

Why Community Groups?
Created for Community
8/22/2021

Good morning. My name is Jesse Howard and I serve here at Cornerstone as the associate pastor of music and discipleship. For those of you who have been with us, you know that Pastor John Marc has been teaching through the book of Revelation. Currently, we are in chapter 2 working through the seven letters to the churches. That is really perfect timing because each fall, we take some time to focus in on what it means to be the Church by talking about Community Groups. So we'll be talking about the importance of Community Groups for the next three weeks.

If you are new here, we'd like to welcome you, and I want you to know that this is a great time to be visiting our church because in this series, we are going to be talking one of our core values here at Cornerstone—the importance of Community Groups and how they serve an essential role in the fulfillment of our mission.

What is our mission? Well, without cheating and looking at the bulletin, who can tell me what our mission is? To know Christ and make Him known. To know Christ and make Him known is not just a catchy slogan. Nor is it particularly unique. You may have heard of other churches or organizations with a similar mission. That is to be expected because our mission is not ours to define. It is defined by God in His Word. So unlike the creators of every cereal in the grocery isle, the Church does not need to continually reinvent itself. Our mission has been the same since the Church was born on the day of Pentecost. For almost 2000 years, God's people have been called to know Christ and make Him known.

Where do Community groups come into all of this? Let me say it like this, in our bulletin it doesn't say "your" mission. It says "our" mission. Last year to start off our Community Group series, John Marc reminded us that our mission is a "community project." God intends to accomplish His purpose for this world through His people—collectively. It is not the duty of a few particularly gifted Christians alone.

No, God *created* us for community. And that is where we start our series this morning. We are created for community. This is not optional. It's not a suggestion that you engage in the family of God. It's a command. As [Hebrews 10:24–25](#) says, "[And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.](#)" Living life in community with the family of God is essential. And we think one of the best ways to do that is to be in a Community Group.

If we are created for community, the question is, "How do we live out our mission in Community Groups?" We have boiled it down to three key biblical terms—Family. Missionaries. Servants. We were created for community, and we live that out together as family, missionaries, and servants.

So before we dive in, I just want to be really clear about my goal for this sermon and this series. My goal is to convince you from the Scripture that God designed you to live in community with other believers. To be a Christian is to be part of a community—the people of God. But I hope to show you from God's Word that living in community, and I'm talking about real, meaningful, deep relationships, is a wonderful thing. It is a beautiful thing. My hope is that

when you see what God has designed the community of the Church to be, it will become so precious to you that you will do whatever it takes to find it and be a part of it. I'm not trying to sell you a bill of goods here. This side of glory, Christians still sin. If you have been a part of Church, you have been hurt by people. We're not perfect yet but living outside the community of God is not an option for the believer.

And if you see the God-ordained purpose and benefit of Christian community, then I hope you will join a community group. And if you are in one, I hope to remind you why this is so important. So let's start with the fact that God created us for community.

Created for Community

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. We will be looking at 2:19–22, which is part of a larger section where Paul is explaining the mystery of the Church. Paul uses the word mystery because even though the Old Testament clearly promised that all nations would be blessed through the nation of Israel, it never clearly identified the entity we know as the Church. As he defines it, we learn some important things about what it means to be part of the Church.

Ephesians 2:19–22, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

Just a little background on Ephesians, Ephesians 1:1–2:10 is about *how* a person is saved. How does a person become a member of the Church? It starts in chapter 1 with God’s predetermined plan before the foundation of the world to choose a people for Himself to save. In chapter 2 we see that every human being is dead in their trespasses and sins. We are hopeless and cannot save ourselves, any more than a dead man can do...well anything! That’s when the grace that God had predetermined to bestow on us shows up. And we come to the familiar passage of 2:8–10. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” All of God’s people are saved by grace, through faith. It is not of ourselves, meaning we can’t earn it. It is all a gift of God. That’s what grace is—a gift. We can’t boast about it because we didn’t contribute anything to our salvation. God gets the glory. All the glory! This is where it all begins. We can’t talk about how to function in the community God created if you’re not a member of it.

Once we are saved, Ephesians 2:10 says God has also prepared beforehand good works that we should walk in them. Those good works are what chapters 4–6 are all about. But before Paul gets to the application of our salvation in chapters 4–6, he spends the rest of chapter 2 and 3 explaining what we are saved *into*. God saves individuals, but He saves them into a community of believers. That community is the Church.

