

LIFE GROUPS

Life Together – Ephesians 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: What differences do you have from people in this group?

Read back through the passage before going through the questions.

In Jesus, what we have in common is greater than our differences. This idea is at the heart of community. Both the unity and diversity of the church should be beautiful realities. Unfortunately, church is one of the most misunderstood aspects of a relationship with Jesus today.

In today's study, we will re-imagine the church, seeing that we were created for community—to be in the diverse family of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
- 2. Read Ephesians 5:25-27. Does God show His love any different to His creation? If so, why?**
- 3. Read Ephesians 3:1-13. How is the community in the church described in these verses? How would you describe your community?**

“God has great purposes for the community of your church: to safeguard the gospel, to transform lives and communities, to shine as a beacon of hope to the unconverted. Community that does this is demonstrably supernatural. It is not community designed around the gospel plus some other bond of similarity. It is community that reveals the gospel. Yet too often, community in our churches better testifies to our own prowess in niche marketing than to the supernatural at work.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 27). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“Yet as we do this, we must remember that community isn’t the point. The point, the substance, is God. God is immortal. He “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). So how do we learn about him? Through his Word. And how do we perceive his glory? Primarily, through the church. The body of Christ is the fullness of God (Eph. 1:23) and the most visible manifestation of God’s glory in this present age (Eph. 3:10). And so describing community in the local church is like describing the light radiating from the heavenly throne. The point is not the community; the point is God. Community is merely the effect. Our new society of the church is not a mutual admiration society, but a shared admiration society. Our affection for each other is derivative. It derives from our worship of God—a God who saved us from a million different “communities” of this world to become his family.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (pp. 29-30). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

a. Can you love and serve Jesus and not the church?

“Jesus’s words to him were stunning and life-changing: “Why do you persecute me? ... I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9 v 4-5). Twice, Jesus accuses Paul of persecuting him. The implication was clear: by persecuting the church, Paul was persecuting Jesus. The relationship between Jesus and his people is so tight that what you do to them, you do to him.”

- Allberry, Sam. *Why bother with church?: And other questions about why you need it and why it needs you (Questions Christians Ask)* . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

4. So how do we work against our own tendencies and cultivate biblical community in our churches? What specifically needs to change to achieve that type of community?

“Jesus is not talking about serving people in general, but about his “brothers and sisters”—his people. The New Testament has much to say about helping the needy in

general, but it is when it comes to his own people that Jesus tells us that what is done for them is done for him. Again, how we treat his people is how we treat him. If we serve our (and his!) brothers and sisters, we serve him. The reverse is also true. If we fail to serve his people, we fail to serve him. Neglecting the church is neglecting Jesus. Doing “church” in my bedroom on my own isn’t starting to look so good...”

- Allberry, Sam. Why bother with church?: And other questions about why you need it and why it needs you (Questions Christians Ask) . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

5. Read Romans 12:4-6. What is your relationship with the other believers? What is one way God is calling you to a deeper involvement and commitment to the local church?

“Notice the implication: being formed together into one body gives us an obligation. We belong to the rest of the body. It is impossible to be in Christ and not belong to others. A Christian, by definition, has a connection with and a responsibility to other Christians. You cannot claim Christ and avoid his people. If God is your Father, then his people are your family, and you are to treat your family as your Father wants you to. Church is therefore not a meeting you attend, but a body you belong to.”

- Allberry, Sam. Why bother with church?: And other questions about why you need it and why it needs you (Questions Christians Ask) . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

“Depth: Instead of calling people to act out the supernatural depth of commitment to other Christians that is inherent to faith, we make our churches as low-commitment as possible for newcomers. “Slide on in,” we say. “We’ve got no expectations.” We hope that as they grow, these people will increase their commitment to one another. But, of course, what you win them with is how you’ll keep them. Attract people as consumers, and you’ll wind up with a church of demanding consumers. This may allow our people to feel some level of commitment quickly, but it compromises long-term depth of love for each other. And consumerism is the antithesis of the gospel of grace.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. The Compelling Community (9Marks) (pp. 30-31). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“Church is not something we go to but something we belong to.”

- Allberry, Sam. Why bother with church?: And other questions about why you need it and why it needs you (Questions Christians Ask) . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

6. What is supernatural about the local church community? Is your church community dependent upon the Spirit of God?

“One way in which this community glorifies God is by reaching people who, apart from supernatural power, would never unite together. Remember Ephesians 2:18: “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” Second, this community is notable for its depth. That is, it doesn’t merely bring people together to tolerate each other, but to be so tightly committed that Paul can call them a “new humanity” (2:15) and a new “household” (2:19, NIV). Paul reaches for the natural world’s deepest bonds—the bonds of ethnicity and family—to describe this new community in the local church.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 25). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“They do. If community in your local church is not dependent on God’s supernatural Spirit for its lifeblood, it is not evidently supernatural. If it is not evidently supernatural, it is counterfeit community. It’s posing as biblical community but fails to accomplish its purpose. It fails to show off the wisdom of God to the world (Eph. 3:10).”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (pp. 36-37). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

a. Does love exist in a community that is formed around something other than the Gospel?

7. How does your church community differ from your community outside of the church? How many of your friendships at church likely exist even if you weren’t a Christian?

“Let’s go back to the small group for single moms. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be with people of similar life experience. It’s entirely natural and can be spiritually beneficial. But if this is the sum total of what we call “church community,” I’m afraid we’ve built something that would exist even if God didn’t.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 21). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“In gospel-revealing community, many relationships would never exist but for the truth and power of the gospel—either because of the depth of care for each other or because two people in relationship have little in common but Christ.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 22). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

- a. **What do you talk about with other church members outside of church? To what extent do casual conversations differ from what you'd expect to hear outside the church?**

8. Read John 13:34-35 and Ephesians 4:11-16. How is evangelism and discipleship impacted by the community of church?

“But failure to be involved in a local church means we miss out on more than spiritual encouragement: By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13 v 35 A significant part of the church’s evangelistic impact will be due to the quality of relationships it demonstrates between its members. Jesus says it is the defining mark of true discipleship: we most show ourselves to be his followers when we exhibit his self-giving love to other disciples.”

- Allberry, Sam. *Why bother with church?: And other questions about why you need it and why it needs you (Questions Christians Ask)* . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

“This is discipleship in action: stability in doctrine, resistance to false teaching, and a perseverance to observe all that Jesus commanded us, no matter what may come.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 40). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“Pastor Michael Lawrence put it like this: To some extent, the postmodernists are right. There is a social character to knowledge, a community aspect to our perception of reality. That’s why culture is so powerful. It shapes our perception of what is true, what is plausible. In a fallen world, culture becomes a plausibility structure for unbelief, for the denial of God and the exaltation of self. That is why the apostles are so concerned about the unity of the local church. The church is a counterculture, an alternative plausibility structure for faith.”

- Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie. *The Compelling Community (9Marks)* (p. 41). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

PRAYER

Thank God for sending Jesus to establish His kingdom in our hearts and lives. Ask God to help us see the immeasurable value of Christian community. Thank God that the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms community. Ask Him to help you be serious, not only about being in community with each other, but also about holding each other accountable to living with Christlike love and forgiveness. Ask that God would show you how to better serve each other so we may best serve Him.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/whatever-happened-to-community/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/compelling-community/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-your-dream-small-group-die>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/captured-committed-contagious>