TEACHING THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF AUTHENTIC

COMMUNITY TO THE MEMBERS AT CAMBRIAN PARK

BAPTIST CHURCH IN SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

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A Project

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by

Keith William Booth

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APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

The hope of this research project was to encourage and cultivate biblical community at Cambrian Park Baptist Church. Its completion is a testimony to the necessity and power of community. Without the help and support of dozens of people, the completion of this project would not have been possible.

First, I thank God for leading me to CPBC twenty-five years ago and surrounding me with grace-filled believers who love the Lord and love one another. I want to thank all the members of CPBC for their patience and love during my studies, and their willingness to be active participants in the research project. I specifically want to thank pastors Kurt Robinson and Kirk Booth for their time, counsel, and assistance. I want to thank pastor Justin Duran and Tina Mitchell as well for their faithful participation on the expert panel.

Many SBTS faculty members have been instrumental in the research and implementation of the project. First and foremost, I would like to thank Robert Cheong for his willingness to supervise my work and guide me through the process. For the past two years he has taken the time to read and respond to each chapter, offer counsel on the project's procedures and implementation, and encourage me along the way. I want to thank Dr. Harrod and Dr. Haste as well, for their accessibility and excellent advice.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. My children—Kirk, Sarah, Brandon, Hazelle, and Joshua—were a source of constant love and encouragement. Their love and watch-care for one another gives me a vision of what God's spiritual family can look like. Above all, I want to thank my wife, Laura. As a faithful helpmate, she served in my absence,

proofread every page, and helped finance my degree. She is a living testimony to God's amazing grace in my life.

<div align="right">Keith Booth</div>

San Jose, California

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God designed and equipped the local church to be a *community* of believers—
believers committed to living in accordance with the Bible. Biblical community is God's
prescribed family. It is an alternative family of saints committed to living interdependent,
interconnected lives. It is a family working for the sanctification and preservation of
God's people, as a gospel witness to the world, for the glorification of Christ. The members
of Cambrian Park Baptist Church (CPBC) struggle to live in authentic community. The
fast-paced, transient culture of Silicon Valley cultivates and approves radical individualism,
not biblical community. But if authentic, biblical community is essential for the spiritual
maturity and testimony of the local church, then CPBC must grow in this area. The
members must transition from living independent to interdependent lives as a covenant
community for the glory of God. The hope of this ministry project was to help equip the
saints at CPBC to grow in their understanding of both the purpose and practice of
authentic community.

Context

San Jose, California, is in the heart of Silicon Valley, a place where the idols of
money, technology, and material possessions have great sway over the hearts and minds
of many. According to Christian pollster George Barna, the San Francisco Bay Area is
the most unchurched and dechurched people group in the United States.[1] CPBC,
established in 1952, sits in the heart of San Jose. Missionally, CPBC is strategically
positioned to have a gospel impact on one of the more influential, yet darker cultures, in

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[1] Barna Group, "Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?" May 1, 2015,
https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/.

the world. However, instead of capitalizing on this missional opportunity, many covenant members at CPBC have succumbed to the Valley's individualistic lifestyle.

Silicon Valley is a transient place to live. Due to skyrocketing mortgages and the fluidity of the technology industry, most newcomers do not stay long. On average, new members at CPBC stay approximately two years. But building trust takes time. Twenty-four months is insufficient to cultivate the community Jesus created for his covenant people. Jesus' vision for authentic community consisted of his followers interacting "with one another like members of a strong-group, surrogate family characterized by collectivist solidarity and commitment on every front."[2] The volatility of the culture has reverberated in the church, making it difficult for members to enjoy lasting, communal relationships— relationships the Bible reveals as essential to the health and testimony of a local church.

The transiency of the broader culture, combined with the extremes of Western individualism, have left CPBC communally depleted. Many members join CPBC with no intention of staying in the area and most dismiss biblical community as essential to the Christian life. The result of this unbiblical ecclesiology has been twofold. First, many members devalue the communal importance of CPBC's corporate gatherings. The corporate worship services, Sunday school classes, and Wednesday night small groups no longer take precedence in members' lives. The church's fellowship meals and prayer gatherings are trumped by long work hours, family time, and entertainment. Regrettably, most members do not see the negative impact their absence has on the spiritual well-being of others. They do not see, as Thabiti Anyabwile suggests, that "our privatized ideas about the Christian life do not square with biblical Christianity" because "Christianity is a family religion."[3]

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[2] Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 75.

[3] Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 112.

Second, most CPBC members rarely meet on their own for one-on-one Bible study, prayer, or mutual accountability. They do not see themselves as vital members of a living body, equipped by God to lovingly care for their brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, most members have conformed to the culture—putting self over community, and their personal needs over the needs of others. But this lack of commitment to organic, personal interaction outside of the church's weekly gatherings only compounds the problem. Instead of enjoying the intimacy and sanctification authentic, biblical community offers, most members remain disconnected and isolated from one another.

What has been the cumulative effect of transiency and individualism at CPBC? The membership is isolated and lonely, deprived of the common unity essential to growing God's people. As a reformed, Southern Baptist church, most members acknowledge their prescribed role in the life of the body. They would concur with the apostle Paul when he wrote "the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" and "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor 12:21-22). Yet, this agreement is only cursory. Many CPBC members continue to live as though they are dispensable rather than essential to the unity of the church. Brett McCracken rightly argues that "unity exists in the body insofar as the parts . . . recognize that they need one another and humbly work to that end."[4]

The question then becomes, "Is this dispensable approach toward biblical community an issue of disobedience or ignorance?" Varied aspects of what it means to live in authentic community have been taught over the years, mostly through expository preaching. Though, no concentrated study on church community has been systematically taught in over a decade. The elders believe that this lack of concentrated training has contributed to CPBC's current predicament—limited one-on-one interaction during the week, and poor participation in corporate gatherings.

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[4] Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 172.

The elders are not advocating religious attendance or obligatory small groups. Rather, they desire to see members joyfully gathering for the well-being of one another. They seek to cultivate gospel-centered, one-on-one interactions that reveal the majesty of God. Sundays and Wednesdays at CPBC provide members with rich opportunities to grow in community. Cumulatively, members have the opportunity each week to worship God together through song, prayer, preaching, teaching, fellowship meals, and small group gatherings. But if the members at CPBC continue to see corporate and one-on-one gatherings as Christian "add-ons" rather than essential practices of the Christian life, then the vitality of CPBC and its impact on San Jose will remain nominal.

In summary, many CPBC members have conformed to the ways of the world in Silicon Valley, rather than being "transformed by the renewing of their minds" (Rom 12:2) through authentic community. This deficiency in authentic community hinders the giving and receiving of help from one another that God purposed to grow his people and glorify his name. The elders believe there is a strong need for the members of CPBC to be educated in the purposes and practices of authentic community. Only then will the corporate means of grace and personal "one anothering" help to meet the spiritual needs of CPBC members, as well as glorify the name of God among the lost in San Jose.

Rationale

God saves his children into biblical communities, not only for their own interests "but also [for] the interests of others" (Phil 2:4). As described, the "interests of others" appears to be lacking among the members of CPBC. The members do not struggle with the inherency or infallibility of God's Word, nor do they disagree with the idea of covenant membership. These two axioms, the authority of God's Word and belief in covenant membership, have been part of the culture of CPBC for over a decade. With this firm foundation, there is good reason to believe members will respond well to a concentrated teaching on authentic community for the following reasons.

First, God equips his church to live in community. The Bible teaches that God is communal and made man in his image to live in community. Michael Reeves writes, just "as the Father, Son and Spirit have always known fellowship with each other, so we in the image of God are made for fellowship."[5] With the fall, the biblical community once enjoyed with God and with man was severed. To overcome this alienation, God sent His Son as a propitiation for the sins of man. For those who repent and believe in the Son, forgiveness is granted, justification is rendered, and the Holy Spirit is sent to dwell in the believer. As a result, every believer is supernaturally united to the Father and the Son and purposed by God to be united to his new family—the church. Through the local church, God changes the core identity of his children. He transforms the sinner from being an autonomous, disconnected individual to that of a "trinitarian-ecclesial self"—a person whose identity is defined by his communion with God and his communion with the local church.[6]

Second, the church needs to be trained. As the culture continues to isolate, the elders at CPBC need to call members to a "gospel-revealing" community, one that not only transforms lives but also reveals the power and glory of God to the world.[7] CPBC members cannot be faithful to their "trinitarian-ecclesial" selves unless they see the relational priority of the church and commit to living out the Bible's one another commands. According to Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, "the goal of community (unity and maturity) comes as a congregation does ministry—equipped by their leaders."[8] Unity and maturity are not

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[5] Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 102.

[6] John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 71.

[7] Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29.

[8] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 136.

completely foreign to the culture of CPBC, but the elders believe most members do not understand how important their faithful participation in the life of the church truly is.

Third, faithful participation in the life of the church is essential for sanctification. God purposed his church to be a sanctifying community. Through the corporate gatherings, his children are to grow together in their faith. By meeting one-on-one and in small groups, believers are to sanctify one another. But thinking of spiritual formation as communal is a direct challenge to the radical individualism sanctioned by the culture and now embraced by many churches. "In our culture of self-improvement," Wilhoit argues, we have "turned spirituality into a narcissistic pursuit."[9] However, God's Word clearly reveals that true spiritual formation is fundamentally others-centered and best nurtured in the context of authentic community.

Fourth, authentic community is necessary for the perseverance of the saints. The Holy Spirit revealed in Hebrews 3:12 that believers need to gather regularly "lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." The ability to persevere to the end is accomplished by the power of God and exercised through the communion of the saints. Again, this persevering through community has been taught to the members at CPBC over the years, but not consistently or with the proper weight the Bible prescribes.

Fifth, CPBC's ability to reach the lost in Silicon Valley is contingent upon the body being healthy. A healthy church is a "one anothering" church. A "one anothering" church is a relational church. It would be foolish for CPBC to believe it can be relational with the gospel in the world unless it first enjoys gospel-centered relationships among its members. Craig Van Gelder believes this relational unity is essential to the mission of the church. Because the story of redemption is "contextualized in the life of the church," he

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[9] James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 32.

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argues "the church becomes, in fact, the hermeneutic of the gospel."[10] Making this transition from a gathering of isolated Christians to a unified body of gospel-minded believers is essential if CPBC desires to be faithful to the Great Commission.

Lastly, a local body of believers living in authentic community brings God glory. It is God's desire for his people to enjoy the blessings of authentic community—experiencing the life-giving benefits a gospel-changed community offers. He desires these gospel communities not only for the well-being of his children, but also for the magnification of his name. Mark Dever argues that an "authentic, gospel-revealing community with supernatural depth and breadth" magnifies God's glory in the world.[11] If true, then every local church, including CPBC, must strive to this end—living communally lives for the glory of God's name.

I do not assume that an eight-week teaching on authentic community will change the culture of CPBC immediately. Rather, I hope to plant several seeds of biblical community that will change the culture of CPBC over time. By teaching on the purpose and practice of authentic community during the class sessions and giving members opportunities to practice biblical "one anothering" in their small groups, this project not only addressed the root causes for CPBC's communal struggles, but also provided real-time opportunities for communal living to be experienced. Once these struggles are addressed and corrected by God's Word, the members of CPBC will be poised to not only love one another biblically, but also have a lasting impact on the greater culture of Silicon Valley.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach about and provide opportunities for the purpose and practice of authentic community to the members at Cambrian Park

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[10] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 144.

[11] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 33.

Baptist Church.

Goals

The following goals established the practical out-workings of this ministry project. The goals are sequentially ordered in logical progression to evaluate and accomplish the purpose of this project.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the members' general understanding and practice of authentic community.

2. The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum to train members on the purpose and practice of authentic community.

3. The third goal of this project was to increase the understanding and practice of authentic community for a select group of members at CPBC.

4. The fourth goal of this project was to practice select mutuality commands that foster authentic community.

Each goal followed a prescribed research methodology. The methodology described how each goal was to be measured and evaluated for success. Done properly, this project will provide the elders of CPBC with (1) the memberships' general understanding of and attitude toward authentic community, (2) a curriculum and platform to teach and practice authentic community, and (3) an opportunity to measure any changes in the understanding or practice of authentic community in those members who participated in the study.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this project was to assess the members' general understanding and practice of authentic community. This goal was implemented by giving an online survey through Google Forms to the members at CPBC.[12] The survey was divided into three sections: (1) biographical and binary questions, (2) communal knowledge, and (3) communal attitudes. Section 1 was multiple choice. The biographical data gathered in

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[12] All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

section 1 enabled me to study the Likert results categorically. Sections 2 and 3 used a five-point Likert scale. The five-point scale was selected for both its symmetry and balance. By using the Likert scale in the original assessment, I was equipped to administer the survey a second time and procure a quantitative comparison following a prescribed event—an eight-week teaching series on authentic community.

Goal 1 was measured by administering the pre-assessment survey to a minimum of 50 percent of the church membership.[13] The survey was given at least two weeks in advance of the Sunday school teaching series on authentic community. To limit the Hawthorne Effect,[14] results were gathered anonymously. Each participant was required to create a unique, five-digit personal identification number at the start of the survey. Upon completion and submission of the online survey, the data was recorded and collated in Google Forms and then downloaded into Excel for further analysis. For members with limited access to the internet, hardcopies were provided and the results were inputted manually into Google Forms. This assessment provided the CPBC elders with an understanding of the congregation's current knowledge of authentic community. This goal was to be considered successfully met when (1) a minimum of 50 percent of the membership completed the survey, and (2) the survey had been compiled and analyzed.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum to train members on the purpose and practice of authentic community. The series was divided into two primary sections: (1) biblical foundations of authentic community, and (2) biblical applications of authentic community. The aim of the curriculum was not solely academic. The goal of the class was to provide members with the biblical resources necessary to understand, teach, and live out God's vision for biblical community in the

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[13] See appendix 1.

[14] The Hawthorne Effect concerns the "awareness of being observed or having behavior assessed engenders beliefs about researcher expectations. Conformity and social desirability considerations then lead behavior to change in line with these expectations." Jim McCambridge, John Witton, and Diana R. Elbourne, "Systematic Review of the Hawthorne Effect: New Concepts Are Needed to Study Research Participation Effects," *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 67, no. 3 (2014): 268.

local church. Each lesson was intended to be taught once a week in 1.25-hour sessions. Each seminar had specific objectives to be accomplished and key points I wanted the members to know by the end of the series. Each seminar began and ended with a time of review and members were encouraged to ask questions during the lessons.

This goal was measured in two ways. First, the curriculum was submitted for evaluation in *Foundations of Teaching*.[15] Second, the curriculum was submitted to an expert panel for evaluation. The panel utilized a curriculum rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.[16] The expert panel consisted of two elders from CPBC, an elder from another local, like-minded church, and a young mother from CPBC who has a firm grasp of biblical ecclesiology. All eight lessons were distributed to the expert panel no later than one month prior to the first class on authentic community. As the experts completed their reviews, I met with each evaluator to (1) review the curriculum, (2) receive feedback, and (3) discuss the curriculum evaluation rubric. This goal was to be considered successfully met when (1) the graded curriculum in *Foundations of Teaching* received a 90 percent or higher, and (2) a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria on the curriculum rubric met or exceeded the "sufficient" level. If a 90 percent on the curriculum rubric was not initially met, then the material was to be revised until it met or exceeded the 90 percent benchmark.

The third goal of this project was to increase the understanding and practice of authentic community for a select group of members at CPBC. This goal was implemented by teaching the eight-week Sunday school curriculum on authentic community developed under goal 2. It was taught to the afternoon adult Sunday school class at CPBC. This goal was measured by administering a post-assessment survey identical to the pre-assessment

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[15] *Foundations of Teaching* (80960A) is an SBTS doctoral level seminar designed to introduce students to different methods and philosophies of effective teaching.

[16] See appendix 2.

survey administered under goal 1.[17] The post-assessment survey was given to measure any changes in the knowledge and practice of authentic community for members who (1) took the pre-assessment survey, and (2) participated in at least seven out of eight teaching sessions on authentic community, either physically or remotely. Remote video access of the lessons was made available each week for those who were unable to attend in person or missed one or more sessions.

The post-assessment survey was made available to participants for one week following session 8 on authentic community. Each participant used their unique, five-digit personal identification number from the pre-assessment survey. Upon completion and submission of the online survey, the data was recorded and collated in Google Forms and then downloaded into Excel for further analysis. For members with limited access to the internet, hardcopies were provided and the results were inputted manually into Google Forms. This goal was to be considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. A *t*-test for dependent samples "involves a comparison of means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores."[18]

The fourth goal of this project was to practice select mutuality commands that foster authentic community. This goal was implemented in three of CPBC's weekly, small group gatherings. Led by one of the elders of CPBC, each small group (1) met every Wednesday during the same eight-week calendar period as the Sunday school curriculum on biblical community, and (2) practiced authentic community by exercising select mutuality commands taught to during the Sunday series on biblical community. At the beginning of each session, I would spend 20-25 minutes teaching on the mutuality command to be practiced that evening. The elders then split into their respective groups

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[17] See appendix 3.

