

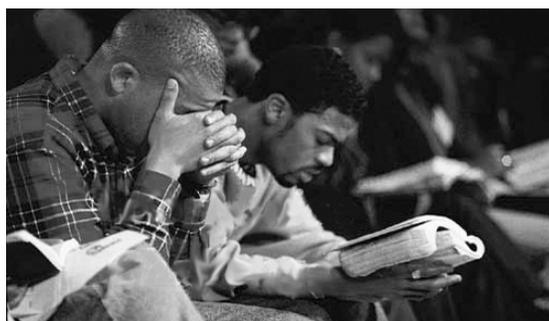
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A PICTURE OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

ACTS 2 COMMUNITY



Okay, so picture this: *“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:42-47 NASB).

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.

FELLOWSHIP AND BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

A second commitment foundational to community is a commitment to fellowship. This commitment means a lot more than just showing up at Bible study once a week. A devotion to fellowship requires us to be a meaningful part of other Christians’ lives. While we certainly should have non-Christian friends, there’s something wrong if most of our closest friends aren’t other Christians. As we see in the example from Acts, fellowship doesn’t happen accidentally. Sharing meals together, giving generously of our possessions, visiting other Christians where they live, is the result of intentional planning. Without intentionally spending time together, and a conscious commitment to fellowship, community will never happen.

CONTINUING IN ONE MIND

Just as the early Christians “continued in one



mind,” we too need to continue to be united together throughout the Christian community. Unity among believers is so important that Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “I pray also for those who will believe in me.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me...” (John 17:20-23). Jesus actually connects unity to the effectiveness of our witness to the world around us. It should be no surprise that when the book of Acts finishes the description of the early, united, Christian community, that it concludes with, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day...” (Acts 2:47 NASB). Clearly, a united Christian community is attractive to outsiders.

Unity has been always been an elusive goal. Even in Biblical times, we are shown a whole range of problems that undermine Christian unity. Most of these problems are still around today in some form. The Corinthians were guilty of factionalism as members claimed their primary loyalty to different teachers (1 Cor 3:1-9). Racial and economic prejudice challenged the oneness of the early church (Eph 2:11-22, 4:1-5, and James 2:1-6). Disunity also came from overzealousness in minor issues (see Romans 14:1-23). I’m confident you can see how these same sources of disunity are still in the church today.

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 Bible study just like any other small class that you might take on campus. 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 honor 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 our campus.