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O R D I N A R Y  
**ANGELS**

BASED ON AN EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY

**COMMUNITY DEVOTIONAL**

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# DAY 1: WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Scripture Passages: Luke 10:25-37

Most of us, if we grew up in church, have probably heard the story of “The Good Samaritan” more than a couple of times. As I have grown older, I have realized that there’s danger in the familiar. The stories that I think I know so well, however, always deserve a closer look. In today’s Scripture passage, let’s find the things that weren’t obvious to us the first time we heard the story.

We tend to start any conversations or dialogue about the Good Samaritan with Jesus’s literal story about the Good Samaritan. At the beginning of this passage, however, we see Jesus having a conversation with someone who Scripture tells us is a “religious scholar.” The man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus actually answers the man with a question: “What is written in the law?” he asked him. “How do you read it?” (verse 26)

The scholar answers in verse 27: He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus then responds with, “That’s right. Now go and do what you just said.” (My paraphrase.)

The religious scholar, however, decides to challenge Jesus with another question: *Who is my neighbor?*

And Jesus responds with a story—the story of The Good Samaritan. The story begins with a man who is robbed and beaten on the side of the road and left for dead. A PRIEST, the most obvious person to care for this man, passes him by. A Levite (also a religious man) passes the man by. The Samaritan—the person who, culturally, would have no reason to interact with the man who was beaten and left for dead—feels compassion for the man. He stops and provides care. He assumes the cost. He loves this man he didn’t know or have a reason to love because he saw him as his neighbor.

I think Jesus knew exactly what that scholar was going to ask Him. Jesus includes in the story a lot of different groups of people who don’t typically interact. Jesus illustrates each of us as the priest or the Levite in the story. We, like the Priest and Levite, have the most in common with the Jewish man dying in the street. The Good Samaritan was someone who didn’t have a reason to love the Jewish man. They were cultural enemies. But he looked past everything that the world said about why they shouldn’t love each other, and he did it anyway. He loved the man and stopped and cared for the man who *didn’t deserve his love*. Sound familiar? The Good Samaritan is like Jesus. Jesus is perfect and blameless. And we are not. But he loves us anyway.

The point that’s not so obviously obvious is that Jesus is saying, “you’re all neighbors. If the point of the law is to tell you how to be the image of God, and I am the image of the living God, and I love people who are sinners and don’t deserve love and grace from me, then what is the logical conclusion? Point blank: You are to love each other. The point of the law of my Father is to love Him and love who He has made—all of who He has made, whether you think you should or not isn’t the point. The point is you should love everyone.”

That really can change the way that we think about community. When we think of community as available to us everywhere, then the way we think about loving people changes.

When you think about your neighbors, who are the people who come to mind?

How are you loving those people?

As we close out today, pray for each of those people who have come to mind. Ask God to reveal to you specific and unmistakable ways that you can show your love and care to each of them. And when those times come, be committed to being obedient in loving those people well.



# DAY 2: COMMUNITY IN WORSHIP

Scripture Passages: Genesis 1:26-27, Colossians 3:15-16

Sometimes, we limit ourselves in the way we think, and I know for myself, it's been the case when we think about community and where we find it. It's not only our literal neighbors or the people we sit next to in a pew or sanctuary on Sunday. We can find community—neighbors we are called to love—everywhere.

In today's case, let's think about worship. When I think about worship, I automatically think about music. And music is one way we can join together to worship. But worship is so much more.

So, what is it? One author and scholar, NT Wright, frames worship by saying, "True worship is open to God, adoring God, waiting for God, trusting God even in the dark."

His definition is both simple and complex. The thing about this definition, though, is that worship can happen anywhere in any circumstance. It's an acknowledgement of God—our need for him, our gratitude for what He's done and doing, our awe and fear of him, and our trust in Him for all things. That being said, for today's conversation, we are going to think about worship in the corporate sense—using music and the Word of God.

When we come together as a community with Christ as our commonality, it's a form of worship! Why? Because it's how he intended for us to live—together.

## **Let's read Genesis 1:26-27 together.**

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.*

A couple of things that I don't want us to miss. In verse 26, God said, let us make man in our image. The triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was present and active in creation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together in perfect unison. In verse 27, we are told that we are made in the image of God. The image of God is not just God the Father, but the triune God. If we are made in his image, then part of our role as image bearers is to be in community with other image bearers.

