

SMALL GROUP COMMUNITY | WEEK 2

Think/Read | Take some time to read through this material from our Small Group Leader's Handbook at College Park. Is this what you long for in community?

We use the term "biblical community" deliberately because the Bible's vision for community differs from ideas that the world presents. It's difficult to give a precise, comprehensive definition of "biblical community." The Bible itself doesn't present the concept as a dictionary would, but here are three marks of biblical community that make it a relationship distinct from other affinity groups in the world:

1. Biblical community is united by a common relationship with Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28)

All communities are defined by something their members hold in common: same neighborhood, similar interests, same life stage, political affiliation, etc. The more you have in common with someone, the easier it is to connect with them. C.S. Lewis said, "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: "What! You too? I thought I was the only one."

Because we believe that all Christians are one in Christ, we hold that biblical community must be centered on the common relationship we have with Jesus rather than on another point of interest. Even if you have nothing in common with someone else in your group, you both are sinners saved by the grace of God, members of the Body of Christ, and ambassadors for God to the lost world. If we elevate this common bond enough, we'll enable people to develop friendships across any social divide. As such, the focus of biblical community is on others, not self-satisfaction.

2. Biblical community is marked by godly grace and godly truth (Acts 2:42, 44-46)

Just as Jesus was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), our community needs to be marked by godly grace and godly truth. Being marked by *godly grace* means extending God's love to people who don't deserve it. Biblical community isn't a social club for the wealthy, the clean, or the charismatic; it's a leper colony. Our communities should be places where people can confess sin,

let down their guards, and be open about how God is acting in their lives. We don't condone sin, but neither do we condemn or exclude people for unbiblical reasons. Being marked by *godly truth* means God's word guides our experience of community. God's word is our common source of life; one goal of our community must be growing more in line with the teachings of Scripture.

3. Biblical community emphasizes serving others (Eph. 4:11-16)

This passage from Ephesians 4 says that Jesus gave us church leaders to *equip the saints for the work of ministry*. "The saints" are the whole church; that means the *entire church* is doing "the work of ministry," not just the leaders. I tend to think of community as a place where my needs are met, and biblical community does meet my needs. But it doesn't stop with me. One of our goals as a community, then, ought to be to serve others. This means that your small group ought to be a place where people are encouraged to interact with their family, friends, and coworkers for God's glory and their good. This outward focus keeps a community from becoming self-centered and stagnant.

Pray | Pray through some of the themes you read about above. Are any of these foreign to you or not what you expected? Use those themes *specifically* to ask the Lord to massage them into your heart.

Do | Take a look at the Small Group map at the local outreach wall. Are there groups in your area that you might be interested in? Check out the church website to see what is available so that after LIVE |15, you are prepared to find a group.