[18] Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People (Who Think) They Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

and spent the remaining hour leading participants through various practical exercises on the mutuality command for that week. The commands selected each week reflected areas where the members of CPBC are most deficient.

This goal was measured by (1) administering a hybrid survey at the end of the eight weeks to a minimum of 50 percent of the small group participants, and (2) collecting oral observations from the small group participants.[19] The written survey consisted of true/false and short answer questions. It was given to the small group participants on the last, small group Wednesday meeting and collected no later than one week from the last meeting. It was made available in both electronic and hardcopy formats. The oral observations were collected during a large group, question and answer session held the Wednesday following the last small group session. This assessment provided the CPBC elders with feedback on the effectiveness of practicing some of the mutuality commands in a small group environment. This goal was considered successfully met when (1) 50 percent of the small group participants completed the survey and participated in the oral question and answer session, and (2) the survey had been analyzed by the elders to yield a clearer picture of the effectiveness of practicing mutuality commands in a small group environment.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Local church. The New Hampshire Confession of Faith defines a *local church* as

a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws; and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His word; that its only scriptural officers are Bishops, or Pastors, and Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.[20]

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[19] See appendix 4.

[20] *The New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, accessed December 18, 2018, http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/1833newh.htm.

Church membership. According to Jonathan Leeman, "Church membership is (1) a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant that consists of (2) the church's affirmation of the Christian's gospel profession, (3) the church's promise to give oversight to the Christian, and (4) the Christian's promise to gather with the church and submit to its oversight."[21]

Authentic community. Authentic, biblical community is God's prescribed family, saints committed to living interdependent, interconnected lives for the sanctification and preservation of God's people, as a gospel witness to the world, for the glorification of Christ.

Mutuality commands. According to Gerald L. Sittser, "the New Testament issues a series of commands to show us how to develop . . . healthy relationships. Called 'mutuality commands,' because they use the phrase 'one another,' these commands translate love into action. . . . They enable the church to become a community of love."[22]

Strong-group/collectivism. Hellerman uses *strong-group* and *collectivism* interchangeably to describe first-century, social structures—specifically a worldview in which people believed "the welfare of the groups to which they belonged took priority over their own individual happiness and relational satisfaction."[23]

Radical individualism. According to Ayn Rand, *radical individualism* is the belief that "man must choose his actions, values and goals by the standard of that which is proper to man."[24]

Three limitations applied to the project. First, the accuracy of the pre-assessment survey was dependent on the willingness of the respondents to take the survey and to be

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[21] Jonathon Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 217.

[22] Gerald Sittser, *Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 20.

[23] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 14.

[24] Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 25.

honest about their understanding and practice of authentic community. To mitigate this limitation, the surveys were administered anonymously using personal identification numbers and detailed instructions were given on the importance of honesty and accuracy when taking the survey.

Second, the results from the post-assessment survey were dependent on the respondents' faithful participation in the eight-week teaching series on authentic community and their willingness to take the post-assessment survey. Several steps were taken to mitigate this limitation: (1) the lessons were advertised and calendared in advance, (2) the members were encouraged to attend all eight-sessions, (3) the evaluations were given anonymously using personal identification numbers, and (4) participation in at least seven out of the eight sessions, physically or remotely, was required to take the post-assessment survey.

Third, the teaching and small group sessions were conducted during Santa Clara County's Covid-19 mandatory directives for gatherings. Consequently, participation was greatly affected. To mitigate this limitation, CDC guidelines were posted during each in-person gathering, and remote video access was made available for those unable to participate physically.

Four delimitations were placed on the project. First, to honor the regular Sunday school schedule and adjust for Covid-19 regulations, the project series on biblical community was limited to an eight-week study. Second, the data pool for the post-assessment survey was limited to those who participated in at least seven out of the eight sessions on authentic community, physically or remotely. Third, this project was limited to evaluating the members' understanding of the purpose and practice of authentic community and the exercising of select mutuality commands in small group environments. Last, given the breadth of Scripture on biblical community, the development and teaching of the curriculum was designed to address the specific needs of the members of CPBC.

Conclusion

The Bible does not suggest that believers should live communally in the local church, it commands it. Being united with Christ and therefore united to one another, God purposed his church to live as a new family in Christ for the well-being of his people and for the glory of his name. For CPBC to battle against the cultural pressures of transiency and radical individualism, the members must grow in their understanding of the purpose and practice of authentic, biblical community.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
TEACHING THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF
AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

God—being communal in nature—created his people to live in community.

Living in isolation as a Christian is contrary to the Christian life. In their book, *The
Compelling Community*, Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop define authentic community in
the local church as "a togetherness and commitment we experience that transcends all
natural bonds—because of our commonality in Jesus Christ."[1] They believe the church is
designed to function as a "gospel-revealing" community because "many relationships
would never exist but for the truth and power of the gospel."[2] But in the Western culture,
where individualism is preferred to community, cultivating these "gospel-revealing"
communities is a challenge. Jonathan Leeman describes this challenge well. He argues
that cultivating community in the west is difficult because "we are all free agents, and
every relationship and life station is a contract that can be renegotiated or canceled."[3] But
if *the spiritual maturity and testimony of a local church requires authentic community*,
then the pursuit of such communities must be a priority for every local church.

The Bible offers substantial biblical and theological support for this argument.
Five passages from the New Testament have been selected to reveal that the spiritual
maturity and testimony of a local church does require authentic community. First, an
exegesis of Acts 2:42-47 will show that the early church was devoted to a way of life that

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[1] Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 13.

[2] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 22.

[3] Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 44.

cultivated authentic community. Second, an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 will reveal that authentic community is contingent upon members living interdependent lives. Third, an exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16 will show how authentic community is necessary for the building up and maturating of a local church. Fourth, an exegesis of Hebrews 10:19-25 will reveal how authentic community is essential for God's people to worship in faith, persevere in hope, and encourage one another in love. Fifth, an exegesis of 1 Peter 4:7-11 will show how the mutuality commands—faithfully practiced in authentic community—serve the purpose of glorifying God.

A Devoted Community: Acts 2:42-47

In Acts 2:42-47, Luke offers his first extended summary in the book. The Holy Spirit had been poured out at Pentecost. Peter had called the people to a life of repentance and faith in Christ. And God grew the community of believers from 120 to 3,000 in a single day through proclamation of the gospel. David Peterson argues that Luke was highlighting "the fact that God was building a new community and not simply dealing with individuals in isolation."[4] So how did the believers in this "new community" relate to one another? What did their time together look like? What means of grace did they exercise to foster and grow their love for God and one another? Although not a perfect prototype, Luke's summary reveals that *the early church in Jerusalem was devoted to a way of life that cultivated authentic community.*

Elements of Communal Life

The great danger of identifying ways the early church fostered community is religious pragmatism—following a set of rules to produce a desired effect. Luke identifies four distinguishing marks of the early church that fostered community, but he does so as an historian. He does not give a set of religious requirements the church must

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[4] David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 158.

follow in dogmatic fashion. Rather, as John Polhill suggests, he "provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts were incorporated into the believing community."[5] In other words, these corporate means of grace exercised by the Jerusalem church were practiced because their hearts had been changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They were "devoted" (2:42) to this new way of life because they wanted to worship God in authentic community. The translation of the verb "devoted," according to Richard Longenecker, "connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action."[6] Accordingly, David Peterson argues that Luke "implies that the church in Jerusalem was a model of what could happen when people were bound together by a belief in the gospel."[7] Motivated by the power of the gospel, the Jerusalem church exercised four communal characteristics that fostered authentic community.

Apostolic teaching. The early church was built on the teachings of the Apostles—those authorized by Jesus to proclaim the gospel (Acts 1:8), make known the Lord's teachings (Matt 28:20), and reveal the plan of redemption (1 Cor 15:3-5). These apostolic teachings became the "raison d'être and focus of the early Christian community."[8] Luke describes a community that consistently and collectively submitted to the apostolic teachings, where all the believers "not only attended the meetings faithfully but also earnestly adhered to what was taught."[9] This adherence made the community of believers in Jerusalem a Spirit-filled church. It was not the miracles done by the apostles (2:43), but the church's fidelity to hear and submit to God's Word. John Stott is correct in

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[5] John Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 2001), 118.

[6] Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Temper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 756.

[7] Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 159.

[8] Longenecker, *Acts*, 756.

[9] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles,* Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934), 115.

saying that "a Spirit-filled church is a New Testament church, in the sense that it studies and submits to the New Testament instruction."[10] If, as Peterson believes, most of their studies took place when they met "together in the Temple courts" (2:46),[11] then their corporate gatherings in the Temple would be congruous with the Sunday gatherings of expositional churches. The bond, then, that drew believers into community—namely God's Word—is the same bond that has cultivated biblical communities throughout the centuries.

Fellowship. A product of the church's bond in Word and Spirit was fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship is κοινωνία and it normally means "to share with someone in something above and beyond the relationship itself."[12] Luke gives examples of this practical "sharing" in verses 44 and 45, as the believers enjoyed "all things in common," and provided "as any had need." A little later in Acts 4:32, Luke uses the phrase πάντα κοινά to describe how the believers had "everything in common," only this time he prefaces his statement by describing the believers as being "of one heart and soul." This relational quality best describes biblical κοινωνία, articulated by David Seccombe as "the general friendship and unity which characterized the community."[13] Κοινωνία, then, is a communal intimacy among believers that necessarily manifests itself into action. Stott puts it well: "Christian fellowship is Christian caring, and Christian caring is Christian sharing."[14]

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[10] John Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (Leicester, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 81.

[11] Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 160.

[12] Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160.

[13] David Peter Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz, Austria: Albert Fuchs, 1982), 204.

[14] Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 84.

Breaking of bread. Several commentators argue that both "the breaking of bread" and "the prayers" (v. 42) were religious expressions of the early church's fellowship. John Polhill believes that by breaking bread, "they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together."[15] If so, then the "breaking of bread" in verse 42 would likely include (1) sharing in the Lord's Supper, (2) enjoying an *agape* meal as a community, and (3) "breaking bread in their homes" (v. 46). Regardless of one's interpretation, to share a meal with someone conveys both a sense of intimacy and approval. Darrell Bock argues that "the phrase [breaking of bread] suggests the intimate interaction and mutual acceptance that was a part of community life."[16] Both their formal worship, "attending the Temple together" (v. 46), as well as their informal worship, "breaking bread in their homes" (v. 46), presumes authentic community—intimate, mutually accepting relationships forged together by their common bond in Christ.

Prayer. Lastly, Luke concludes his list with "the prayers"—communal prayers. The article ταῖς that precedes the plural noun for "prayers" (προσευχαῖς) has led many to conclude that Luke is referring to the formal prayers kept daily in the temple (2:46; 3:1).[17] It is unlikely the post-Pentecostal church continued in the daily sacrifices, but the importance of praying to God corporately remained an essential exercise for God's new community. Polhill argues that "the reference . . . is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship."[18] If so, then the church's devotion to "the prayers" was both organized and organic. Stott

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[15] Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

[16] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 151.

[17] Craig S. Keener, *Acts,* The New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 172.

[18] Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

draws a logical, contextual conclusion: "There is no need to polarize between the structured and the unstructured . . . the Church needs both."[19] The church still needs both. If, as Acts reveals, prayer was essential to their community life, how could it be any less important today. The Jerusalem church, Bock suggests, understood that "God's family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord's direction."[20] In other words, communities serious about pursing the Lord as "God's family" will also be serious about prayer.

The result. The newly formed community of believers in Acts 2 was devoted to these four key elements of church life—apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. If, as Peterson argues, "Luke was . . . commending the positive example of the earliest community of Christians to his readers,"[21] then contemporary churches would be wise to follow suit. After all, the fruit of their authentic community was compelling, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). Their devotion to Word-centered worship and fellowship produced an authentic community that was pleasing to the Lord. This pleasure was evidenced in the early church's continued growth and favor with nonbelievers. As Luke continues his historical account, this blissful state enjoyed by the early church did not last. But Polhill believes it remains for every church "an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew."[22]

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[19] Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 85.

[20] Bock, *Acts,* 151.

[21] Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 158.

[22] Polhill, *Acts,* 122.

An Interdependent Community: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

After teaching to the gifts of the Spirit and their distribution to believers in verses 1-11, the apostle Paul uses the human body as an illustration in 1 Corinthians 12 to reveal the *interdependent nature* of the body of Christ. In describing the church, Paul writes, "the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body" (1 Cor 12:12). In other words, the diverse gifts are given to believers to serve "the interest of unity," not promote personal gain.[23] Just as the diverse parts of the human body make up a glorious whole, so too do the diverse members of the church body form the glorious unity found in authentic, local communities. "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (v. 14). "To function properly," Kistemaker argues, "the body needs all its members."[24] With the local church in mind, Paul uses this extended analogy of the human body to demonstrate *that authentic community is contingent upon members living interdependent lives.*

The Diversity of the Church

The Western world is adamant about celebrating diversity, but this celebration comes at the expense of a common unity. The Bible reveals the necessity of both. In verses 15-17, the apostle uses various body parts—hands and feet, eyes and ears—to answer a rhetorical question, "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (v. 19). The answer is plain—it would not exist. The vitality of the local church, Simon Kistemaker writes, requires a diversity of gifts, for "without the variety of body parts that fill their assigned role, the body itself would rapidly deteriorate and die."[25] No single member or

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[23] Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 428.

[24] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 432.

[25] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 433.

gift can make up a community of believers. Such a gathering "would be," according to Leon Morris, "a monster, not a body."[26]

Rather, Paul's body analogy reveals that each member of a local church is not only equally part of the body of Christ, but also has his own unique function as decreed by God.[27] Recognizing the God-ordained importance and uniqueness of every member will have a sanctifying effect on any local congregation. First, such a recognition will be an encouragement to those who are differently gifted and see themselves as "less a part of the body" (v. 15). Second, it will humble those who believe they are self-sufficient and say to themselves "I have no need for you" (v. 21). David Garland explains, "Both the eyes and ears, hands and feet, have their assigned function in the body, without which the body becomes disabled . . . the implication is that there is no unimportant gift or person in the body of Christ."[28]

The divine origin and specific placement of each gift in the body by God also reveals his love for diversification. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner explain, "The body is fit together not accidently or haphazardly . . . God is sovereign over the placement."[29] If "God has so composed the body" (v. 24) with its varying gifts, and God's decisions are perfect (v. 18), then diversity in the local church is not only necessary, but also inherently good. Garland exalts the wisdom of God's diversification in the church when he writes, "One person alone, no matter how gifted, cannot play a Beethoven symphony, act a Shakespearian tragedy, or compete against another team."[30] The same can be said of the

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[26] Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 169.

[27] Mark Taylor, *I Corinthians,* The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 298.

[28] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 554.

[29] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 601.

[30] Garland, *1 Corinthians,* 559.

local church—one person cannot cultivate authentic community or fulfill the mission of the church, but several believers, using their varied gifts for the good of the whole, can.

The Unity of the Church

"Diversity," according to Garland, "is necessary for a body to function, but the body is unified as each member is interrelated and interdependent."[31] The various gifts are given by God for the purpose of unification, not self-interest. Put another way, unity among God's people for God's glory is the goal. Paul's earlier allusion to baptism in verse 13 reinforces this idea. Morris explains, "All alike are baptized into *one body*, and thus into a unity that transcends all human distinctions."[32] By coming to a saving grace and being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, the believer's new common life in Christ supersedes all the old distinctions—"Jews or Greeks, slaves or free" (v. 13). It is replaced by being part of "one body" (v. 20) where there is "no division" (v. 25) and the members exercise a mutual "care for one another" (v. 25).

Within such a unified, caring environment, authentic community has an opportunity to thrive. Members who feel inferior or expendable will see that they are, in fact, "indispensable" (v. 22) and bestowed with "greater honor" (v. 23). Ciampa and Rosner draw a logical deduction. Like the human body, where "it is essential for each one to play the particular role for which it was created,"[33] a unified church will encourage full participation, especially among the "unpresentable parts" (v. 23). A unified church will also humble those copiously gifted by God, reminding them that "the body does not consist of one member but of many" (v. 14). Garland argues that any sense of "superiority can breed notions of self-sufficiency."[34] But if the unity of a local church is

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[31] Garland, *1 Corinthians,* 558.

[32] Morris, *1 Corinthians,* 169.

[33] Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 601.

[34] Garland, *1 Corinthians,* 595.

the product of its "many members" (v. 12), then Fee is right: "All the parts are necessary, no matter what one may think."[35]

The Interdependence of the Church

Both the unity *and* diversity God cultivates in his church reveal a necessary interdependence among its members. As a holistic organism—like the human body—when one member of the church is not functioning properly, the entire church suffers. Kistemaker argues accordingly: "The recipient of any gift must understand that all the members of the church depend on him or her to exercise that spiritual gift."[36] If the eye says to the hand, "I have no need of you" (v. 21), then every part of the body is adversely affected, including the eye. The same is true of God's church. Conversely, when all the parts are working together in harmony, as God "so composed the body" (v. 24), then God is glorified and his people are blessed. This is the portrait Paul is painting for the Corinthian church—an authentic community where individual members exercise their specific gifts for the well-being of the whole. Paul is describing a community where "individual members are so involved with one another that they react as one to what goes on in their midst."[37] "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (v. 26).

