



Peninsula City Church

Community

Going Back to Go Forward

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Contents

Going Back to Go Forward.....3
Introduction.....3
1. What is community?3
2. Why do we need to look back to understand the biblical community?4
3. How do we live in a community moving forward?7
Some Concluding Thoughts.....8

Going Back to Go Forward

Introduction

Q. What is an ideal community, and how do we get there?

If we asked numerous people, we probably would get different answers to this question. It would probably reflect their community preferences. Some enjoy the experience and effervescence of a bigger community. Whereas others might enjoy the intimacy of a smaller community. However, does it come down to personal preference, or something larger than our ideal?

In trying to answer today's question, i.e. 'What is the ideal community and how do we get there?' we may ask, "Do we really need to go back or go forward to arrive at this place? "to this I would answer, yes.' That is, yes, it is a good path to try to understand what a community is in light of our current series. Again, it could be asked, "Is it the church meant to be large or the small?" To which I would again answer, "yes." In other words, it is meant to be both the large and small.

In discussing the idea of going back to go forward and the large of a small church, we need to understand that there no perfect answer. Instead, there is a tension that has always existed and still exists today. So, this morning we will briefly review the 'biblical view of community. It will consider the smaller foundational home base community and the larger public meeting of the smaller communities coming together. The small community has an intimacy, while the public meeting has corporate celebration and encouragement.

1. What is community?

Q. So, how would Jesus bring the Kingdom of God to life today in your community?¹

We have seen in previous weeks that the Kingdom of God message needs to be central to all that is being done and said. Especially for the community of Christ-followers. That is,

"The transforming gospel message proclaimed a new family of God, in which each member was a child of God with full Kingdom rights."²

If the Lord is our Heavenly Father, then one would expect that we are His children, Jn 1:12; Matt 6:9. He has brought people together into a community, which is part of the Kingdom of God.

It would appear from church history that at times we have lost our way. We have tended to lose focus on what was of importance. It can sometimes still true today. In light of this, it has correctly been said that,

"We must always come back to the reason we do things."³

If a community is essential, then why? If we were to answer what is a community as opposed to what is the community, the following could be stated. That is, a community is a micro-environment within the community or the macro-environment. It is where grassroots growth is to take place. A community is a place where there are the soils of relational connection on an intimate level. While the larger community offers safety in numbers, a larger identity and the power to make a change in society. The Cambridge Dictionary has defined a community as,

"The people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality."⁴

¹ Comiskey, Joel. *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church*. (Loc 2336 of 3029) (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2012). Kindle Edition.

² Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 1377 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 2549 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

On defining a community, it has also been said that,

“Communities are people. They are not abstractions. They are not rhetoric. They are human beings. A community is a group of people who share something in common.”⁵

It that, is true the, ‘What do we share in common?’

So, how does this relate to us today? Well from the beginning people have been in a community. That is, the first couple were created to be in community with God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit and with one another. The truth of this was pointed out a couple of weeks ago by David McGregor. In recognising this truth, it was said that,

“The Trinity dwells in perfect unity and community. God is not alone individualist, and this fact should stir God’s people away from rugged individualism (“How can I do my thing?”) to community-oriented living (How can I serve the body of Christ?).”⁶

There is a great blessing in being a community in that all participating can help each other to grow together. That is, to grow upward together towards the Lord, grow inwards together towards each other and grow outwards together towards those who need to be part of our community. A community, whether large or small, can not only be a blessing to each other but also bless each other. So, what does it mean to bless one another in community? We have been singing a song this year called ‘The Blessing,’ which reminds us we are never alone. God is always with us; we are larger than the one, and that we are in a blessed community. This song and this idea come from a section of the Torah in the Book of Numbers 6. It was a blessing that was given by the Lord, to Aaron and his sons as priests to bless Israel, the broader community, and also the smaller communities within Israel. It says,

²² “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ **SPEAK** (*an imperative*) to Aaron and to his sons, saying, “In this way, you shall **BLESS** (*an imperative*) the children of Israel. You are to say to them: ²⁴ The Lord bless you (*singular*) and keep (or *watch over*, or *take care of*) you (*sing*); ²⁵ the Lord cause His face to shine on you, and be gracious to you (*sing*); ²⁶ the Lord lift up His face to you and give you peace.’ ²⁷ So they shall invoke (Lit. *put*) My name on the sons of Israel, and then I will bless them” (Num 6:22-27 NASB).

Notice how it is the blessing of the community, but also smaller communities within the larger. So, are we a community of blessing and one that blesses others?

2. Why do we need to look back to understand the biblical community?

Q. Really, what is the biblical model of a community?

So, we all live in the community at large, but we also need to live in a smaller community. One reason that we need to be part of a community, as it is a small-scale version of the larger gathering is a hothouse for growth of all within it and a community. However, to understand this idea, we need to look back to go forward. We need to learn from how it was done in the first place.

Now if we look back, we see that the Lord chose Abram and his family to leave Ur and start over and become a new community and nation, Gen 12:1-4. Then this growth continued within the life of Israel when they came out of their time in Egypt. There was the rise of the families, communities, and nation of Israel (Ex 12:37-38); or an even more precise number in Num 1:46.

