

THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY - NOTES

PASTOR ALEX KRANJEC

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Life Group Notes

Main Truth: We're better together. We were created to gather together, do life beside each other, and walk toward God within community.

In all the attempts of our society to become more connected, studies show we are actually more isolated than ever before. However, social media does have many benefits. **Reflect for a moment on how you are using social media technology. What are you doing successfully? What areas need to be improved?**

One of the core values of Calvary Church is *People Developing*. In that we say, "We encourage growth in Christ through 1) Sunday worship experiences, 2) small groups, 3) mentoring relationships, 4) outreach or missions opportunities, and various other ministries. In those contexts we develop friendships, learn how to care for each other and experience life together. Our goal is total life transformation!" **How is your life being transformed as a result of this? Stop for a moment and discuss how your life group is developing. Rejoice over the victories you have experienced. Discuss ways you might be able to improve your community and fellowship with each other.**

The Greek word here in Acts 2 for fellowship is *koinonia*, which means "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, close relationships, participation, willing contribution, and partnership."

This fellowship, or *koinonia*, can be boiled down into two main categories 1) having a share in, and 2) giving a share in. Having a share tells us that because we are in Christ we share something at the core in common. This has more to do with who we are than what we do.

1. We fellowship with others because we first have fellowship with Christ. Read 1 John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 1:9, and John 14:23. We've been invited into a divine community - of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Bruce Demarest puts it this way:

"As apprentices of Jesus, we must intentionally and prayerfully model the others-centeredness, intimacy, trust, honest communication, and unconditional love that He exhibited in relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit as a member of the social Trinity. To experience transformation into wholeness and holiness, we are called to cultivate, nurture, and sustain the quality of relationships experienced between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We do this by imitating Jesus' life on earth, which flowed from His life in the Trinity."

How does our fellowship with others flow out of our fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

2. We are designed and created to do life together. In Genesis 2:18 we read, "Then the Lord God said, 'it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper

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fit for him.” The word *man* here means mankind, more than it means male. In the same way that our bodies were designed to require water and nutritious food, we need regular community and fellowship. **What is it about how we were created that makes fellowship so important? How have you seen the consequences of loneliness impact your life?**

3. In Christ we are part of God’s family. The common blood line that now runs through all of us is the Holy Spirit. Read Ephesians 1:5 and reflect on what it means to be part of God’s family through Christ. Regardless of your family history, when we come to Christ we are adopted into the family of God and the common “bloodline” that runs between Christians is the Holy Spirit. All previous divisions of class and identities become secondary. **How does understanding this impact us in following the second commandment to love others well?**

Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

The second form of *koinonia* has to do with “giving a share in”. This is about action and function - “sharing with, participation, contribution and partnership.”

1. True fellowship is not about what I can get, but rather what I can give. The early church gave themselves away to God and each other. They were “radically unselfish.” Do you view church as a place to get something, or a place to give? **What ways can you grow in unselfish living? What ways can you, and will you, give and serve the body of Christ?**

2. True fellowship is made up of many gifts - no matter how big or small we think they are. 1 Corinthians 12 talked about the many parts of the body and how important each role is in the body of Christ. **How are you stewarding the gifts God has given you within the community of Christ?**

3. True fellowship is committed to the mission of Jesus Christ. John 13:35 says, “your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” Unfortunately the church has often communicated a very different message to the world around us. Jesus intended for our *agape* love for one another to be our distinction. **Envision how biblical fellowship is attractive to our world! How does your love for others (both in and out of God’s family) bring salt and flavor to our world? Are others attracted to the way you love? What are you doing as a life group that demonstrates to the community around you the love you have?**

4. True fellowship takes hard work through vulnerability and grace. Read and reflect on Galatians 6:2 and James 5:16. The early church shared each others burdens and confessed sin to each other. Vulnerability basically means to be known, to deny self, and to be open to others. **What does it look like to be vulnerable with others? How do we experience grace and freedom when we allow ourselves to be known? How will you carry the burdens of those you love?**

