

Reach inside that worship folder and grab your message notes
 As we continue the series we've been in called Stepping Out In Faith
 One of our CORE values here at ERBC is community
 Simply stated we believe that we're better together.
 And it's for that reason that today as we continue our Stepping Out In Faith series, we're talking about Connecting In Community.

Right at the outset I want to share with you the big idea and it's simply this - You And I Were Created For Community

When it comes to this thing we call life, you and I were never intended to go it alone, we were created for community.

This week I read about a study that was conducted by the University of Chicago, and their study found that at any given moment 20% of us are unhappy

<https://news.uchicago.edu/story/qa-prof-john-cacioppo-examines-profound-power-loneliness>

<http://magazine.uchicago.edu/1012/features/the-nature-of-loneliness.shtml>

What the study found was that if you're going through life at a rapid pace, and you're throwing yourself into your work and checking items off of your to-do list, and you're being productive and you're getting things done, but you're not relationally connected to someone else, and you're dealing with your stress alone . . .

You're spending what little free time you have watching Netflix or scrolling through your social media feeds, then you are missing out on one of the reasons for which we were created, which is community – relationships.

The study found that "persistently lonely people are unhealthy, depressed, withdrawn, hostile."

Community --- which is what we're looking at today is part of God's solution to that problem

Read through the Bible and you'll pretty quickly discover that Community was God's idea.

Genesis chapter 1 – the very beginning of your Bible – you read these words . . .

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . ." Genesis 1:1

And you read the verses that follow and you see how God created light, and water and land and plants.

He creates the day and the night

He creates the creatures of the sea and all the animals on the earth

And then you get down to Genesis 1:26 and you find these interesting words . . .

There you read . . .

"Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. . ."

Don't miss the use of the plurals there . . .

"Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. . ."

We worship one God, who exists in three persons . . .

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God exists in community.

And he formed us in His image to exist in community as well.

The very next verse says . . .

"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27

God exists in community

He created us in His image

Community was God's idea.

Again, looking at that creation account in Genesis 1 & 2

You see in Genesis 1:4 that when God created light He Saw That the light was Good.

In verse 10 he creates the water and the land and God Saw That It Was Good.

In verse 12 he creates the vegetation and the plants and God Saw That It Was Good.

In verse 18 he creates the day and the night . . . and God Saw That It Was Good.

And toward the completion of his work of creation, God creates man, and in Genesis 1:31 he doesn't just say that what he sees is good, he says that it's VERY GOOD.

But then when you get to Genesis chapter 2:18, God for the first time says something is NOT GOOD.

What was it that was not good?

It was NOT GOOD for the man to be alone.

Some of you look at that and you think, "Why Not?"

Some guys like to be alone.

It's why they go out and tinker in the garage so that they can be alone.

It's why they go hunting or fishing by themselves all weekend.

So what's the big deal with this?

There was a study done by Harvard Medical School

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mental-health/can-relationships-boost-longevity-and-well-being>

And it found that men who are married OR have a couple of deep friendships in their life live longer than men who don't

The study followed a group of men over a period of 8 decades beginning in 1938

And the study found that it didn't matter if the men came from privileged or humble beginnings.

It didn't matter if they experienced a lot of triumphs or tragedies.

The one constant when it came to happiness was relationships.

Among the conclusions of the study were that . . .

- Social connections are good for your health
 - Loneliness can be toxic
 - Relationship quality matters
- And . . .
- Good relationships appear to protect our brains

Now think about that for a moment.

WHY would the quality of our relationships, affect the quality of our life?

The best answer that I can come up with is the one that God stated thousands of years ago.

It was NOT GOOD for the man to be alone.

Something else that I don't want you to miss about that statement that God made, is that it was made at a point when . . .

There was no sin in the world.

No disobedience in the world.

God and man, were existing together with nothing separating them.

A perfect relationship in which Adam walked with God, and talked with God.

It's paradise

And yet something was not good.

Why????

