

Why Community Groups?
Family
8/16/2020
Ephesians

This morning we continue our study of the importance of Community Groups. Why Community Groups? To answer that question, I'd like to start with a quiz. Can anyone quote to me from last week what our church mission statement is? To know Christ and make Him known.

Why Community Groups? Simply put: to know Christ and make Him known. Now the next question is, "*How* are you going to know Christ and make Him known?" We believe this happens best in small groups. We call them Community Groups. Why Community Groups? Are they really necessary? Are they just another program to join? Are they optional? Do they have any practical importance in my life?

As John Marc explained last week, Christian community is not an option. It is not a suggestion. It is essential. It is commanded. 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.

God's Word gives multiple illustrations of what Christian community is like. Believers are called "God's people." We are His "sheep." We are His "body." We are His "bride." We are His "kingdom." We are also described as His "household" or "family." And that is the key illustration we want to look at this morning. When we look at how Scripture defines what Christian community looks like within the Church, and what our Community Groups should look like, we see at least three things. We are family. We are missionaries. We are servants

Today, we are going to look at what it means to be the family of God. Next week we'll look at what it means to be missionaries, and John Marc will close our series by looking at what it means to be servants.

Our text for this morning will be the book of Ephesians. Yes, you heard me right! The book of Ephesians! As I continued to prepare for this sermon, I found myself coming back again and again to this book. As we look at the family of God, we will get an overview of the book. Here in Ephesians we will see:

- 1) **The Origin of the Family of God**
- 2) **The Entrance into the Family of God**
- 3) **The Walk of the Family of God**

1) **The Origin of the Family of God**

I want to start here because I think one of the great hurdles we face in our context is convincing people that Christianity is about more than just you as an individual. Why did God design His people to be in a familial relationship with each other? This is not just some arbitrary idea He came up with. It is rooted in His very nature and rooted in eternity past. Turn to

Ephesians 1. What is the origin, or the foundation of the family of God? The answer comes in verses 3–6. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to *adoption* as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

The origin of the family of God is God’s eternal decree to adopt a distinct people into His family. Family is rooted in the eternal purposes of God. We see this in verse 5 in the term “adoption.” What does adoption mean? It comes from two Greek words, the word “son” and the verb “to place.” Very literally it means “to place as a son.” Adoption is the legal act by which one is placed into a family, with full legal rights and privileges, that is not their biological family.

God’s idea for a family began before the foundation of the world. This is because God is intrinsically relational. He is a tri-unity. God is one, but He is three distinct persons. This is where we get the term “Trinity.” Before the foundation of the world, God existed in community with Himself. He was in perfect relationship with Himself. He was perfectly happy with Himself. He was perfectly satisfied with Himself.

God decided to create this universe and mankind, not out of *lack* but out of His *abundance* so that we could share in that perfect relationship He has in Himself. God created us to be relational beings because we are created in His image. He created Adam in a relationship with Himself. But He also created Adam to be in relationship with other people. In Genesis 2, God created Adam first and let him name all the animals. Through this exercise, Adam realized that he was alone. God declared in Genesis 2:18 that it was not good for Adam to be alone. So He created a helper suitable for him—woman. And in so doing, God created the first human relationship and institution—*family*. Even in a perfect world with no sin, God created man to live in a family relationship. Adam was a child of God and a husband to his wife. He was created to be a family man. From the very beginning God intended us to live as family with one another. You were created to be relational.

Now I’d like to pause and make a quick detour. Not everyone has the same thing come to mind when they hear the word family. For some, thoughts of peace and joy arise. But for others, when they think of their earthly family, thoughts of anxiety and pain arise. Family has suffered from the awful consequences of sin. No matter how much you love your family or how strong your family is, you have probably experienced pain, hurt, and suffering in those relationships. Every family has sin. And that is why we have such a massive breakdown in the earthly family, and even in the spiritual family of God.

Some of you may even be thinking, “If the church is a family, I don’t want anything to do with it. I’ve suffered enough from family.” Many struggle with God being their Father because of their relationship, or lack thereof, with their earthly father. Or they struggle with their brothers and sisters in Christ because of a bad relationship with siblings.