This understanding of interdependence is essential if a church desires to minimize disputes and maximize member care. God composes each church in such a way "that there may be no division in the body" (v. 25). Divisions cause separation and disunity within the church. Paul Gardner argues that if "each member cannot exist at all when it is separated from the body *and . . .* the body loses its functionality when members are cut

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[35] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 613.

[36] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 433.

[37] Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 547.

off from it,"[38] then any division is unhealthy for the whole church. Knowing that division disables a church, every member of a local body should strive to "live peaceably with all" (Rom 12:18). Similarly, when members understand their dependence upon one another, member care will increase. "The sin of autonomy," according to Anthony Thiselton, "is precisely the 'fleshly' attitude within the church (3:1-4) which Paul finds alien to Christlike existence 'for others.'"[39] Though, when a body of believers begins to see that they need one another to "love, nurture, teach, train, equip, and support [their] fellow members,"[40] Kistemaker believes they will properly care for one another and authentic community will flourish.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 is clear—a believer's well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of the whole church. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (v. 26). The Holy Spirit cultivates these interdependent communities by giving gifts. When these varied gifts are exercised in the local church "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7), the community thrives. Authentic community, then, is contingent upon members understanding and living out these interdependent lives. "When all the members employ the talents the Holy Spirit has distributed to God's people, then," Kistemaker contends, "the entire church functions efficiently for the benefit of all,"[41] and a loving watch-care for one another will become "the hallmark of the Christian community."[42]

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[38] Gardner, *1 Corinthians,* 543.

[39] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1006.

[40] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 439.

[41] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 433.

[42] Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 438.

A Building Community: Ephesians 4:11-16

First Corinthians 12 reveals that when members of local churches use their varied gifts for the well-being of the body, authentic communities are the result. But thriving, biblical communities are not the ultimate goal. In Ephesians 4:11-16, the apostle Paul reveals how *authentic community is necessary for the building up and maturing of a local church* to serve a greater purpose. Lincoln explains the purpose, "that [Christ's] work of filling all things might be brought to completion."[43] By "ascending on high" and giving "gifts to men" (Eph 4:8), Jesus equips his church to fulfill the original mandate given to Adam and Eve—to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). With Christ as "the head of the church" (Eph 5:23), the church, Lincoln argues, "becomes his instrument in carrying out his purposes for the cosmos."[44] In verses 11-16, Peter O'Brien sees the apostle Paul calling individual members into community for this cosmic purpose of "filling the universe with his rule."[45] To accomplish this goal, Paul urges every member to strive for the *building up* and *maturing* of the local church by doing his or her part.

Gifts for Building

In Ephesians 4:7, Paul reveals that every believer is endowed with certain gifts—"grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." These gifts are given to build up Christ's body on earth. Paul then delineates these gifts, beginning with gifts of leadership—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (v. 11). He begins with these gifts, not to exalt those in positions of influence, but to charge them to equip the whole church for the ministry of spiritual construction. In other words, Paul provides clarity on how Jesus planned to fulfill the promise he made in Matthew 16:18 when he said, "On this rock I will build my church." According to Arnold, Jesus

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[43] A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 248.

[44] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 248.

[45] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 297.

gifted leaders in the church "not merely to do the ministry, but to invest their time heavily in developing and preparing fellow believers to engage in ministry to the body."[46] Thielman believes this ministry model of the Lord's is designed to "equip all believers to do the work of ministry for the edification of Christ's body."[47] It is a ministry model that requires a community of producers, not a group of gifted professionals who strive to meet the needs of spiritual consumers.

The ultimate goal of this Spirit-gifted, ministry work is the "building up of the body of Christ" (v. 12). Paul draws from the architectural analogy he started in 2:20, where "the "building" (οἰκοδομὴν) under construction is the "dwelling place" (κατοικητήριον) of God."[48] Each member is not only a "living stone" in the church (1 Pet 2:5), but a builder of the church as well. Harold Hoehner explains, "As each believer functions with the gift given to each, Christ's body, the church, will be built up."[49] This diversity of gifts in the church ought to produce a diversity of services; services F. F. Bruce believes were to be "rendered in the community, so that the community as a whole—'the body of Christ'—would be built up."[50] This "building up" of the church is understood by most commentators to be one of spiritual maturation rather than numeric growth. Merkle makes this point both linguistically and contextually. He argues that because οἰκοδομὴν refers to the strengthening of believers spiritually, "and because of the following context of spiritual maturity, this term is best understood primarily in a qualitative, and not

[46] Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians,* Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 262

[47] Frank Thielman, *Ephesians,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 279.

[48] Thielman, *Ephesians,* 280.

[49] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 551.

[50] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 159.

quantitative, sense."[51] In other words, every member of a local church is responsible for the qualitative, spiritual maturation of every other member of that local church.

Building to Maturity

Spiritual maturity, as one body, is the goal. Believers are exhorted by Paul to use their gifts to grow the church "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). This is no small task. With the glorified Christ as the standard, Bruce rightly states, "the corporate Christ cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ."[52] In one sense, this perfection has already been achieved for the believer by Christ (Eph 1:23; 2:6). In another sense, Thielman argues that "the church is still moving toward full union with Christ."[53] Paul calls the church to collectively strive for this forward momentum "until we all attain . . . mature manhood" (v. 13). "Manhood" in verse 13 is singular because it refers to the church growing as a unified body. Paul wants the entire church, not just certain individuals, to attain to what Arnold calls, "the 'size' of Christ . . . to reflect his virtues and likeness in their lives."[54]

The apostle reveals two aspects of this spiritual maturity that every church should be striving for—"unity of the faith" and "the knowledge of the Son of God" (v. 13). First, this striving for unity is understood to be a collective effort. Christian maturity does not take place in isolation. "It is by faith," Bruce writes, "that the people of Christ are united to him, and in being united to him they realize their own unity one with another."[55] Paul's emphasis to "attain unity" (v. 13) does not nullify his previous call for the church to "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3) that they already enjoy. Rather, he highlights

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[51] Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians,* Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 129.

[52] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* 159.

[53] Thielman, *Ephesians,* 282.

[54] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 266.

[55] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* 159.

this "already/not yet" tension of church life. He highlights this tension, according to William Klein, by reminding the reader that "whatever differences of opinion we possess on various matters, on the central core issues of the faith we must strive for unity."[56]

Second, growing collectively in "the knowledge of the Son of God" (v. 13) is not separate from a believer's faith. It is by faith that "we have come to share in Christ" (Heb 3:14). It is by faith we have come "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Heb 3:19). Having already emphasized the unity the church enjoys through faith in verses 4-6, Paul stresses in verse 13 the need for all believers to have what Arnold calls "a comprehensive understanding of Christ and his work and its relevance to their lives."[57] Without this unity of faith *and* knowledge, some will be "tossed to and fro" and "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (v. 14). The gifts are given by Christ, in part, to prevent this type of disunity in the body. So even though the church, on the one hand, possesses a unity of faith and knowledge in Christ, Lincoln is right—"it still remains to be attained . . . through the effective utilization of the gifts."[58] Therefore, the various gifts are given to the church and expected to be exercised. O'Brien explains why: "So that by building his body, immaturity and instability will increasingly be left behind."[59] However, to accomplish this spiritual maturation as one body, each member must see his indispensable role as a builder in the community of Christ.

Maturing Collectively

Paul reveals that this building up to full maturity will require (1) members speaking the truth in love to one another, and (2) each member properly exercising his spiritual gifts. In stark contrast to verse 14, where "children" are influenced by "every

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[56] William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. David E. Garland and Temper Longman III, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 119.

[57] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 265.

[58] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256.

[59] O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians,* 308.

wind of doctrine," truth speaking bathed in love is essential to a church's growth "into Christ" (v. 15). Paul is advocating what Hoehner calls a "love with truth that enables individual believers to grow harmoniously with other members of the body."[60] As the embodiment of both truth and love (Eph 3:19; 4:21), Christ is both the goal of a church's spiritual maturity (v. 15), as well as the power behind its growth—the head that "makes the body grow" (v. 16). At the same time, growth of the body is not independent of its members. Paul reveals that every member must participate in proclaiming the truth of God's Word to other members. This truth speaking must be done, as Arnold writes, "with a heart that is tender and concerned about the feelings, growth, and well-being of fellow believers."[61]

Second, Paul reveals the necessity of each member properly utilizing his gifts. The apostle does not negate the fact that it is Christ who "makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (v. 16). By identifying Christ as "the head" in verse 15, Thielman believes Paul is acknowledging Jesus as the "source of this unity and growth . . . both guiding its construction and crowning its completion."[62] At the same time, the apostle also reveals the prescription for this growth according to the gift giver—"when each part is working properly" (v. 16). Christ joins and holds the body together, but he does so "by every joint with which it is equipped" (v. 16). The "joint" analogy conveys both close proximity and the transfer of supply from one member to another. Paul's emphasis, according to Arnold, conveys the idea "that the corporate community of believers grows and matures through the active participation of every individual member."[63] When members do not use the measure of gifts given to them by Christ (v. 7), growth is stunted. Conversely, when "each part is working properly" (v. 16), exercising his gifts for the

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[60] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 565.

[61] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 289.

[62] Thielman, *Ephesians,* 286.

[63] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 270.

well-being of the whole, then the church will grow "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13), as decreed by God.

Filling All Things

Ephesians 4 is an ecclesiastical gem. A. T. Lincoln argues, "No other section of the letter is so directly and intensively devoted to the Church's life and purpose."[64] In this chapter Paul illuminates the nature of communal life in the church, describing it as a body and a building (vv. 12, 16), and the fullness of Christ (v. 13). With each analogy, the reader sees (1) the ascended head, Jesus Christ, distributing gifts to his members, (2) the members being held together by Christ, and (3) the necessity of each member exercising his gifts in community to "build up" and "mature" the body to "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). Paul then bookends this passage with the energizing power of love (vv. 2, 16). He does this because "even the fullest demonstration of gifts," O'Brian writes, "has no spiritual value if love is lacking."[65] Lincoln argues that for Paul, love is the driving force "behind the community's drive to maintain unity."[66] Love must be the driving force that fuels authentic communities—communities striving for unity and maturity as they participate in the Father's cosmic plan for His Son to "fill all things" (v. 10).

An Essential Community: Hebrews 10:19-25

The author of Hebrews echoes Paul's emphasis on community. After highlighting the work of Christ as high priest in 4:14–10:18, he exhorts the church to "hold fast the confession" (v. 23) by *collectively* drawing near to God. These communal exhortations are based on Jesus' gaining access for the church to the "holy places" by his own "blood" (vv. 19-21). Each exhortation begins with a "let us" command

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[64] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 267.

[65] O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians,* 316.

[66] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 267.

(προσερχώμεθα)—the Greek first-person plural that prohibits a western, individualistic interpretation. Having access to God in Christ, the church is to "hold fast" by (1) worshiping in faith, (2) persevering in hope, and (3) encouraging one another in love (vv. 22-25). These three virtues—faith, hope, and love—encompass what Gareth Cockerill calls "the totality of the Christian life."[67] Neglecting these communal blessings is a serious matter. So serious that the author of Hebrews argues that any professing believer who continues "sinning deliberately" (v. 26) by forsaking community is no longer covered "by the blood of Jesus" (v. 19) and therefore subject to the judgment of God. Hebrews 10:19-25 reveals how *authentic community is essential for God's people to worship in faith, persevere in hope, and encourage one another in love.*

Gaining Access

The author of Hebrews does not call the church into God's presence lightly. First, in clear contrast to the old covenant's prohibition, the church under the new covenant has access to God because Jesus (1) made a "new and living way . . . through his flesh" and (2) serves forever as our "great high priest" (vv. 20-21). The objective truth of Jesus' broken flesh on the cross becomes the believer's confidence to commune with God. Under the old covenant, only the high priest, once a year, could pass behind the curtain into the holiest of holies, into the presence of God. The Christian's confidence to access God is Jesus himself. Johnson writes, "His mortal body is the 'veil' that must be passed through in order to find full access to the living God."[68] In other words, the Christian's confidence is not a subjective feeling, but an objective truth in the atoning, cleansing, and sanctifying power the blood of Jesus provides.[69]

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[67] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 215.

[68] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews,* The New Testament Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 257.

[69] Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 449.

Second, the community of saints can have confidence in communing with God because Jesus "holds his priesthood permanently" (7:24). As the church's forever priest who "always lives to make intercession" for his bride (7:25), William Lane argues that now "the community possesses a way that had not previously existed."[70] Under the laws of Moses, the believing community had limited access through the sacrificial system. But the author of Hebrews clearly established in 3:3 that "Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses." With Jesus as the "great priest over the house of God" (v. 21), the church becomes God's household (3:6). Taught at a time when being part of a prestigious household brought dignity to its members,[71] Christ's intercession both validates and dignifies the presence of sinners saved by grace being in the household of God. With these two foundational truths—a new and living way to God with Christ as high priest—the author exhorts the Christian community to faith, hope, and love.

Worship in Faith

The first exhortation, "let us draw near" (v. 22) to God, is a call to faith-filled, congregational worship. Before the high priest could enter the holiest of holies on the Day of Atonement under the old covenant, he would first have to be sprinkled with blood (Exod 29:21) and washed with water (Exod 40:12). The community of saints under the new covenant now enjoy a better sanctifying power in Christ. Through the cleansing blood of Jesus, sinful hearts are made clean—no longer subject to the doubts of an evil conscience that "could turn one away from God."[72] Additionally, through the sacrifice of Christ, God's promise to "sprinkle clean water" on his people—cleansing them from all unrighteousness—is also fulfilled (Ezek 36:25), leaving the believing community without excuse. The only appropriate response to Christ's all-sufficient work as high priest is for

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[70] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Dallas: Word, 1991), 283.

[71] Koester, *Hebrews,* 449.

[72] Koester, *Hebrews,* 449.

God's people to collectively draw near to him in "full assurance of faith" (v. 22). Lane argues that this "drawing near" in faith is not only "the essence of being a Christian," but also "the responsibility of the community."[73]

Persevere in Hope

The author's second communal exhortation—"let us hold fast the confession of our hope" (v. 23)—builds on the first. God promised his people "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain" (6:19). He then fulfilled this promise on the cross of Christ, proving himself "faithful" and our hope unassailable. The power, then, for a community to persevere in hope is not individual determination or personal resolve. The basis for Christian endurance "without wavering" (v. 23) is the faithfulness of God to his believing community. That is why holding "fast the confession" (v. 23), according to Johnson, requires the "active and mutual commitment and upbuilding"[74] of the local church. The author's earlier warning in chapter 3 to not "fall away," but "hold our original confidence firm to the end" (3:14) is predicated on the community "exhorting one another daily" (3:12). This type of daily exhortation in community, Koester writes, enables believers "to maintain their convictions and manner of life within a larger society that does not share their views."[75] If Lane is correct and "the community possesses the strongest incentive for fidelity in the faithfulness of God,"[76] then to forsake biblical community is to entice the soul to faithlessness and potentially the "fury" of God's eternal judgment (v. 27).

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[73] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* 286.

[74] Johnson, *Hebrews,* 259.

[75] Koester, *Hebrews,* 450.

[76] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* 289.

Encourage in Love

The third "let us" exhortation is comprised of three parts—stirring, meeting, and encouraging—none of which can be done in isolation. Rather, with a deep love for God and one another, community members were to be actively engaged in the spiritual maturation of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Stirring up. He begins the third exhortation by calling his readers to "consider" how they might "stir one another up to love and good works" (v. 24). "Consider" is a weak translation for the Greek word κατανοέω. Lane translates it "keep on caring for one another,"[77] which is more fitting. Every believer is to "keep on caring" for those in their covenant communities by "ardently inciting one another,"[78] to "love and good works" (v. 24). They were to (1) pay attention to the needs of others, (2) lovingly meet those needs when possible, and then (3) "provoke"[79] others to do the same. According to Hebrews 6:10, the recipients of the letter had already been loving one another in this manner. Now, the author encourages them to continue sanctifying one another in this way. They are to provoke one another to love and good works because, as Cockerill writes, this behavior "is the full expression of the community life appropriate for God's people."[80]

Meeting together. Evidently some of the readers were "in the habit" (v. 25) of no longer gathering with the community of the faithful. The author's exhortation to "not neglect meeting together" (v. 25) certainly included their corporate worship services, but F. F. Bruce suggests it goes beyond their Sunday gatherings. He argues they were being encouraged to welcome "every opportunity of coming together and enjoying their

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[77] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* 273.

[78] Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 289.

[79] Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 220.

[80] Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 220.

fellowship in faith and hope."[81] This rendering coincides well with the author's earlier admonition to "exhort one another every day . . . that none may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13).