Now I realize the word “Church” is not in 2:19–22 but it exactly what he is talking about. Paul used the word Church for the first time in 1:22–23 where he says, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” He uses it again in 3:10. And Paul makes it very clear in 1 Timothy 3:15 where he says, “But in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know

how one ought to conduct himself in the *household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*”

Our passage in Ephesians 2:19–22 uses the word “household” and 1 Timothy 3:15 says that is the church of the living God. The word “Church” is really the technical title given to the community of believers, but it is not the only way it is described. Paul uses several here metaphors here in Ephesians 2. The main thing I want you to see from this passage is that all these metaphors teach the corporate nature of Christianity.

In [verse 19](#) he says we are “[fellow citizens.](#)” You are part of a kingdom and you don’t have a kingdom with just one person. A kingdom has citizens. [Verse 19](#) also says believers make up a “[household.](#)” This word is used here in the plural, not singular. It is speaking of multiple people that make up a family. All believers make up the family of God. In [verse 21](#) we are called a “[building.](#)” A building isn’t one wall, or a window, or a pipe. It encompasses the entire structure. Notice that he says it is “[fitted together.](#)” There are multiple parts of this building that make up the whole. And this is different than your average building in that it is “[growing.](#)” The building will be complete until the “[times of the gentiles are fulfilled,](#)” as Jesus says in [Luke 21:24](#). Paul says the same thing in Romans 11:25. [Verse 21](#) tells us what kind of building we are part of—a [holy temple](#). This speaks to the purpose the Church. The Church is first and foremost about God. It is where He dwells, which is exactly what [verse 22](#) says. We are being built together in to a “[dwelling of God.](#)”

So what is the point? Notice that all these metaphors have a similarity—they all describe a single corporate entity made up of many individual pieces. We are fellow citizens, a household, a building, a temple, and a dwelling. One entity, many parts.

There is one metaphor used in Scripture that is unique to the Church, and that is the body. This is what Cole read about for us in our Scripture reading from 1 Corinthians 12. The Church is the body of Christ, and this metaphor is extremely helpful for how we should think about the community we have been saved into. [1 Corinthians 12:12](#) says, “[For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.](#)” You only have one body, even though there are many parts. And without the many parts, you don’t have a body.

Here is the implication Paul works out in the rest of this chapter. You were created in Christ Jesus to be a part of His body. He is the head, and He saves every person into His body. You were created for this because *you need the body and the body needs you*. Let me say that again. You were created for the community of the body of Christ because you need the body, and the body needs you.

When we say that we are created for community, the word “created” is strategic here. I am referring to the way God originally created us. If you were here over the summer, you remember that we did a series on biblical manhood and womanhood. That series was rooted in how God created us in the beginning. His original creation of man and woman included community. [Genesis 2:18](#) says, “[Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’](#)” Now that is speaking of the relationship of marriage, but the principle is bigger than that. God made humans relational beings. Before the fall, He created us for community. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were created already in fellowship with God. They didn’t do anything to earn it. They were made that way. But think

about it, God didn't create mankind to fellowship with Him *only*. He also created us to fellowship with each other.

God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to multiply. They apparently did not do this before the fall, but God's original design was that it wouldn't just be Adam and Eve forever in the garden. They were told to multiply. He wanted lots and lots of humans; lots and lots of image bearers as [Genesis 1:26–27](#) calls us. And part of enjoying God in a perfect world included living together in community. We were created in the beginning for community.

The ultimate reason we were created for community is because we were created in the image of God. God is a relational being in and of Himself. That is what the Trinity is. One God, three persons, in perfect eternal fellowship. Jesus said in [John 17:24](#), “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Father, Son, and Spirit lived in eternal joy in relationship with each other. When they created mankind in their image, being relational was included in that. The fall did not change that original purpose. It just ruined it.

We were created for community. Now in light of the fall, we need to be *recreated* for community. Paul already mentioned this in [Ephesians 2:10](#). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so we would walk in them.” We need to be “created in Christ Jesus.” And when we are created in Christ, we are saved into a new community—the Church. We will live in community with God, and each other, for all eternity. Heaven will be made up of a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue all worshipping God together.