## **Let's flip to the New Testament and look at Colossians 3:15-16.**

*And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

Let's take note: we were called to be one body. The church is one! We are called to teach and admonish one another—that can't be done alone. And we are called to sing together, gratefully, to corporately acknowledge God and his words.

We are one. In a world that tells us to isolate or that we don't need one another, let us remember what's true.

# DAY 3: COMMUNITY IN WORK

Scripture Passages: Genesis 2:15, 1 Peter 4:10

According to a 2022 *Harvard Business Review* article, “when people had a sense of community at work, we found that they were 58% more likely to thrive at work, 55% more engaged, and 66% more likely to stay with their organization. They experienced significantly less stress and were far more likely to thrive outside of work, too.”<sup>1</sup>

It shouldn't be shocking that research will tell us people are more likely to enjoy work when they have a sense of belonging there. As we've talked about the last couple of days, God created us to be in community—everywhere. And not only did he create us to be together, but he created us to work.

## Let's read Genesis 2:15 together.

*The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.*

If we were created in God's image, then that means that we were not only created to work and to be together, but to actually create together. When we work, and when we build community at work, then we are doing what God intended us to do. And when we work together, using all of the gifts that He's given us, when we find joy in doing our work well, we are actually reflecting the image of God.

When we can look at what we accomplish together, and when we can call it good, we are reflecting our Creator! I think it's an important note that we individually reflect God's image, but also in community, we reflect God's image. He gives each of us gifts that when we steward for His glory, reflect His glory, and the Kingdom.

## Let's take a look at 1 Peter 4:10.

*Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.*

Depending on your job, you might not be working with other believers. But, that doesn't mean you can't facilitate community and be a part of something very beautiful. What are ways that we can help build community? Quick ideas: Share a meal. Ask a question of the day. Commit to praying for your co-workers.

<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2022/08/rekindling-a-sense-of-community-at-work>

# DAY 4: COMMUNITY IN LIFE

Scripture Passages: Acts 2:42-47

A few days ago, we talked together about who our neighbors are and what it means to love them. We learned that everyone we come across is really our neighbor, but today, let's talk about our literal neighbors—the ones who share the same side yards and streets and buildings as us.

Do you know your neighbors? According to a Pew Research study cited in an article on Axios.com, 57% of Americans say they only know some or none of their neighbors.<sup>2</sup> That's a staggering statistic—and a fact that the early church would have a very hard time relating to, is my guess. While there are times that many Jews went to the Temple to learn or interact with one another, many of the early Christian churches met in each others' homes. And they didn't just meet to talk about what was happening down the street or to chat about yard work—although those things in themselves aren't bad. They met and really spent intentional time together talking about the Way of Jesus and enjoying each other's company.

## Let's look at Acts 2:42-47.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.*

*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

There is so much richness in this passage—and I want to unpack some things together as to not miss all that God has for us here.

Something to remember while reading the Bible is that we are reading translations of the original languages—usually Greek and Hebrew. We don't always have a word in English that translates the original language fully and completely. For instance, the word, "fellowship," in verse 42, is the Greek word, "koinōnia." And while it alludes to what we would consider fellowship, it means a lot more. It actually means to attain a level of intimacy with a group of people, sharing a commonality, and an "exhibiting of an embodiment." That's a much stronger connection than what I typically think when I think of the word, "fellowship." But how? How do we create that strong bond? Luckily, the passage tells us!

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.axios.com/2022/07/28/neighborhood-connections-knowing-neighbors-strong-society-america ns>

## Let's look again:

1. They were together. They made time for each other. As a very basic first step, they just made time to be with one another.
2. They met each other's needs. There's a lot of context in this that gets misconstrued at times...when Scripture talks about selling possessions and distributing the proceeds. Unfortunately, there's not time today to get into all of that—it's a whole separate study! What I think is the important thing to grasp, though, was that people saw needs, and if they had the means—even if it required sacrifice on their part—they made a way to meet them.
3. They shared meals—joyfully. Food is disarming! It's an easy and natural way to open your home to people you might not know well. And everyone eats. So if time is scarce, sharing a quick meal is an intentional way to also share time. It doesn't have to be fancy. Your house doesn't have to be magazine-clean. The fact that you think of your neighbor and show them that you want them there with you means more than a fancy meal or magazine-worthy house ever will.
4. They invited all sorts of people in. In verse 47, it says, "enjoying the favor of all people." It's easy to read this statement and miss some context, but let's not miss it. At the time, Jews and Gentiles didn't spend a lot of time interacting. They shared a physical location to a degree, but they were different in how they lived—from how they treated one another to the foods they ate and even the laws they observed. BUT, the early church was a place for all people...and while they were different in so many ways, what united them was a common desire to know God more. We can practice the same thing. We can invite people in who don't look like us or think like us or sound like us with the hopes that our time together will help us know God more.

