

Start One

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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We were created to live in fellowship with other people. It's not normal, it's not natural. It's not even safe or good for our well-being to go through life alone. We were meant to live with others. Now, I know that even in saying that, I recognize that God has created us all different. And we have the spectrum that we all fall on of the extreme extroverts and the extreme introverts, right? And you all know people that you would put on those extremes, the extroverted people that are recharged by being with people.

And so when I say that we are created to live in fellowship, they just want to yell amen, right? Of course, we're created to live in fellowship. But then on the other side of the spectrum, God has created certain individuals that are more introverted by nature. And this is probably my way that I have been created. I fall more on the introverted side. And people that are introverted are often recharged, refueled by being alone. I often say that after a bad day or after a bad week, if you just give me a piece of wood and let me go to my wood shop and work on it, then I will be fine.

All right? It's a good stress reliever for me. The wood doesn't talk back to me. You don't have to worry about disciplining the wood or anything. And so for me, being an introvert, that is a blessing for me. But God has still created introverts as well to live in community. We were meant to do life alone. So if you're an introvert, raise your hand this morning. I'm just joking. You're not true introverts. You want to raise your hands, right? Okay? Made you do that. Some of you go how dare you? Okay.

But we have introverts and we have extroverts, but regardless of how we are created, God has made us to live in community. And I can say that with 100% confidence, because I look at scripture and over and over again, we are reminded that it's not good for us to be alone. Let me read some of these scriptures to you. Genesis chapter two 18, you're familiar with this. The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

So right away in the garden, even before sin enters the world, God says it's not good for man to be alone. I will create somebody to go through life with him. Hebrews chapter ten versus 24 and 25. The author says, and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. So there's an interaction that's taking place.

Not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but instead encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching, the author recognizing, again, it is important for us to live in community, to continue to meet together, to encourage each other, to spur one another on towards good deeds, Paul and Galatians chapter 6 verse two says to carry each other's burdens. And in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Well, you can't carry someone else's burden if you're not living in community or fellowship with them. You don't even know what's going on in their life. And we are commanded to carry each other's burdens not to go through life alone. Peter says, in first Peter, chapter four verse ten. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others. And you can't serve others when you're by yourself, right? You have to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. We should use the gift that God has given us.

You know the analogy we're called the body of Christ. And each of us plays a part in that body. And if we are not doing what God has gifted and called us to do, then the body is suffering because we were meant to live

in community. Romans chapter 12:16, Paul says, live in harmony with one another, do not be proud, but willing to associate with people of low position do not be conceited.

So personally, as a self proclaimed introvert, I know the temptation that exists to just do things alone. Some of you may have been hurt in the past, you've struggled with relationships, and so you think, you know what? I am not gonna put my heart out there again for someone to trample on. And so I'm just gonna go back into my shell and be introverted and do my own thing. And I can tell you again from personal experience that for a time for a moment, it might feel good.

You'll feel like you know this is why I like being an introvert. There's peace here. It's pleasant. But if you can learn anything from me, please know that it doesn't last. Because that's not how God has created us. And so when you are trying to live contrary to how God has created us, things will eventually come up. Something will feel like it is missing. You will feel empty. These feelings don't last because we are created in the image of God, scripture is very clear. We are created in the image of God.

And the God that we serve is a triune God. God the Father, God, the son and God, the Holy Spirit. And that's a message for another day. But God lives in community. He lives in perfect community. And so when you and I are created in his image, we are created for community. We are created to be with one another. Even as we know this to be true, I was looking up statistics over this last week and found it interesting that over 20.5% of people that live in America say they don't have a close friend.

That's one out of every four of us would say, I don't have somebody that I completely trust that I'm close with that I would say is kind of my best friend. 25% would say that that person doesn't exist in their life. And I think about this in the world in which we live, technology, which I would say I'm living in the technology age, it's changing so fast, which was supposed to make connecting with others easier, has actually isolated us even more.

Because now, instead of being face to face with people and talking with people, we do things like social media and we have chatting, you know, we'd send each other text messages and looking at people through a camera is just not the same as doing life with somebody. And so today we actually have more acquaintances than ever, but no real Friends. We have a lot of acquaintances. People we know, we know what's going on in their life. You know, we follow them on Facebook. I like to say some people stalk on Facebook, you know?