We were created for community. Believers have been recreated into the community of the Church. Once this has happened, the question is, “How should we function in that community?” As I said, we have chosen to focus on three areas for living together in community groups. Family, missionaries, servants. We're going to cover all three of those now, but I want you to know that last year we did sermon on each of these areas. So if you want the expanded version, you can check those out on our website.

Family

What does it mean that we are family? Being part of God's family has many implications, but to boil it down, it has implications on how we relate to God and how we relate to one another. God is my Father. I am His child. God is your Father, and you are His child. But that is not the only familial relationship we have. God is my father, and you are my brothers and sisters. When God saves you, He saves you into a family. These are your brothers and sisters. This is what [Ephesians 2:19](#) said. We are “of God's household.” We belong to His family. And everyone who lives in that household is part of God's family.

How are we supposed to live as family? Here is what [1 John 4:19–21](#) says, “We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.” We will talk about love more in this series, but do you see the implication here? Because we were created for community and saved into the family of God, living as a member of the family of God becomes a test of true salvation. Do you love your spiritual family? Do you

desire to be with your spiritual family? Does it even matter to you? Do you view your family as indispensable in your walk with Christ? Because if you call yourself a Christian and function as if you are not a part of the family of God, Scripture says there's a problem. You are either grossly misinformed, or you are a liar.

How can John be so certain of this? Because the love with which God loves us includes a love for the family of God. Think about it. If you adopted a child into your family, you wouldn't just want them to love you as the parent, you would want them to love your other children too. And if they said, "I'm really grateful that you are my dad, but I really hate these new brothers and sisters I have," you would probably say something like, "If you don't love them, you don't love me." If you are a Christian, you have a spiritual family.

Let's think together through some of the basic implications of being in a family. This is by no means exhaustive.

Family *knows* each other. Do you have relationships in the family of God in which you know others and they know you? This is why we need Community Groups. Sunday morning brings the family together in an important way, but it doesn't provide the opportunity to really know one another. That takes a small group environment.

Family is the first call. When you need something, who do you go to? Typically, you go to family. In the context of your Christian family, you're probably going to go to your Community Group first. There is a God-given sense of responsibility for your family. That's the way it's supposed to be. Our community groups should have a God-given sense of responsibility for one another. We should never say to a brother or sister in need, "that's not my problem!" There should be a pull in your heart to help the family of God. I'm not saying it's always easy or convenient, and you may not have the best attitude about it all the time. But if you are a genuine Christian, you will love helping your spiritual brothers and sisters in need.

Too often we think our walk with God doesn't affect anyone else. This is just as foolish as a husband who says, "If I don't go to work today, that doesn't affect anyone else." Or take the metaphor of the body from 1 Corinthians 12 again. What if the eye said, "I'm just kinda tired of doing my job. I think I'll take a few days off. No worries. It doesn't affect anyone else right?" How do you think the rest of the body would respond? We don't have that luxury. When Ali and I were dating and started considering marriage she said to me, "You taking care of yourself is you taking care of me." Talk about a wakeup call. It would be like a pregnant mother refusing to take care of herself when her infant is literally dependent upon her for life." You are a part of the body of Christ and if you neglect your role, you're not just hurting yourself, you're hurting the body. And lest you think that is too tall an order, remember 2 things. 1) Christ is the head and nourishes and cherishes the body as Ephesians 5:29 says. He is looking out for the welfare of the body. 2) What is true of you is true of every other member of the body too. We all need to live in a way that serves the family of God, not just ourselves.

Family *shares*. Family shares everything. I'm not just talking about material things, I'm talking about joy and pain, success and failure. We share it all. [1 Corinthians 12:26](#) says, "[And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.](#)" Do you feel the pain of your brothers and sisters who are struggling? Do you

even know if they're suffering? Does it give you joy when you see your brothers and sisters celebrate blessings in this life?

Family *calls one another out*. We're going to talk about this more in next week's sermon from Hebrews chapter 3, but a healthy family cares so much about each other that they will speak the truth in love to one another. If I start drifting, I've got family that's going to speak up. They're going to wait till I've walked off a cliff either, they're going to keep watch on my soul. Psalm 141:5 says, "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon the head; do not let my head refuse it."

And there is so much more! This is the reason Community Groups are so important to us at Cornerstone. We are called to live as family, and we've got to get into small group settings to do that. We need each other. God created us for community. He saved us into His family. Our Community Groups are designed to provide the opportunity for us to live as God has called us—as family. The next way we live together in Community Groups is as missionaries.