Up until this point, we've talked about what it means to be in community with our literal neighbors. I think that it's easy for us to focus on how we get *something* from being in a community...we get friends and a closer connection and people looking out for us. And all of those things are true and a blessing, so I don't want to sound dismissive. But there's a little bit of gold at the end of this passage.

**Let's reread the end of verse 47:** *...Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

God uses our devotion to knowing our neighbors. The fruit of our willingness allows God to draw more people to Him—people seeing God in you helps them see God. Friends, what a privilege it is to be used by God. When we delight in the neighbors He gives us, He is glorified. Let's pray for that to be our motivation to invite others in. When we invite others into our homes, it's an invitation into the Kingdom.

# DAY 5: COMMUNITY IN CHURCH

Scripture Passages: Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 2:18-22, Genesis 1:26-27

## What is church?

To me, that's a loaded question! I think that it's easy for us to think of church as a building—a place we go to on Sunday mornings. But that's only a part of the activity of the church. That's not the church itself.

### **Paul, in the book of Ephesians, gives us a definition of the church. Let's look together!**

*And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.* (Ephesians 1:22-23 CSB)

There's a lot to be said in these short verses. Scripture tells us that Christ is the head of the church, and we, his followers, are the body. Logic would tell us that as the head, we are submissive to him and the way that he leads. And a body alludes to there being many parts—many members. An arm serves a different purpose than a kidney—the body can't operate without either. And really can't operate without the head (brain) telling those parts what to do. We are many members making up one body. This extends to the entirety of God's kingdom—all believers belong to Christ. Christ is the head of the church. So regardless of which building or pew we sit in on Sunday (or Wednesday, or Tuesday morning at 5am,) we are all the church. We are a community.

### **Let's flip now to Ephesians 2:18-22.**

*For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.*

Whew. Where to start here!?

First, Scripture tells us that we aren't strangers. We have the Creator and Savior of the World as our commonality. We might not know each other's names, but we know we belong together. We are made for and meant for each other.

Secondly, with Christ as the head of our body, with Him as our cornerstone, we make up a Temple. This is where it can start to feel complicated. There is, without argument, a need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in order to be right with God. There's no way around that. That being said, though, there is a communal sense of being a Temple. We talk about our bodies being Temples in church services often, and it's usually when we are talking about how to care for ourselves in the way that we eat, experience intimacy, exercise, rest, and so much more. And let's not dismiss the importance of caring for the bodies that God has given us. But us thinking of our bodies as a sole Temple for ourselves for Christ to reside is actually an incomplete picture. Because what this passage in Ephesians tells us is *that the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* In the whole body (*all of us together*) is where we will experience the fullness of the image of God. **Let's think back to day 2, and look at Genesis 1:26-27 again.**



*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.*

"Let us make man in our image." God is one, in three persons.

His plan has been the same since the beginning. He created us to be in community with one another, because our gifts and talents and beauty—while all different—actually reflect him fully. We, together as one body, are the image of God. But our sin shattered the mirror. We look at a splintered mirror and know, to a degree, the image looking back at us. But because it's shattered, it's incomplete. Enter Jesus. When Jesus is the head, when his broken body actually binds up all the splinters in the glass and makes right the broken mirror, then his reflection is actually ours. Our full community with Jesus' reflection as our own, is the image of God.

Do you see it? The church, as Paul gives us the definition in Ephesians, with Christ's body as our own, is the fuller image of God.

Let's not miss what church really is! It is, as Ephesians tells us, *God's dwelling in the Spirit*.

Community is so much more than work or neighbors or worship or friends. At its very core, it is a way to remind us all that belonging is what we were created for, because it's a reflection of God Himself. Take heart and look for the Kingdom, because friends, it's already here. It's where the Spirit of God dwells. Take time today as we close out our study this week on community to meditate on the gift of the church.

