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10 Unexpected Benefits of Real Community

Your group of friends might be enriching your life even more than you think.

By Debra Fileta

Here's a story with which you may be familiar.

Boy meets girl. They fall in love. They have a big wedding, in which all their friends and loved ones show up to celebrate their big day.

And then, following that wedding, those same friends and loved ones stop hearing from the newlywed couple. The marriage relationship has become so prioritized that their other friendships and relationships nearly dissolve altogether.

Sound familiar?

As a professional counselor, author and relationship expert, I wonder if our Christian culture at large tends to get fixated on romantic relationships, without remembering the other important relationships that God calls us into. Somehow, we've fallen prey to the dangerous mindset of seeing marriage as *the* only relationship that is supposed to reflect the Body of Christ.

As important as marriage is within the Church, I can't help but wonder: what about the other significant relationships God calls us into? What about our relationships with other believers that God has placed into our lives? What about mentorship, discipleship and friendship? What about community?

Here are some reasons community might have more benefits than we think it does:

1. Community Challenges You to be More Like Jesus. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Nothing makes you more like Jesus than the daily grind of interactions with others. We often think about marriage when it comes to this refining process, but the truth is God also gives us community as a way to become more like Him. God's Word reminds us that we are put in

relationships in order to encourage one another in our pursuit of God and His Kingdom. It's within the context of community that we are given the opportunity to be refined as followers of Christ.

2. Community Meets Practical Needs. (Acts 2:42-47)

Just like in the early Church, community is a place where we come to get our physical needs met. We need to learn to let down our walls and ask for help from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Whether we need someone to pick up medicine for us when we're sick, cook us a meal at the end of a long week or help us carry a financial burden, the Body of Christ was made to support and love one another in practical ways. We can learn a lot about love within the exchange of practical needs.

3. Community Carries You Emotionally. (Galatians 6:2)

Just as important as physical needs are the emotional needs we carry through life. We are given the the responsibility to support each other in hard times and to carry one another's burdens. As much as we need to be available for our brothers and sisters in Christ, we also need to have the courage to ask them to come alongside of us when we're the ones in need of support, prayer or a shoulder to cry on.

It's important to learn to be real with one another, because that's what true community is all about.

4. Community Reveals Your Gifts and Talents. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Two are better than one, because there is double the strength, double the stamina and double the talents.

Within the context of community we're given the opportunity to discover our gifts and our talents and then use them to bless others. We're each given a very specific role in the Body of Christ, and it is within these relationships that our roles can be used to glorify God to the fullest. We're part of something really special (1 Corinthians 12:27).

5. Community Opens Your Eyes to the Needs of Others. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Within community, we are encouraged to look around at the needs of those around us. We're called to strengthen those who are weak and to and encourage those who are down and out. Community calls us out of our self-centeredness and self-absorption by giving us the responsibility to look outward.

6. Community Empowers Your Relationship With God. (Proverbs 27:17)

There is something real about the concept of power in numbers. When we are surrounded by other believers, we feel empowered in our faith and may even be more sensitive to God's presence in our lives. There's something powerful about believers joining together, making each other

accountable and being a sort of a witness of one another's lives. We need people checking in on us, asking the hard questions, and challenging us to really live out our faith.

7. Community Helps Meet Our Need for Love. (Proverbs 17:17)

There's no denying that we are men and women who crave love. We were made to, by a relational God who longs for us to be in relationship with Him. But even more amazing, is that God gives us the gift of each other as a way to meet our earthly needs for love. This brotherly love (*phileo*) that we're given is a beautiful representation of the greatest Friend who laid down His life for us. We're also called to love each other in this beautiful way.

8. Community Offers Opportunities for Confession, Which Leads to Healing. (James 5:16)

There's power in confession. It gives us the chance to bring to light the things that have been holding us back in darkness. Within community, we're given the opportunity to get real with one another, to confess our sins, and to break free from the things that are holding us back from living God's best life. True community requires transparency, authenticity, and confession.

9. Community Teaches You to Work Through Conflicts. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Bring any group of people together and one thing is certain: conflict is inevitable. But we're called to work through our divisions with one another as the Body of believers. We're asked to be a united Body, which isn't always easy or natural. It's a humbling experience that teaches us to lay down our pride, to learn assertiveness, and to enhance our communication.

We need each other, because it's within the messiness of relationships with one other that we're reminded of our desperate need for Him.

10. Community Gives You the Chance to Forgive. (1 Peter 4:8-11)

There is nothing more beautiful than the picture of the Gospel displayed through our healthy interactions as a Body of believers. Within this Body, we're bound to get hurt, and then guaranteed the opportunity to forgive. We get to feel what Jesus felt as He suffered wounds at the hands of the people He loved, and then loved them anyway. This is the hardest part about community, but it's the part that makes us most like Him.

Every day we are called to become more like Jesus, and community is one of the ways that we are invited to do so. So, what does that look like in your life?