The author does not specify why some had ceased to meet, but the seriousness of such absenteeism is understood. So serious, Lane writes, "It threatened the corporate life of the congregation and was almost certainly a prelude to apostasy."[82] After all, how could a believer "stir up" (v. 24) or "encourage" other believers to worship in faith or persevere in hope if they neglected to meet? Worse yet, Cockerill argues that a professing believer's habitual abandonment of the gatherings risked "exclusion from the community of the faithful, and thus forfeiture of the ultimate salvation that Christ provides for his own."[83]

Encourage one another. Lastly, with an eschatological view toward salvation and judgment, the author offers an alternative to habitual absenteeism: "Encourage one another . . . as you see the Day drawing near" (v. 25). For the faithful, seeing the Day draw near would have been an encouragement to press on. For the disobedient, the nearness of the Lord's return meant judgment and the need for repentance and faith. Either way, believers could not encourage or be encouraged when absent the body. Paul Ellingworth argues that the author of Hebrews "emphasizes almost exclusively the responsibilities of Christians for one another, within the believing community."[84] The whole community

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[81] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 257.

[82] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* 290.

[83] Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 221.

[84] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 526.

was given the responsibility of watching and intervening when one of its members grew weary or became apostate.[85]

Johnson concludes that this, "call to mutual stimulation to faith, love, and hope, as well as to mutual exhortation, indicates the communal character of . . . this 'house of God.'"[86] Hebrews 10:19-25 is in agreement. The Christian life is opposed to any sort of individualism that devalues or dismisses the need to gather regularly. Christ gained access into the presence of God so that every believer could worship in faith, persevere in hope, and encourage one another in love. When members of the body distance themselves from the community, they not only bring harm to themselves, but Johnson believes they create a "perilous condition for the remaining members, all of whom rely on a shared and enthusiastic commitment if they are to persevere" to the end.[87]

A God-Glorifying Community: 1 Peter 4:7-11

In 1 Peter 2:11–4:6, the apostle focused on how Christians are to live and relate to those outside of the church. In 4:7-11, Peter turns his attention inside, focusing on the mutual relationships God expects those in his household to have and enjoy. Accordingly, J. Ramsey Michaels suggests that "the keynote of the section is mutuality, expressed repeatedly by the phrase εἰς ἑαυτοὺς, 'to each other' (vv 8, 10), and εἰς ἀλλήλους, 'to one another' (v 9; cf.5:5b)."[88] A close examination of 1 Peter 4:7-11 will show how *the mutuality commands* of love and forgiveness (v. 8), hospitality (v. 9), and shared ministry (vv. 10-11)—*faithfully practiced in authentic community—serve the purpose of glorifying God* (v. 11).

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[85] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13,* 290.

[86] Johnson, *Hebrews,* 260.

[87] Johnson, *Hebrews,* 261.

[88] J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 244.

Love and Forgiveness

Before Peter addresses how believers are to relate to one another, he establishes not only the urgency involved, but also their dependence upon God to live out these communal lives. He begins verse 7 with an eschatologically persuasive truth-claim: "The end of all things is near." The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ ushered in the last days. "Therefore," Peter concludes, "be self-controlled and sober-minded" (v. 7). Thomas Schreiner believes that the apostle uses eschatology at the beginning of his entreaties (vv. 8-11) "to encourage believers to live in a godly way" and "galvanize them to make their lives count now."[89] The urgency of the times required discipline and clarity so God's people could pray. I. Howard Marshall suggests these are corporate prayers, given the context of the passage.[90] Whether corporate or individual, R. C. H. Lenski argues that the emphasis is clear: "They who pray aright to God, who worship as they should, will gladly do all that is here asked . . . aided and enabled [by God] in every way."[91] Authentic worship, buttressed by the prayers of the saints, equips the household of God to live as the authentic community he decreed.

Love is first. "Above all" (πρὸ πάντων), mutual love must be the controlling influence among God's people. Not a shallow love, but a love "fully stretched" (ἐκτενῆ), deep enough to withstand the pressures of sinners saved by grace living in the same household; a love deep enough to "cover over" all the sins of "weakness, faults, mistakes, and failings"[92] that can tear authentic community apart. This love does not have the power to pay the price sin exacts, only Christ can do that for his people. But Edward Clowney suggests that "our love can imitate the mercy of God; our love can forgive, and

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[89] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude,* The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 211.

[90] I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter,* The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 142.

[91] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 193.

[92] Lenski, *The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, 195.

forgiveness always pays a price."[93] The love Peter is describing is costly—it is costly because "it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful" (1 Cor 13:5). Rather, it is an others-centered, life-giving love that unifies God's church. When a local body of believers strives to "earnestly love" one another—forgiving and overlooking sin—Davids believes love will become the "most valuable virtue in a community that needs to preserve its solidarity."[94]

Showing Hospitality

An area where this "earnest love" was first tested in the early church was in their homes. Hospitality was a necessity. Whether hosting a corporate worship service, traveling teachers, missionaries, or a brother in need, believers needed a supernatural love to do it well. Although hospitality was an essential practice in Mediterranean culture, Christians were expected to provide comfort and protection in their own homes to one another "without grumbling" (v. 9). Peter adds this qualifier because hospitality is also costly—time, energy, resources, and patience are all required. It was the church's ability to minister to one another joyfully that distinguished Christian hospitality from the larger culture. And even though near-eastern hospitality may not be practiced in the same manner in the Western church today, Christian communities are still expected to open their homes to one another. Michaels argues, "Hospitality is simply a concrete expression of mutual love among Christians, and therefore . . . a general obligation of the entire congregation."[95] Authentic communities striving to love one another earnestly will produce these hospitable cultures, not by command or rule, but by choice.

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[93] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 180.

[94] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans: 1990), 158.

[95] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 249.

Ministering in Word and Deed

The cultivation of these loving, hospitable communities would not be left to chance. Peter reveals that God graciously bestows his "varied" gifts upon his people to cultivate community. Unlike Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12, Peter does not delineate a long list of gifts. He summarizes them in two general categories—speaking and serving. This generality, Grudem suggests, expands the gifts to include "any talent or ability which is empowered by the Holy Spirit and able to be used in the ministry of the church."[96] The key is gifts being used. God gives gifts expecting his people to be "good stewards" (v. 10), or managers, of the gifts given. Every believer is expected to exercise his gift (or gifts) wisely for the betterment of the church because it does not belong to him. "God maintains a claim" over every gift and each gift, Lewis Donelson argues, "is destined for the good of the house, for "one another.""[97]

Word gifts. The first general category of gifts Peter identifies involves speaking. Some argue this refers specifically to the verbal gifts found in the New Testament—prophecy, teaching, evangelism, tongues, etc. Michaels suggests that Peter is broadening this category "to include all the teaching and exhortation that goes on in connection with Christian worship."[98] Lenski goes one step further and argues that Peter is referring "to the common, daily talk of any and all Christians, of women as well as men."[99] If Lenski is right, then a defining quality of God's household is the constant and faithful ministering of God's Word, the "oracles of God" (v. 11), one to another. God's Word, not the wisdom and opinions of man, will be the primary verbal influence that gives shape to a believing community.

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[96] Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity: 2009), 182.

[97] Lewis Donelson, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 130.

[98] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 250.

[99] Lenski, *The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude,* 198.

Deed gifts. The second general category of gifts Peter addresses involves deeds, or "services" (v. 11) that one Christian does for another. Grudem argues that these gifts of service "include any kind of helping or encouraging ministry for the benefit of others in the church."[100] These "service" gifts, then, are not only given by God, but also exercised out of "the strength that God supplies" (v. 11). This God-given "strength" parallels the "words" God gives to those with the verbal gifts. In other words, both the verbal and the service gifts were given, Michaels believes, to "center on 'God' as the source of everything worthwhile accomplished among his people."[101] All the gifts, then, serve the dual purpose of maturing the community of saints while simultaneously glorifying the power and goodness of the gift giver.

For the Glory of God

The ultimate purpose for God's people to think clearly, love earnestly, practice hospitality, and exercise their gifts is so "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (v. 11). Collectively revealing and reflecting the character of God is the goal of the whole church. When a local church strives to be "self-controlled and sober-minded" (v. 7) so they can pray effectively, God is glorified. When a congregation loves one another deeply, God is glorified. When members practice biblical hospitality in their homes with cheerful hearts, God is glorified. When the church faithfully exercises its "varied" gifts of grace in God's strength, God is glorified. God is glorified because he supplies all these gifts and abilities through Christ. The love, wisdom, and strength to exercise them all come from him.

This God-glorifying community, created and sustained by God, leads Peter to close this section with a doxology—"to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (v. 11). "The point of the doxology," Michaels concludes, "is that the ministry of

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[100] Grudem, *1 Peter*, 183.

[101] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 251.

Christians to one another counts as authentic worship."[102] Worship is glorifying God. Practicing the mutuality commands in authentic community, then, serves the purpose of glorifying God and is therefore "authentic worship." True Christians have no greater reason to love and serve one another in the community of the church than this—the glorification of God through worship.

Conclusion

According to Jerry Bridges, the Scriptures clearly teach that "God has created us to be dependent both on Him and on one another" and "none of us has the spiritual wherewithal to go it alone."[103] The Western church may affirm the first biblical truth—dependence on God, but its lack of authentic community reveals a discord with the second—dependence on one another. Some disregard community as a biblical necessity. Others affirm the doctrine but live their lives as though they can "go it alone." The problem with this individualistic approach is that it contradicts the Bible. The biblical texts exegeted in this chapter clearly reveal that a life lived in isolation is contrary to the Christian way of life and God's purpose for his church. The Bible teaches that *the spiritual maturity and testimony of a local church requires authentic communit*y. God cares deeply for his church. Any practice or doctrine that minimizes community works against God's plan for his church—the revelation of his glory to the world through the communion of the saints.

The church in Jerusalem following Pentecost set the stage. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and instructed by the apostolic teachings, the church devoted itself to God and to one another. A gospel-centered community became intrinsic to its DNA. As God continued to reveal his Word through the apostle Paul, it became apparent that community was not only a blessing, but also a requirement. The interdependent nature of the church (1 Cor 12), as well as the gifts given by God to build up and mature his church (Eph 4),

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[102] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 252.

[103] Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 60.

both necessitated biblical communities. The Holy Spirit then revealed in Hebrews the church's inability to worship in faith, persevere in hope, or encourage one another in love without authentic community. These mutuality commands, expanded on in 1 Peter 4, were given by God to bless his church. But Peter also revealed a greater purpose. When God's people live out their faith in authentic, Christian community, as prescribed in his Word, God is glorified. For this reason, above all others, Christians ought to fight against the radical individualism of the culture and strive to live daily in the authentic community of a local church.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR
TEACHING THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF
AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

The Greek word for "church" in the New Testament is ἐκκλησία. It is a
compound word that means "called out."[1] When distinguishing between groups of people,
it means a gathering or assembly of "those who are called out."[2] Etymologically, the
church is a community called out or set apart from another community. John Hammett
argues that "the most important background" to our understanding the word ἐκκλησία "is
not etymological . . . but the Old Testament."[3] His argument is based on two primary words
used in the Old Testament to identify God's people, *edah* and *qahal*. Hammett points out
that the translators of the Septuagint used the word *synagogue* when translating *edah*,
referring to a "permanent community into which one was born."[4] But when translating
qahal, they used the Greek word ἐκκλησία, a word that "embraces only those who have
heard the call and are following it" into a new community.[5] In other words, an early and
primary distinction was made in the New Testament between biological communities and
spiritual communities—between the ethnic children of Abraham and the children of
Abraham according to the promise (Rom 9:8).

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[1] Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 411.

[2] Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament,* 411.

[3] John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*
(Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 26.

[4] Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 27.

[5] Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 27.

This distinction is critical when considering authentic community in the local church. According to Nathan Finn, "there has been considerable diversity in the prerequisites for and practice of church membership" for 2000 years.[6] However, if the true ἐκκλησία is made up only of the "called-out ones" and not a *corpus permixtum*, then church community presupposes regeneration—sinners born again by the Holy Spirit and called into the communion of the saints. Craig Van Gelder argues that the church is a creation of the Spirit who "corporately offers salvation to individuals, but this salvation is accepted and experienced within a community."[7] In other words, every Christian is saved into community. Joseph Hellerman calls this salvation "a community-creating event."[8]

For the church in the western world, cultivating authentic community in a culture that idolizes individualism, personal autonomy, and free choice can be challenging. Social scientists have labeled this cultural phenomenon *radical individualism*. Ayn Rand defines it as a worldview in which "man must choose his actions, values and goals by the standard of that which is proper to man."[9] Not what is "proper to man" as a communal creature, but what Gordon Carkner defines as the belief "that individuals should be free to maximize their individual potential in order to pursue whatever they find most rewarding."[10] Both God's Word and the history of God's people are antithetical to radical individualism. Millard Erickson states the matter plainly: "Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in

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[6] Nathan A. Finn, "A Historical Analysis of Church Membership," in *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline,* ed. John S. Hammett and Benjamin Merkle (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 75.

[7] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 131.

[8] Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B & H, 2009) 124.

[9] Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 25.

[10] Gordon Carkner, "Individualism & Radical Freedom Examined," accessed March 18, 2020, https://ubcgcu.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/radical-individualism-examined.pdf, 1.

relationship to others."[11] As previously established in chapter 2, the Bible clearly teaches that authentic community is necessary for the spiritual maturity and testimony of a local church. Radical individualism has no place in God's ἐκκλησία. Churches desiring to live as a "communion of saints" must fight against this perversion of autonomy by recapturing the Bible's vision of authentic community. In other words, *a paradigm shift is necessary in the priorities, attributes, and practices of communal life if CPBC desires to experience authentic community.*

Relational Priorities: God's Family First

The first required paradigm shift is relational: authentic, biblical community prioritizes the collective well-being of God's family over the felt needs of the individual. Christine Pohl, in her book *Living Into Community,* starts with the premise that "human beings were made for living in community. . . . It is in community that we flourish and become most fully human."[12] As image bearers of a communal God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—community and communal living are necessary for those created *imago Dei.* The social reality of the Godhead establishes the foundation for man's longing and needing to be together. Tim Chester and Steven Timmis argue that because God is three-in-one, "we should define ourselves by the network of relationships in which we live," rather than our personality traits or individual accomplishments.[13] That is why Van Gelder, in *The Essence of the Church,* argues that human beings are created "to live in community, come to understand their individual identity from community, and express their individuality through community."[14]

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[11] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1058.

[12] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 3

[13] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 41.

[14] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 92.

Most cultures throughout human history have understood this—that a person's identity is not developed in isolation, but in relationship with others. According to Hellerman, all "societies throughout history have been (and continue to be) collectivist in their view of the world."[15] Collectivism presupposes community. In collectivistic cultures, the well-being of the family, extended family, or local community takes precedence over the desires of the individual. Personal identity is *being* a member of a group. This does not necessarily mean a denial of individuality or personal choice. Rather, each individual is free to act and make choices. But only, as Bruce Malina describes, "if the action [is] in the group's best interest. The group has priority over the individual member."[16] For the Christian, this means belonging to God has consequences—an allegiance to this new community that Chester and Timmis say "supersedes even the loyalties of biology."[17]

The matrix a person uses to prioritize his relationships will determine his commitment to community. In the western world, relational prioritization generally starts with the individual and moves outward. For example, most western Christians would prioritize their relationships accordingly: God, family, church, others.[18] These categories make sharp distinctions between "personal" and "corporate" relationships. Such categorical distinctions are to be expected in autonomous cultures, but not without consequences. Carkner believes this "vigorous pursuit of individual freedom and self-control has led . . . to insecurity, poverty, social fragmentation, [and] despair."[19] These sharp distinctions between personal and corporate life are not found in the collectivist cultures of the New Testament or the early church. The New Testament reveals God's new community as

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[15] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 4.

[16] Bruce Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 19.

[17] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 41.

[18] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 73.

[19] Carkner, "Individualism & Radical Freedom Examined," 5.

being "exceedingly important to God's economy."[20] In other words, the historical record reveals that "the early church did not sharply distinguish between commitment to God and commitment to God's family."[21]

The prioritization of relationships seen in the New Testament and early church were communally driven and looked something like God's family, my family, others.[22] Unlike today, a believer's personal relationship with God was understood and experienced in the context of community. A believer's love of his wife and children was expressed in the life of the church. Even the believer's interaction with the world was as a member of a local body of believers. Van Gelder explains, "The Bible's focus is not on individual Christians but on the formation of a new type of community, a new humanity that is indwelt by the Spirit."[23]

This communal prioritization of relationships, what sociologists call "strong-group" orientation, was certainly true of the Mediterranean culture in the first century.[24] Hellerman writes, "The world in which Jesus and His followers lived was a distinctly strong-group culture in which the health of the group—not the needs of the individual—received first priority."[25] Jesus used this strong-group paradigm of "community first" to establish the relational supremacy of the church. In Luke 14:25, for example, Jesus reveals how being part of his "new" community would undermine the allegiance expected in biological families. In Matthew 8:21, one of Jesus' disciples said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Again, Jesus' response was countercultural: "Follow me, and let the

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[20] Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 123.

[21] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 73.

[22] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 74.

[23] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 112.

[24] Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology*, 19.