But sin has not changed that God built us to live in relationship with one another. It has simply made it harder. A lot harder! But I want to encourage you to let go of some of the excuses that come up when it comes to engaging with the family of God, the church, the body of Christ. If you are His child, He created you to be in His family.

My wife, Ali, and I are very blessed to have wonderful families and we love them dearly. But since we got married, we have never lived near them. So for us, our church family has always been incredibly important to us. When we were first married, we were living in Nashville. We were part of a plant church that began meeting in homes. Within the first year of being married, I got a gig that kept me on the road for 20-25 days a month for about 9 months. In fact, there were people who started coming to our church who didn't believe Ali was even married! Our church became Ali's lifeline! And it wasn't just our church, it was our Community Group. They were her family. And when I finally got off that gig, they became my family too. Leaving those people was the hardest thing about moving to Los Angeles.

We faced a similar situation in Los Angeles when we started seminary. Instead of a small plant church where we knew everyone, we were part of a massive church. But we finally found our way into a small community group. And once again, they became our family. We still didn't live near our biological families, so who was there when Evie was born? Our Community Group. Who was there when we found out she had a cataract and needed surgery at 6 weeks? Our Community Group. Who was there when we moved 2 months after Evie was born? Our Community Group. Who was there to send us off when we left to come to Cornerstone? Our Community Group. They were our family, and that was the hardest part about leaving LA. This is how the body of Christ works.

If family is so important, having its origin in the eternal purposes of God, I think all of this raises some important questions. *First, why don't we engage in the family of God?* I'm sure there are multiple reasons, but two come to mind.

Pride – I can do it myself. I don't need help from anyone. We are particularly susceptible to this in our individualistic society. We don't think we need the family of God.

Fear – Many people are afraid of being known, and I mean really known. The fear they won't be loved. They fear they will let others down. They fear they will be hurt. They fear they will be let down.

We need to fight against both pride and fear preventing us from the gift of participating in the family of God.

Second, why isn't Sunday morning enough to live as you should in the family of God? Why are we advocating for more, particularly through Community Groups? Why did John Marc say last week that we are asking you to attend Sunday mornings, Community Groups, and then become a member and serve? Again, I'll just highlight two reasons.

Time - Why do you know your family members better than anyone else? Because you spend more time with them than anyone else! Is an hour and half once a week enough time to build deep familial relationships? I mean, there's no guarantee you'll even see the same person every week. We need more time!

Size – Praise God that Cornerstone has grown over all these years! But you know with size come challenges. Both my parents grew up as an only child. That means for me, I had no aunts, no uncles, no cousins, no extended family. My mom’s dad died when she was 9. I have two older brothers. So most of my life, my entire family was 8 people—my parents, two brothers, and 3 grandparents. Then my mom’s mom died and we were down to 7. So all that said, our family gatherings were quite small. And it wasn’t hard to know everyone.

When I started pursuing Ali, I met her large family. Her mom was one of 5 sisters, and their side of the family alone was enough for me to be pretty freaked out at family gatherings. I don’t remember how long it took me to figure out who was who and who belonged to who. Let’s just say it was very uncomfortable for me at first.

There are not enough hours in the day to have intentional, intimate relationships with such a large group of people. Our Sunday morning gatherings serves many wonderful purposes—the preaching of God’s Word, corporate singing, mutual encouragement, opportunities to meet people, but it does not provide every opportunity we need to live as family members. We need small groups. There is a unique opportunity that comes in small groups that doesn’t come in large groups. We try to keep our groups smaller. And Lord willing, as they grow, we will then multiply them into more groups so they remain small.

So why did we start with the origin of the family of God? To show us that God intended to create a family before the foundation of the world. And do you know what is amazing? The family of God will live on forever in heaven. Earthly families will cease, but the family of God will never end. Next, we look at the entrance into the family of God.

2) The Entrance into the Family of God.