Because we were Created for Community.

We were made for relationships

A relationship with God and a relationship with others

It is NOT GOOD for man to be alone.

And yet increasingly we are

We can shop for our groceries online

We can attend church online

You do all your Christmas shopping online and now have your packages delivered to your car.

We can follow our favorite sports teams online, all by ourselves

We can get driving directions and news on our phones without ever having to talk to another person.

And yet God says . . .

It is NOT GOOD for man to be alone.

Why????

Someone said it this way. . .

There is a God – Shaped hole in every heart that Nothing Else can fill.

We can try to fill it with all kinds of things . . .

Hobbies, possessions, but the bottom line is there's this God-shaped hole in our heart and when we don't have God in that place we will continually feel frustrated.

We'll feel like something is missing.

The early church father Augustine, said it this way in the 3rd century

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

So . . .

There is a God – Shaped hole in every heart that Nothing Else can fill.

But there's a second principle and that is . . .

There is a Human – Shaped hole in every heart that God has Chosen Not to fill

God created us with a DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY

He could have created us, NOT to need one another, but he didn't.

We were CREATED FOR COMMUNITY.

It doesn't matter HOW YOUNG YOU ARE or HOW OLD YOU ARE

It doesn't matter if you're MALE OR YOU'RE FEMALE

It doesn't matter if you're RICH OR POOR

It doesn't matter if you COME TO CHURCH ALL THE TIME or you never really come at all

It doesn't matter if you CALL YOURSELF A CHRISTIAN or you don't

God made you for two relationships.

A relationship with God and a relationship with others.

On your notes . . .

The Christian life is not just about Believing.

It IS about believing, but it's not JUST about believing.

It's also about Belonging and Becoming.

As a church we want to be a place to BELIEVE

A place to BELONG and

A place to BECOME

Very often it begins with BELIEVING

The Bible says, "***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.***"

We begin with information that we believe.

But, god's greatest goal for our lives is not information, it's transformation.

The Christian life is a journey in which we should be becoming more and more like the one we've come to worship, like the one who gave his life for us.

And we believe that, that process of becoming more and more like Jesus happens best in community.

Our memory verse for this week comes from Ecclesiastes chapter 4 and says . . .

***"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."* Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**

God has DESIGNED us . . .

He's WIRED us . . .

He's SHAPED us in such a way that we are better together.

That's A TRUTH THAT WE NEED TO BE REMINDED OF over and over.

Because WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY THAT VALUES INDEPENDENCE, and self-sufficiency.

For some people, leaning on others shows dependence, and dependence is weakness.

We've bought into the myth of the . . . Lone Ranger

That to be a real hero, you need to go it alone.

Now there may be times when we do have to ride solo.

But what we forget is that even the Lone Ranger had Tonto

He had someone to lean on.

From a Biblical viewpoint, we need community

Read through the New Testament and you'll see that the phrase "one another" occurs about 54 times.

Let me just share with you a few of those . . .

In 1 Thessalonians it says . . .

"Encourage One another . . .

In Romans it says . . .

"Be Devoted To One another . . .

And then . . .

"Honor One another . . .

In Ephesians it says . . .

"Be Kind and compassionate to one another..."

And . . .

"Forgiving one another . . ."

Elsewhere you'll read . . .

"Be patient with one another . . ."

"Teach and admonish one another . . ."

"Live in harmony with one another . . ."

"Offer hospitality to one another . . ."

"Bear one another's burdens..."

I won't take you through all 54, but I think you get the idea.

The N.T. has an awful lot of instructions that you can't begin to complete apart from community.

You can't do the one-anothers if you're flying solo.

54 Times you'll find the Greek word for one-another.

The Bible doesn't any similar word for a Christian who is going it alone -- who is living apart from community.

If you're a follower of Christ, God's expectation is that you would be involved in the lives of other Christians.

So this morning I want to share with you three reasons why we need community

We need community . . .

1. Because we Grow better together

The writer of Proverbs says it this way . . .