[25] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 6.

dead bury their own dead" (Matt 8:22). Commenting on this verse, N. T. Wright concludes, "The only explanation for Jesus' astonishing command is that he envisaged loyalty to himself and his kingdom-movement as creating an alternative family."[26]

Loyalty to this "alternative family" was revealed most clearly in Mark 3. As Jesus' mother and brothers stood outside of a house seeking his attention, the Lord used their request as a teaching moment. In Mark 3, Jesus not only refuses to honor his family's request—a cultural faux pas—but he points instead to those within the house and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:34). He replaces the culture's primary allegiance to the patrilineal family with a new, higher allegiance to God's alternative family. In other words, Jesus' vision for authentic community, Hellerman argues, consisted of his followers interacting "with one another like members of a strong-group, surrogate family characterized by collectivist solidarity and commitment on every front."[27]

This vision of God's church as a "strong-group, surrogate family" is antithetical to the western idols of individual happiness and personal fulfillment. However, to miss the relational priority of God's family over self—or even one's biological family—not only denies the believer true happiness and fulfillment, but also limits the testimony of God's people to a fallen world. Pohl rightly observes, "Our cultural emphasis on personal freedom and self-fulfillment has left many people lonely and emotionally fragile."[28] The very thing man longs for as a communal creature he seeks out in privatized religion, and in so doing denies himself the happiness and fulfillment God created him to enjoy. In the *Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, Thabiti Anyabwile rejects this "privatized religion" because it "destroys spiritual communion" and leaves the Christian still searching for

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[26] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 401.

[27] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 75.

[28] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 3.

community.[29] Anyabwile concludes, "Our privatized ideas about the Christian life do not square with biblical Christianity. Christianity is a family religion. We live the faith dependent upon brothers and sisters."[30]

When a local church begins to live and love like a strong-group family, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger agree that "all its institutional practices will undergo change."[31] Instead of overemphasizing "functionality" or "organizational structure," God's people will see themselves primarily as a social community.[32] And not just any social community, but a spiritual family united to the Son. A spiritual family that will, according to Michael Reeves, cry out together "Abba" and begin "to know each other truly as brothers and sisters" in a new family.[33] This family making is the work of the cross, where Jesus calls people out of radical individualism and into the family of God. John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ,* argued that the work of Calvary was never to simply "save individuals, and so perpetuate their loneliness."[34] He said the cross of Christ was purposed by God to "create a new community whose members would belong to [Jesus Christ], love on one another, and eagerly serve the world."[35]

As long as the western church continues to see itself as a collection of individuals rather than the interconnected, interdependent family of God that it is, authentic community will be unattainable. So important is this relational paradigm shift for the church, Hellerman believes, "Until we truly begin to understand and embrace the

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[29] Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 169.

[30] Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, 112.

[31] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 97.

[32] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 23.

[33] Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 103.

[34] John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ,* 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 249.

[35] Stott, *The Cross of Christ,* 249.

strong-group model of church as family, we will have neither the theological foundation nor the social capital necessary to act in a manner diametrically opposed to the dominant culture of radical individualism."[36]

It is difficult to imagine any significant movement towards authentic community without relationships in the church first being reprioritized. Individualism has conditioned an entire culture to think, worship, and live in isolation. Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop offer a different approach. They argue that when a local church embraces its family identity—when personal identities no longer stem "from our families of origin, or professions, or our interests and ambitions, but the fact that we are [one] in Christ"—then authentic community has a chance to flourish.[37]

Key Attributes of Authentic Community

Reprioritizing relationships within the church is a necessary first step. Though, simply realizing that Christ established his church to live as a surrogate family will not automatically produce community. Authentic community requires the presence of certain, key attributes in order to exist and thrive.

Several attributes of church life could be identified as essential. For example, authentic, biblical community must be Christ-centered "because Christian community," as Bonhoeffer argued, "is founded solely on Jesus Christ."[38] Authentic community also needs to be Spirit-filled. Van Gelder writes, "The church is God's personal presence in the world through the Spirit."[39] Authentic community needs to be founded on God's Word because "Christianity is word-centered" and according to Chester and Timmis, it is

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[36] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 85.

[37] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 30.

[38] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 31.

[39] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 25.

governed by God "through his gospel."[40] Authentic community must also be gospel-centric. If the church wants to differentiate itself from what Dever and Dunlop identify as other communities "that would likely exist even if God didn't," then it must be gospel-centric.[41]

All these attributes are necessary for a local congregation desiring biblical community. Without them, all other communal axioms become irrelevant. The members at CPBC have been fed a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Word-based, gospel-centric diet for over a decade. However, the influence of the culture has had its toll on the church. The prevailing view of Western life, as described by Chester and Timmis, is "an individual standing on his or her own heroically."[42] This worldview still characterizes many Christians. Most members at CPBC validate this cultural heroism by how they relate to one another. To move the membership toward embracing their family identity, three key attributes of authentic community need to be taught to and modeled: *commitment, truthfulness, and unity in love.*

Commitment to Community

Commitment in the local church is essential to authentic community. Without commitment, relationships have no healthy soil in which to grow. But the commitment-phobia of the culture has also become a significant problem within the church. "Commitment phobia," according to Mark Dever, "is the fear that in promising to do something good we will miss out on getting something even better."[43] Economists call these choices "opportunity costs." In a culture that puts a premium on freedom of choice—including where and how long people worship with others—retaining the

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[40] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 24.

[41] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 23.

[42] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 44.

[43] Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of A Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 147.

freedom to choose often outweighs the priority of commitment. The consequences of such thinking work against communal development. Pohl argues, "A willingness to make commitments to one another remains at the heart of our deepest relationships."[44] Communities that remain commitment free in the name of personal choice unwittingly promote shallow relationships and shallow communities.

To counteract this commitment phobia in the church, the prevailing response by evangelicals has been synthetic—manufacturing communities by attracting people as consumers. [45] Although successful numerically, a consumer-based attractional model fails for two primary reasons. First, it creates a community of consumers rather than producers. According to Dever and Dunlop, "spiritual consumers commit to a congregation to the extent that commitment benefits them; spiritual providers commit because of the benefit they've already received in Christ."[46] Without Christ at the center of giving and receiving of one another, manufactured communities will be composed of self-serving consumers rather than life-giving producers. This result is both counter-gospel and anti-community. The church growth and seeker-sensitive movements of the last several decades have borne this out. When the attraction goes away, so do the people.

Second, non-committal, consumer models actually encourage transiency. Dissatisfied people often change their circumstances by simply leaving—finding a place where the grass is greener. Pohl concurs: "Dissatisfaction as a way of life is encouraged by a consumerist culture that feeds notions of entitlement."[47] Churches creating consumer cultures will reap what they sow. The "more" and the "better" are always right down the

[44] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 70.

[45] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 31.

[46] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 165.

[47] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 28.

street. However, as Brett McCracken argued in his book *Uncomfortable,* "commitment even amidst discomfort . . . is what being the people God has always been about."[48]

The answer to commitment phobia in the church is not fewer boundaries or more choices. The answer is found in the promise-keeping God Christians serve. Jesus promised to "never leave or forsake" his people (Heb 13:5). Christians are to derive their fidelity to one another from him. Pohl describes him as "a covenant-making, promise-keeping God [who] has formed a people of promise, born by God's own fidelity."[49] In other words, churches striving for authentic community need to start with commitment rather than attraction. Dever and Dunlop teach that local churches "should call true believers to commit in deep and meaningful ways to the local church community and then increase their love from there."[50]

This counter-culture model for building authentic community rejects a bait and switch approach. It starts with commitment and robust membership covenants. It means unashamedly expecting members to participate in the life of the body and an uncompromising family loyalty to the local church—blood-bought brothers and sisters in Christ committed to the family they are in. Hellerman likens a Christian's commitment to the local church to the natural family: "We do not choose our natural families, and neither do we choose our church families. We might initially choose the particular church we attend. But once we commit to a local congregation, we invariably find ourselves among a group of brothers and sisters."[51]

If God has so "arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chooses" (1 Cor 12:18), then when a Christian commits to a local congregation, he should

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[48] Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 25.

[49] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 67.

[50] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 55.

[51] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 151.

be fully committed. He should not leave because he does not like the music or thinks the pastor preaches too long. He should not leave over a disagreement with a brother or sister, or because he disapproves of the mission's budget. He will stay because the local church is his "new family."

This is not to say there are no compelling reasons to leave a church. There are. But breaking a membership covenant is the breaking of a vow—a promise—and should never be taken lightly (Deut 23:21). When Christians easily break covenant promises by moving in and out of congregations, authentic community cannot be sustained. Craig Dykstra rightly concludes that "when the very making of promises is no longer believed, and believed in . . . families die."[52] Families die because trust is broken. Broken trust destabilizes communities. This destabilization not only heightens emotional tensions within the community, but also breeds a fear of loss.[53] The church community is no exception.

When the church advocates mobility and consumer choice over fidelity to church family, it cannot be surprised when covenant promises are easily broken and people leave when things get difficult. Like a healthy marriage, covenantal commitments in the church provide the framework for healthy relationships. When commitments are shallow, relationships will be shallow. But, when covenant commitments are tested over time and found faithful, authentic community can flourish. McCracken believes, "A healthy relationship with the local church is like a healthy marriage: it only works when grounded in selfless commitment and a nonconsumerist covenant."[54]

It is good to expect members to be committed. It is good to promote longevity and stability in the local church, pushing against what Eugene Peterson calls the "great

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[52] Craig Dykstra, "Family Promises," in *Faith and Families,* ed. Lindell Sawyers (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1986), 143.

[53] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 80.

[54] McCracken, *Uncomfortable*, 25.

market for religious experience,"[55] and encouraging people instead to a "long obedience in the same direction."[56] This type of commitment may be contrary to a culture that demands immediate satisfaction, but "communities in which we grow and flourish," Pohl contends, "last overtime and are built by people who are faithful to one another and committed to a shared purpose."[57]

Truthfulness in Community

Once commitments have been established and proven over time, members of a local congregation will feel secure enough to be *truthful.* Being truthful— sharing and receiving truth in the context of a local church—is essential for building authentic community. Thomas Aquinas goes so far as to say, "It would be impossible for men to live together [in community], unless they believed one another as declaring the truth one to another."[58] Without truthfulness and transparency, people cannot know or be known by others. Authentic community requires shared knowledge amongst its members—true knowledge that can be communicated and expressed in the context of a loving and safe environment. The local church is specifically designed by God for people to relate to one another in this way.

Because Christians are united with Christ (Col 3:1-4), they share in the objective reality of being united one to another (Eph 4:3). Jerry Bridges argues that this "realization that we do in fact share a common life with other believers should stimulate within us a desire to share experientially with one another."[59] Part of this experiential sharing will be

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[55] Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 16.

[56] Peterson, *A Long Obedience*, 17.

[57] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 4.

[58] Thomas Aquinas, "Question 109: 'Of Truth,'" in *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 2:1662.

[59] Jerry Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring: Recovering the Meaning of True Fellowship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1985), 65.

truth-telling—speaking and receiving the truth in love with one another (Eph 4:25). Fundamentally, this will begin with God's Word being faithfully spoken from the pulpit week after week. Corporately, it will be manifest as members speak the dynamic truth of God's Word to each other organically and regularly.[60] However, cultivating a truthful community requires more than sharing scriptural truths. It requires believers sharing their lives together. Dever and Dunlop describe it as a culture "where it is normal for people to have deep and honest conversations about their spiritual lives."[61]

The culture of the San Francisco Bay Area favors perception over transparency. It is a culture where truth is dismissed as relative. Ralph Keyes would call it a post-truth community, where "we no longer tell lies. Instead we 'misspeak.' We 'exaggerate.' We 'exercise poor judgment.'"[62] Communities that are hostile to the truth will often prefer silence or deception over honest communication, but a rejection of truth and transparency is incompatible with biblical community. In the church, believers must not only speak the truth of God's Word to one another, but as Bridges describes, their speaking must also involve "the sharing of [their] sins, failures, and discouragements, as well as [their] blessings and joys."[63]

In other words, truthful transparency is essential to community. When in need, the believer will ask for help. When encouraged, the believer will rejoice with others. When edified, the believer will teach his brothers and sisters. When in sin, the believer will confess his sins to a brother. Chester and Timmis describe it as a community where "God-talk is normal . . . talking about what we are reading in the Bible, praying together whenever we share needs, delighting together in the gospel, and sharing our spiritual

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[60] Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring*, 82.

[61] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 171.

[62] Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 44.

[63] Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring*, 84.

struggles."[64] A community like this will be honest, but not necessarily tidy. [65] It will be an authentic place for knowing and being known, and communities like this are glorifying to God.

Ed Welch, in his book *Side by Side*, sees truthful transparency as essential to intimacy. He offers this general rule: "The better you know other people, the more you enjoy and appreciate them—that is, the more you love them, the more you will be invited into their lives."[66] This principle is key. Inviting and being invited into one another's lives is where communities really begins to thrive. However, these invitations will only take place in communities that, Pohl writes, "make a safe place for the awkwardness of confession, forgiveness, and healing." [67] Such communities exist when every member truly believes he is the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15) and refuses to condemn his brother or leave when offended. These gospel-centered communities do not overlook or accommodate sinful patterns in the lives of their members. Rather, they create cultures that promote openness, healing, and growth through confession and reconciliation.

Truthful communities strive to live in the power of the gospel and daily presence of the cross. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this: "The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners."[68] But he then concludes with this simple truth: "The fact is that we are all sinners!"[69] Every Christian is a sinner, but he is a sinner saved by grace. When God's grace is expressed properly in community, transparency, not concealment, will be

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[64] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 65.

[65] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 115.

[66] Edward T. Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 97.

[67] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 151.

[68] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112.

[69] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112.

the fruit. Members will share their struggles and confess their sins and expect others to do the same. Chris Rice, in *Grace Matters,* writes, "One of the foundations of community is knowing that you will sin and be sinned against. It needs to be our daily expectation. But there also needs to be an expectation of forgiving others their sins and being forgiven."[70] Church communities that strive for this gospel-truthfulness will grow over time in both intimacy and authenticity.

Pursing Unity in Love

Commitment and *truthfulness* are necessary pillars for authentic community to thrive. Another key attribute of biblical community is *unity in love*—members fighting for the unity of the church out of their love for God and love for one another. It is a fight because man's natural tendency is toward disunity. Christians are to fight for unity first and foremost because it reflects the unity of the Godhead. Christians are also to fight for unity in the church because it shows off the wisdom and power of God to a divided world.[71] Second-century patristic father, Tertullian, reveals how unity in the church reveals the power of God to fallen men: "We call each other brethren . . . One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives."[72] Van Gelder sees the new community of the church as a "people of diverse racial, ethnic, national, and political identities" supernaturally brought together by God.[73] One would expect division and strife within such a diverse gathering. But when local churches made up of people from varied backgrounds find themselves unified in Christ, God is glorified, his people are blessed, and the world

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[70] Chris Rice, *Grace Matters* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 203-4.

[71] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 164.

[72] Tertullian, "The Apology," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 46.

[73] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 109.

stands in awe. Pohl is correct in saying "how we live together is the most persuasive sermon we'll ever get to preach."[74]

When the church lives as a loving, unified body of believers, it thrives. Russell Moore notes that such communities thrive, in part, because "only a strange gospel can differentiate itself from the worlds we construct."[75] So, when modern evangelicalism constructs churches that match the world—oftentimes in the name of unity—authentic community suffers. Low-barrier, seeker-sensitive churches with little or no expectations of living life together have a disunifying effect. The early church understood this ecclesiastical precept. Instead of pursuing unity by diminishing expectations of communal life, McCracken observes that "in the first centuries of Christianity, churches were hard to enter."[76] The early churches did not grow by becoming culturally acceptable. According to Alan Kreider, they grew "because they required commitment to an unpopular God who . . . equipped them to live in a way that was richly unconventional."[77]

One aspect of this "richly unconventional" way of living is a radical commitment to the unity of the church—commitment that moves beyond lip-service. During the Enlightenment, strong-group thinking gave way to a worldview that prioritized personal autonomy over collectivism. The result transformed Western civilization. Political, social, and economic structures moved away from prioritizing family or village to prioritizing self. The church was not immune. Many Western Christians today may say they want community, but they only want it on their own terms. They want it, Pohl writes, "with easy entrances and exits, lots of choice and support, and minimal

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[74] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 2.

[75] Russell Moore, "Is Christianity Dying?" *Moore to the Point* (blog), May 12, 2015, http://www.russellmoore.com/2015/05/12/is-christianity-dying/.

[76] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 41.

[77] Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 149.

responsibilities."[78] However, capitulating to the culture by creating low-commitment churches will not bring unity. Instead, Dever and Dunlop argue that churches serious about community will call their members "to act out the supernatural depth of commitment to other Christians that is inherent to faith."[79]

A commitment to unity will be revealed by Christians recognizing their mutual dependence upon one another. This idea of being dependent is contrary to the prevailing worldview of the western culture. In the Western world, Carkner argues that "radical Individualism holds a strong allure . . . especially for the young, strong and bright, or people who want to reinvent themselves, or make a name for themselves."[80] The biblical worldview rejects the notion of personal "reinvention" or "name making." In strong-group communities, Hellerman points out that a person's "identity is not primarily in his own personal achievements, but in the context of the group to which he belongs."[81] In other words, every Christian is dependent upon the local church to know himself and be known by others—identity is dependent upon unity.