How does one become a member of God’s family? God planned before the foundation of the world to elect certain individuals into His family. We are *adopted* into the family of God. But it raises the question, if being adopted means being legally placed into a family that is not your “biological” family, what family were you a part of prior to salvation? The answer to that comes in Ephesians chapter 2. Let’s read verses 1–2 of chapter 2. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the *sons of disobedience*.”

The reason we are adopted is because we all come into this world as children of disobedience. We are members of a different family. The family of Satan. How do we gain entrance into the family of God? The answer to that lies in a very familiar passage in chapter 2 verses 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.” God determined before the foundation of the world to save His children by grace, through faith, not according to works.

If you jump down to 2:19 we read, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” Our entrance into the family

of God makes us members of God's household. We are God's children. He is our Father. That, in and of itself, is an amazing reality. How is it that we, former enemies of God, have become His own children? What grace! What mercy!

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 as much as your earthly brothers and sisters.

That family breaks down all barriers of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and background. As Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The family of God is one in Christ. Only God's family can experience the unity that is ever elusive to the world.

The foundation of the family of God is the eternal purposes of God to adopt sons and daughters into His family. And the entrance into the family of God accomplishes that very purpose by bringing us into the household of God by grace through faith. As we progress in the book of Ephesians, we will now see the walk of the family of God

3) The Walk of the Family of God

This is where we get down to the nuts and bolts of our Community Groups operating as a family, and this is will we spend the remainder of our time. How should the family of God live? How should we interact with each other? What does a child of God look like? That's exactly what chapters 4–6 are about. First, Paul lays the doctrinal groundwork of our justification, that is, how one becomes right with God in chapters 1–3. Then he then lays out the practical application of our sanctification in chapters 4–6. Paul does this in five "walks." And by "walk" he means a way of life. Those 5 walks are as follows:

- 1) Walk Worthy (4:1)
- 2) Walk Not as the Gentiles (4:17)
- 3) Walk in Love (5:2)
- 4) Walk in Light (5:8)
- 5) Walk in Wisdom (5:15)

Before we dive into these walks, I want to point out that we live in a very individualistic society, and this creeps into our understanding of our relationship with God. It's about me and Jesus. It's just Him and me. It is absolutely true that your relationship with God is about you. You cannot rely on the faith of your parents, or your spouse, or your friends, or anyone else to save you. Each person must have a personal walk with Christ.

But we need to remain balanced. We cannot focus too much on the individual nature of salvation at the expense of the corporate nature of the family of God. And we cannot focus too much on the corporate nature of the family of God and neglect each person's need to confess Christ as Lord and Savior.

What I want us to see is that the application of chapters 4–6 is very much a “family” endeavor. This is not quite as apparent to us as it could be because modern English lacks a distinct difference between “you” singular and “you” plural. Unless, of course, you live in the South. They’ve got “y’all.” We will see that every one of these “walks” we are going to look at are not singular, but plural. He is saying “you all,” or “y’all.” I lived in Nashville for a while, so I’ll stick with “y’all.”

Y’all walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you’ve been called.

Y’all don’t walk like the Gentiles.

Y’all walk in love.

Y’all walk in light.

Y’all walk in wisdom.

This is a family effort. This is the body of Christ working together. This is believers encouraging one another, speaking the truth to one another, counseling one another, correcting one another, warning one another, and living with one another in familial love! It’s just like John Marc says every week—salvation is a personal matter, but it was never designed to be a private matter. You were saved into the family of God. And our walk was meant to be lived out as a family. Let’s look at the first walk.

Walk Worthy

The first “walk” comes in Ephesians 4:1, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” How do adopted children of God live? How do they walk? They walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which they have been called.

What does that look like? Well keep reading. Picking up in verse 2, “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

Is this how you would have defined a worthy walk? In my individualistic mentality, I would have thought of things like Bible study and personal spiritual disciplines. These are, of course, incredibly important, but I just find it fascinating that the first thing that comes into Paul’s mind for a worthy walk is all about living in the family of God! Remember, verse 1 says, I implore you...that y’all. I implore y’all to live in humility and gentleness, with patience, tolerance, love, and unity. Think about it. Those are all characteristics of interacting with one another in the family of God. They are not personal, they are *interpersonal*.

