

SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY

The need to belong and to connect is a fundamental need with us.

Loneliness is a big challenge in the world today. Not just in one generation, but across the spectrum.

- 40% of American adults said that they were 'lonely' according to the TIME magazine
- The percentage amongst millennials who fall within the ages of around 23-37, was even higher at around 45%
- Gen Z which is comprised of ages 15 – 23, had an even higher result at around 48%

Christian Piatt, a renowned author, writes about 4 reasons that he came back to church. One of his reasons was around the fact that he found a place to belong:

"I found a place where I belong"

I talk to churches a lot about the difference between worship attendance, membership and the need to belong. Too often we see all three of these as the same, but they're not. I wanted to find a group of people passionate about things that mattered to me, and who would make a space for me, regardless of whether we agreed on everything, or if I gave enough money, or if I had signed my name in some official book.

For a lot of churches, that affirmation of feeling like you belong comes after you commit to membership as part of an institution. The problem for me was that I didn't really care about their institution; I only cared about the people. I came to understand the value of some institutions along the way, but young adults don't inherently trust institutions the way previous generations have, and we don't care nearly as much about preserving them either.

I'll close this piece out with a short list of all the things that didn't matter so much in my decision to come back to Christianity, but which many churches assume are critical to their transformation:

- *I didn't care that much about the preaching.*
- *It didn't matter to me that there wasn't an elaborate music program.*
- *I didn't care what denomination the church was a part of.*
- *I didn't care about their doctrines or creeds*
- *I didn't care if the carpet was nice, the garden was manicured or the bathrooms smelled fresh*

All of those things are nice, I guess. I'm sure they're important to someone. But I can hear great sermons online. I can download more great music to my iPod than I can listen to in a lifetime. I can join a fancy country club and feel like I'm a part important. What I can't get in other parts of my life is authenticity. Everything else was nice, but it wasn't what brought me back.

People are searching for an authentic community. A place that is real.

- Technology, which in many ways makes us feel more connected, in fact only isolates us further. It's a false sense of connection

I came across this picture recently.

Christoph niemann and a graphic artist. He recently drew this which I think sums up societies problem when it comes to social media and technology.

PICTURE of PHONE FRIDGE

The world is hungry for connection, for purpose, but we're looking in something that will only leave us feeling lonelier over time. The world is searching for God, but they want the real thing. To see a people that operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, to see a community that loves deeply.

- ⇒ **Many people** come to church to connect and to find friends. But if we were just a community, we would have missed it. We're called to be supernatural community! We're called to be a community that lives sacrificially and that operates in their giftings. A community that prays for healing, that hears God for one another. A supernatural Community.

And so here we see the account of the early church. Where this value of supernatural community living stood out. Let's have a look at Acts 2:42-47

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO FELLOWSHIP

- ⇒ **Sometimes the word fellowship can be known as a strong Christian word if that makes sense, but isn't always understood properly.**
- ⇒ The word used for fellowship is koinoinia – it is the same word used for communion. When we think of communion we think of a relationship that is very closely knit together. The community was a communion of people.
- ⇒ Community is something that is lacking in our society today. Often people don't know their next door neighbours. There are fewer 'hubs' in society where the community naturally meets. When we do spend time with others, it is often with people who are just like us. Society is crying out for authentic community.

Community has been on God's heart since the beginning

Community wasn't something that was introduced in the book of Acts.

It was God's since the beginning.

- Gen 12, God made a promise to Abraham that his descendants would be made into a nation.
- Further on, the prophets were God's voice to draw nations back to God. Apart from neglecting God, the Israelites had neglected their community, things like justice for the poor and the needy.

This Acts passage sets the standard for us as NT believers.

Check the emphasis on community in our Acts passage:

- v44 They had everything in common.
- v45 They gave to anyone as they had need.
- v46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.
- v46 They broke bread in their homes and ate together
- v47 Praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.

