

HOPE
“Better Together”

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 (NIV)

“The single most common finding from my half century’s research on the correlation of life satisfaction is that happiness is best predicted by the breath and depth of one’s social connections... As a rough rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups, but you decide to join one, you have cut your risk of dying in the next year in half.”

- Robert Putnam, in “Bowling Alone”

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.”
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)

The 5 relationships we all need: (From the life of King David)

1. Mentoring Relationship (Samuel: prophet/judge who anointed David to be king)

“But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

- Someone who sees the best in you
- Someone who brings out the best in you

“Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.” 1 Samuel 16:13 (NIV)

2. Relationship with a Mentee (David’s Mighty Men: 2 Samuel 23:8-39)
3. Relationship with a Truth-speaker (Nathan the Prophet: 2 Samuel 12:1-13)
4. Relationship with a True Friend (Jonathan)
 - Someone who believes in you and is willing to stand up for you

“Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.” 1 Samuel 19:4 (NIV)

- Someone who points you to God

“Jonathan went to David... and strengthened his faith in God.” 1 Sam 23:16 (NCV)

5. Relationship with God

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.” Psalm 23:1 (NIV)

HOPE - Better Together

(Start by introducing each other if you have new people or if your group is starting up.)

This week begins the six part series on HOPE that partners the Sunday morning messages with our LIFE groups. It seems only appropriate to begin this series by talking through the value of community and why the Bible talks over and over again about the importance of *pursuing life together*. We have our four values that make up the LIFE acronym:

(Suggestion: If your LIFE group is not starting for the first time this week, see if the group members can name the four values.)

- **LOVE GOD** (our connection to God through prayer, worship and the Bible)
- **IMPACT OTHERS** (our outreach and service efforts to help others in need)
- **FIND TIME TO PLAY** (a time of fellowship so we can become better friends)
- **ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY** (being honest and open will build trust when appropriate)

Which of these four values do you (personally) most enjoy about Christian community and LIFE groups? Why?

Each of these values make up our definition of how LIFE groups help us grow both personally and corporately. We are better together when we choose to become willing to actively pursue relationships and not simply walk through life as a loner. One example of the wisdom we see in Scripture about the value of relationships is from King Solomon who wrote this:

(ask someone in the group to read this passage)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 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.

What sticks out to you from Solomon's encouragement in this passage about being better together? Why is it that this sounds easy but in reality it can be quite hard at times?

This passage we just read looks and sounds nice but the truth is, it is hard. The reality is that life gets in the way, we become busy, and in some cases, trust is broken and walls go up as a result. These barriers and walls make it difficult to do any of the four values well, and especially *engaging authentically*. Sometimes this can cause us to close up and go rogue for a while. Whether this happened at work, with a neighbor, or in a church, these walls go up and we have to fight hard to heal, forgive, and re-engage again for our own sake. As hard as it may be at times, we have all been

hurt by people and we have to decide whether or not if we are going to let that hurt define us or our decisions moving forward.

Without sharing details, when is a time that you stepped away from Christian community because of hurt? What caused you to re-engage again?

When we operate from a place of hurt the Devil can use this as a way of pulling us away from each other. This tactic is fairly simple and yet quite effective. Just like in a battle, if you are able to separate the groups and single out individuals it is far more effective in attacking the enemy as a single unit rather than a cohesive team. Without a doubt, we are better together, but it comes at a cost. The cost from us is our effort. When we choose to become intentional and pursue life together, we are rewarded with a more complete image of how God designed us in the first place.

Paul says it this way in Romans 12:4-5 (NLT)

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

This is why we believe at Coastal that the best place for you to be is in a LIFE group. There are a lot of really good things happening and opportunities to grow but the truth is, nothing compares to being in a group of Christ followers all trying to become better by being together. We have talked a lot about the new building opening soon, and as exciting as it will be to have a home base we have fought hard to keep the message clear - We are the church...the people! Specifically this means that the heart of the Church and the heart of our community is found in our LIFE groups. You obviously believe this, or are open to this because you are here in a group. It is important though that we never lose sight of this as we continue to grow as a church and as individuals.

One of the goals of LIFE groups is to have open space and invite others so they can experience the great community that we are a part of right now. Who are people in your life that could benefit from this kind of group and are not currently in one (think about work associates, classmates, neighbors, and Coastal members)?

As you share names of people that you think could benefit from this group, have a plan and ask someone to hold you accountable. If we truly believe that we are better together then we don't want someone to be left out and end up trying to do it all on their own.

So how does this have anything to do with HOPE?

Towards the very end of Jesus's life he approached the disciples and gave them their final marching orders...the rally cry:

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

This commissioning message was given with one clear point: I am leaving and placing the *hope* of the world in your hands!

How does this passage from Matthew 28 tie in to our LIFE group?

What hope does a life group offer us?

The Church has one mission - to introduce people to the saving power of Jesus.

This message of HOPE is in our hands and we can only carry out this mission when we are linked together with clear vision and purpose. Jesus left the fate of humanity in the hands of eleven men and a small group of others with the hope that has spread across the world over the course of two thousand years. Imagine what we can do as a church and as a LIFE group?

ACTION STEPS:

- 1. Commit to being a part of the entire series (Sunday services and LIFE groups).**
- 2. Make an effort to invite people who are not connected to a group.**
- 3. Be accountable to someone about inviting people.**

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Pray for each other -

We become the hope that God created us to be when we are together. We need each other and one of the ways we can become better together is by praying for each other. Split up into groups of two or three and share one thing that you are asking for God's help. Commit to praying for the people in your group throughout the week and hold each other accountable to actively looking for someone you could invite. For some people, they may check out a LIFE group before they ever check out a Sunday service. Ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you this week be bold so that we can continue to *better together*.

Family Focus:

Try this simple object lesson to teach children the importance of the church community in their lives.

Main Idea: We are stronger together, the church is a group of friends who help each other follow Jesus.

Items Needed: Several heavy books. We used unwrapped story Bibles.

Suggested Verses:

Ecclesiastes 4:12 — Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Proverbs 27:17 — Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 — Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

Hebrews 10:24-25 — Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Directions: This object lesson involved a few children as volunteers at the front of the class.

Begin by calling an older child to the front. Ask them to hold a single book above their head with flat palms.

Give them a few seconds to feel the weight and ask them if this is getting hard. The delay is key to making the task harder with fewer books. If they are ready for more, carefully place another book on the stack. Repeat this process until the books slide off. Be sure to catch the books to prevent injury. Most kids will lose the balance of the books and they will slide off.

Invite several children to try this “strong” test. Always congratulate them for the effort, but remark how hard it must be to keep adding weight.

Explain the point, “This is something like following Jesus. It may feel easy at first but over time it can feel heavy. The world we live in, plus our own hearts, is like a constant force making it hard to follow God’s plan. But God gave us a wonderful gift. It’s a group of friends who are all working together to learn how to love God & love other people. It’s called the church. Let’s get some helpers to try our hard task together.”

Invite 2-4 kids to try the books at a time. As you add more books, remark how it’s still hard but much easier than doing it alone. After several children get a chance to work together, restate the point.

This object lesson deals with a common error kids make when thinking about the church. They often imagine it as another place they go (like school or the movies) rather than a group of people. For this lesson, emphasize how the church is a group of friends who we spend time with and learn how to follow Jesus together. In my teaching, I even talked some about their own choice of a church when they become grown-ups. That’s my little hint toward their future ownership of their own faith and discipleship.