We could boil this walk down to unity. That’s what a worthy walk looks like. Unity. Unity is impossible without humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance and love. If you read your Bible, pray every day, and memorize Scripture, but are not living in unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ, you’re not walking the worthy walk. I think Jesus talks about this idea in Matthew 5:23–24 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go;

first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” Your relationship with God is not right if your relationships with your brothers and sisters is not right. The monastery is not what God has called you to. Escaping from the body of Christ is not pious. It's disobedient! It's *unworthy* of the calling with which you've been called.

Let me put it as plainly as I can. *If you desire a salvation that does not include active involvement with the family of God, you do not desire the salvation that God offers.* Let me say that again. If you desire a salvation that does not include active involvement with the family of God, you do not desire the salvation that God offers. It doesn't work with God to say, “I'd love to go to heaven, but I don't want anything to do with your family.”

If we're honest with each other, we know that family is not always easy. Unity in your earthly family is hard. And unity in the spiritual family will be hard too. But look at what God's family has that no biological family does: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father.

I believe walking worthy, walking in unity, really happens in Community Groups more than Sunday mornings. It's not as hard to be humble, gentle, and patient on Sunday morning when you see a person for a short period of time. But it's hard when you do life together. Yet living as a family is what we need. We need small groups where people know us and we know them. That is where Christian unity is really lived out.

So if you want to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called, strive for unity in the family of God.

Walk Not as the Gentiles

Our next walk comes in 4:17, “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.” Paul says that you, which is y'all, must not walk as the Gentiles. Now remember, Paul is writing to a primarily Gentile audience. So what is he saying? He is saying is that genuine faith changes you. If you are an adopted child of God, you will look like one. But it's not just you, it's all of us. Collectively, the Church should look different than the world. If we don't, something is wrong.

What does it mean to not walk as the Gentiles do? Verses 22–24 explain, “That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” This is a 3-step process.

- 1) Lay aside the old self
- 2) Be renewed in the spirit of your mind
- 3) Put on the new self

How is the family of God supposed to live? We're supposed to be laying aside our old way of living, turning to God's Word to be renewed in our minds, and putting on the new self, which is the likeness of God.

And again, I ask you, how are you going to do this? Have you ever tried to start a new diet or workout program alone? Now have you ever tried to do it with someone else? That is so much more successful. The family of God is supposed to be striving together to be more like Christ. This is what Community Groups are designed to do. In small groups, we get together and commit to lay aside our old life and help each other do the same. We commit to renew our minds with God's Word and help each other do the same. We strive to put on Christ-likeness and encourage one another to do the same. We do all this together as family.

We walk worthy of our calling, and we don't walk according to our former way of life.

Walk in Love

Next we come to the walk of love. Ephesians 5:1–2, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Do you see how being a child of God *results* in being an imitator of His love? “*As beloved children, walk in love.*” Children act like their parents. If you have kids this is obvious to you. And sometimes it is painfully obvious. I say painfully because while they pick up on some of our good habits, they also pick up our bad habits. Do you kids act like you? You bet they do! And sometimes it is like a megaphone in your face of your own sinfulness. Children act like their parents. The same is true of God's children. God's children should act like their father. If you don't, the question is, are you really a child of God?

Now if I had to pick, I would say this walk of love is THE distinguishing mark of the family of God. I try to stay away from absolute, big sweeping statements like this, even though they preach very well, but I think this is warranted by Scripture. Last week John Marc talked about John 13:34–35 where Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is why I think love is the mark the family of God. How will someone know you are a disciple of Jesus? It is by your love for the family of God, for one another.

Notice too how this connects with Ephesians 5:1–2. Jesus says in John 13 that we love “even as He loved you.” And that is what makes this command distinctly “new.” Loving one another is certainly not a “new” command. God commanded that throughout the Old Testament. What's “new” about it is the incredible example of Christ. We love *as He loved us*. And that's exactly what Ephesians said. “Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.” The family of God loves each other as Christ loved us.

