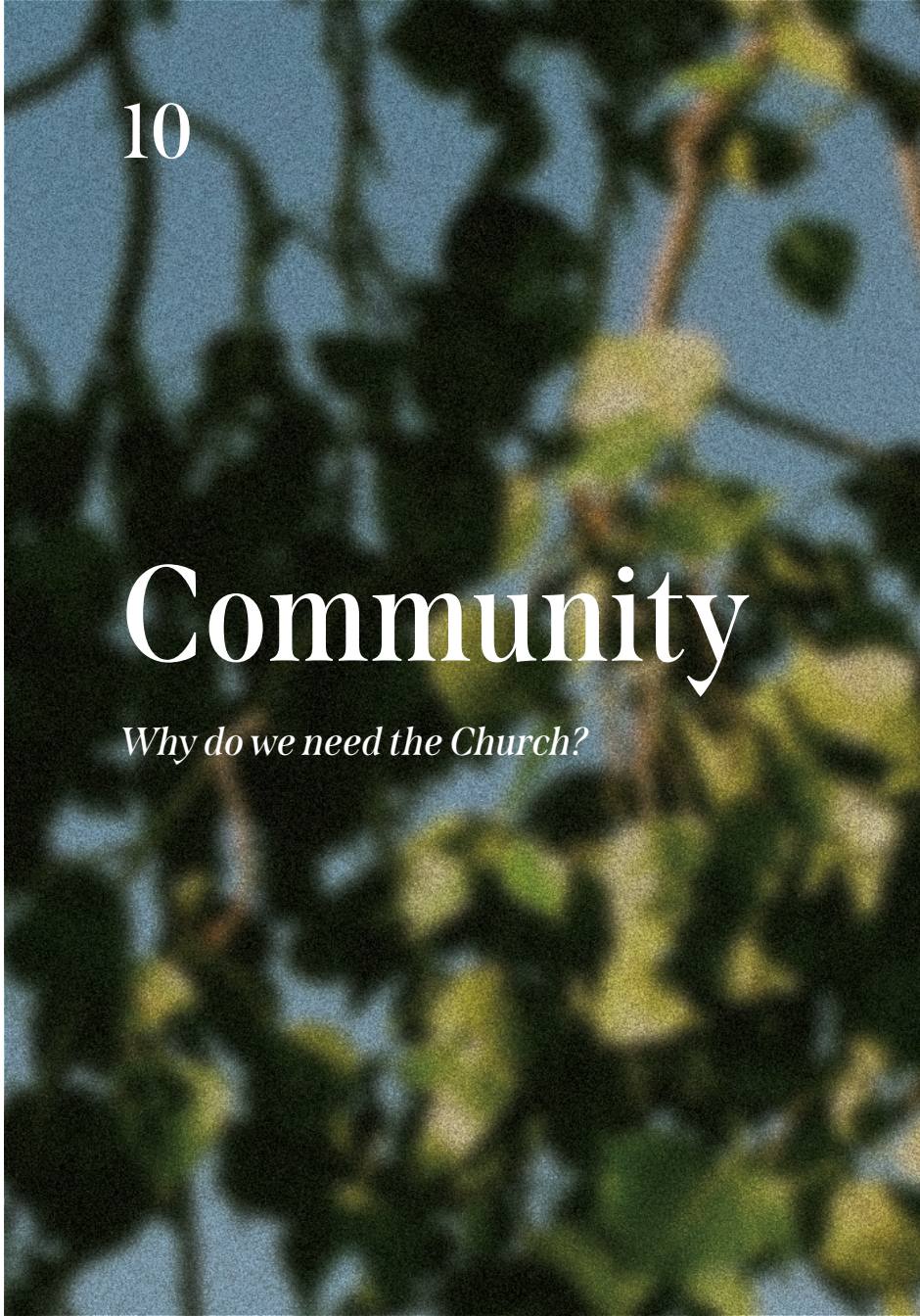




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Community

Why do we need the Church?



Discuss:

*Who do you consider to be
your community?*

*What role does community
play in your life?*

In the Western world, we live in a culture where individualism reigns. We are told to be who we are, do what makes us happy and let no one tell us otherwise. In fact, the ability to make it on our own is one of the primary indicators of our arrival in adulthood. Urged to strive for autonomy and self-reliance, we are led to believe that we reach our pinnacle by achieving complete independence and self expression. As a result, we strive to be fully self-sufficient and dependent solely upon ourselves. The problem is this is never fully attainable or even fully desirable. As humans, whether we admit it or not, we have a deep need for interaction with other people. Interestingly, when we look at Scripture we see that this need for community not only exists but, according to Genesis, is good. Our need for community is, in fact, integrated within the very fabric of our nature as humans.