5. True fellowship is the context for corporate worship. Part of the fellowship of the church in Acts 2 was corporate worship - they gave, prayed, praised, broke bread, and

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committed to the Apostle's teaching. **Why is it important for us to gather to do this (both in the context of Sunday mornings and life group)? How does understanding and living true biblical fellowship impact our corporate gatherings?**

Transcript

Acts 2:42-47 NLT

“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 favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

So this morning I want to go back to our **Worship Series**, where I left off back last summer when we focused on this passage in Acts 2 and talked specifically about the Lord's Supper. **Visit our website or App to review previous parts of the Worship Series.*

Vince Lombardi was the legendary coach for the Green Bay Packers from 1959-1967 and then coached the Washington Redskins for one year. His career stats included 96 wins to 34 losses, six Division championships, two conference championships, and two Superbowl wins. He won Coach of the Year in 1959, was inducted into the hall of fame in 1971, and is the namesake for the current Superbowl trophy. One of the things that contributed to his success was his review of the basics at the beginning of every season:

“All the players knew that at the first team meeting, the legendary coach would waste no time getting straight to the point. Many of the men, half Lombardi's age and twice his size, were openly fearful, dreading the encounter.

The coach did not disappoint them, and, in fact, delivered his message in one of the great one-liners of all time.

Football in hand, the great coach walked to the front of the room, took several seconds to look over the assemblage in silence, held out the pigskin in front of him, and said, “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

The story goes that Lombardi stressed fundamentals. After holding up the football as though they had never seen one and describing its importance; He would then take the team out and show them the field. He'd point out the out-of-bounds lines and the end zones. Then, he would remind the players that the football is to go across the end zone line.

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I believe Acts 2 lays somewhat of a foundation for the Christian church and an ideal picture of what the church should aspire to be in all generations. It offers us a reminder of the basics that Jesus calls us to - the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread (including the Lord's Supper), and prayer. These are the four main areas we must continually devote ourselves to.

So today we will focus on the **The Worshipping Community**. When the worshipping community gathers, it's not an isolated, random event where a bunch of random individuals come together. Fellowship and community are key to who we are as human beings and as the church of Jesus Christ!

Main Truth: We're better together. We were created to gather together, do life beside each other, and walk toward God within community.

Each of us longs for community, or true fellowship - to be part of something, to be connected to one another.

Over the last 10 years our society has made crazy advances in social media technology. We should be more "connected" than ever before. Americans in 21st century devote more technology to staying connected than any society in history - yet we feel increasingly alone. It could be said that the greatest disease today is loneliness.

- Only 20% of world cultures and societies are considered individualistic. America is at the top of that list. The rest focus more on collectivism and family.
- In the last 30 years the number of people whom the average American discussed "important matters" with dropped from 3 to 2.
- 1/4 of US households are just one person. More people are living alone than ever before.
- Social connection has powerful effects on health - loneliness leads to shorter lifespan, difficulty with stress, weaker immune system and greater risk of certain illnesses. Not to mention it's one of the leading causes of suicide.
- Being neighborly used to mean visiting people, now being nice to your neighbors means not bothering them.
- Isolation, loneliness and social rejection has led many to drugs and alcohol. "Have a drink or pill that makes you feel better. Depression medication is on the rise.

So in all our attempts to "get connected" we have actually grown further apart. Take a minute and think about the amount of people you would share your "important matters" of life with. Not how many Facebook friends or Twitter followers you have, or even people that you regularly talk with. But people you would share deeper things of life with - your questions, doubts, challenges, failures, victories, great joys?

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Are you relationally connected to others? Are you living in the context of community? Or do you feel alone and isolated? How are we doing as a church? Is fellowship just another program to be added to our busy schedules? Or maybe it's Pastor Josh's job now as the connections pastor?

One of our core values as a church is what we call *people developing*. In that we say;

“We encourage growth in Christ through 1) Sunday worship experiences, 2) small groups, 3) mentoring relationships, 4) outreach or missions opportunities, and various other ministries. In those contexts we develop friendships, learn how to care for each other and experience life together. Our goal is total life transformation!”

