



THE POWER OF COMMUNITY



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The Power of Community

I purchased a motorcycle! And yes, my wife Kim approved it! It was actually Kim's idea to save money on gas from driving my truck. She is actually much wiser than me. So, I purchased the bike, but I didn't have a license yet. No problem, I wrote the written exam and got my M1 motorcycle permit and then I registered for a motorcycle safety course. There were 20 people in attendance. Twenty strangers came together to do a training course to learn how to drive a motorcycle safely. The course required me to communicate with and take directions from the instructors. It was not a requirement for students to engage with each other. A person could show up and take in all the training, pass the test, and leave with an M2 upgrade without taking time to connect with anyone in the class. Talking to other people was optional. Just like it is in life. But what I found interesting was that people were engaging with each other during the two days of training.

As we were waiting in line to get checked in on day one, people introduced themselves to each other and asked very personal questions. Are you new to motorcycles? How long have you been driving motorcycles? What kind of bike do you own? Even before the course began, people connected with each other and called each other by name. People carpoled to go for lunch on the first day with people they had met 4 hours ago. Why?

Because they had a common interest - riding a motorcycle. At the end of the course, I watched people exchange phone numbers and other information because of their shared interests. People chatted about setting up dates to ride together once they got their bikes on the road. It was amazing.

Since then, I have communicated several times with a guy named David. He has sent me pictures of himself on his new bike and told me about his first experience driving for the first time through the city. Many assume that driving a motorcycle is an individual pursuit by loners who want to ride alone. But this is a false assumption!

You may have noticed that there is a strict unwritten code for bikers when driving. Does anybody know what this is? Bikers will wave to each other every time they pass another biker. After driving a bike for two months, I can testify that most bikers do respect this code to wave. It is amazing. I got thinking - if motorcycles can unite people, how much more should the power of the gospel and our faith in Jesus Christ bring people together? We are stronger together, aren't we?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

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.

Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Most of us would say that one of our greatest gifts is our friends - so let me ask you...

1. How many friends do you have? How many would you identify as your "refrigerator friends?" This is a friend that is comfortable enough to:
 - a. Enter your house
 - b. Open your fridge as they desire
 - c. Borrow things as they need
2. If you had a crisis and needed help in the middle of the night, which friend(s) would you call?

Let's assume you couldn't call family. Who would you call first? Second? Who would feel free to call you?

3. Which of your friends have you permitted to get in your face and tell you what you don't want to hear?
 - a. Have they ever done it?
 - b. When was the last time someone did it?
 - c. How did you respond?

Can you think of anyone who is this type of friend in your life? If you can, great! Keep building community in this way. But, many people, struggle to think up a name. When did most of us forget how to make friends?

Remember how easy it was to make new friends when you were a kid? If someone was playing in front of my house, that person would soon become a friend. "Are you a grownup? No? Me either; let's play catch and be friends!" If you had anything in common... "You like Spiderman? I like Spiderman...! Let's be best friends!" It seemed like all of life back then was one big potential adventure...anything was possible.

It seems like, as we enter our adult years, it becomes very hard to make new friends. It's like all the pegs on your Lego are full, and you have no more room. People, like Legos, usually have a limited capacity for relationships. Some are four-peg Legos, some are 32. We often fill our lives with meaningful relationships, people or activities and once our Lego is full, we can no longer add more. Even the people we want to become friends with have no open pegs.

Often as adults, we're not interviewing; we're no longer open. By this time, the three things that accommodate making friends are far more challenging.

- distance to one another
- Repeated connections
- A setting that is relaxed and conducive to being genuine

According to one recent study on social behaviour, our circle of close friends is getting smaller. Over the past twenty years, the number of people we can discuss "matters important to us" dropped nearly a third. The number of people who said they had no one to talk to about important matters more than doubled, to nearly 25 percent. According to the New

York Times, the lack of close friends has significantly impacted mid-lifers.

Pressures affect us all. Schedules compress, priorities change and people often become pickier about what they want in their friends. We move from BFFs (Best Friends Forever) to KOF's (Kind of Friends). People Really Do Need People? Right? You could argue this doesn't matter. We are different now, we're not looking for friends.

