

Multiplying Community

Intro

I'm Andrew Paulsen and doing Community Groups Leader Training

As a social studies teacher, elections are an exciting time and offer all kinds of ways to engage students. Sometimes those moments have funny twists for us teachers. One ap government teacher shared that his class was going over qualifications for president and presented the fact that in the US constitution a candidate has to be 35 years old and naturally born. One girl became really upset and felt that was unfair, how many great leaders would be disqualified because they weren't naturally born. As she began to rant and the rest of the class patiently listened, they all of a sudden were shocked and laughed as she said "What makes a naturally born citizen any better of a leader than one born by c-section!"

Let's be honest, we've heard crazier arguments and political comments. Let me pray before we get started.

- **Opening Prayer**

You know, talking about community this week, this month, this year is hard. As Brian and Dan already have touched on, we all get that relationships are strained in 2020, with a messy election and tension and violence in our cities and being cut off from others through quarantines. We're asking to you to look and think and pray about something that many of you would rather avoid or leave behind. I heard on news radio the other day about how many people have let go of relationships, some of them decades long, over differences of beliefs and opinions and values recently. Just a year ago many young people were saying "You do you" meaning hey, I don't care what you believe or what you do, as long as you leave me alone and it makes you happy. But now it feels the mantra has changed to "You better do" because every opinion, every purchase, every post is potentially a reason to separate in our cancel culture. It's a dramatic shift. And before we say how sad, let's remember many of us not that long ago were bothered by the apathy and lack of morals among our young adults. So let's recognize that it's a good thing that many have realized that everybody just doing their own thing and not caring doesn't work. The next step is learning how to have these difficult conversations with respect and learning to listen. Because, whether we're still using you do you or we're into cancel culture, we're still not listening, but just avoiding each other in different ways.

In a sense, the whole idea of community is part of our tension in our society today. Because community, by definition, says that there is something in common all members are a part of; that they hold to. There is a common unity if you will. For some it is a common team to root for, others a common hobby, others a political platform, and others a video game. That's been the appeal of the grandfather of social media: Facebook. You can create groups or communities around just about anything on their platform with anyone around the world.

So we're not claiming only Christians can have community. Many people find connections in all kinds of community: from their sports teams to comic books to creepy breeds of cats. But the bold claim we make is that only Christ-centered communities will last for eternity, that only Christ-centered communities follow the one true God who lives with them and saves them and empowers them. It doesn't mean they look or speak better or have it easier, but they do have a solid foundation that will last forever.

Let's recap this series on community:

Community was part of God's design for us in the beginning. Brian took time to show us that the Trinity, God Three in One, Father Spirit Son, exists in community. We reflect Him when we love like He does: a love that is humble, generous and creative.

God uses community to mold us, to shape us. Pastor Lacasse pointed out when we're with people is when we can powerfully experience reflection, accountability, learning and opportunities to serve. We can't live out what the Bible asks us to do on our own, it requires community. And through those relationships, we become more like Jesus.

And last week Pastor Dan went over how being in Community is messy, if it's real and authentic. That's part of our mission and motto here, to love people authentically. Authentic love is seen best with authentic people, which means we see the bad and the good, the clean and the unclean. In other words, being part of a community isn't easy and it takes commitment. Working through that difficulty is what makes an impact though. A Christ-centered community that has real people who show real love shares a gospel that is believable, compelling and true.

80s and Bad Multiplication

How many of you remember the 80s? Are fans of the 80s? Love Stranger Things or other 80s shows? Last Saturday our RISE High youth group had an 80s night and there were lots of neon and tight denim and puffy jackets. But let's be real, some things in the 80s shouldn't be copied: like mullets, or frizzy perms, or the most embarrassing thing my aunts and mom did: customized sweatshirts with puff paints. Remember those! Bright neon globs of paint spelling some slogan? Embarrassing!

Here's my point, when we imitate something, when we multiply something, we want to multiply good things. Virus' like what we've experienced this year is a great example of what not to do. Somethings are dangerous when multiplied.

