guarded or prefer solitude. But community is God’s desire for us—and a sign of a **mature faith**. Because at the end of the day, when we grow in our relationships with others, we’re growing in relationship with Him!

WE ARE CHRISTIAN – a video