We want to be connected... don't we? Here is something to ponder. There are billions of people with social media accounts looking for community and a place to find a connection. Is it a coincidence that the single most successful destination on the internet, Facebook, has to do with meeting our need to be social? But are these people on these platforms really "friends"?

This week I read a past article from the New York Times that revealed a true story regarding "Facebook friends." The author writes about his experience; I started an account and soon had 700 friends. In his own words, "I was shocked but very proud!" So he decided to have a Facebook party to push his virtual friends into actual friends. He invited all 700 of his "friends" to join him for a party. People could respond to one of three options:

- "Attending"
- "Maybe Attending"
- "Not Attending"

Fifteen said they would be there, and sixty said they might be there. He guessed somewhere around 20 would show up. He was thrilled and excited. On the evening in question, he wanted to look good, so he showered and shaved. He put on new pants and a favorite shirt. Filled with optimism, he headed to the party and waited and waited. Eventually, one person showed up.

And the one woman who showed up to meet him, well he didn't know her. She was a friend of a friend. They ended up making small talk, and then she left. He waited till midnight, but no one else showed up. So, he ordered a drink and sulked.

He concludes his article with these words: "Seven hundred friends, and I was drinking alone."

Social media is not social. Social media is more about the media, and less about being social! Over the last 50 years, while society has grown more prosperous and individualistic, our social connections have been dissolving. Studies show that since the 1980s, people who describe themselves as lonely have doubled. These days:

- We volunteer less.
- We entertain guests at our homes less often.
- We are getting married less.
- We have fewer children.

Over these past few years, our social isolation has increased, our level of happiness has gone down, and rates of suicide and depression have multiplied. The Golden Gate Bridge, connecting the city of San Francisco with Marin County by spanning the Golden Gate Strait, is one of our world's most recognizable landmarks. Its red, wiry structure is a remarkable symbol of connectivity and a testimony to what people can achieve through collaboration and intelligence.

Unfortunately, it is the second-most popular destination in the world for people to kill themselves. Roughly once every two weeks, a person caught in a dark web of isolation, depression and hopelessness chooses to climb over the protective guardrails and jump. There was a suicide note collected a few years ago that was written by a person as they made their way to the Golden Gate Bridge. The writer remarked that he was walking to the bridge with the intent of ending his life, but one sentence of the note stood out. "If one person smiles at me on the way," this person wrote, "I will not jump." He jumped.

This type of isolation, disconnection and guarded attitude even seems to be working its way into the church these days. How often do we come to church and act like a poser(s)?

- We act as if we have it all together.
- We pretend to be something we are not.
- We are afraid of showing others our problems...even the little ones.

There is a hesitation to show our real authentic selves. Why is that?

Luke 18:9-14

Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'

I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Our tendency too often is to come to church and we feel we need to show our best instead of revealing our flaws, insecurities and areas of need. Our best sometimes makes us proud. Our flaws and pain will always make us real. Too often, it feels like in the church community, we don't hear about people's stuff until it's almost too late. And we know it's never too late for God.

However, it seems like nobody has small problems. We only hear about the house burning down; we don't hear about the small electrical problem. We hear about the divorce, but what if they could have shared about the pornography issue or the drinking issue or the anger issue? We hear that they're going to prison for embezzlement, but what if they could have shared about the overwhelming financial problems? We hear about the suicides, but what if they could have shared the overwhelming darkness that was closing in around them? We hear that their son ran away from home, but what if they had shared all the conflict they were having up to that point?

So, what stops us from sharing our vulnerabilities with one another? Is North Park Community Church a place where we can be real with one another?

Your Christian life was never meant to be lived alone.

In the New Testament of the Bible, there is a phrase that is repeated over and over. Can you guess what it is?

"one another's" There are 59 in total. Here is just a few...

"...Be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:50)

"...Wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

"...Love one another..." (John 13:34)

"...Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (Romans 12:10)

"...Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

"Live in harmony with one another..." (Romans 12:16)

"...Stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:13)

"...Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)

"Greet one another with a holy kiss..." (Romans 16:16)

"...Have equal concern for each other." (I Corinthians 12:25)

"...Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)

"...In humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

"...Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." (Colossians 3:13)

"Teach...[one another]" (Colossians 3:16)

"...Do not slander one another." (James 4:11)

"Don't grumble against each other..." (James 5:9)

"Confess your sins to each other..." (James 5:16)

"...Pray for each other." (James 5:16)

"...Love one another deeply, from the heart." (I Peter 3:8)

"...Live in harmony with one another..." (I Peter 3:8)

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (I Peter 4:9)

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." (I Peter 4:10)

We get the feeling you can't do this alone. This is all about ONE ANOTHER. **We cannot do ONE ANOTHER ALONE!** Christianity is "a team sport" and as a team, we can help lessen the stress of the game. The game is called life. And we are not meant to live this life only. Jesus made it very clear in Matthew 22, love God and love others.