You know, everything about that person, but you haven't talked to them in forever. And the repercussions of these types of relationship means that we just have more of these lonely feelings. And when we aren't truly close with other people, we lack the ability to hold each other accountable, we lack the ability to motivate somebody because if somebody's not close, if you aren't in that inner circle, then it's almost like you don't have the right to share with them. How to grow.

And so we get stuck in the status quo and we have versus like proverbs, chapter 27:17 that says as iron sharpens iron, so one person should sharpen another. We help each other. We motivate one another. We encourage one another. But if we aren't in those intimate friendships and relationships, that is not taking place. The truth is, we can grow stronger together than we ever could alone. So what are we going to do about this?

What are we going to do about this recognized that we recognize that we are supposed to have relationships? We're supposed to be in community. There's a few options we have. One, we can just stand by and just watch it happen. As relationships fall apart and we get more and more divided and separated as a society, we can just claim that it's too much work. You know, we're too far gone. It just is what it is, and we're just going to sit on our hands and just let it be. We can ignore it as a problem. Just fake like it doesn't exist.

We can make up the lie or continue to tell the lie against scripture that we believe it's not true. We could say I have true fellowship with others. I don't need to live in community. Or we can try to do something about it.

And make a difference. So here at the church, we've recognized this trend of relationships breaking apart and the enemy causing division. And so we have decided that we are going to make it one of our goals to push people to live into community, to pull people, to live in the community with us.

And we have what we call life groups. And as a church, we're constantly looking for ways to get people connected, to put people together with others so that they can be encouraged and they can sharpen each other, but this is not an easy job. As the staff sits around and we try to do this, this is going to be on Brenda's plate. That's why we hired her. So she's going to be helping to work with all of these life groups. It's almost like trying to set up a blind date. This is going to get weird for a little bit, okay?

It's like a, it's like a middle school dance where the girls are on one side and the guys are on the other and they don't want to connect you know. Nobody's getting on the dance floor. Nobody wants to do that. And so we're sitting back going, okay, we've got these great people. They want to be in a life group and we're trying to put them together and sometimes it doesn't work. And sometimes it's awkward and sometimes there's just not a good connection. And so it's hard. And so it's easy because of that. Many of you have experienced this. And so it's easy just to say, you know what? I'm going to come in on Sunday morning.

I know that pastor stands out there until 5 till. So we're going to show up at three till so we don't have to talk to him, all right? I know some of you do that, all right? You come in because you know I'm already in here and you even have it figured out during the closing song. You know kind of when the last choruses and so you sneak out right before the closing song so nobody can talk to you. Now, trust me, I've been here for 19 years. I know that some people come to the church just for a time of healing. Maybe you're here because you've been burned at another church or a relationships or whatever else.

And so you honestly just need a time where you can sneak in and sneak out, and that's okay. All right, you're welcome to do that. And we have many people that do that. And I fully understand that. But don't fall into the trap then of the enemy that after that time of healing has kind of happened that you say this is just better. I'm just going to keep sneaking in and sneaking out because I don't want anybody to know me or to know my story because then it gets messy. That's not the way that God has created us.

And so we're constantly looking for ways to put you together. Unfortunately, I have conversations with individuals in the church that fall into that trap and they sneak in and they sneak out and you know they're connected with the church, but they don't really know anybody at the church. And they experience something in life that's traumatic. It's a health issue. It's a family issue. It's a relational issue. And so they come to the church. And they contact the pastors. They contact me or somebody else. And they say, hey, we're going through this.

And we need to meet with somebody and so certainly as pastors as a staff at a church, we say we'd love to get together. And so we get together and we talk, but you know, there are a thousand of you and ten of us or whatever the ratio is. And it's impossible for us to walk extremely closely with all of you. And so that's why we encourage life groups. And so sometimes these people will come to us and you know we want to be there, we'll pray with them, we'll go visit them, we'll send them cards, we'll do all of that.

But I can't tell you how many people have left the church because as a staff, we couldn't meet the expectation of being like a life group and community and couldn't stay as connected as even we wanted to because there just wasn't enough time in the day or in the week to do that. And that's why we feel life groups are so important. Let me tell you how the church in America works today, at least from my perspective, as I watch other churches, and as I look at this church and I've been doing this for almost two decades now, the church in America, most people are attracted to a church because of people like Mark and Sam and our worship team that puts together the music and the songs.