Christians are needy people. That is why Welch's vision of a truly unified church consists of knowing and needing: "Picture a community—a church—being side by side with us as we know and help others"[82] Welch argues that one of the greatest gifts a Christian can give to his church to cultivate unity is his neediness, because by being needy "you will inspire others to ask for help."[83] This encouraging "neediness" may sound violent to the Western ear, but it is essential if the church desires to grow in unity. Rather than pursuing a "try-harder," Western cure, James Wilhoit offers an alternative approach.

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[78] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 4.

[79] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 30.

[80] Carkner, "Individualism & Radical Freedom Examined," 4.

[81] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 21.

[82] Welch, *Side by Side*, 161-62.

[83] Welch, *Side by Side*, 15.

He believes cultivating unity "requires that people use their brokenness and their thirst to drive them to God in and through his community."[84] Wilhoit calls it "optimistic brokenness"—rejecting will-power as a solution to sin and turning instead to the unified power of the local church.[85]

Knowing that Christians need one another, especially in the context of the local church, should also compel believers to consider the unity of the church when making major life decisions. If the body is truly "one," then every major decision made by a member affects the entire body. Wilhoit argues that becoming a Christian means becoming "part of a larger body, and it is the glory of Christ and the mission of his church" that must be considered "first."[86] Americans take great pride in the freedom to choose where they will go to school, who they will marry, where they will work, and what church they will join. This type of autonomous decision making is foreign in strong-group communities. Hellerman explains, "People in traditional, strong-group cultures typically make none of these decisions in isolation. They are made within the context of the family or village community."[87] Churches striving for unity will take an active, prayerful roll in the major life-decisions of its members.

This communal participation is not designed to stifle freedom. Collective decision making is to be exercised because the "opposite to no division," according to Anyabwile, "is that [members] should have equal concern for each other."[88] In other words, having a genuine care and concern for *every* member of the church should inform a believer's decision-making process.

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[84] James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 58.

[85] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 62.

[86] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as of the Church Mattered*, 90.

[87] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 6.

[88] Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, 40.

In the West, most personal decisions are made with the primary interest of self or biological family. Pragmatism, not seeking unity in the church, has the greatest sway. Wade Roof, in *A Generation of Seekers,* draws the same conclusion. He argues that when a Christian's life choices are "disjointed from belonging [to a local church], it amounts to a 'portable' faith."[89] Though biblically, there is no such thing as a "portable faith." Bonhoeffer is right in saying, "We are members of a body, not only when we choose to be, but also in our whole existence. Every member serves the whole body, either to its health or to its destruction."[90] Churches that desire to preserve the unity of the church will encourage communal decision making. They will reveal their practical care for one another by encouraging members to make major life decisions with the help of the church and with the best interests of the church in mind.

Commitment, truthfulness, and *unity* are essential attributes of authentic community. McCracken argues that the world "needs a true, unified, and eloquent witness to the distinctly alternative vision for life that Jesus offers."[91] Jesus offers every believer a gospel vision to love and be loved in the context of the local church. He calls Christians to love him and to love one another, knowing that love cultivates unity in the body.[92] When the "eloquent witness" of a unified church is on display—people with little in common, loving each other like family—Dever and Dunlop rightly concur: "All heaven looks on with wonder at what the gospel has created."[93]

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[89] Wade C. Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journey of the Baby Boomer Generation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 200.

[90] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 89.

[91] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 37.

[92] Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring*, 99.

[93] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 72-73.

A Practical Shift: Mutuality Commands

Every believer set apart by God and indwelt with the Holy Spirit is equipped and expected to engage in the life of the church. First Peter 4:10 says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." For many in the Western church, serving one another has become optional—a Christian add-on for the "really" committed believer. But God expects all his children to become servants (Mark 10:43-44). In addition, because God has "bound His grace up" in the use of the various gifts, Anyabwile argues that "our involvement in the fellowship of the body becomes critical for receiving and supplying God's unearned kindness."[94] By serving one another, members cultivate the unmerited love of God throughout the body. Serving is a mark of authentic community. Gerald Sittser describes this service as believers committing their "time, money, energy and expertise to meet the practical needs of fellow believers."[95] It is a community where everyone participates and nothing is held back.

Every Christian is expected to participate in the life of a local church by exercising the mutuality commands. Gerald Sittser argues that these commands are given by God to show believers how healthy relationships develop.[96] According to Sittser, these one-another commands "translate love into action" and "enable the church to become a community of love" as envisioned by our Lord.[97] For CPBC to transform into this "community of love," several mutuality commands need to be better understood and faithfully practiced in the life of the church. The members of CPBC need to reconsider how effectively they are *encouraging, instructing, sharing with, showing hospitality to, and evangelizing with one another.*

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[94] Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, 83.

[95] Gerald Sittser, *Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 91.

[96] Sittser, *Love One Another*, 20.

[97] Sittser, *Love One Another*, 20.

Encouraging One Another

In his teachings to the church in Thessalonica, Paul urged believers to "encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thess 5:11). The Greek word for encourage, παρακαλέω, literally means to "personally make a call."[98] Most Western Christians are not natural encouragers. A lack of intimacy, combined with a sense of self-sufficiency, has led to the neglect of this essential grace among God's people. However, Sittser calls encouragement the "maintenance ministry of the church."[99] He calls it a "maintenance ministry" because without constant encouragement, members will either grow weary and bear less fruit or burn-out altogether. Healthy communities encourage one another regularly (Heb 3:13) to ensure that each member not only continues to grow, but also remains faithful to the end.

The Christian life can be hard. And because the church is, as McCracken describes, "imperfect, messy, maddening, and at times mundane," the command to encourage one another is vital.[100] Churches must seek to replace "critical" and "neglectful" cultures with communities where every member (1) sees that he is needy and (2) in his need, seeks encouragement from others. Crabb's description is helpful: "A church is full of broken people who turn their chairs toward each other because they know they cannot make it alone."[101] Broken people need to be encouraged. Churches that are serious about cultivating encouraging communities will be proactive, taking every opportunity to collectively lift one another up, especially the silent majority. Sittser argues that encouraging churches will regularly "honor the quiet, faithful majority who help the church

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[98] Muhammad W. G. A. Schmidt, *A Greek-English Reference Manual to the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Hamburg, Germany: Disserta Verlag, 2018), 399.

[99] Sittser, *Love One Another*, 106.

[100] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 119.

[101] Lawrence J. Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 32.

fulfill its mission in the community."[102] Such modeling, when coupled with faithful prayer, is a powerful tool. And when practiced consistently over time, a church's DNA will begin to change into a community that encourages others "with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Cor 1:4).

Instructing One Another

One way a church will faithfully encourage one another will be through mutual instruction. In the closing chapters of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul writes, "You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another" (Rom 15:14). The Holy Spirit equips each believer to not only understand the Word of God (1 John 2:27), but also teach it to others. In the Western church, this practice of the priesthood of all believers—teaching and learning from one another—has been superseded by professional ministers and celebrity pastors. The result has been counterproductive for cultivating community and edifying the saints. Henri Nouwen believes that "one of the principal reasons why the ministry cannot accomplish all that it ought is that it is too weak without the help of the universal priesthood."[103] Believers teaching and being taught by other believers cultivates community through mutual necessity. Nouwen writes, "In complete contrast to our idea that adulthood means the ability to take care of oneself, Jesus describes it as a growing willingness to stretch out one's hands and be guided by others."[104] In humility, Christians are to give and seek biblical instruction, one to another.

One of the hardest parts of mutual instruction is correction. Western Christians often avoid correcting other believers because they think it is unloving or an invasion of privacy. Most avoid confrontation because they fear man and want to be liked. The problem with this Western, nonconfrontational approach is that it stands against God's

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[102] Sittser, *Love One Another*, 112.

[103] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 29.

[104] Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, 97.

Word. Jesus commands members of his body to confront sin through one-on-one instruction (Matt 18:15). Dever and Dunlop argue from scripture that "*ordinary church members* must address *each other's* sin . . . turning a blind eye to sin is not an option."[105] However, this call to mutual correction violates the consumer logic of the contemporary, Christian culture. Thankfully, biblical community has never been about consumerism or comfort. McCracken believes, "It's about pushing each other forward in holiness and striving together for the kingdom."[106]

Any church serious about community will encourage corrective instruction among its members and make it difficult for members to leave over relational strife. Anyabwile is right when he states, "If we are to enjoy authentic community, we must be a group of people committed to the sometimes painful and messy work of restoring others."[107] This commitment is necessary for the solidarity of the community and spiritual well-being of those who want to leave. According to Hellerman, studies have shown that "people who leave to escape the hard work of conflict resolution are often destined to repeat the cycle."[108]

Sharing with One Another

A third mutuality command that will cultivate authentic community at CPBC is the sharing of material goods with one another. The author of Hebrews instructs the church to "not neglect to do good and to share" because "such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13:16). The God of the Bible is a sharing God. Just as the Father shared the "bread of life" with the world (John 6:35), it is fitting for his children to share their "bread" with one another.

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[105] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 173, emphasis original.

[106] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 38.

[107] Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, 111.

[108] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 1.

Meeting the material needs of God's people has been a hallmark of the church. At the end of the first century, Clement commanded the believer's "to acquire treasures in heaven" by sharing their possessions: "give food to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and shelter the houseless."[109] In the second century, Justin Martyr modelled Acts 2 by telling his church to "bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need."[110] Greed, socialistic fears, a lack of compassion—they all work against the Western church sharing biblically. Craig Dykstra, in *Growing in the Life of Faith*, argues that "faith and the life of faith are communal before they are individual." [111] If true, then Christians cannot neglect the physical needs of those in the church without forsaking authentic community. In fact, one of the definitions of κοινωνία is sharing our things with others.[112] Hellerman argues that the apostle Paul assumed that the sharing of material resources "would characterize relationships among brothers and sisters in God's family."[113]

True material solidarity requires humility—members willingly sharing their need for physical help. Pride impedes a willingness to share. However, "in emotionally healthy churches," Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird contend that "people live and lead out of brokenness and vulnerability," not pride and self-sufficiency.[114] Material solidarity

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[109] Clement of Alexandria, "Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. William Wilson, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 594-95.

[110] Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 167.

[111] Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices,* 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005)*,* 78.

[112] Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring*, 89.

[113] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 79.

[114] Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 74.

will also require a sacrificial love within the church. McCracken calls this a "cruciform love . . . the church financially supporting one another, even if it is costly."[115] Costly sharing—especially when it comes to money—reflects the authenticity of a believer's love for his family members. Money is more than a medium of exchange. Money, and how the Christian uses it, reveals the heart. Stated succinctly by Howard Rice: "Our money is a symbol of ourselves. When we share our substance, we are sharing our life with others."[116] The Scriptures are clear: "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Showing Hospitality to One Another

The apostle Paul, in Romans 12, couples the Christian's call to *share* material possessions with *hospitality*: "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (v. 13). Sociologists have observed that as the Western culture has become more connected virtually it has become less connected physically.[117] Though, practicing hospitality requires more than virtual community; it requires people physically inviting other people into their homes, even when things are busy and life is messy. "Life in the body of Christ need not be about impressing one another or keeping up appearances," McCracken argues. "It should be about entering one another's spaces often and sharing life together rather than separating into private enclaves as soon as the Sunday morning service lets out."[118] Gen Xers and Millennials may be more connected virtually than previous generations, but in-person, in-home community is lacking in their post-Christian

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[115] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 93.

[116] Howard L. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 194.

[117] Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Science, "Stanford SIQSS Study," accessed April 2, 2020, https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/personal-lives/stanford.html.

[118] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 132-33.

world. It is difficult to practice hospitality when schedules are overloaded, no one is ever at home, and privacy prevails over people. But rather than being "sidelined by the sucker punches of post-Christianity," Rosaria Butterfield believes, "Christians are called to practice radically ordinary hospitality to renew their resolve in Christ."[119]

Butterfield, in her book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key,* defines radical ordinary hospitality as "using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God."[120] She is not describing a once a month potluck, a weekly small group gathering, or the squeezing of people into an already crowded schedule. Butterfield is describing what Pohl calls a total reconsideration of "how we live our lives."[121] It is a recognition that every Christian is saved into God's new family. No Christian is an orphan, free-agent, or spectator. And as members of this new family, every Christian is to daily be in the lives of other Christians—loving, serving, and enjoying one another regularly, as hosts and guests. According to Butterfield, this simple "principle of both giving and receiving" regularly "builds community and glorifies God."[122] It is not an easy way of life. Biblical hospitality is time consuming and costly. It requires Christians to care more about their covenant members and neighbors than their own creature comforts. Though, as with all of God's commands, the costs associated with biblical hospitality are far outweighed by its countless blessings.

Pohl rightly observes that communities practicing hospitality soon "discover that one of the most precious resources they have to share with people is their fellowship and friendship."[123] When hospitality thrives as a selfless, loving practice within the church,

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[119] Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 22.

[120] Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, 20.

[121] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 165-66.

[122] Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, 37.

[123] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 170.

it helps satisfy that deep, human desire to belong, to be valued, and to be accepted. It is both life giving and life receiving. Pohl concludes that truly "hospitable communities recognize that they are incomplete without other folks, but also that they have a 'treasure' to share with them."[124] When Christians share their lives with others, they share the "treasure" of Christ. This sharing is not optional for the true believer. Miroslav Volf, in *After Our Likeness,* states this emphatically: "Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others and invite them in—even our enemies."[125] Making space for regular, intimate relationships—with Christians and non-Christians—is one of the fastest ways to cultivate authentic community.

Evangelizing with One Another

 If Van Gelder is correct and "most Christians in North America have a distorted picture of the church," then the church must seek every opportunity to change that perception.[126] One of the best ways to do that is by members of local churches loving one another. When Jesus instituted his new community, he revealed the evangelistic witness of life together in the body: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The strategy behind the Lord's evangelistic approach is simple. Rather than slick marketing campaigns or evangelistic programs, Jesus understood that a love-saturated, gospel-centric church would be attractive to the world. He envisioned an alternative community where, according to Robert Webber, the "embodied experience of God's Kingdom will draw people into itself and nurture them in the faith."[127] Van Gelder argues that such communities have the power to not only reveal God's redemptive story, but also provide the primary hermeneutic of the gospel. He

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[124] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 159.

[125] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 129.

[126] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 25.

[127] Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 72.

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believes "the world is able to understand the truthfulness of the gospel story by reading the story of the life of the church."[128]

Butterfield argues that evangelistic hospitality is one of the best ways to tell Gods' story: "When our Christian homes are open, we make transparent to a watching world what Christ is doing in our bodies, our families, and our world."[129] Biblical hospitality, then, serves the dual purpose of not only nurturing the saints, but also providing a witness to a watching world. Neighbors are brought into relationships with members of God's family. They are exposed to topics and dialogues not heard in secular communities—Jesus, the Word, salvation by grace, repentance, and faith. Dever and Dunlop teach that when Christians grow in hospitality, they "grow in reaching out to those with whom they don't share much natural affinity."[130] These relationships— unencumbered by any natural attraction—provide the most fertile ground for the gospel to flourish because Christ is on display. No evangelistic campaign or program, no temporal bond or attraction, can compete with the alluring power of a gospel-infused, Christ-centered community of believers. When communities become attractive because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God creates a community that other people will want to be a part of.[131]

Conclusion

The Western church's primary response to a commitment-phobic cultural has been increased freedom—come, worship, relate, do not relate, leave as you see fit. Though, if the evangelical church in the twenty-first century desires to be God-honoring and relevant, it cannot capitulate to the radical individualism of the culture. The church

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[128] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 144.

[129] Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, 20.

[130] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community,* 121.

[131] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 50.

must honor God and be relevant at the same time by calling Christians to be *the church*—believers, saved by grace, living committed, truthful, unified lives together in the body of Christ. By simply living as God's "called-out" ones—what McCracken calls "a community of actively serving members practicing resurrection in their neighborhood"—the church will be both countercultural and revolutionary.[132]

For the members at CPBC, this countercultural, revolutionary movement requires a paradigm shift—*a shift in the priorities, attributes, and practices of communal life*. Relationally, this means church members must engage one another as brothers and sisters in the new family of God—a family where God's blood-bought children enjoy an intimacy and commitment to one another of the highest order. In this family, three attributes will characterize God's "new community"—commitment, truthfulness, and unity in love. Each attribute, when exercised by the power of the Holy Spirit, will enable authentic community to thrive. Lastly, the practice of five mutuality commands—encouragement, instruction, sharing, hospitality, and evangelism—will help cultivate attributes inherent to communal life.

Through the cross, Christ has already imparted the *priorities, attributes,* and *practices* of authentic community to his bride. Therefore, Pohl writes, "The goal of all this is not to try harder to build community or to get the practices right. It is about living and loving well in response to Christ."[133] When Christians of any church find themselves loving one another well—in response to the love they enjoy in Christ—authentic community will invariably be the result. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

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[132] McCracken, *Uncomfortable,* 118.