How have you experienced the push from culture and society to seek independence from everyone else?

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Have you seen this to be a positive or negative thing and how so?

According to Genesis 1:26, we are made in the image of God. However, if you read these verses, you'll notice the language used indicates plurality: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." We are made in the image of a God who, by His nature, exists within relationship. We serve a God who is one and yet somehow three: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully separate and yet fully connected and engaged in eternal community. This truth – known as the Trinity – illuminates and validates our deep need for other people. Just as God lives in community, He also intends for us to live life together – as a group of people continually encouraging each other, loving each other, and pouring our lives into one another. People might be able to

survive disconnected from community, but they will never thrive. When we try to live individually and independently, we are in direct violation of how God created us.

God intends for us to serve individually, but also within community. He intends for us to pursue Him privately, but also while rubbing shoulders with one another. In order to succeed in our walk with Christ, we have to deeply involve others in our lives. Community is one of the primary means through which we are matured, kept accountable, encouraged and grown. To neglect this is to waste one of the greatest tools God has given us. We typically believe that our sin and struggles are between us and God. We keep community at arm's length, allowing only surface level relationships so we can maintain the appearance of perfection. On the contrary, in James 5:16, we are instructed to: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other, so that you may be healed." As Will Walker states:

The suggestion that my sin is best dealt with between me and God is problematic. This point of view sees community as nonessential to sanctification. It treats the Body of Christ as a gathering of the healed, not a fellowship of the broken. It suggests that sin can be conquered by introspection and personal struggle. These notions are not biblical...To say, 'It's my sin; I need to deal with it,' is to suggest that God will give me the end (victory over sin) apart from the means (gospel-centered community)."

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Community as it was intended is a powerful thing. This community is made up of the people who will fight with you in your struggles and will come alongside you when you fall. They'll also remind you of God's grace in your sin and lovingly push you toward Christ. Community is not an option; it's an essential factor in our ability to live the Christian life well. In forgoing it, we miss out on the support, richness, and healing that comes with living life together. As Christians, we are surrounded by a community of people who are walking ahead of us and with us – people who have been where we are now, dealt with similar struggles and encountered innumerable victories and failures. When temptation to sin threatens to overwhelm us, we have people in our corner raring to help us fight. If sin starts to entangle us and numb us, we have people who can call us out and remind us of God's love and mercy.

How do you see yourself avoiding community and not letting others be a part of your life?

Community, however, also takes work. It requires us to let people into the places that we'd rather hide. It also forces us to give up our pride and self-reliance. It's humbling to admit we can't do life on our own and willingly put ourselves in a less than favorable light. It also entails you pouring your life into others. Just as people come alongside you, God asks you to reciprocate. Community is a two-sided endeavor. Setting your desires aside, you are to honor fellow Christians above yourselves (Romans 12:10). Living in community is a lesson in selflessness, humility, forgiveness, and continual love even when the other party does not deserve it. This is a part of living in light of God's mercy and grace. We do not deserve His forgiveness and love, but He gives it anyway. As His children, we are asked to do the same.

Read John 13:34-35, Phil 2:1-8, 1 John 4:11-12

Our love for each other is powered and modeled in Christ and, as a result, should set us apart. Anything patterned after God's love will naturally be distinctive. God's love is unconditional and sacrificial—even to the point of death. Christ is our example and we are to imitate His love so that the world might see our Savior. As 1 John says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us." God uses us and our love for one another to reveal Christ's love to the world. As Christians, we cannot afford to neglect community.

ACTION STEPS

Take an inventory of the people in your life. Who are the other Jesus Followers that God has placed there that you need to develop a deeper relationship with?

Begin praying that God will help you connect with them and develop spiritual relationships with them.

List a couple of ways you can better love your roommates or close friends? How can you be more involved in your village? How can you be more involved in Resonate in general?

Choose to encourage someone different everyday this week. Be creative. (Examples: write a letter, send a text, leave a sticky note in a place they'll find it, make cookies and deliver them, etc.)