

Big Idea: Community is more than just conversation.

Primary Scripture: Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25

Supporting Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- A kid from Florida named **Jaylen Arnold** learned early in life that being different isn't easy, especially when the world doesn't understand you.
- When he was little, Jaylen experienced symptoms that other kids didn't understand—involuntary movements, compulsive behaviors, and social communication differences.
- Any one of these challenges can be tough to navigate as a kid. But Jaylen was dealing with all of them at once.
- By the time he was in second grade, Jaylen started being bullied at school.
- The stress made his symptoms worse, which only resulted in more bullying. It was brutal. But instead of shrinking back, Jaylen chose a different path.
- When asked about this time in his life, here's what Jaylen said years later:
- *"God has given me a purpose, and I know that if I try hard enough, I can do anything I want to do. One day, after months of being bullied, I decided I wanted to educate people about respect and bullying. I set out a goal when I was 8 years old that I would one day be on YouTube and television spreading my message of Bullying: No Way!"*
- That same year, Jaylen launched the **Jaylen Challenge**—a movement to stop bullying by teaching students how to treat others with kindness and respect.
- Jaylen has been widely celebrated for the difference he made.
- His movement has reached tens of thousands of students, helping create schools where every kid can be themselves without worrying about being bullied for it.
- Jaylen realized that the very thing causing him pain—feeling different and misunderstood—was something he could transform into **connection** with others who felt the same way.

- Jaylen understood something that many people, even adults, often miss: the power we have to create the kind of **community** we wish we had.
- And that leads us to the final week of our ***Into the Deep End*** series. Over the past few weeks, we've looked at what it means to go deeper in our faith. We've learned that...
 - **Prayer** is more than **just words**.
 - **Scripture** is more than **just a book**.
 - **Worship** is more than **just music**.
- This week, we're talking about one more essential part of spiritual growth: **community**.
- We're talking about **authentic, intentional, spiritual community**. The kind that helps us grow, gives us strength, and reflects Jesus to the world around us.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- The early Church is a powerful example of authentic, intentional, spiritual community.
- The groups of believers in the first and second centuries who helped shape what it means to follow Jesus.
- Many of them had actually heard Jesus teach in person, and some were even original disciples.
- Here's how the earliest church is described in the Book of Acts:

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ 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— ⁴⁷ 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 2:42-47 – NLT)

- A large chunk of the New Testament consists of letters written to these early churches—gracious but direct reminders to correct the things they were getting wrong.

- The New Testament book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians in the early days of the church—believers trying to make sense of their faith in a complicated world.

²⁴ *Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. (Hebrews 10:24 – NLT)*

- When the author of Hebrews says we should “think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works,” it’s not just a random suggestion—it’s likely a response to something that wasn’t going so well.
- The early church probably wasn’t doing a great job of being kind or generous.
- If you’ve ever been part of a group where kindness and generosity are missing, you know how quickly that kind of community becomes something no one wants to be part of.

²⁵ *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25 – NLT)*

- The author goes out of their way to remind this church that they should be as encouraging to each other as possible, because they all have one common thing that they are looking forward to: **Jesus’ return**.
- No one knows when Jesus is coming back.
- In the meantime, we’ve got a choice: we can drift into disconnection, selfishness, and apathy, or we can build the kind of community the author of Hebrews was pointing toward.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Community encourages growth.

- Growth doesn’t happen in isolation; it happens in relationships.
- You become like the people you spend time with.
- When someone in your small group shares honestly about a struggle, it gives you permission to be real, too.
- When you see someone choosing kindness over drama, it challenges you to follow their lead.
- That’s the power of community. It pulls each of us forward **together**.

- You don't have to be perfect or have all the answers. Just being consistent and choosing to follow Jesus with others makes a bigger impact than you realize.

2. Community provides strength.

- Following Jesus isn't always easy, and life doesn't always go as planned. Thankfully, none of us was meant to face life's challenges alone.

⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. ¹¹ Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? ¹² A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - NLT)

- In our most difficult moments, our community can provide the strength that we are lacking.
- Not just physical strength—but emotional, spiritual, and relational strength.
- We lift each other up when we're down. We show up for one another.
- God didn't design us to go through life **alone**. We're stronger when we stand **together**. And when we do, others notice.

3. Community reflects Jesus to the world.

- When we live in authentic community, it becomes a picture of God's love that others can see.

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. (John 13:34-35 – NLT)

- Real community still does this today.
- When you include the new kid who feels invisible, when you forgive someone who hurt you, when you show up for a friend going through a hard time—people see something different in us—they see Jesus.
- What if your friend group, your small group, and our youth group reflected Jesus so clearly that people wanted to know what made you different?

- Real community doesn't just help us grow and give us strength—it shows the world who Jesus really is.
- We were made for the kind of community that transforms us and points others to Jesus.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Show up for your community.

- This week, look for ways to actively engage with the community you're already part of—such as your small group, your youth group, your friend group, or even your family. Instead of just showing up physically, show up emotionally and spiritually.
- When you show up fully, you're not just getting something from community—you're helping create the kind of community others want to be part of.

2. Allow your community to show up for you.

- Many of us are really good at helping others but not so great at accepting help.
- We tell ourselves we don't want to be a burden... or maybe we assume no one really wants to deal with our problems... or we go out of our way to convince ourselves that we should be able to handle everything on our own.
- This week, practice being vulnerable and honest about what's really going on in your life. Here are some ways to start:
 - When someone asks how you're doing, actually tell them instead of just saying, "I'm fine."
 - Ask for help with something you're struggling with.
 - Let a trusted friend know when you're having a hard day instead of trying to go it alone.
 - Accept help when someone offers instead of always saying, "Nah. I'm good."
- This isn't about oversharing or making everything about you, it's about being real enough that others can actually care for you the way God designed community to work.

3. Invite someone in.

- Look around this week for someone who seems to be on the outside.

- Here's your challenge: invite one person into something you're already doing.
- Here are a few ideas to get you rolling:
 - Invite someone to sit with you and your friends at lunch
 - Ask someone new to youth group if they want to grab food afterward
 - Include someone in your weekend plans
 - Invite a friend who's never been to youth group to come with you
 - Ask someone to join your study group or group project
 - Bring someone along when you hang out with other friends
- The goal isn't to become best friends immediately. It's to help someone experience what you've been experiencing—authentic community where they feel seen, valued, and included.
- The people who experience the deepest community are usually the ones who are actively creating it for others.
- This week, show up, let others show up for you, and invite someone new to experience what real community looks like.