What we mean is that in order to grow as a disciple, as a Christian, we need to experience life together. Walking in Christian fellowship and community is essential for total life transformation!

So what is this fellowship all about? Acts 2 tells us they devoted themselves to fellowship. It might be an odd word for you. I don't hear people using that word much in our culture and if you have any church background you might think of things like - “fellowship hall” or church potlucks, awkward ice breaker games, and so on. Whatever your past associations with the word, let's endeavor to see what the Bible teaches us about the nature of the worshipping community.

The Greek word here in Acts 2 for fellowship is *koinonia*, say that with me, *koinonia*, which means “**close association involving mutual interests and sharing, close relationships, participation, willing contribution, and partnership.**”

This fellowship, or *koinonia*, can be boiled down into two main categories 1) having a share in, and 2) giving a share in.

1. Having a Share In tells us that because we are in Christ we share something at the core in common. This has more to do with who we are than what we do.

1. We fellowship with others because we first have fellowship with Christ.

1 John 1:3 tells us, “**...And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.**”

and 1 Corinthians 1:9 - “**God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.**”

The communion that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have shared for all eternity, we get to be part of through Jesus and the indwelling Spirit. God is a communal God by nature, and we are invited into that.

Fellowship with the Christian community flows out of the very life we've been given through Christ. The basis for our fellowship with others is the grace we've received in salvation through Christ.

2. We were designed and created to do life together.

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Scientists once thought that the smallest particles were protons, neutrons, and electrons. Recent research in particle physics has shown that subatomic particles known as quarks form one of the two basic constituents of matter. Quarks, however, do not exist alone but only as three pairs of two. The smallest things scientists have discovered exist only in relationships - as three interacting pairs of two.

The very universe demonstrates the Creator's intent. Isn't that interesting - three interacting pairs of two. It's almost as if the Creator God designed our very matter to reflect His desire to bring us into community with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! And when He created us, He formed us to do life together too.

God makes a profound statement in Genesis 2:18 - **“Then the Lord God said, ‘it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”** So God created woman. Then He tells them to be fruitful and multiply, to create additional community. In just the second chapter of the Bible we get a glimpse of who our God is and how His Kingdom works - we were created to do life together!

3. In Christ we are part of God's family. The common blood line that now runs through all of us is the Holy Spirit. God loves family, and in Genesis 2 we see how central the family unit is in the Kingdom of God. If you know Jesus today, you've been adopted into God's family. We were made and created to do life together in the context of family.

Ephesians 1:5 - “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.”

I don't know what your family origins are, and whether or not you find it important. My family name, Kranjec, is from Croatia, a country in Europe just south of Germany and east of Italy. It's where my dad was born and raised. It's pretty cool, but I really don't know much about it, and I've never been there. But one of my brothers thinks it's a big deal. He even has a tattoo of something Croatia-related on both of his arms. His heritage is a big deal to him. He's been there, and wants to go back. He roots for the Croatian soccer teams, and all of that.

That's kind of like what happens when we come to Jesus. He adopts us into His family and Jesus' heritage - all that belongs to Him - becomes ours! And we now root for a heavenly team! Our Christian heritage is a big deal for us Christians!

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 - 12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. 13 Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

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Under Christ, we are baptized into God's family that is birthed out of Judaism, anchored in the Gospel, sustained for two thousand years of church history, and millions of brothers and sisters. Our primary identity is now redeemed. Kranjec becomes secondary, male/female becomes secondary, black/white, young/old, rich/poor; these things become secondary. They are not our primary means of identity any longer. We submit them to Jesus because we see they aren't ultimates. Your social, racial, financial, or gender status won't save and redeem you. We aren't saying they are no longer important parts of who you are, just they aren't the ultimate parts of who we are! We all have His Spirit within us - we are linked to Jesus' heritage and share in the same Spirit! It's the blood line of Christ's family.

This leads to the second form of fellowship, or *koinonia*...

2. Giving a Share In. While "having a share in" was about identity, "giving a share in" is about action and function. In verse 22 Paul begins talking about the care we have for the body. This is the part of *koinonia* that means "sharing with, participation, contribution, and partnership."