And so you hear there's a great band there and it sounds good and it's worshipful and sometimes you get, you know, good feelings and goose bumps on your arms when you're worshipping. And so people will come to

church for that. Sometimes people will come to church because they have children, right? So they grew up in church, and then they, you know, they go into college, they walked away from church, they got married. They start having kids, and they're like, oh, I kind of need help with this. And so they come back to church. And so some people are drawn to church because of children's ministry. And so we have people like Jessica and Kerry and we did this whole summer sports jam and people are getting connected to the church.

And so some people are drawn into the church because of that. Other people are drawn to the church because maybe they didn't come back when they had kids, you know, when they were younger because everything was going well, life was going okay, but then they became teenagers and they're like, my kids broken. I need some help, right? And so they come to the church and they say, hey, I need you to fix my kid. And so they drop off their teen. And so they come back to church. And they do all of that. And I have found out that my only responsibility at the church is just not to scare people away as the preacher. That's all I get to do, right? My job is just not to scare you away.

Nobody comes to church because of the preacher. Nobody comes because of what I say. And I know this to be true. So you're not hurting my feelings when you believe this, okay? Because I grew up in church my whole life, and I can tell you that as I look back on my own life, I can remember maybe a handful of messages that the pastors gave that truly were life altering for me. Now, granted, they were life altering and God used them and used those men certainly to make a difference in my life. And God used those messages, but I have probably heard thousands of messages, and I'm telling you I have a handful that have stuck, all right?

That made it into my mind and they're still there. But if I think back on my life, I have hundreds of times that God has used relationships to change me. That God has used individuals, conversations that I had with the youth pastor, with the pastor, conversations that I had with other adults that God had brought into my life. I believe that you will take more steps toward Jesus in a small group setting than you ever will in a setting like this on a Sunday morning.

In this model is not new. In the church today, you and I are following a model that has existed for 2000 years in the early church. And so this is probably the longest introduction I've ever done. I only have about ten minutes, all right? But we're going to get into the word here in a little bit. In acts chapter two, we are going to find the early church made up of those early apostles and disciples that were following Jesus, and they were trying to figure out what does this church thing look like. There was no book that existed called church for dummies, right?

They were making it. They were figuring out, what are we supposed to do? And they could only look at the model that God left for them, that Jesus left for them, and so we believe that relationships are the goal to help you connect. I fully understand that you don't come to church to hear me speak. Nobody said amen, but I knew you were thinking it, okay? You come because of relationships. That's what helps you connect. So let me pray.

And then let's look at acts chapter two versus 42 to 47. God, here we are, gathered. As a family, and I know that relationships are messy and family is messy, and so the enemy often uses that to cause division and separation, but you know you have taught us that unity is extremely important. You created us to live in community. And so my prayer is that we would do that. And be blessed because of it.

We ask this in Jesus name, amen. Acts chapter two versus 42 to 47. Luke writes this, speaking of the early church, those early followers, they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and a fellowship to the breaking of bread into prayer, everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. These are those that believed that Jesus was the messiah.

This is after the crucifixion. It's after the resurrection, and all of those men and women are left behind going, what do we do next? This is what they're doing. All of these believers were together. They had everything in

common. Luke tells us that they often sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. And every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people, even the introverts. All right?

Enjoying the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily, those who were being saved. This was the early church. It was small. It was a small gathering of people, and the only model they had was the model that Jesus left. They had each other. That was it. They were devoted to one another, Luke says. This wasn't just a cordial relationship. This wasn't just acquaintances. This wasn't just a, oh, I kind of know who you are. I've seen you a few times.

What would it look like for Fairview to be devoted to one another in the early church? Real quickly, we're going to look at these 8 things that Luke mentions here. They studied together. They ate together. They prayed together. They served together, supported each other, even financially, if necessary, they met together, they worshiped together, and they gave together. So let's look at all of these individually. They studied together. We see there in Acts chapter two that they studied the apostles teaching.

They studied the word of God together, the holy scriptures, and they were able to grow in their understanding of who God is. Have you come to the realization yet in your life that getting to know God as an eternal process? For all of eternity, we will be in this process of getting to know who God is. Getting to understand and comprehend his attributes. We can always learn more.