Who walks or sits with you? Who listens or cries with you? On the flip side of this is; Who are you walking or sitting with? Who are you listening to or crying with? Remember you have been uniquely gifted to bless someone! Who are you reaching out to these days?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

I like what Christian author Philip Yancey says, "God's presence often comes as a by-product of other people's presence."

So what is the big idea? **Investing in relationships today guarantees interest when needing to make withdrawals tomorrow.** In other words, you reap what you sow! A strange reality is that people expect to live better financially in retirement than they did during their working years. How can this be done? The only way this is possible is by making significant and constant deposits. If they don't invest, they will need to work longer.

The same principle is true for our social needs and living in a community. Where are you intentionally doing biblical community with others? Are you investing in people? Investing in relationships today guarantees interest when needing to make withdrawals tomorrow.

At North Park, we value community, and it is one of our six values. *“Being deeply connected to one another in caring and truth-telling relationships.”* And we want to invest in you! It is like my motorcycle training course. The instructors wanted me to learn how to drive a bike safely. Why? So I could enjoy the bliss of riding on the open road. Also, they taught me that driving with other bikers is far more enjoyable than riding alone.

Engaging with others was optional, (yes) but it was one of the best things about the course. The church is the same! Attending a Sunday morning service or watching a service online is just the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more below the surface, but that requires a choice to dive and go beyond just a Sunday service.

Let me share some ways you can do this. Join a group. There are many types of groups at North Park. Groups that will work for both introverts and extroverts. Quads, Triads, Small groups, Women studies, Men studies, Prayer groups and Serving groups. We want to encourage and model building community and relationships in any small group setting. When helping on a serve team to complete a task we want to provide and facilitate opportunities for you to be intentional about building relationships with God and each other. We need so many volunteers here at North Park to do everything we do. But the job or task is not the primary goal of getting you involved. The primary goal is to provide a pathway to help you grow deeper in your faith with God and others as you do that task or job.

There are many of you who are looking to join a new group. And I am excited to help you find community here at North Park. Discovering, activating and training new leaders to lead these groups will be an ongoing process and a key element to growing a healthy sustainable small group ministry. Many of you are already connected and committed to a small group, know that it has been a source of strength and encouragement over the past two years for you and your family. That’s

the way it should be. I need you to continue to promote and encourage small group life here at North Park. Why? Because you understand it, and you are experiencing the power of real biblical community and what it takes to make it work. Let’s be honest it takes hard work and commitment to build healthy relationships. But investing in relationships today guarantees interest when needing to make withdrawals tomorrow.

North Park has a Vision statement - We believe God desires that all people experience the love and grace of Jesus, and with this, invites His people to participate with others in community in His work of transformation.

North Park has a Mission statement - We desire to Inspire, Support and Mobilize one another to live like Jesus as a transforming and life-giving presence in our families, communities and the world.

So the vision and mission of any small group activity here at North Park, is to help people take one step closer to Jesus by creating a place where they can connect relationally, thrive spiritually and commit missionally.

We offer and teach many foundation courses and electives each year to bring people together intentionally. Things like:

A Baptism Class on October 6 - This class teaches that being baptized connects us to the body of Christ, and gives us a real sense of being joined with other believers in a communal journey towards the goal of perfection in Christ Jesus.

My Daily Quiet Time on October 12 - Pastor Paul will be teaching about the S.O.A.P. method (Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer) which provides a framework that will guide your thinking and ensure that you can engage Scripture consistently, leading to long-term life change.

Faith and Finances on October 27 - Our society constantly promises us that money will provide what we want; success, comfort, peace and happiness. Leading people to trust money for things it was never intended to give us. Even if we think we know what the Bible says about money, there seems to be a gap between our theology and our everyday money struggles.