[133] Pohl, *Living into Community*, 175.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT PREPARATION, IMPLEMENTATION,
AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to teach to, and provide opportunities for, the purpose and practice of authentic community to the members at Cambrian Park Baptist Church. Four goals were established to plan, exercise, and evaluate this project: (1) assess the members' understanding and practice of authentic community, (2) develop an eight-week curriculum that teaches to authentic community, (3) increase the understanding and practice of authentic community among project participants, and (4) practice certain mutuality commands that foster authentic community. This chapter will provide, in chronological order, the preparation, implementation, and conclusion of these four goals.

Project Preparation

Preliminary preparation for this project started in fall 2019. One of the assignments for the *Applied Empirical Research* seminar was to design and test a research survey tool that could be used as a pilot for the ministry project. This initial pilot survey consisted of three parts: (1) twenty biographical and binary questions, (2) twenty-one knowledge-based Likert-scale questions, and (3) twenty attitude-based Likert-scale questions. The survey was taken and critiqued by the members of the class and the professor. Based on the feedback from the class, the survey was revised and then sent to a pilot group of ten Christians outside of CPBC on January 28, 2020. The results from the pilot group were compiled on February 15, 2020 and led to a revised, third iteration of the survey in late February. The changes included (1) expanding the number of questions in sections 2 and 3 to 40 and 29 questions respectively, (2) eliminating ambiguous words and phrases, and (3) ensuring all Likert-based statements were non-binary and scalable.

In the summer of 2020, one of the assignments for the *Foundations in Teaching* seminar included an eight-week curriculum that could be used for the ministry project. Using chapters 2 and 3 of the project, I wrote and submitted a preliminary eight-week curriculum as a post-seminar assignment on July 31, 2020. The curriculum was divided into two primary sections—biblical foundations and biblical applications of authentic community. Under biblical foundations (lessons 1-3), five New Testament passages were studied to better understand the biblical teaching of authentic community. Each passage emphasized a distinct characteristic of biblical community—devotion (Acts 2:42-47), interdependence (1 Cor 12:12-27), mutual building (Eph 4:11-16), essentiality (Heb 10:19-25), and God-glorifying (1 Pet 4:7-11). For the biblical application section (lessons 4-8), the curriculum focused on the priorities, attributes, and practices of communal life.

One of the evaluation matrixes used to satisfy goal 2 of the ministry project was receiving a 90 percent or better on the eight-week curriculum submitted in *Foundations of Teaching*. The curriculum was submitted via Canvas on July 31. It was graded and returned by Matthew Haste on August 7. The curriculum received a 98 out of 100, thus exceeding the 90 percent minimum requirement and partially satisfying goal 2 of the ministry project.

Upon the completion of these two doctoral seminars, the primary research tool and course curriculum for the ministry project had taken shape. From August 1, 2020 to November 30, 2020, roughly eighteen weeks, I continued to develop, implement, and evaluate the ministry project.

Weeks 1-2

There were six objectives to be accomplished in the first two weeks of the project: (1) confirm the expert panel's willingness to participate, (2) explain the panel's role in accomplishing goal 2, (3) revise and distribute the eight-week curriculum to the expert panel, (4) submit ethics forms to Robert Cheong for review, (5) receive approval from Cheong to begin the survey process with the participants, and (6) begin formally

promoting the pre-assessment survey, Adult Sunday school class on authentic community, and the upcoming small group practicum.

After speaking verbally with each panel participant in early June, I sent a letter via email to the panel on August 7. In the letter, I briefly described the expectations, time commitment, and process of sitting on the panel review team. After receiving confirmation of participation from each expert, I sent a detailed explanation of their responsibilities as evaluators. In it, I reviewed goal 2 of the project, the evaluation rubric, the numeric values attached to each category, and the expected timeline of completion. Additionally, the panel of experts received a revised copy of the eight-week curriculum submitted in *Foundations of Teaching* and the evaluation rubrics for each of the eight weeks.

The ethics forms for the project were submitted to Cheong on August 5. After receiving notification that he was on sabbatical, I forwarded the forms to Haste and he confirmed my ability to start the survey process. I received official confirmation from the PDS office on August 12.

Promoting the class on authentic community and the corresponding small groups had been taking place informally for months. Beginning August 2, the weekly bulletins and pulpit announcements included a brief explanation and encouragement to participate in both the course and small groups. Additionally, the dates and times of these gatherings were announced, and the pre- and post-surveys were briefly discussed. On August 9, the weekly announcements began promoting and encouraging members to participate in the pre-assessment survey. The elders explained the importance of the survey data, not only for the degree program, but to help the elders assess CPBC's understanding and practice of authentic community.

Weeks 3-4

Preparation objectives continued in weeks 3 and 4. They included (1) making final revisions to the pre-assessment survey on Google Forms, (2) having the survey proofed by the elders prior to distribution, (3) formally describing and promoting the

eight-week course on authentic community via email, (4) formally inviting members of CPBC to participate in the pre-assessment survey, and (5) outlining the curriculum and establishing the structure for the small group practicum.

After completing the curriculum project in *Foundations of Teaching*, I revised the pre-assessment survey one more time. Each question or statement on the survey had to correspond to one or more learning objectives identified in the course curriculum. Survey questions that seemed irrelevant or not directly applicable to the curriculum were discarded. Simultaneously, survey questions were added in areas where the learning objectives were either not addressed, or not addressed sufficiently. Once complete, the revised survey was sent to the elders for review on August 12. The elders reviewed the survey, made a few suggestions regarding clarity and wording, and a final version to be sent out to members was completed on August 15.

On August 24, I sent out a formal invitation to the church encouraging the members to participate in the upcoming seminar on authentic community and the pre-assessment survey. In the email, I discussed my research over the past two years and my desire to share some of this material with the church. I discussed the timeline, ability to livestream, importance of the research for my doctoral studies, and importance of attending or viewing all eight sessions. Additionally, I discussed the pre-assessment survey, process of taking it, need for a personal identification number, and a requested completion date of August 30. The members were eager to begin.

During week 3, I wrote a general outline for the small group gatherings and coordinated with the elders on the times, locations, and logistics of these gatherings. I decided to write the details of the small group curriculum each week as the seminar series progressed, hoping to capitalize on real-time questions or concerns that came out of the Sunday teaching series. In week 2, I wrote a curricular outline for the small group gatherings that included (1) the specific mutuality commands I wanted taught to and discussed over the eight week period, and (2) the format of these gatherings—twenty

minutes designated for a large group time of teaching, and seventy minutes for small group discussion and practice.

Due to Santa Clara County's Covid-19 regulations, CPBC's small groups had not met in several months. The elders spoke with the members about this community series and many desired to start meeting again in person. The consensus was to meet as a church for a fellowship meal at 6:00, and an hour and a half of teaching and practice from 7:00-8:30, on Wednesday nights. Those who agreed to participate were divided into three groups. The groups stayed together for the eight-week period, but the elders rotated groups each week. This model proved to be very effective.

Project Implementation

Weeks 3-4

There were four implementation objectives to be completed in weeks 3 and 4 of the project: (1) receive and review the curriculum rubrics from the expert panel, (2) schedule times to meet with the experts in person or via Zoom, (3) send out the pre-assessment survey to the membership, and (4) remind and encourage the membership to take the survey.

Sunday, September 13, was scheduled to be the first day of class. I had hoped to have the curriculum rubrics back and dialogue with the expert panel completed no later than September 6. That would have allowed me a full week to make any significant changes to the curriculum prior to the first-class session. Three of the four panel participants had the curriculum reviewed and rubrics filled out, with notes, by August 29. The fourth member of the panel sent me his rubrics and notes on September 12. I scheduled one-one-one interviews with three panel participants the week of September 1, and an interview on September 12 with panel participant 4.

The pre-assessment survey was sent out to the membership on August 24. It included instructions on taking and submitting the survey, as well as a link to Google Forms. A deadline of August 30 was given, with the hope of having all the forms in and

downloaded to Excel by September 6. Hard copies were given that week to members who did not have access to, or were unfamiliar with, the internet. A reminder was sent out on August 29, thanking the members who had already completed the survey, and encouraging those who had not to take it.

Weeks 5-6

Weeks 5 and 6 were busy. My objectives were to (1) discuss the curriculum rubrics and notes with members of the expert panel, (2) review their notes and make changes to the curriculum, (3) review preliminary survey data and make changes to the curriculum, and (4) make final announcements to the membership regarding survey completion, the beginning of the course on September 13, and the start of small groups on September 16.

The second matrix used to evaluate the success of goal 2 was a rubric proficiency rating. A minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria completed by the expert panel had to meet or exceed the "sufficient" level for the goal to be considered successfully met. Of the evaluation criteria, 99.65 percent met or exceeded the "sufficient" level, successfully completing goal 2. After reviewing the rubrics for each curricular week, I met with the expert panel members—2 in person, 1 via Zoom, and the other by telephone—to discuss the results and make changes to the curriculum.

Each evaluator provided helpful comments and suggestions on how to improve the teaching series. Following each expert interview, I made a variety of improvements to the curriculum. Some of these changes included (1) clarifying specific lesson goals, (2) fleshing out theological connections between God and community, (3) emphasizing critical points for the members of CPBC to know, (4) adding scriptural support to the application lessons, (5) improving and adding application questions, and (6) improving summary and review portions of the lessons. Most of these changes were made in weeks 5 and 6, but others were made as the course progressed.

Reviewing the results from the pre-assessment survey also aided in the curriculum revision process. Twenty-eight members had taken the survey and submitted their results by August 30, and an additional 9 responses came in the following week, for a total of 37 respondents. At the time of the survey, CBPC had 52 members on the roll. To successfully meet goal 1, a minimum of 50 percent of the membership had to complete the survey, and I had to compile and analyze the results. As of September 7, 71 percent of the membership had completed the pre-assessment survey. By September 11, I had compiled and analyzed the results, successfully completing goal 1.

From these results, the following changes were made to the curriculum: (1) placing a greater emphasis on the interdependence of covenant relationships, (2) stressing the importance of corporate gatherings and personal intervention, (3) highlighting the connection between fellowship with God and fellowship with the church, (4) expanding on the purpose and necessity of the spiritual gifts, (5) emphasizing and providing examples of biblical collectivism and corporate decision making, (6) establishing commitment as foundational for community, (7) stressing the role of community in the authentication and preservation of the saints, (8) highlighting the relational priorities of Christians and the church, and (9) emphasizing gospel-centered communities.

With the data collected from the expert panel and the pre-assessment survey, I made final changes to the curriculum. The church was encouraged again via email to participate in the afternoon seminar on September 13 and to join one of the small group gatherings on September 16. The email contained information regarding times, locations, online accessibility, and expectations, as well as a pastoral exhortation for the entire church to participate. A final reminder was sent to the church on September 12 in the weekly service outline and announcements.

Weeks 7-14

Weeks 7-14 comprised the actual teaching and small group gatherings. The Sunday seminar on authentic community began on September 13 and concluded eight weeks later on November 1. The small group practicums ran concurrently with the Sunday seminars, beginning on September 16 and concluding on November 4. Large-group question and answer sessions were held on November 8 for the Sunday seminar, and on November 11 for the small group gatherings. These sessions were used to ask questions, cultivate further dialogue, receive oral feedback on the series, and clarify teaching points from the post-assessment survey. Each week of the series followed a general pattern, but varied in content. This section will discuss the common structure of each week and then I will address the particulars of each week separately.

The Sunday teaching series was divided into two primary sections: (1) Biblical Foundations for authentic community and (2) Biblical Application of authentic community. Section 1 on Biblical Foundations focused on five passages and was taught weeks 7, 8, and 9. Section 2 on Biblical Application consisted of three parts—priorities, attributes, and practices—and was taught weeks 10-14. For each Sunday seminar, I spent the week prior reviewing lesson notes, verifying sources, making last minute changes, and committing to memory key points of the lesson. No later than Thursday of each week, I would put together a PowerPoint presentation that corresponded to the lesson, as well as determine what I wanted written on the whiteboard. As I prepared the PowerPoint each week, I strove to implement various mnemonic devises to aid in the long-term retention of the material—memorable phrases, icons, and visuals aids, such as drawings and pictures. On Saturday mornings, a teaser was sent out to the church, and members were given a foretaste of the lesson and encouraged to participate.

Each Sunday morning before the service I reviewed the material for that day's study and tested the PowerPoint presentation. Both the Sunday teaching time and small group gatherings were noted in the bulletins and announced from the pulpit each Sunday. Each lesson was taught from 1:30-2:45 to the Adult Sunday School class and recorded.

The curriculum was designed to build upon itself from week to week. This systematic structure helped students see the weekly progression of thought. Each lesson was reinforced by a five-minute review session at the beginning and end of each class. Following each lesson, the elders gathered from 3:00-4:00 to discuss the lesson and offer feedback. For those members unable to attend, the recorded lesson was sent out to the church as a YouTube link every Monday.

For the Wednesday small group practicum, I prepared the lesson for each week on Monday afternoon and sent it to the two elders leading small groups by Tuesday morning. Each lesson had a student handout. The handouts were used during the small group sessions. Every Tuesday night, the handout for that Wednesday's lesson was sent to the church, along with an email reminding and exhorting members to participate. Hard copies of the lesson were also provided the day of the lesson.

During the weekly Wednesday afternoon elder's meetings, I reviewed the lesson, conveyed my expectations for the evening, and answered any questions the elders had. Each lesson consisted of a large group teaching time from 7:00-7:20 in the sanctuary, followed by the small group breakout sessions from 7:25-8:30. During the large group time I taught from God's Word the mutuality command (or commands) to be practiced that evening. In the small groups, each elder led his group through a time of prayer, reflection, discussion, and practice. The elders spent the first 10-15 minutes asking reflective questions specific to the mutuality command being taught and then answered questions from their groups. The remaining 45-50 minutes were spent practicing the mutuality command for that evening. The fourth goal of the project was to practice specific mutuality commands that foster authentic community. The Wednesday night small group format was designed to accomplish this goal.

Week 7. Session 1 on authentic community was held on September 13. The lesson objectives included introducing the study, describing its progression, creating interest, and beginning part 1 on "Biblical Foundations for Authentic Community." We

studied Acts 2:42-47 and considered how the early church in Jerusalem was devoted to a way of life that cultivated authentic community. Building off Acts 2, the small groups gathered on Wednesday, September 15. They considered and practiced Galatians 6:2: "Bearing one another's burdens." In addition to reflection and discussion, small group members had the opportunity to share a burden with the group and experience the blessing of being prayed over. Several members offered assistance beyond prayer.

Week 8. Continuing with "Biblical Foundations," session 2 was taught on September 20. During our time together, we considered 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and how authentic community is contingent upon members living interdependent lives. We also examined Ephesians 4:11-16 and how authentic community is necessary for the building up and maturing of a local church. On Wednesday, the small groups examined and practiced the mutuality command of "outdoing one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10). Members were given an opportunity to honor other members of their group by identifying the grace they see in each other's lives.

Week 9. During week 9, we concluded part 1 on "Biblical Foundations" by looking at Hebrews 10:19-25 and 1 Peter 4:7-11. In Hebrews 10, we examined how authentic community is essential for God's people to worship in faith, persevere in hope, and encourage one another in love. In 1 Peter 4, the class saw how the mutuality commands of love and forgiveness (4:8), hospitality (4:9), and shared ministry (4:10-11)—when faithfully practiced in authentic community—serve the purpose of glorifying God (4:11). The Sunday teaching series was reinforced on Wednesday by having the small groups discuss and practice the mutuality commands of encouraging and comforting one another. The groups examined 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11 and were then given opportunities to share their struggles with the group and be encouraged or comforted by the group. Group members were transparent with their struggles and forthright in offering wise, biblical encouragement from God's Word.

Week 10. Week 10 started part 2 of the series, "Biblical Application for Authentic Community." Building off lessons 1-3, members were challenged with the following thesis: a paradigm shift is necessary in the priorities, attributes, and practices of communal life if CPBC desires to experience authentic community. Beginning with relational priorities, the members learned that authentic, biblical community prioritizes the collective well-being of God's family over the felt needs of the individual. This teaching was expanded upon Wednesday night as the small groups considered and practiced Ephesians 4:25 by "speaking the truth" to one another. Group members were encouraged to share something truthful about themselves that other group members would not know and discuss difficult conversations they needed to have with others.

Week 11. At the midway point of the series, participants were introduced to three essential attributes of authentic community—commitment, truthfulness, and unity in love. Week 11 focused on the attributes of commitment and truthfulness. The members saw the importance of covenant relationships as entry points into community and how speaking the truth in love cultivates intimacy. The Wednesday night small groups built on the attribute of truth-telling by practicing the mutuality commands of confession and forgiveness (Jas 5:16; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). After spending time teaching to both commands, group members were encouraged to confess any sins appropriate for a group setting and to create an action plan to seek forgiveness from, or grant forgiveness to, other members of the church.