John picks up this theme again in the book of 1 John. He says in 3:19–21, “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.”

Those who genuinely love God, love the family of God. Those who don't love the family of God, don't love God. That's a strong statement isn't it? But it's not me, it's God's Word. Let me read it again. "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."

This is why I said earlier, *if you desire a salvation that does not include active involvement with the family of God, you do not desire the salvation that God offers.*

If you came to me and said, "Jesse, I love you! But I can't stand your family," I would not feel very loved. How can you say you love me when you hate what I love? To hate my family IS to hate me. If you hate my wife, it's just the same as hating me. How can you tell God you love Him and hate His precious bride? If you love God, you love what God loves. And God loved His people so much that He sent His only Son to die for them! Christ died for your brothers and sisters, but you don't love them?

Again, I contend that small groups, like Community Groups, are the best place to walk in love. Just taking from chapter 4 verses 25–32...

It is in Community Groups that we speak the truth with one another.

It is in Community Groups that we build each other up instead of tearing one another down.

It is in Community Groups that we are kind, tenderhearted, and forgive one another.

It is in Community Groups we imitate His love for us to one another.

Love is THE mark of the family of God. If you love God, you love the family of God. And when we love one another they way Christ loved us the world will know that we are His disciples.

Walk worthy. Don't walk as the Gentiles. Walk in love.

Walk in Light

The fourth walk is walk in light and it is found in chapter 5 verse 8, "For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." Again, the "you" is plural. Y'all were formerly darkness but are now light. Y'all walk as children of light. As the family of God, we are new creatures, a new creation. We have been born again. We are no longer darkness; we are light.

I love this walk because Paul doesn't use the analogy of light as I would expect him to. Notice that he says, "you were formerly darkness, but now you are light." He didn't say, you were "*in* darkness, now you are *in* the light." He says, "you *were* darkness" and now "you *are* light." This is an identity issue. The family of God is light. And then the admonition comes—walk as children of light. Scripture often does this. It states our identity and then calls us to live in light of that identity.

You're a saint. Live like it.

You're a member of the family of God, live like it.

You're light. Live like it.

You're forgiven. Live like it.

You're no longer under the power of sin. Live like it.

What does it mean to live as a child of the light? Look at verses 9–11, “(for the fruit of the Light consists in *all goodness and righteousness and truth*), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.” The family of God is supposed to be the light of the world.

John Marc talked about this last week based on Matthew 5:14–16 which calls us the light of the world. He said, “*A light is meant to shine and give direction. A concealed lamp, placed under a bowl would be useless. Light-radiating people live so that others see their good deeds and give praise not to them but to their Father in heaven.*”

This is what we want our Community groups to look like. As the family of God lives life together, we help each other avoid the unfruitful works of darkness. We expose those works for what they are, and we walk as children of light. As our world becomes increasingly dark, the family of God needs to be a beacon of light. You need the family of God to help you in this endeavor. Our vision is that Community groups will live together in such a way that others will see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven!

Walk worthy. Don't walk as the Gentiles. Walk in love. Walk in light.

Walk in Wisdom

We now come to the final walk. Walk in wisdom. It is found in verses 15–16. “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” The collective nature of this admonition is there again. Be careful how y'all walk. The family of God needs to be careful how we walk in these times. Why? Because the days are evil! Do you feel that in the days we live in? This has been true since the day Paul wrote it, but there are times where it seems the Lord allows us to see the evil around us more vividly. We do not live in a neutral world. The world is not the friend of the family of God. The whole world lies under the power of the evil one. He is constantly scheming to bring about his wicked intentions. He is constantly seeking to destroy the family of God.

If the family of God is going to live out our calling in the midst of such evil days, we need to walk in wisdom, knowing how to redeem the time. One thing COVID 19 has hopefully broken us of is the, “I'll do it later” mentality. I think one of the reasons we don't engage in community is because we always think there's another time we can. We sense no urgency to live life in the family of God. But it is vitally important. We will not pull off any of these walks in isolation. We need each other.