Missionaries

Our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. We are called to be missionaries. But again, this is something we do *together* as the body of Christ. We believe fulfilling our God-ordained purpose of being missionaries happens best in the context of Community Groups. There are no lone rangers in the Christian faith. We will fulfill our role as missionaries better together than we ever will alone.

Matthew 28:18–20 clearly explains our mission. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" There's your mission. Make disciples. But I don't mean it's your mission as an individual. It's *our* mission. The command to make disciples is second person plural. You *all* make disciples. God uses the Church as a whole to accomplish the mission.

I was just recently thinking about this. Let's say I have a conversation with a person and God opens their eyes and they recognize their sin, repent, and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Praise God! What role did I have in that conversion? I would submit to you that none of us know. There were no doubt other experiences and people God used in that person's life to bring them to the moment of justification. It is all God doing His work through the community of believers. This is exactly how Paul understood it in 1 Corinthians 3:5–7, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

Being missionaries is a community project. Families don't work well with just one person, do they? Guess what? Neither do missions. We are all called as believers in Jesus Christ to make disciples. But we are not called to do that in isolation. We need the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We also need accountability from our brothers and sisters. Knowing that your Community Group is praying for you is encouraging. Knowing that they will ask you if you followed through is good accountability.

We can help one another come up with ways to engage and interact with unbelievers for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. Perhaps you know someone in your group you're trying to share the gospel with who is Catholic. Maybe someone in your Community Group was Catholic and can help you. We too often get overwhelmed thinking we have to know the Bible cover to cover, along with every religion, oh, and all of the scientific literature on evolution and biology before we can share the gospel. That's just not true. If you've been saved, you can share the gospel. Your job is to be faithful, but don't try and do it as a one-man band. Rely on your community.

You could have some of your CG members over for dinner and invite a neighbor to join. If you're nervous about sharing your faith, you can tag team. We can encourage one another with ways to bridge the conversation to spiritual matters. We can help each other be more effective witnesses.

Let me share one other thought on Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus could have just left it at, “make disciples.” But that is not all He said. He starts with a statement of authority and ends with a promise. In verse 18 He says, “[All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.](#)” Our mission is to make disciples, but the authority to do so comes from Jesus, the creator and sustainer of the universe. Back in [Matthew 16:18](#) Jesus said, “[I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.](#)” Jesus has all authority to accomplish what He said He would. Do you know what that means for you and me? We just need to be faithful. He will build His Church.

The promise is this: “[I am with you always, even to the end of the age.](#)” What a promise! What does that mean for you and I? Well how about we just let [Hebrews 13:5–6](#) say it for us, “[For He Himself has said, ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,’ 6 so that we confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?’](#)” Jesus has all authority, and He will never leave you. He is with you in the mission. Are you ever nervous to share the gospel? Sure you are. Do you ever wonder if you'll say the right thing? Sure you do. But is Jesus right there with you? Yes He is!

We should never forget these two things. We serve the all-powerful God of the universe who has all authority, and He is with us always. So let's fulfill our mission as the Church together. And let's do that in the context of Community Groups.

God created us for community, and we live that out together as family, as missionaries, and finally, as servants.

Servants

The final aspect of living in community we try to focus on is being servants. And in this, we are simply following the example of our savior. [Jesus said in Mark 10:45](#), “[For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.](#)” Jesus was a servant. What do you think He wants you to be? [Philippians 2](#) presents Jesus as the supreme example of a humble servant and calls us to emulate Him. [Philippians 2:3–8](#), “[Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7](#)

but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus was a servant. Should we not follow in His footsteps? In John 13 Jesus washed the disciples’ feet giving them an example of being a servant. What do you think He wants you to be?

Do you know what *the* essential quality of being a servant is? Humility. You will never be a true servant without humility. The prideful heart is antithetical to servanthood. The prideful heart thinks everyone else should serve them.

The humble servant views their life as a living sacrifice to God. After all, we are not our own, but we were bought with a price as 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 says. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Being saved into the body of Christ is being saved into a community of servants. You may think that sounds like a terrible thing, but for the follower of Christ it’s a beautiful thing because it is being associated with our savior!

1 Peter 4:10 says, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” When God saves you into the family of God, He also gives you a spiritual gift. What is the purpose of these gifts? God gives gifts so that we might serve the body of Christ with them. We were created for community, a community of servants.