We never get a full grasp of who God is. We can learn from others. And so I believe that we were meant to read scripture in community. I can't tell you how much I have learned from my life group from the times that we open the word of God together. And God will share something with an individual in our group and they will share that and it's a perspective that I never thought of. It's amazing when God does that. It's different than just listening to a message. It's the interaction that takes place. It's the discussion that takes place afterwards.

Nothing wrong with listening to a message on Sunday morning. I hope you keep doing that, or I won't have a job, right? But it's processing it together. It's discussing it. It's saying, what is God showing you? What does God show me as God gives us his spirit? And there is something neat that happens there. The second thing they did together was eat together. They shared meals together, isn't it interesting to know that important conversations have taken place around the dinner table for thousands of years? I know we've talked about this before in our society.

We've gotten so busy that we don't even eat meals together. It is extremely important. I don't know what happens when you gather around food, but it's like sometimes the walls are just put down. It's why we started having donuts and juice and coffee out in the foyer, pre COVID, because it was a way for people to connect. And I don't know what it is. Maybe it was the sugar and the donuts, but people would just talk more. You would stay after church more. You'd connect. There were opportunities for conversations to take place. We encourage our groups to gather together and to eat.

Here's something true of our life group that I'm in. Some of my life groups best conversations have happened after our study time when we're having snacks. We did our little Bible study thing. We did our devotion thing. And then we say, okay, we pray it's over and we go to eat snacks. And then it's like, oh, now we're really having conversation. This is good. We encourage people to eat together. I don't really have to push that one too hard, do I? We all like eating together. The third thing they did together was pray together. They cried out to God together.

They prayed for each other. They prayed with each other. They shared requests. When they were having a bad day, they knew they weren't alone. They knew that they could contact one another that they would pray. So today, that's what technology is good. You can send a text message, hey, I'm having a bad day. Hey,

my family's having a bad week. Can you please pray for us? They had friends who had their back when they were persecuted. In your life groups, in your communities, you should be sharing with requests with others. Real requests and not gossip requests.

I love all the people that have grown up in church, you know? You've all heard the gossip prayer requests. You know, we need to pray for our neighbors so and so they're having an affair and like what? You know? It's like, you probably shouldn't share that in prayer group. I'm talking about real, you know, this is what's going on in my life. Like, I need you to pray for me. Real request, spending time together, praying out loud with each other in for each other. The next things, they serve together. As we read in the scripture, they obviously were doing ministry together because we read that people were being healed.

They were doing signs and wonders. They were going out and sharing the good news. Obviously, together, because we also read that numbers were being added to their church day after day after day. Again, something miraculous happens when you serve with one another. Some of the biggest steps that I have seen individuals take toward Jesus and some of my largest steps in my life that I've taken towards Jesus were on short term mission trips. We went to serve and help others only to find that God had worked to do in us.

Anybody that's ever been on a short term trip can probably say that statement. We went to help and serve others only to find that God had worked to do in us. You should find ways of the group to serve and minister to others. And this has been hard. It's been hard for our life group. There's always opportunities inside the church of things that you can do in ways that you can, and many of you do that, whether you take on an event, say, hey, our life group is going to run the outdoor baptism. And you take the whole thing on, that's awesome. You know, to help out with summer sports jam, that's awesome.

But serving outside the church has just, it's been difficult to find opportunities. And so that's another thing that Brendan, I'm just giving you a to do list today, okay? So Brenda just started on Monday. Monday was her first official day, and she was here every night at summer sports jam, voluntarily. So we already know she's a keeper, all right? But we need to find ways to serve our community, to serve together. That's been hard for our life group. The next thing that they did is support each other. They supported each other, even financially.

Now, in our life, group we haven't had this happen yet where somebody's had a financial need arises in the life group, but I could share other stories of other life groups where there was somebody that just, you know, something happened and the life group jumped behind them even more than that. I mean, not just financially, but spiritually, emotionally as well. I can share with you story after story where somebody in a life group went through a physical thing, a health thing, a relational thing, and their life group has just surrounded them and is praying with them and loving them through this.

So much so that some of those individuals come up to me and say, I don't know how I would have made it through without my life group. Without this support that I have. And so they support each other. The next thing they did obviously was meet together. They met together. They spent time together. You can't develop close relationships or relationships, friendships in general. If you don't spend time together, and I know we're all busy, but we have to make it a priority. There's good seasons and bad seasons. My own life group has experienced this.