"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble." Proverbs 13:20

The Apostle Paul takes that same truth and he looks at it from the flip-side

He says . . .

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" 1 Corinthians 15:33

Will you take your pen and circle that first statement?

"Do not be misled:

Go ahead and circle that.

In other words, he's saying — don't miss this.

Don't delude yourself into thinking that you are impervious to the influence of other people.

Bad company corrupts good character.

Go ahead and underline that.

"Bad company corrupts good character."

Someone said it this way . . .

Show me your friends and I'll show you your future

Let me challenge you at the start of this new year, to take some time and take inventory of your current friendships.

Ask yourself . . .

When it comes to your friendships ARE YOUR friends helping you to GROW TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS, to become more the man or woman of God that God wants them to be?

Or are they hindering you?

There may be times in your life when the best thing you can do is to break off a toxic friendship.

Who you hang with, is who you are on your way to becoming.

Why do we need community?

One reason is because . . .

1. Because we Grow better together

Another is because . . .

2. Because we Learn better together

Take a look at Acts 2:44-45 - it's there on your notes

As you're finding that, let me mention that every now and then someone will comment and tell me that sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes I go through these slides so quickly that you miss some of the fill-ins.

I appreciate the feedback, but what interests me is that you think that I'm doing that unintentionally . . .

That I don't know that I'm going faster than you can fill in the blanks.

If I'm going so fast that you miss a fill-in, but the person who is sitting next to you got it. . .
 What does that force you to do?
 It forces you to ask them for help. . .
 And in the process it reminds you that we need one another.
 We need one another because. . .

- We GROW better together,
- And we LEARN better together.

Acts 2 gives us a description of life in the Early Church.
 Life among the very first followers of Jesus as they were living it out.
 And in verses 44-45 we're told that. . .

"And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need." Acts 2:44-45

We're told that. . .

"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved." Acts 2:46-47

As you read those words I want you to notice something about life in the Early Church.

First of all they. . .

"They worshiped together at the Temple

That's like what we do here on the weekend.

It's BIG CHURCH

It's the LARGE GATHERING of all the believers

But then they did something else.

"They met in homes

If you read the other verses in this second chapter of Acts you'll see that in those meetings they spent time in Bible study, and in prayer, they shared meals together they fellowshipped together.

Don't miss this.

Life in the early church, was the large meeting, and it was small groups.

We've done our best to follow their example here.

We have the big group meeting each weekend when we come together to worship, and then we gather in small groups, we call them Life Groups.

They are the single best way to get connected here at ERBC.

We need community because we grow better together, and we learn better together.

In Acts chapter 8 there's a story of someone who was reading his Bible, trying his best to make sense of it, trying to understand what he was reading.

It was at that point that one of the disciples named Philip encountered him and asked him. . .

"Do you understand what you're reading?"

The man's response????

"How can I, unless someone instructs me?"

And based on that invitation Philip explained to Him the meaning of what he was reading.

The reality is, none of us has a lock on the truth, that's why we need one another.

We grow better together. . . We learn better together. . . And . . . because we serve better together
 And this is important because for most of us, serving is not something that comes naturally.

More often we're interested in "being served" rather than in serving.

When choosing a church, we often look first at ways in which the church can serve me.

(Show - **Me Church Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek25yrfOzCE>)**)

That may be a little bit of an exaggeration when comes to people's expectations for a church. . .

But when you think about it – there's a lot of truth in it

For a lot of us it's about what that church can do for us.

It's all about "Me" - Me Church.

And that's a perspective that goes all the way back to the beginning.

Genesis – the first temptation.

When Satan comes into the garden, what does he say to the woman?
 He says "You've got to do what makes you happy."
 "I know God said that you ought not to go near that one tree."
 He said "You could eat all from all the others, if you'll just stay away from that one."
 "But think about it Eve . . . don't you want to do what's going to make you happy?"
 And Eve says, "You've got a point."
 And she disobeys God and eats the fruit.
 And remember, the serpent came at her when she was alone
 Why?
 Because we're better together. Stronger together.
 When God said . . .

