

## **PART SEVEN - WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW: CONNECTION & COMMUNITY**

We talk a lot about “community.” We are big fans. In fact, community is so important to us we use it to describe our approach to Adult Sunday School. We don’t have classes, we have “communities,” groups designed to provide and foster unique community. And, history, 28 years’ worth in this location, proves it’s an effective structure. Simply put, it works. That said, community can be found in many places and in many forms, and it’s everywhere. The Argus Leader featured an article that led with, “Community is a big deal!” Uh, yeah, that’s true. No matter the size, shape or form, community is vital to modern life. Once upon a time, soon after the dinosaurs roamed the earth, families remained together or in close proximity. It wasn’t unusual for two to three generations to live in the same house or close by. Family was community. Proximity made life’s up’s and downs easier. No one walked alone. Life was shared. Time’s changed. Migration, for various reasons, became the norm. Family-based community was lost, and in many cases never replaced. Today community is not familial and thus bestowed, it’s sought after and joined.

In the vein of “any community is better than no community,” there are many options out there. Our book club, ALTA team, or Lions Club provides an identity beyond ourselves and fills an intense need to be connected and attached to something a bit bigger than us. Virtually anyone can find a place to belong and engage in meaningful relationships. But, however, does our Bridge Club or Bocce Ball group provide opportunity and insight into how to make the world a better place. Do our ceramics classmates provide a vision and path for impacting lives? Are any of our community groups equipped to show up at 2:00 am to hold our hand when our lives are falling apart, or drive 250 miles to make sure we are supported after a loved one dies? I’m convinced my Rotary Club would visit me in the hospital, bring me food if I’m in need, and make sure I never walk alone. My Rotary Club also strives and succeeds at making the world a better place. My club is seeking to fully eradicate polio, ensure kids in Third World countries have the

needed surgery, provide clean water to those battling water borne disease and make sure the fewest possible number of people go without food. My club believes the world can be changed. Who needs church community if a civic group can meet those lofty goals? Well, me. I do. My Rotary Club can do many of the same things my church can do, but it cannot bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to a scarred, beat up world. No civic group can lead a person to find their creative purpose, but my church can, my Sunday School Community can, and as such, so can I.

In his book, "Bowling Alone," Robert Putnam cites loneliness as America's new pandemic. O.K., he did write this well before the pandemic hit, but that makes his revelation even more stark. If people were lonely and unconnected before 2020...how much worse might it be now? Christian community is in intense need today and so is the preface to it, finding one's place with God. Even Jesus knew this, well that didn't come out right, did it? Said differently, Jesus taught toward Christian community when he routinely skipped the strategy and doctrine lessons and taught his followers how to love one another and live in harmony and unity. The first churches were not churches in the way we know the church, they were groups of believers who were doing faith and life together. Faith life and life-life, done together, was the plan all along.

Christian community provides opportunity to do things on a larger scale. Christian community provides a safe place to be genuine and transparent. This is a space that allows us to deal with life's tough issues as well as theological ones with grace and honor. It's also where we laugh and cry together, often in the same session. Christian community ensures we never walk alone. As one writer observed: "We have built-in cheerleaders and advocates. Christian community is the place where our burdens grow lighter."

We have the answer for the masses of people who haven't yet found their creative purpose. They likely do not yet know how much God loves them; how he has had a plan for their lives all along. Simply put, they do not yet have what we have. They need us, they just don't realize it...yet. So, let's reach out to them

before it's too late. Views of the church universal aren't at an all-time high right now.

The latest edition of Christianity Today features an article on how important it is for today's church to understand how much the world has changed over the past 15 months. The same-old, same-old won't make us relevant in a new world landscape, and truth be told, we weren't amazingly relevant before Covid. Here's the quote: "The gap between the church and society is only going to be larger as we rebuild the church in a post-pandemic world."

This is undoubtably true of the church universal, but we have an edge, which provides opportunity to save spiritual lives and bring Christian community to many people. Let's talk about how we can pull this off.