⁴ “Community.” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/community> (19th October 2020).

⁵ “How Do You Define Community?” <http://www.artofrelevance.org/2018/02/20/how-do-you-define-community/> (19th October 2020).

⁶ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 521 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

So, Israel was made up of the many families, numerous clans and the 12 tribes.⁷ Understanding this can help us to grasp the biblical idea of the smaller communities, which were part of the broader community.

However, due to time and space here, we only look at Jesus and the early church and their understanding of the larger and smaller communities of Christ-followers. Since from the beginning, Jesus set the early church an example to follow to spread the message of the Kingdom of God. It will also help us to understand the biblical idea of a community. In light of Jesus' example for all of His followers, it has been said that,

“Christ’s missional approach was to find a household willing to commit to His Kingdom message. With this house as the base, Christ’s followers attempted to reach the entire town and surrounding area.”⁸

So, Jesus went to the larger public meetings in the temple, but He similarly went to home meetings. He spoke in larger public meetings, but also in the home. So, for Jesus, it was not a matter of either-or, but both and for meeting together. He was teaching the twelve that He had chosen how it was to be done. It has been rightly suggested that,

“Christ knew that theoretical information separated from practical experience would have little lasting value.”⁹

Therefore, He taught His followers the value of both the larger public community and a smaller community within the home. It has been pointed out that,

“Many NT scholars believe that both forms—small house churches and the whole church as a unit at that location—existed side by side in early Christianity.”¹⁰

He did this publicly,

- In what has been called the Sermon on the Mount: Matt 5:1-7:29
- Then also at the Cleansing of the Temple: Jn 2:13-22
- In Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacle: Jn 7:1-39, etc.

He also used homes to speak to people. For example, The following offers a glimpse of Christ's home ministry,¹¹

- Jesus in the house of Peter: Matt 8:14; 9:10
- Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus: Lk 19:1-10
- Jesus in the house of Lazarus and his sisters: Lk 10:38-42
- Jesus in the house of Jairus: Mk 5:35-38
- Jesus healing two blind people in a house: Matt 9:28-30
- Jesus in the house of Simon the leper: Matt 26:6
- Jesus teaching His disciples in a house: Mk 7:17-18; 9:33; 10:10
- Jesus forgiving and healing a paralysed person in a house: Lk 5:19

⁷ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 695 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 1047 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 986 of 3029). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Gehring, Roger W. *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 25.

¹¹ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 1013 of 3029) CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

- Jesus in the home of a Pharisee: Lk 14:1
- Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in a house: Matt 26:18
- Jesus sent His twelve and His seventy disciples to heal and teach from village to village and house-to-house: Lk 9:1-9; 10:1-11

As a consequence, when we come to the early church, they did what Jesus did and had shown them to do. They met in both public places and homes. As with Jesus did this, so too did the early church. For them, it was not an either-or, but both places.

For example, the local church held meetings in public places as a larger group,

“And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46 NASB).

“And at the hands of the apostle's many signs and wonders were taking place among the people, and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch” (Acts 5:12 NASB).

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42 NASB).

“But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9 NASB).

“...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20 NASB).

“Gaius, a host to the whole church and me, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother” (Rom 16:23 NASB).

However, the local church also met in smaller groups within homes,

“And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46 NASB).

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42 NASB).

“...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20 NASB).

“...also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia” (Rom 16:5 NASB).

The general number of people meeting a typical home has been suggested as follows,

“Comparing archaeological digs of houses at that time, a typical house might have fit comfortably between 6 and 15 people. If the crowd spilled over into the gardens, more could have gathered.”¹²

As far as the household goes, it has also been said that,

“Family households did not consist of nuclear families in the modern understanding of a married couple and their children but rather were multigenerational (up to four generations)

¹² Osiek, Carolyn. & Balch, David L. *Families in the New Testament World*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 30.

and included the social arrangement of several families, related by blood and marriage, who lived in two or three houses architecturally connected.”¹³

We need to remember why the early church grew so much, was partly due to it becoming smaller communities within the larger community of Christ-followers. They met where they were living, working, and doing life. They did this both in public and in the home. That is,

“One of the major reasons the early church was so effective was because they infiltrated the basic fabric of society—families living in homes. One problem with the church today is that people go to an event in a building, participate in various programs, but their lives don’t change.”¹⁴

3. How do we live in a community moving forward?

Q. what are some of the responsibilities and benefits of living in a community?

So, what can we learn from all of what has been said so far? Firstly, that a community is essential. Secondly, a smaller community is where grassroots growth is to take place. In contrast, the larger community offers safety in numbers, a larger identity, and the power to make a change in society. Finally, as we shall see here, it all comes with responsibilities and benefits.

In a real community, there is no place for a false narrative regarding those who are not part of our community as the enemy. That is, those who are not Christ-followers are the enemy to us/me, and our preconceived ideas of who is welcome and who is not. We need to remember that people want to be loved, not fixed. So, we may need to rethink how we live in community. Is it a place that we can bring those around us? Do we live a life seeking the highest good of others, regardless of whether they return our love or not?