Community groups are one of the best places to find a place to serve one another. It is difficult to know the needs of everyone in the church, but it’s a lot easier to manage a small group. When you are living together as family, I promise you service opportunities will abound. How can you use the gifts God has given you if you are not in community with the very people you are supposed to serve? Don’t be like that servant who just buried his talent in the ground. Serve in the body of Christ.

Our service should not be limited to Christians. Galatians 6:10 says, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” Yes, we serve fellow believers, but we also do good to all people. We think again, this is done best with the support of a small group. We don’t serve unbelievers for the sake of serving, but for the sake of the gospel. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:19, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.” Our desire is to see Community Groups develop creative ways to serve unbelievers for the sake of the Gospel and the glory of God.

Living together in the community God created us for means living together as servants, looking to the needs of our brothers and sisters, and working together to serve unbelievers for the sake of the gospel.

This is our hope for Community Groups at Cornerstone. Family, missionaries, and servants.

Conclusion

I want to close by sharing a story about the power of community groups from some friends we served with in Nashville. I wanted you to see the practical implications of being involved in genuine Christian community. This is from my friends, Dan and Erin Atkeson.

“My wife, Erin, and I moved to Nashville as a newly married couple in 2011. We quickly found ourselves in a brand new city, with new jobs, and only knew a handful of people. A year or two later, the Lord brought us to our church home, The Church at Antioch (now called Christ for the Nations). Here, we got connected with a community group and began attending regularly. We didn’t expect it at the time, but the Lord would eventually change our lives in unexpected ways through sharing life with fellow believers. We don’t have family in town so the church and our community group have truly become family to us. Over the years, we have prayed together, cried together, studied together, worshipped together, shared the gospel together, made meals for each other, and served alongside each other. When I think back to some of the memories I have in our community group, I can’t help but see the Lord’s hand working through it all.

I want to share a quick story of how the Lord completely changed our family’s lives through our community group. In 2014, our community group was looking for areas in the city to serve. During this time, we got to know a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Erin and I, along with our group, regularly visited this family and we quickly became friends. Although we helped with job applications or schoolwork, the Lord used these times to teach *us* more than we were ever able to give to the Balire family. In 2015, a situation arose and we asked the oldest boy, Eric, in the family to come live with us. What we thought would be a month turned into several years. Eric lived with us through two of our babies being born, his high school graduation, and one of his college graduations. He now has two college degrees and is serving our state as a Highway Patrolman. More importantly than all of that, he loves the Lord and is the best big brother to all three of our kids. None of these things happened due to our own hard work or dedication. The Lord placed us in this community group and had bigger plans than we could ever imagine. More recently, our group is continuing to serve the refugee community in Nashville. We have anywhere from 20 to 50 kids that join us for games and Bible stories. 10 years ago, Erin and I didn’t even know there was a large refugee community in Nashville. Now, we couldn’t imagine serving with our community group anywhere else. “

That is a powerful example of living life in the community God has designed for us. If you will commit to do things God’s way, I assure you He will do things you would have never imagined. Or as [Ephesians 3:20](#) says, [He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.](#)

If you have seen God’s amazing goodness in creating us for community...if you have benefited from living in the body of Christ as family, missionaries, and servants, I hope this relights a fire in you to commit yourself to genuine Christian fellowship in the context of Community Groups. I am asking you to reach out to others that you see and meet at Cornerstone and be an advocate for groups. I would hope that as people come to our Church, it would not take long for them to hear, “What Community Group are you in?” And if they aren’t, that it would follow up with, “Why don’t you come to ours,” or, “let me introduce you to so and so who has a group near you.” When you know the essential nature of Christian community, you don’t have to sell Community Groups, you are eager to get others to experience the same joy you have.

If you are not engaged in a Community Group at Cornerstone, why not? Why not start now? You were created to be in the family of God. You need the body. And the body needs you.

Please go see someone at the information counter, sign up online or on our app, or come talk to me after the sermon and we can get you more information about groups. We have two new groups that I want you to know about as well. One that is starting in San Luis Obispo and

meets on Sunday's at 1:30 pm. The other is on Wednesdays in Atascadero. Our groups meet Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesdays.

Now is the time to live as God has called us to. Now is the time to be the Church.