We're in that season right now where life is just busy. People are going on vacations. They're traveling, all of that makes sense. But we need to keep fighting to say, okay, we still want to meet together. And you know there's been times where my life group hasn't met for a month or even longer at a time. And I often will tell them, hey, I really miss seeing you. I really would love to get together, and they write back and say, I miss you too, but I think they're just being nice. I'm not sure they really miss me you know. It's like when you tell somebody, oh, I love you. And they're like, oh, I love you too. You know?

But you got to meet together. You have to spend time together. And it's going to be cyclical. It's okay. There's seasons. I get that. But keep fighting for it. Don't give up, because the problem is, when you get out of the routine, and then when you can meet, you're like, eh, do we really want to? So you got to meet together. Next thing they did was worship together. This one's a little harder in life groups, of course. Worship is more than singing. If you have someone that plays an instrument and can sing, you can worship in that way, but there's other ways to worship.

You can worship in prayer, you can worship by going through attributes of God, you can worship by sharing praises, not just prayer requests, but you can say, God, I want to thank God for this, but find a way to worship together, worship who God is, and finally, they gave together, we just celebrated our give it all the way offering, and I'm not going to go into that whole thing where it's just fun to give together. There's a connection that happens. What would it look like if your life group or your close connection of people had a project, you had a secret?

Maybe it's during Christmas time, and you adopt a family or something like that. Wouldn't that be neat for your life group, a bond would happen there when you give together? You need to get connected. It's how God has created us. And maybe you say, you know, we just don't have time, our life circumstances, whatever. We can't make the life group thing happen. We have other ways to get connected. We have Sunday school classes that meet on Sunday morning. So maybe you say, you know what? We can't give another day out of the week, but we can come for another hour on Sunday morning. So whether you come to first or second service, we have classes that meet in the rooms behind the sanctuary around the sanctuary.

And so I want to connect there. I just need to get to know some other people to make a connection. That's great. Maybe you find us something else. You go to an event. We have men's event and women's events. And the reason why we do that is not just to fill our calendars. We don't need to be more busy. But we recognize that it's opportunities for people to make connections. We even do crazy things like a women's shooting outing yesterday. It sounds scary. But many of you did that and I heard you had fun and you did really well.

But it's just an opportunity to get together to make friendships, make connections. I love all of that. It's awesome. It may not even be your thing, but you say, you know what? I just want to be in community. You have to find some way to be in small community where you can grow and take your next steps towards Jesus. Real quickly. I'm out of time. I've shared about life groups before, but someone shared with me a couple of things that I thought were good. One of the misconceptions about life groups is that when you join it, you're in it forever.

And he said, it's a life group, not a life sentence. So if you join a life group and it just doesn't work. And I know that there's weirdness. It's happened here, okay? You join a group. I said it's like a blind date, right? So you get together and after 6 months, you're like, you know, I really don't like them. It's like, oh, it's okay. We'll find another group. You know, we'll figure it out. It's not a life sentence. You can give it a try. Hopefully you'll find some people you can connect with. So if that's something you're interested in, I encourage you email me, email Brenda. We'll do our best to get you connected. We constantly need new leaders.

We constantly need new groups because, of course, when a group forms and they get close to each other, the goal is that eventually maybe they could split and have two groups. But when you're so close to people, that's really hard. So then you know what happens? We got people that want to be in a life group, and we don't have a life group to put them in because a life groups are full, right? Because this is supposed to be a small group. So if I got a group of 30 people, it's like, well, that's not really a small group anymore. And so we always need new people to lead and to start new groups. So if you're interested in joining or starting, please email me, email Brenda, and we'll try to set you up on a blind date.

How do you like that? All right? Not really. People are just going to pick that message online. So no, not a blind date. We'll connect you with a life group. All right? Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father. I know their

relationships can be messy. They can be difficult. They can be hard. And if there are people here today that are watching online listening here in the sanctuary, that have just had a bad experience. Maybe they're telling themselves, I'm never going to do that again. But I believe as they do that, they're missing out on what you have for them.

And so God, would we be willing to just put ourselves out there? And we trust that you are going to connect people in ways that we never could. So that being a part of community would be a blessing. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.