Notice the continued collective language of verses 17–21, “So then [y'all] do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And [y'all] do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but [y'all] be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your [that is, all y'all's] heart to the Lord; 20 [y'all] always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Community groups

exist to get us involved in each other's lives enough so that we can accomplish these things together.

Let me ask you this, are you wiser on your own or with others? If you answered, "on my own," you failed the test. To be wise is to recognize your own lack of wisdom and need for input in your life. The family of God is here to provide that wisdom. If we're going to walk wisely, redeeming the time in the midst of such an evil age, we are going to have to do that as a family. And the chances of you getting down to that level of relationship with someone outside of a small group is not good. So let's join together as family in Community Groups and help one another walk in wisdom.

Walk Worthy
Walk Not as the Gentiles
Walk in Love
Walk in Light
Walk in Wisdom

Stand Together

We have worked our way through our 5 walks. And now Paul does something very interesting. He concludes in chapter 6 with the word "stand." Let me see if I can bring all of Ephesians together for us. *Based on the sovereign election of God to adopt us as sons and daughters, which He decreed before the foundation of the world, we enter into the family of God by grace through faith, not by works. And as God's beloved children, we are called to walk a certain way as members of the family of God. And when we live according to His Word together, we are able to stand.*

The exhortation to stand comes in chapter 6 verses 10–14. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore." And then he goes into the specific pieces of the armor of God.

And as you can guess by now, this admonition is to all of us. We don't just stand, we stand *together*. Y'all be strong in the Lord. Y'all put on the full armor of God. Y'all stand. I always took these walks, and particularly this admonition to stand, as individual. *I* need to stand firm. *I* need to put the armor of God on. *I* need to resist the devil...by myself.

I'm not suggesting that we don't have personal accountability before God on this. I'm suggesting that it is utterly foolish to think that I can do this by *myself*! Who am I to think that I can stand by myself? No, we stand together as the family of God. And that is what our community groups do for one another. We help each other stand. When one member of the family is weak, we strengthen them. When one is suffering, we share their burdens. When one is falling, we help them stand.

We all put on the armor of God so we can stand together. Standing is a family endeavor. All of these are family endeavors.

We walk. And after we walk...we stand. Together.

Conclusion

Don't you want to be part of that kind of family? One of my best friends in Colorado had a good friend who walked away from the faith. I knew him as well and helped my friend process the conversations they were having. He never turned back to the Lord, but he said the most fascinating thing. After rejecting God and Christianity, he said one thing Christians do get...is community. He couldn't find what he experienced in the family of God in the world.

When we fail to engage in the family of God, we rob our family members of our unique purpose in the family, and we sever ourselves from the God ordained means by which we live a life that pleases Him. This is what it means for our Community Groups to live life together as family. And I hope that you are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

Now what?

Get Involved

First, get involved in Community Groups. This is a practical way you can live as a member of the family of God. You can sign up on our app. Click on Events along the bottom of the app and then Community Groups. You can sign up on our website on the Community Groups page. You can sign up in the back.

Advocate

Second, advocate! Community Groups are going to grow at Cornerstone because of you! Our job is to keep them on the forefront of your mind. Your job is to "recruit" others. But this isn't a sales position where you are trying to meet quota. This is a heartfelt belief that the family of God is essential to our Christian walk and a desire to see others take advantage of this means of grace from God.

Serve

God designed His family to be many members yet one body. We have diverse gifts, but the same mission. We'll talk more about this in two weeks, but family members don't just attend, they participate. How can you serve? We need group leaders. We need host homes. We need food coordinators. We need care coordinators. We need prayer warriors. We need childcare. If the Lord is putting on your heart that you can serve in some way, come talk to us.

Scripture never presents being a member of the family of God as a "program." It's a grace gift. It's part of God's good, wise, eternal design. And here at Cornerstone, we don't view Community Groups as just a "thing" to do. This is not about you signing up for another event. This is about encouraging you to do what Scripture calls you to do. Walk with the family of God and stand until we meet Him face to face.

What's our mission? To know Christ and make Him known? How do we do that? Together as the family of God in Community Groups.