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.

Don't miss the words that immediately follow
 God said . . .

I will make a helper who is just right for him." *Genesis 2:18*

Some of us read those words and we push back, because that can sound like it's a second-class relationship

"Helper"

What's that about?

Is it like, someone to make me a Tuna sandwich when I get hungry?
 It's important to note that elsewhere in the O.T. God is referred to as a helper.
 This isn't talking about some sort of second-class relationship, it's talking about a partner
 It's talking about a co-laborer.

And what I love here is that God doesn't ask Adam's opinion.

He doesn't say, "Would you like a wife, or would you like a Labrodor Retriever?"

You can have a wife or you can have man's best friend.

I'll leave it up to you.

God didn't do it that way.

He made the decision because God knows what every one of our needs.

And if you remember the story you know that God brought all of the animals to the man, and Adam named each one of them.

But still there was not found a helper suitable for him.

So God created the woman.

And when Adam first saw the woman, what was his reaction?

It was like "Whoa! Check her out! She's got thumbs!"

I'm sure that's what he noticed first.

At least that's the way I imagine it went.

You're free to imagine it different.

But she was a helper She was a co-laborer

And that was important - - why?

Because we're better together. We serve better together.

Hebrews 10

The last passage on your notes.

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

We need that motivation, because left to ourselves, we tend to think only of ourselves.

So we come together to *motivate one another to acts of love and good works.*

When it comes to opportunities to serve, we try to provide those for you every week in on the connection card that we put in your worship folder.

Go ahead and pull that out for a minute.

As you're taking it out, let me share with you one opportunity to serve that didn't make the card

It has to do with these name tags that you found inside your worship folder.

Maybe you saw that and you were wondering what it was about?

Maybe you knew what it was about and you decided you didn't like it.

This name tag is an exercise in SELFLESS SERVICE.

What I mean by that is, that to help us connect in community I've given you a next step on the RIGHT SIDE of your connection card, relating to tonight's message and it's this - Learn the name of one person today that I didn't previously know

It can be awkward to just walk up to someone and say, "*Hey, I know you've been coming here for like forever, but I never bothered to learn your name, so would you tell me what it is, and I'll try and remember it?*"

To make that a little less awkward, we've given you these name tags and I'm going to ask you to just put your first name on the front.

This really is an exercise in selfless service

And what I mean by that is most of you, already know your name.

If you forget it you can always pull out your Driver's License or look at the label you sewed insider your clothing.

You know your name

You don't need to do this for you.

I'm asking you to write your first name and wear it, not forever, just until you get into your car.

Learning a person's name is a step toward connecting with them.

And if you really want to take this to the next level -- on the weekend's to come -- even when we're not giving you the name tags..

Make it your goal to learn the name of one new person each weekend.

Every week we give you opportunities to connect through serving here at ERBC

I believe that the best way to get into community is to sign up for a Life Group

Did I mention that sign-ups are going on right now?

But some of us connect better through serving on a team.

Every week there are opportunities to learn more about serving at through ERBC

There are four on the card this week.

You could learn more about serving with the

- Homeless outreach feeding program
- Helping to serve at the Saturday Night Dinner
- Serving on the weekend welcome team
- Serving on the Trader Joe's food distribution team

This is the list we have this week, there will be a different one next week.

I don't know what a next step for you would necessarily look like, I do know that as we start out a new year, it's not unusual to set some goals.

- Lose weight
- Exercise more
- Get out of debt

Those aren't bad goals

But you can be in great shape physically and financially and vocationally

You can hit all those goals, but if you're not relationally connected you can still feel empty.

Make it your goal this year to get closer to God and closer to others.

Take some time to read your Bible and to pray -- to get closer to God

Take some time out to invest in relationships

We were created for community

It's not good for you to be alone.

Let's pray

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