We all love the benefits of community. However, what about our responsibilities? Do we see our smaller and larger communities as places of our entitlement, thereby placing expectations on others to do something for us/me? Do we have a blind spot when it comes to our entitlements within our communities? How can we deal with those blind spots? What responsibility do we have to deal with these blind spots?

So, what are we able to do as we embrace our responsibilities as a community of Christ-followers, within the community at large? Following are some suggestions. It has been said about the early church that,

“The movement attracted people because of the Christians’ behaviour toward one another and toward those outside the church. Yes, Christian beliefs were appealing... The ancient church was a strong-group family of surrogate siblings who lived out their belief system in a practical and winsome way.”¹⁵

On this issue of the behaviour of the early Christ-followers, some things would have stood out to the surrounding community at large. There was also the way that they behaved toward and spoke to each other and strangers. How do we behave towards each other and toward those outside our community? Besides, there was the example of loving one another, just as Jesus had loved them, Jn 13:34. However, it has been suggested that,

¹³ Perdue, Leo G. Blenkinsopp, Joseph. Collins, John J. & Meyers, Carol. *Families in Ancient Israel*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 174-175.

¹⁴ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 1073 of 3029) CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

¹⁵ Hellerman, Joseph. *When the Church Was a Family*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 106.

“Hospitality emerges early as a key virtue in early Christian groups, as is demonstrated by the very hospitality offered by the missionary couple to Paul himself (Acts 18:1-3; see Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:1-3).”¹⁶

If the Holy Spirit audited us, I would how we would stack up with responsibilities like these? It gives us some food for thought and prayer as we move forward.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. What is the ideal community, and how do we get there?

When it comes to the idea of community, there is no one method or formula to fit all. The only thing that seems to be a constant is that there needs to be the larger community of Christ-followers, worldwide, nationwide, citywide and our local church community. However, there also needs to be communities that are in the home, workplace, school, sports club etc. It is both of these that were part of Jesus Christ’s mission, so they need to be central, regardless of how we put community into practice. It has correctly been said that,

“In all honesty, I don’t believe God gave an exact prescriptive pattern in the New Testament called cell church. After all, the early church met every day in the temple courts and from house-to-house. If we wanted to talk about a once and for all cell-celebration pattern, should the local church meet every day? Few people would agree with this. It’s hard enough to meet in celebration each Sunday.”¹⁷

So, do we see our larger and smaller communities as places of our deserved freedoms or rights? That is, do we demand to live our own life the way we want as part of our entitlement and say what we want, regardless of who it hurts? Yes, we are free in Christ, but not to live the way we choose. Yes, our communities of Christ-follower should be different. But not to the exclusion of those people within the community at large. It could be asked,

- Do we see our larger and smaller communities as places merely to receive, or as an opportunity to contribute as well?
- Do we see our communities as a privilege to belong to and a massive gift to those around us, or as places of entitlement?

These should not be places of compliance with the party’s line, but of the freedom in Christ to be who you have been created to be and still accepted. We need to be more open-handed with what we have received, allowing things to be taken as we offer them and allowing things to be put into our hands by others. We need to be more open-minded when it comes to our communities. We need to have more awareness in our community to remember that people want to be loved, not fixed. Let me repeat it; please remember that people want to be loved, not fixed. We need to introduce the broken, wounded and hurting to the Lord and let Him fix them. It is not our role to try to conform someone into what we think that they should be. But we need to love them and walk with them in our community. We need to let there be a renewal of their mind through the Holy Spirit as he transforms them. Remember that all of this needs to be done in the Lord’s timing and not ours.

¹⁶ Osiek, Carolyn. MacDonald, Margaret Y. & Tulloch, Janet H. *A Women’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*. (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), Kindle edition, p. 31-32.

¹⁷ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*. (Loc 324 of 3029) CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

In this time of standing still in being stuck in our thinking due to Covid and isolation, we need a wakeup call to the need and value of our communities. Otherwise, we will come out of all of this God-given time for reflection on what is of value in our lives and have missed it. Then we will merely go about what we were doing before all this happened.

In closing, remember that there is a great blessing of being a community in that all participating can help each other to grow together. As we grow upward together towards the Lord, grow inwards together towards each other, and grow outwards together towards those who need to be part of our community. A community, whether large or small, can not only be a blessing to each other but also bless each other. So, what does it mean to bless one another in our community?

We have the opportunity to bless others around us right now. We can pray for those within our communities and those who are not yet part of them. As was mentioned previously, we have been singing a song this year called 'The Blessing.' God is always with us; we are bigger than the one small community that we are a part of in a home, an office, a team, or a local church. We are part of a blessed community called the Church of Jesus Christ throughout history, and around the world right now. It is a song and this idea regarding blessing others coming from Numbers 6. As we watch this clip of 'The Blessing Australia' pray for our larger and smaller communities, but also our city, state, country, and the world.

The Blessing Australia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOt7baaVSbE>