So when we talk about Multiplying communities, we want to make sure we are multiplying Christ-centered communities and not some twisted version of church. Dietrich Bonhoffer once wrote "He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer..." We constantly need to check our ideas and feelings about what we want in our relationships and groups with what God desires. If we don't grasp the principles in the Bible on community, the ones we learned the past few weeks, the principles of loving in generous, humble ways, of being authentic and committed and not giving up, knowing that God is using our relationships

to mold us more into the people He designed us to be; if we don't hold onto those, then the communities we multiply will be a problem.

And just like multiplying false doctrines and fake gods are just setting up people for hurt and disappointment; multiplying false, fake communities will also hurt and disappoint people. You've probably experienced that: a shallow group that only has the poker game in common, the love of running in common, working in the same place. You feel like you're part of something, until when you really need someone, or when you get a little deeper, you suddenly realize there's not much bonding you together. You don't have a strong foundation uniting the group. And I know some of you have been part Christian groups like that. And I am so sorry for the hurt that caused. Shallow fake communities that claim Jesus aren't something we want to multiply. It doesn't help.

With that said, God wants us to multiply as Christ-centered communities.. If you ever have a chance to go through Andrew Lacasse's *Unfolding Gospel*, you'll see how God intends for His people to spread, to multiply. God tells Adam and Eve in Genesis to go forth and multiply, not just meaning to have kids, but to multiply people who know Him. Later, God tells an old, childless man Abram that he will be made into a great nation. God's people are encouraged to engage in the culture around them to bless it as they live in exile by the prophet Jeremiah and others. Jesus recruits his followers to be fishers of men and sends them out to reach others. I could go on, but God is a missionary God and our Christ-centered community should have that principle as a focus.

Huddle Analogy

So I had an amazing month as a sports fan. Sept. 26 the Lakers won the NBA Finals. And on October 27th, the Dodgers won the World Series. My two favorite teams reaching the top! So excited, and I enjoyed celebrating with my sons running around the house and chest bumping. My poor wife Charlotte has all boys in her house and its sports 24/7, especially with the shut down. So now we focus on football, and we're hoping our Rams can complete the sweep for LA.

Football is the perfect sport for snacking don't you think? You have this pause every 15 seconds as they reset the scrimmage line and huddle up. And of course many of us have played backyard football and imitated the huddle. I remember as a kid getting annoyed when the other team took way too long to be in the huddle. Can you imagine if a team never came out of the huddle. "Hey Joe, what's the plan?" "Nothing, we're just going to stay here and talk about our favorite football players" "You mean we're not going to hike the ball?" "Nah, we're just going design cool looking plays and talk about how great they would be." Another person comes by "What are you guys doing?" "Playing football" "But you're still in your huddle" "That's how we like to play, just talking and dreaming of cool highlights" "Ok!"

We would all say that is boring and not really playing football. But if you think about it, that is a lot like what many Christians do today. We huddle up and talk a lot, but never actually get into the game. And I like to think of God being like a coach telling us to get

to the line and hike the ball, to make a play. He didn't bring us together to stay in our safe little bubbles. So why do we stay in the huddle?

1. We're afraid - Jesus tells a parable about a man who leaves 3 servants with his money. 2 invest and multiply his money. But one is afraid and buries his money in a field. The fearful one who doesn't multiply, who doesn't take risk, is the one called wicked and lazy by his master. Our fears keep us in the huddle.
2. We're in toxic arguments- God's people were supposed to be a city on the hill. Yet the kingdom of Israel struggles with discord and civil war almost from the beginning, during Saul's reign, David's reign, and soon after Solomon it splits. If we're busy arguing in the huddle, we'll never get to the line and make a play.
3. We've forgotten our purpose- People can be in the huddle so long they forgot there's a game to play. Christians can stay in their bubble so long they forget there are people around them. Many times just as the disciples were getting comfortable and enjoying what they were doing, Jesus would say we need to cross the lake, we need to move on. There are others who need to hear the good news, others who need help. A clear sense of purpose should move us out of the huddle.

Over the years, Brian has said a few times: Doctors practice medicine, Christians should practice their faith. So how do we practice multiplying our community?

Please open your bibles or scroll in your bible app to John 4: 27-41. The background here is that Jesus is in Samaria, an area of a mixed-race people who the Jews criticized and rejected. He speaks to a woman at a well who has had lots of husbands and scandals in her past, giving her a glimpse of God's love for her by spending time talking and answering her questions.