It was close knit communion that looked after the needy, prayed together, saw the power of God move amongst them, supported each other, broke bread together, was generous with their possessions, and hospitable with their homes.

Not convinced? Let's fast forward by 2 chapters:

Check out Acts 4:32-35

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

So how do we foster community?

1) COMMUNITIES CONNECT (Had everything in Common)

- At the end of the day, Church as awesome as it is, doesn't foster deep relationship and connection. Notice that apart from meeting at the temple, Luke's writes about them meeting and breaking bread in their homes.
- When we meet in our homes we invite people into our space, We're more vulnerable. You'll see that we aren't perfect, you'll see how we interact. This is such a good thing, because it's how we live life together.
- **Apart from Church**, there is such value in some kind of small group or cell group. Whether it's a weekly cell group, an early morning prayer meeting, A weekly cycle around Chapmans with a few friends which includes a connection time. Connecting in the worship ministry. Within our weekly cycle, we need to connect in some way.

- Please hear me here, This isn't just about Cell Groups, this is about how we foster community as a church. One of the main ways to do this is through Cell groups, but it's not the only way. Our main context here is within small groups because that's the most natural and Biblical way

One of the first things we did in CT was to start a community group. Because we knew we needed it. We invited some people, and what do you know, most of them decided to come. And 18 months later, we're just about ready to start another one.

You have to put yourself out there. It's a journey that you go on. A trust journey..after a few months a deeper connection begins to form, you start to get comfortable in your group, and a vulnerability begins to develop. And slowly but surely, the group starts to feel like family.

We express our love for one another through community

2) COMMUNITIES SACRIFICE

(they sold their possessions and property to give to anyone in need)

Hebrews 13:16

¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

I know what you're thinking: Tristan my life is so busy, This is something EXTRA to go to, to juggle. I'll never have the time.

The problem in our society is that we're often told to forge our own individual identity.

Think about some slogans:

- Mcdonalds – Im lovin it
- Red Bull – It gives you wings
- L'Oreal – Because you're worth it
- Apple – Think Different

There aren't any slogans that say: 'Do it for the community'

What's the lie: You don't need others, you can do this life alone...Here's what happens with this.

For example, maybe you're a single parent. You might be juggling a busy job, keeping up with friends, trying to look after a family. Still finding time for the gym and whatever else. But what happens when let's say, a close family member falls ill? "Well I'll have to try and fit that in too", And why does no-one care?

- The lie is that you've believed that this is how life should be. 'Fending for yourself'
- Sometimes you hear people say: I don't do the church thing, I have private relationship with God. Unfortunately, Gods heart is expressed through community. You can't walk out the Christian faith in isolation. You just can't

BUT what if our primary identity was to be God's children, and our primary community was to be God's people?

When this is the case, when we value community, well then when something happens to one member of the Christian family, it has implications for the whole group – because we are a family. We are accountable to each other.

- Sometimes people feel bad when they've missed cell group for a few weeks, my heart is never to made it legalistic, but its rather a matter of saying: We missed you when you weren't here because we couldn't journey with you. We missed your contribution to the group.
- Valuing community requires sacrifice. But we receive from others sacrifice.

The beauty of community, when you belong to a small group of some kind. Is that there's sacrificial living. We get to lay down our lives for one another.

So back to our story about the single parent, You've got all this going on and a family member falls desperately ill. Well, the community gathers around and perhaps offers to take your children to school. They might offer to drive you to the hospital if you can't get there. Perhaps you're battling to pay a month's rent, well that's where your community can help. It's sacrificial living. And of course, they offer prayer for you and your family.

It is all rosy? No. It gets messy. Some nights we might feel tired, or the house is a mess When we first hosted a group in PE, we would cram 20 people in a space of 18 square meters. If was a sacrifice. Some nights I would think, what are we doing? But you after everyone left each time, we had such a sense of joy and peace!

It's a community that has everything in common. This only happen through spending time with each other!