Let's continue on in **1 Corinthians 12**...

14 Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. 15 If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. 21 The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. 23 And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, 24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.

25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

1. True fellowship is made up of many gifts - no matter how big or small we think they are. Paul is saying, regardless of how significant you think a part to be, each part matters. In true fellowship we understand our individuality is actually based out of participation in the whole body. The parts of the body only function correctly when they

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are part of the whole. You don't see any loner heads or outcast feet walking around. Body parts only function within the whole.

Do you know God has given you particular gifts and abilities that are desperately needed in the body of Christ; that are desperately needed here at Calvary Church? Do you know that your voice is important every Sunday when we sing together! Your gift, no matter what you think of the size, skill, sound, amount, is important! No gift is unimportant, no contribution is too small.

Each gift, each role, each person matters to Jesus. True fellowship says there is no lesser gift and that each person is vital to the overall health of the body. When one person is hurting, or unhealthy, it impacts the potential of the whole. Being in fellowship with one another means I am stewarding the gifts God has given me and I am contributing to the community.

2. True fellowship is not about what I can get, but rather what I can give. In acts 2:42 when it says, "they devoted themselves" it refers to giving something away. To devote something means you give it away, you set it apart. You set it aside. So, the early church gave themselves away to learning about Jesus, to worship, prayer, and to fellowship. They gave themselves away to God then to each other. The early church, as Pastor Tim Keller put it, was "radically unselfish".

When you walk in here on a Sunday morning do you come asking, "what can I give today" or do you come in focused on what you can receive? How about in your relationships? Is it about what you can get out of them or is about what you can give? True fellowship reminds us that it's not about us. Life is bigger than me.

The early church gave away what they had, they cared for the sick and the poor, they devoted themselves to serving their neighborhood together. That's what true fellowship is all about!

3. True fellowship is committed to the mission of Jesus Christ. Did you know that one of Jesus' primary missions strategies is Christian fellowship? Jesus said in **John 13:35 NLT** "**Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.**" Jesus is saying when we love, or *agape*, each other in community we announce to the world what it means to be a follower of Jesus. *Agape* means to "love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection." We were all undeserving and we all rejected and disappointed God at one time, yet in the midst of that He loved us. So we are to love others in the same way. It hurts my heart to see the reputation the church has for how we love others in our culture today! Our love is supposed to be our primary distinction!

Do you know that kind of love is missional! That's how I became a disciple. In the midst of the rejection and brokenness of the relationships in my life, two people showed me *agape* love. They accepted me, and all my junk, and loved me. They didn't ask me to be a better person first, they just loved me. And I saw the love they had for each other in Christian marriage, and the way they loved our little youth group.

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Paula Fuller in the book *The Kingdom Life* says:

“We are God’s chosen strategy for the world. The Spirit-energized community of Jesus’ disciples is God’s agency of reconciliation in this world as it calls all people to be reconciled to each other across divisions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality as they are reconciled to God (see Matthew 5:24; 9:35-38; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Witness comes both through the declaration of the gospel message and through the example of living out the gospel message as a family of faith characterized by humility, purity, accountability, discipline, reconciliation, restoration, and forgiveness.”

Our relationships are an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Jesus to our world. It’s the best tool for missions that we have! I love missions trips (I’ve been on a ton of them), I love outreach events, I love the Hope4Philly’s and Egg Hunts! Those demonstrate our love for our community and world on a larger scale. We need those things! But those are macro events that ought to flow out of micro realities. What if we started with laying our lives down for our kids, our spouses, our friends, our neighbors. What if we served and loved them day in and day out, self sacrificially, whether they deserve it or not? True fellowship is missional because it demonstrates and invites others into the redeeming and transforming love of Christ.

4. True fellowship takes hard work through vulnerability and grace. While our bloodline might now be the same and we have this great thing in common, true fellowship does not just happen. It takes hard work. The early church worked on it. It took participation and contribution from each person. They shared each others burdens (Galatians 6:2) and confessed sin to each other (James 5:16). True fellowship is messy - it often brings out the worst in us. Yet, God uses that to redeem the best in us!

Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp in their book, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* say, “God uses other people to mysteriously and counter-intuitively rescue us from self-glory and self-love. Why does He do that? Because He loves us more than we love ourselves.”

Many of us, in an attempt to hold on to our individualism and our honor, will go a lifetime avoiding the messiness required to growing in true Biblical fellowship with others - even in our closest relationships. True fellowship takes hard work. But it’s so worth it!

Vulnerability basically means to be known, to deny self, and to be open to others. We were designed for vulnerability. Think about it, well not for too long, but we were made fully exposed - no mask to wear or persona to maintain. There was no shame.

In Christian fellowship we let down the walls that we used to put up. We share our lives in a way that we would never have done with people before. Before, being open and honest meant weakness. For the way to make it in life is by hiding your flaws and not allowing anyone to see your weaknesses. You want to make sure people think

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you're in charge and have it all together. Before vulnerability meant weakness, but now it means freedom.

But remember what we said, it's hard work. I believe living in open, honest, and vulnerable relationships is part of what Paul refers to in Philippians 3:10, "**that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.**" What's the word there for fellowship - *koinonia*. We can be vulnerable because Jesus came and demonstrated ultimate vulnerability - laying down His life for you and me. Creator God became one of us. That's vulnerability! Paul is saying we are invited to participate and share in Christ's sufferings. And one of the ways we do that is by opening our lives to others and giving up some of ourselves. It's hard work, but in that process we actually experience grace, freedom and the power of the resurrection!

5. True fellowship is the context for corporate worship.

Look at what the church did in Acts 2 - they did corporate worship - they gave finances, they prayed, they praised, they broke bread, and they committed to learning the Apostles' teaching. That sounds a lot like what we do here on Sunday mornings.

Why is it so important that we gather together to do this? Think about praise for a moment.

C.S. Lewis said, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed."

You hear what Lewis is saying there? When you find something you love - a certain food, a particular song, a piece of artwork, a great movie, a really good sports play or athlete... when we see something beautiful, Lewis says something about that beautiful thing makes you want to grab someone and say, "Look at this, you have to see this! You have to watch this, or listen to this or you have to eat this!"

Why is that? Beautiful things demand praise. Pastor Tim Keller says that "the joy you get from a beautiful object has to get out. It has to liberate itself in praise." Lewis tells us that we don't just express our joy in praise, we complete our joy when we praise. The more beautiful the object, the more it demands praise. That's why we gather every week. Its why you should gather your family regularly, and why you should be part of community another day of the week. Heck, the early church gathered every day. They saw the risen Lord, were filled with His Spirit, and saw the beauty of Jesus on display as people were healed, delivered, and saved. The more they saw and the more they learned, the more they needed to praise.

I love how John Piper puts it, he says that "before Christianity is a philosophy, before it's a theology, before it's an ethic or way of life, Christianity is news. Staggeringly good news for weak and helpless and undeserving sinners,"

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You see, news is not really news unless it is told, unless it is announced. I'd suggest what makes news really good news is if it causes you to want to share it with others. You might "like" a Facebook post, but if it's really good you'll probably "share" it. News must be shared and told in the context of other people. There is no church without both news and fellowship. In other words, proclamation and revelation of God and people to tell it to and share it with.

If we are coming as a bunch of individuals to watch what is happening up here, to be entertained, or to simply receive our encouragement for the week, if that's why we are here, we've missed the mark. We come to encourage, to give, to serve others, and to declare to one another - "look at what God has done! Remember who our God is! Don't forget His promises, His truths, His benefits."

Psalm 103, 105, 95

Ron Rolheiser in his book, *Holy Longing*, says:

"Church is not about a few like minded individuals coming together for mutual support. It's about millions and millions of different kinds of persons transcending their differences so as to become a community beyond temperament, race, ideology, gender, language, and background... The church community is to gather around the person of Jesus and the sharing of His Spirit."

That's why we exist. **We're better together. We were created to gather together, do life beside each other, and walk toward God within community.**