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

³⁴ "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

So here are the principles we see for multiplying community

- Let's Be Open- Jesus talks to a woman who had all kinds of relationship problems and then stays in the town of rejects for 2 days. Remember we need to have messy communities. And that's built on remembering that Jesus has to clean up our mess too. To be humble and remember the old saying "There but the grace of God go I". Christ centered communities are open and welcoming to all kinds, loving people authentically.
- Let's Be Diligent- Jesus tells his disciples that the harvest is plenty and he's sent them to reap. He doesn't send them shopping, to the spa, or on vacation, but to work. It takes time and effort but that's what we're called to. I've been convicted lately how in my own life I'm so busy and don't leave myself enough flexibility to meet people where they are at. Let's remember our food is to do the will of our heavenly father. That's where true satisfaction is found for a believer.
- Let's Be Opportunistic- Jesus shares an important lesson here with his disciples. This woman, even with her poor reputation, brings others from her community to meet Jesus. And many of them believed. And Jesus points out to his disciples that the harvest is big. Do you believe that Calvary Murrieta? Does your life show it? Do you really believe there are lots and lots of others out there that God wants us to disciple, people ready to learn about Jesus and grow in Him?

And here's the cool thing: God doesn't just use community to bring others to the gospel, but uses existing communities to spread the gospel. Many leaders in our church have taken the Perspectives course on missions and sharing the gospel. In their curriculum, they like to point out how many Christ-centered communities that thrive have local people who came to Jesus and yet stayed in their community. They didn't abandon their families or their neighbors but stayed and shared. Our very individualistic Western culture somehow sees family conversions as inauthentic or shallow, but that's how many cultures in other parts of the world work. We see that in scripture with the Philippian jailer who has his whole family come and hear Paul after the earthquake. It happens like that all the time in many parts of the world. One story is about the Churas in Pakistan, an ethnic group that was marginalized by both Hindus and Muslims. One man in their tribe converted, stayed and shared with his people because other "Christians" in Pakistan wouldn't accept him or his family members, and Christianity spread among the Churas as groups converted and stayed where they were engaged in their communities. This chain conversion shows that bridges for bringing the gospel to new areas is often communities, not individuals. By practicing their new faith in their groups in their community, the gospel again is compelling, believable and true. And this still happens in America.

When I was in college at Cal Poly SLO, go Mustangs! I early on joined Campus Crusade, now called Cru. My freshman year they were meeting in a large classroom, with about 100 or so students. The following year it moved to the largest lecture hall on campus, with about 250 students. My 3rd year, we were in an auditorium with over 600 students. My last year we were filling the basketball gym, better than our own sports teams. I had little to do with this, but was privileged to see a community built on inviting and including others, starting new bible studies in dorms every year. And the cool thing was that the other Christian fellowships on campus didn't shrink!

A book that shares a lot of this idea is "Breaking the Huddle: How your community can grow its witness". While some might find it too similar to a marketing strategy book, it does give a positive sense of hope of what we can do as a community. I love a phrase it shares "God Moments can become God Movements" That moment with Jesus wasn't just for the woman at the well, it was for her community and sparked a movement in Samaria. That dream the Roman Centurian had wasn't just for him, but for Peter to share with his whole household. The earthquake wasn't just for Paul and Silas, but for the city of Philippi. God moments can become God movements, and those movements are family movements, tribal movements, people's movements around the world and here in Murrieta.

So our community can grow and should be welcoming and open to new people. But it also should be willing to send and support people to other communities as God moves. That's what we've been seeing the book of Acts this past year: people coming to the disciples and growing their community and also the disciples being sent out to start new communities. It's not an either/or but a both/and. We can multiply our own community and multiply communities around the world because the harvest is plenty, and God is lord of the harvest, He has all the power and resources to do it.

So as the music team comes up, let me ask you a question: Are you willing to leave the huddle and be part of His movement?

Let's Pray

(pray for the huddled, pray for the willing, pray for a movement)

Thank you, and I would love to meet with any of you, but especially those of you who want to join me in leading Community Groups, where hopefully we'll see more God moments become God movements.