3) COMMUNITIES ARE SAFE

We look out for each other. But we also value accountability. This is a word we don't always like. Sometimes the word 'control' comes to mind.

- Biblical accountability to designed to give account for one another. To support one another, to speak into each other's lives.

Some weeks its hard, but it's safe and its good

- ⇒ STORY about our group: Reaching a deep level of sharing our weaknesses and struggles to one another. sharing deeply about our vulnerabilities.

It's about listening to each other

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (The World War 2 German Theologian) says this about listening

"There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening, that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person. This is no fulfillment

of our obligation, and it is certain that here too our attitude toward our brother only reflects our relationship to God. It is little wonder that we are no longer capable of the greatest service of listening that God has committed to us, that of hearing our brother's confession, if we refuse to give ear to our brother on lesser subjects. Secular education today is aware that often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him seriously, and upon this insight it has constructed its own soul therapy, which has attracted great numbers of people, including Christians. But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."

COMMUNITIES GROW US IN SPIRIT LIFE

⇒ When I refer to Spirit life, I'm referring to living in the power of the Holy Spirit

This ones really important. A Christian small group, community group, cell group, can't only be a support time. Or a social time. It's in community that we grow as Christians.

We worship

- Giving thanks for something in the week
- Streaming some worship songs
- Someone brings a guitar
- We pray

We learn from God's Word

We minister to each other

- We hear encouraging words from God for each other
- We listen to people
- We pray for them, for healing, for breakthrough
- As we pray for people we will begin to see healing and breakthrough
- We will hear God for one another

A supernatural community of believers will begin flowing in the supernatural
It's the place where we practice and its safe

We model the Christian walk

Small groups are the place where we really get to exercise our spiritual giftings
Hospitality, teaching, encouraging, shepherding...

We become a blessing to each other – being generous with our possessions, hospitable with our homes, popping in on people to see how they are, listening to each other, supportive in time and prayer. Sharing our lives fully and authentically with each other.

So where does this leave us? Well, It starts with your heart. How do we respond to this?

1 Peter 3:8

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

Do you see five traits that stand out here?

1. He says first, **all of you be "Like Minded (Harmonious),"** that is, having a common mindset, not necessarily all the same tastes or gifts or habits, but the same thoughts and values
2. Next, **all of you be "sympathetic,"** As South Africans we're so good at saying: 'Ag shame' But this is sympathy and empathy that goes beyond us. That feels for each other. We don't take one other people's burdens, but we journey with them.
3. Next, **all of you be "brotherly,"** View each other as close family. I believe our church family, our community can reach the point of being as close as our real family. You might say no. Think about it! Jesus adopted us into his family, We were strangers to him, and he now calls us sons and daughters.
4. Next, **all of you be "compassionate."** This not a word about conduct but about your insides—literally, your innards, your belly. The literal translation of the Greek here means "feel generous in your belly."
5. Finally, **all of you be "humble in spirit."** Be authentic and real

⇒ **These traits are attractive to others. We begin to radiate Christ!**

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US AS A CHURCH?

Well let's have another look at this picture from earlier.

- What are you searching for? And is it working for you? Are you lonely?
- Well, is community and connection a value for you?
- How have you formed your identity? As a child of God or as an individual.
- How connected are you?
- Maybe you're in a cell group already? How is that going? Perhaps you need to have a chat with you group and decide on some values in the group.
- Maybe you aren't part of a cell group. Well I really want to encourage you to connect. Chat to one of us as pastors. We are wanting to launch some new cell groups, but we need homes and people. It's time to plug in

You know what's so amazing, is that when we're following the example of Acts 2, we will begin to see God adding to our numbers. A super natural community of believers is attractive and contagious!

What's your next step? How can you play a role in fostering our community. In making this an irresistible community for outsiders.

PROPRESENTER

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 4:32-35

Hebrews 13:16

1 Peter 3:8