

You've Lost it. Get it Back.
Authentic Community
Clay Weed

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Mark 2:1-5 (NLT)

1 When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. 2 Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, 3 four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. 4 They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. 5 Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Mark 2:11-12 (NLT)

11 "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" 12 And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- How has your connection to authentic community been impacted over the past two years?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- **Read Mark 2:1-5.** What does this passage reveal about the importance of living in an authentic community of faith in Christ?
- Clay shared some of the differences between friends that are authentic and counterfeit. If you looked in the mirror, what kind of friend are you?
- **Read Acts 2:42-47.** Notice that the early believers in Christ did life together and devoted themselves to regular spiritual disciplines. How does this model fit into a modern context?
- In what ways can our small group impact the lives of those around us for the sake of Christ? What can you do to put those ideas into action?
- Clay stated that "Authentic Community is God's plan for your life." Describe some differences between counterfeit and authentic community.
- **Read Mark 2:11-12.** As many people had never seen anything like the paralyzed man's healing, there are many people in Brunswick County who have never experienced the value of Authentic Community. What can you do to bring about this change?
- Clay demonstrated the power of community using Solo cups, can you share an experience from your life that demonstrates this same power of a united and faithful, authentic community?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- List some steps you can take to ensure that you are living in authentic community; prioritize them and take action. Some examples are serving together, fellowship and praying for each other.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Pray for God to be the center of your community, and that your small group continues to walk and grow together, serving and loving your neighbors, just as He intended for you.

Proverbs 27:5-6 (NLT)

5 An open rebuke is better than hidden love! 6 Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Question: "What is a church community group?"

Answer: Church community groups are also called life groups or small groups. A church community group consists of a handful of people who attend the same local church. They meet together at different times during the week for Bible study, service projects, and/or fellowship. As churches grow larger, often with multiple services or multiple locations, community groups keep people connected with one another. As church structure evolves to stay relevant with the culture, church community groups have for the most part replaced the older concepts of Sunday school or Wednesday night prayer meetings. The goal of most biblically faithful churches is to create community groups that foster discipleship, prayer, connection, and accountability. The number of participants in each church community group is usually limited so that deep and long-lasting relationships are cultivated and maintained.

The model for church community groups is found in the book of Acts when believers met together in homes to eat, fellowship, and take communion (Acts 2:41–42, 46). They would read the apostles' letters, discuss them, pray, and challenge each other to keep the faith (Acts 20:7–8). A church community group that functions correctly is a little church within a church. There is usually a leader who facilitates the meeting and keeps everyone informed of time changes and upcoming events. He or she also stays connected to the local church leadership and is accountable for the needs and spiritual growth of the members of the community group.

Despite the praiseworthy goals of church community groups, there are some things to watch out for. In our increasingly noncommittal world, community group leaders are often frustrated at the ever-fluctuating attendance at meetings. A community group is only as healthy as its membership. When a leader has prepared a meal, a home, and a lesson during the workweek, it can be discouraging when no one shows up. Some community groups have become so popular with members that they left the local church to become a "church" unto themselves. These situations rarely turn out well because they have taken themselves out from under the spiritual authority God gave pastors and elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). Oversight by the church leaders is vital to prevent false teaching in the community group and to keep everyone focused on the goal.

It is within church community groups that the "one anothers" of Scripture take place. When the Bible tells Christians to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), pray for one another (James 5:16), accept one another (Romans 15:7), and forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), it implies that we are in close relationship with other Christians. Clearly, in a church of several thousand, the pastor cannot visit every sick person or take a meal to every new mother. And regardless of how friendly or outgoing a member may be, he or she cannot personally know an entire crowd seen only for an hour on Sunday morning. So the pastor and staff rely on the community group leaders to take care of the members of their groups.

A community group functions best when it is merely an extension of the larger church body. When each group is studying the same things, there is cohesion rather than division. When leaders are held to a clearly stated standard of morality and personal discipleship, the group tends to follow suit. Megachurches understand the void felt when large Sunday morning gatherings seem like a sea of strangers, and they are often vigorous in creating church community groups that keep members connected and in relationship with each other. It is the job of teaching pastors to communicate to the congregation the importance of community groups, even stressing regular attendance as a part of church membership.

In many ways, the first-century church was a series of community groups. They all studied the same Scriptures (Acts 17:11), read the same letters from the apostles (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27), and adhered to the same standards for public worship (1 Corinthians 11–14). They met in homes throughout the week (Acts 2:46) and established close, personal relationships with each other (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 2:17). When modern church community groups strive for the same unity (Ephesians 4:3; Psalm 133:1), they are fulfilling the expectations Jesus has for His church (Matthew 16:18).