Knowing North Park starting in November --

North Park is a very unique church. Understanding our DNA will help you to appreciate why we do what we do. This “Elder” lead course will help you understand who we are as a church and where God may be calling you to jump in. If you’re considering membership, this elective is a requirement.

The Arts of Spiritual Conversations starting on Thursday, November 3 - When you look at the life and ministry of Jesus, you'll see nine different ways in which He engaged with people. These practices, or "arts" are skills you can learn that will naturally deepen your connections with others. When spiritual conversations become an everyday reality, you will have a front-row seat to watch God change people's lives.

“All Things New” starting October 6 - Linda Greenhow will lead this 8-week women’s course and guide you through the Letter of 2 Corinthians, exploring what it means to embrace the lost and lonely as ministers of the new covenant. Each of us has a message to proclaim and live by: Because of Jesus, the old has gone, and *the new has come*.

New Small Group Launch on October 2 - During the month of September, we are providing training for our new leaders/co-leaders and hosts for these new groups. Throughout the year, we will provide training opportunities for existing and new small group leaders to ensure they have the tools and support they need to lead and facilitate a healthy small group.

Engage 2022 on September 11 - An opportunity for you to engage with the people in your church community. Today you are sitting here in rows. That’s the way we do community in a bigger setting. But next week you will not be regulated by these rows of seats. You will have the freedom to meet and greet whomever you want. But in order to do that you will need to show up and engage. I love the word – *engage* – an action word. I love action.

These courses and events are not just offered so we can make you busy and fill your calendar! The goal is to help you go deeper in their faith and provide opportunities or pathways for you to get connected in a smaller group setting and form meaningful relationships to help you on this lifelong journey to

become more like Jesus and, at the same time, you help others do the same.

One of Jesus' final instructions to His disciples is found in John 13.

John 13:34–35

“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.”

We need a vision for community discipleship that's bigger than ourselves and what we get out of it. Kim and I have attended and led small groups for most of our married life, and we believe it is the biblical model of New Testament Christianity. The times we struggled the most in life and marriage was when we didn’t have time for small group community. It was in those struggles that we recognized the value in being in biblical community.

And we understand it takes work and commitment

- That means that we sacrifice for others in the group because the Bible tells me to put the needs of others ahead of my own.
- That means we show up week after week, even when we’ve had a long day, because we know the value of being faithful.
- That means we focus on meeting the needs of others in the group because friendship is a commitment, not just a benefit.

Philippians 2:3-4

“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”

Having a vision for a Kingdom-impacting community goes even further than this. Jesus said we are to make the Kingdom of God our primary concern (**Matthew 6:33**). We need to work at making our small groups not only places where we are helping each other grow spiritually but also places where we are bringing about biblical community - meaning each of us using our spiritual gifts and practicing the "*one another's*." We need to

have a vision for making our groups places where we are making a Kingdom-impact together.

How do we do that? By doing the things that bring God glory and accomplish His Kingdom purposes:

- Working together in regular ministry efforts that serve the purposes of God - meeting the needs of the needy, serving the downtrodden and giving our collective efforts toward providing tangible help to those who need it.
- Committing as a group to reach the lost people in our lives. Nothing is more effective in evangelism than a small group that invites those who don't know Jesus to be part of their beautiful, biblical community.
- Learning together to daily take up our crosses and follow Jesus in the things that make Him famous.

So let's collectively work at getting over ourselves. Let's determine to make our church and small groups not only places where we pray, "*Thy Kingdom come,*" but also communities on a mission to actually bring about His Kingdom in our world. Let's remember: it's not about us! It's about Jesus Christ who is the Saviour of the world!

Points to Ponder

The Power of Community

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions...

1. What role has community played in your faith journey?
2. Read Luke 18:9-14 — Who are you in this story? Are you like the Pharisee? Or, are you like the tax collector?
3. Do you struggle in being real with people in your Church community? If yes, what stops you from sharing your vulnerabilities with one another?
4. Find the 59 “one another’s” in the NT. Which ones do you do well? Which ones do you need to work on?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 — How do you apply this to your life? Has God comforted you in times of trouble? How have you passed that comfort on to someone else?
6. One of our core values is community. How are we doing in living this value? How are you living out this value in your church community?