Week 12. Week 12 focused on communal attribute 3—pursuing unity in love—and the mutuality command of instructing one another. Ephesians 4:1-3 was the primary teaching text on unity, with an emphasis on separation over assimilation, dependence over independence, and communal decision making. The lesson concluded with a review of the biblical foundations, relational priorities, and essential attributes of authentic community. The Wednesday night small groups drew from the teaching on

unity by looking at Romans 15:14 and the command to "instruct one another." After highlighting the universal nature of this command and how it promotes unity in the body, the members were given opportunities to teach one another in their small groups.

Week 13. With only two weeks remaining in the study, the focus turned practical. Participants were encouraged to consider how effectively they were (1) encouraging, (2) instructing, (3) sharing with, (4) showing hospitality to, and (5) evangelizing with one another. Week 13 focused on the first three commands—encouraging, instructing, and sharing. Scripture passages, illustrations, applications, and reflections were used to make these commands both concrete and personal. On Wednesday night, the small groups considered how they could best "stir up" one another (Heb 10:24). After examining what biblical stirring should look like in the life of a local church, members were given the opportunity to "stir up" one another by (1) considering how God had equipped those in the group "to love and good works" (Heb 10:24) and (2) offering words of encouragement to group members that would lovingly provoke them to engage in the work God had given them to do (Eph 2:10).

Week 14. Week 14 focused on the last two practical aspects of community to be discussed in class—hospitality and evangelism—and practicing the command to "bear with one another" (Col 3:13) in the small groups. During the Sunday seminar, members were challenged to consider hospitality as a "way of life" and evangelism in the context of the local church—specifically how authentic community serves as a gospel testimony to the world. During the last forty-five minutes of class, members engaged in an online, interactive review. Using Kahoot, members competed with one another by answering questions from the previous eight lessons. In the final small group session, members were given the opportunity to practice bearing with each other by identifying circumstances or situations they found burdensome, ways they make it difficult for others to bear with them, and gospel solutions to both.

Project Conclusion

Week 14

Once session 8 was available online, an instructional email and the post-assessment survey were sent out to the membership on Monday, November 2. The instructional email reminded class participants of the following: (1) the need to have participated in at least 7 out of the 8 classes, either in person or via YouTube, in order to take the post-assessment survey, (2) the option to fill out the survey in Google Forms or in their Gmail accounts, (3) the importance of using the same five-digit personal identification number or contacting me if they could not remember their number, (4) to keep the teaching series in mind when answering the survey questions, and (5) to submit the surveys no later than Sunday, November 8.

The post-assessment survey was modified in three ways prior to redistribution. First, the title was changed from "Pre" to "Post." Second, an email signature was added to affirm each survey participant had completed at least 7 out of the 8 classes on authentic community, either in person or via YouTube. And third, the importance of the five-digit personal identification number was reiterated, and an email address was provided for those who had forgotten their number. By Thursday, November 5, only 9 class participants had completed the survey. A follow-up email was sent out that morning, reminding participants of the importance of this data for the research project and encouraging those who participated in the study to take the survey. On Saturday, November 7, the survey was sent again to 9 members using Google Forms reminder.

Week 15

On Sunday, November 8, the class gathered one last time to ask any questions left unanswered in the previous eight weeks, consider several application questions posed by the instructor, and pray as a church for God to bless CPBC with a better understanding and practice of authentic community. For evaluation purposes, copious notes were taken by one of the elders during the Q&A time and then collected. Members yet to complete

the survey were encouraged to do so by that evening, and everyone was encouraged to participate in Wednesday's small group Q&A session and survey. By 10:00 p.m., 30 members who had completed 7 out of the 8 lessons on community had also completed the post-assessment survey.

On Tuesday, November 10, a reminder email was sent to the church encouraging all small group members to participate in a fellowship meal, survey, and Q&A session on Wednesday, November 11. After enjoying a meal together, 23 participants filled out the small group survey, asked questions, and then offered feedback from the previous eight weeks. Notes were taken by the instructor and the surveys were collected for analysis. Goal 4 of this project required a minimum of 50 percent of the small group participants to take a hybrid survey at the end of the eight-weeks and to participate in the collection of oral observations from the small group participants. The average attendance for each small group was 8, for a total of 24 participants. With 96 percent of the small group participants taking the survey and participating in the oral observations, the 50 percent threshold for goal 4 was met.

Weeks 16-18

With both surveys complete, weeks 16-18 were spent compiling data, running statistics, and analyzing the results. For the pre- and post-assessment surveys, this process included several steps. First, the post-assessment survey data from Google Forms was compiled and downloaded into an Excel worksheet. Second, the identification numbers of those who took both the pre- and post-surveys were paired and a separate Excel worksheet was created from the pre-assessment survey results. Third, with the pre- and post-worksheets created, the raw data was put in sequential order according to personal identification number and recalibrated. Questions intended to be answered "strongly disagree" were recalibrated for statistical analysis. Ones became fives, twos became fours, and threes were left unchanged.

With the worksheets paired and recalibrated, several statistics were run. The mean was calculated for every question, section, and participant on both surveys. Both line and bar graphs were created to identify trendlines and outliers. Using the biographical data from section 1 of the survey, the data of various subgroups was also compiled and compared. The subgroups with sufficient differentiation to make comparisons included age, gender, length of membership, participation in corporate prayer, and small group participation. Lastly, questions exhibiting a positive change of 13 percent or more between the pre- and post-surveys were noted and set aside for further examination.

T-tests were then run to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-knowledge sections, the pre- and post-attitude sections, and the knowledge and attitude sections combined. For goal 3 to be successfully met, a *t*-test for dependent samples had to demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. Goal 3 was successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-total survey scores: $t_{(29)} = -7.903$, p $< .0001$.[1]

For the small group survey, the hand-written data from each survey was summarized and transcribed into a Word document. First, the 11 true/false questions were added together for a composite true/false score. Second, each of the short-answer questions was consolidated into 8-10 main points per question, with a numeric designation given to duplicate responses. Lastly, the main points of each question were examined and discussed by the elders.

Conclusion

By the end of week 18, all four goals of the project had been successfully implemented and evaluated. Goal 1, assessing members' understanding and practice of authentic community, was completed and considered successfully met on September 7.

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[1] See table A5 and figure A5 in appendix 8.

Goal 2, developing an eight-week curriculum that teaches to authentic community, was completed and considered successfully met on September 12. Goal 3, increasing the understanding and practice of authentic community among project participants, was completed and considered successfully met on November 13. Lastly, goal 4, practicing certain mutuality commands that foster authentic community, was completed and considered successfully met on November 19. With the successful completion of all four goals of the project, the evaluation of the project in chapter 5 began.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

To determine the success for any project, an honest evaluation is necessary. As the researcher, I want the project to be deemed successful. Knowing this potential bias, I will attempt to examine the project critically for the sake of future readers who may attempt a similar endeavor. In this chapter, I will evaluate (1) the purpose and goals of the project, (2) the project's strengths and weaknesses, (3) what I would do differently, (4) my theological and personal reflections, and (5) my concluding thoughts.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

This project was designed to teach about and provide opportunities for the purpose and practice of authentic community to the members at Cambrian Park Baptist Church. In preparation for my *Project Methodology* course in the winter of 2019, I was required to assess the needs and weaknesses in my current ministry context. After carefully considering the problems of transiency, a lack of commitment, and isolationism within the church, it became apparent that teaching and modeling biblical community to the members at CPBC might be profitable. The elders believe that biblical community is not only taught to explicitly in God's Word, but also one of the primary means God uses to (1) sanctify and preserve his people and (2) testify to the world of his power to save. In other words, because *the spiritual maturity and testimony of a local church requires authentic community,* the pursuit of authentic community must be a priority for every local church.

To address the systemic problem of individualism within CPBC, the elders agreed that a substantial movement was required amongst the members. The elders believed a paradigm shift was necessary in the priorities, attributes, and practices of

communal life at CPBC. They also understood that this paradigm shift would not come easily. Given the degree to which radical individualism and personal autonomy have infiltrated the church, the elders understood that a concentrated effort—through prayer, teaching, and modeling—was necessary. The vehicle for cultivating this paradigm shift was this project.

The purpose was to teach and practice authentic community. Living and participating in community is a learned skill. As a result, the purpose included both a teaching and a practical component. Simply teaching on community in a classroom environment would have been less work, both in the implementation and evaluation of the project. However, to encourage and cultivate real change in communal living, the purpose included opportunities for members to gather and practice what they were learning in a structured setting.

After completing the eight-week teaching series and the small group practicums, I believe the project fulfilled its stated purpose. The members had an opportunity to learn about and practice authentic community. Since authentic community as prescribed in God's Word is woefully deficient in many Western churches, this project's purpose may be beneficial to other like-minded congregations.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

To evaluate the success of the project, four goals were established: (1) assess the members' understanding and practice of authentic community, (2) develop an eight-week curriculum that will train members on the purpose and practice of authentic community, (3) increase the understanding and practice of authentic community for a select group of members at CPBC, and (4) practice certain mutuality commands that foster authentic community. Each goal had a corresponding measure for success. The goals and their successful completion, or failure, are discussed in the subsections below.

Goal 1: Member Assessment

The first goal of the project was to assess the members' general understanding and practice of authentic community. This goal was accomplished by having the membership take an online, pre-assessment survey consisting of twenty-four biographical and binary questions, forty knowledge-based Likert questions, and twenty-nine attitude-based Likert questions.[1] This goal was to be considered successfully met when (1) a minimum of 50 percent of the membership completed the survey, and (2) the survey had been compiled and analyzed by me. On September 7, 71 percent of the membership had completed the pre-assessment survey, completing part 1 of the goal. By September 11, I had compiled the results in Excel and analyzed them, completing part 2 and successfully meeting goal 1.

Thirty-seven members took the pre-assessment survey. After recalibrating the scores to account for statements made in the negative,[2] the knowledge mean (M_k) was 4.25, the attitude mean (M_a) was 4.27, and the total mean for both sections (M_t) was 4.26.[3] Overall, the mean scores were higher than I had expected. After comparing the means of various demographics, there were no significant differences in the mean scores based on gender, age, or length of membership.[4]

However, when comparing the mean attitude scores under "prayer" and "small group participation," there were two noticeable differences. The mean score on the "attitude" portion of the survey was noticeably higher for those who frequented prayer regularly. Those who attended prayer 50 percent or more scored 4.36, almost two-tenths of a point higher than those who did not attend prayer as often.[5] There was a similar

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[1] See appendix 1.

[2] See chap. 4, weeks 16-18 for explanation.

[3] See table A1 in appendix 4.

[4] See table A1 in appendix 4.

[5] See table A1 in appendix 4.

increase in the "attitude" portion for those who participated in the Wednesday night small group gatherings. For those who participated 90 percent or more, they had a mean score of 4.38, compared to a 4.11 for those who attended infrequently or not at all. The results indicate that those who faithfully participated in both the morning prayer services and the Wednesday night small group gatherings had a better "attitude" toward community than those who did not.

Additional data revealed that 100 percent of the participants identified the Word of God as their sole authority over their faith and life. Ninety-five percent indicated reading the Bible a minimum of two to three times a week, with 62 percent indicating reading the Bible every day. However, this affirmation of the authority of God's Word and frequent exposure to it does not translate into practical community. Less than 30 percent of those surveyed indicated meeting at least once a week with another member outside the regular church gatherings. Sixty-eight percent indicated that they had not spent time ministering to a member struggling in over a month. Also, approximately half of those surveyed indicted not having another member into their homes, or not being in another member's home, in the previous two months. Personal discipleship, ministering to one another, and practicing hospitality are all taught clearly in God's Word and are essential for authentic community. To affirm the authority of God's Word and yet not exercise these communal teachings reveals (1) a lack of understanding, or (2) a lack of submission, or both.

As encouraging as the initial results were, the mean scores of a few questions revealed a disconnect between the biblical understanding of covenant community and its practice at CPBC. The assertion, "it is my responsibility to intervene when a member forsakes the gatherings," received a mean score of 3.86. Although not in the 1-2.99 range of "disagreement," after years of teaching to communal watch-care, the elders thought the result would be higher. The spiritual gifts and their use were also called into question. The pre-converted score of statement number 47: "God gives Christians spiritual gifts to be

used for their own spiritual maturation," was 2.49. In the range of "disagreement," but not as strongly as the elders had expected.

Under the attitude section of the survey, two scores stood out. The statement, "I am satisfied with my relationships at my local church," received a mean score of 3.53. Women were more satisfied than men, but only by 0.15. This relatively neutral response in relational satisfaction corresponds with the 3.83 score for question 71: "I feel a strong sense of community at my local church." Both statements are indicative of the need for greater community.

Goal 2: Develop an Eight-Week Curriculum

The second goal of the project was to develop an eight-week curriculum to train members on the purpose and practice of authentic community. As stated in chapter 4, the curriculum was developed as a post-seminar assignment in *Foundations of Teaching.* The feedback received from Haste and other students in the class proved instrumental. Upon completion of the seminar, I made changes to the curriculum and submitted it to my expert panel. The panel used a curriculum evaluation rubric to critique the course.[6] Each evaluator provided a detailed critique of the curriculum. Based on their recommendations, several changes were made prior to the first class session.[7]

During the review/Q&A session in week 9, participants made several helpful comments as well. Several appreciated how the points built upon one another, the extensive use of Scripture, and the direct but compassionate delivery. Others commented on the effective use of clipart to connect different ideas, and the loving but challenging class discussions. Some of the recommendations for improvement included (1) more teaching time, (2) greater details on practical discipleship, (3) more application discussions, and (4) spending time identifying and explaining the spiritual gifts.

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[6] See appendix 2.

[7] See chap. 4, weeks 5-6 for details.

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Two matrixes were used to evaluate the success of goal 2. First, the curriculum had to receive a 90 percent or higher in *Foundations of Teaching*. The curriculum received a final mark of 98 percent. Second, a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria completed by the expert panel had to meet or exceed the "sufficient" level. Of the evaluation criteria, 99.65 percent met or exceeded the "sufficient" level. 238 categories received a 4 (exemplary), 49 received a 3 (sufficient), one category was given a 2 (requires attention), and no category received a 1 (insufficient). The maximum point value per lesson was 144. The average per lesson score was 137.5, achieving a 95 percent average for all eight lessons.[8] With these two matrixes achieved, goal 2 was successfully met.

**Goal 3: Increasing Understanding
and Practice**

The third goal of this project was to increase the understanding and practice of authentic community for a select group of members at CPBC. This goal was implemented by teaching the eight-week Sunday school curriculum on authentic community developed under goal 2. It was taught to the afternoon adult Sunday school class at CPBC. This goal was measured by administering a post-assessment survey identical to the pre-assessment survey administered under goal 1.[9] Thirty members participated in at least 7 out of 8 teaching sessions and were therefore qualified to take the post-assessment survey.

This goal was to be considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. A *t*-test for dependent samples "involves a comparison of means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores."[10] Paired, two-tailed

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[8] See table A2 in appendix 5.

[9] See appendix 1.

[10] Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People (Who Think) They Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

t-tests, each with an $\alpha = .05$ and a critical *t* value of 2.045, were run on the following

categories: (1) pre- and post-knowledge sections, (2) pre- and post-attitude sections, and

(3) the totals of the knowledge and attitude sections combined.

The paired *t*-tests calculated the mean survey scores of participants in the adult

Sunday school class before and after the teaching series on community. The *t*-test results

for the knowledge section were $t_{(29)} = -9.66$, $p < .0001$.[11] The *t*-test results for the attitude

section were $t_{(29)} = -4.61$, $p < .0001$.[12] The total *t*-test results for the knowledge and attitude

sections combined were $t_{(29)} = -7.57$, $p < .0001$.[13]

The *t*-tests for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically

significant difference in all three categories and therefore the null hypothesis can be

rejected.[14] An examination of the means revealed that participants had higher mean

scores after the teaching series on community ($M_k = 4.87$, $M_a = 4.73$, $M_t = 4.81$) than

they did before the teaching series ($M_k = 4.30$, $M_a = 4.33$, $M_t = 4.32$).[15]

Given the objective nature of the statements, I was hopeful the knowledge-

based section of the survey would yield a statistically significant result. It did, with a

$t_{(29)} = -9.66$. I was less hopeful with the attitude-based section. The subjective quality of

these statements left me uncertain as to how decisive the results would be. However, with

an $M_a \Delta$ of 0.4, a *t* critical score of -4.61, and a *p* value of .0000037, I was pleasantly

surprised and encouraged. The results indicate that during the eight-week study, the

participants not only grew in their understanding of community, but also in their

affirmation and practice of it.

In addition to the overall results, a statistical analysis of several key questions

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[11] See table A3 in appendix 6.

[12] See table A4 in appendix 7.

[13] See table A5 in appendix 8.

[14] See figure A1, A3, and A5 in appendices 6, 7, and 8.

[15] See figure A7 in appendix 9.

proved encouraging and insightful. By examining the means and standard deviations for responses with significant positive movements (generally an increase of 13 percent or more between mean scores), I was able to identify specific aspects of the teaching that had the greatest influence on participants.[16] For example, question 11—"It is my responsibility to intervene when a member forsakes the gatherings"—saw an increase of one full point, from 3.87 to 4.87, and a decrease of 0.39 in the standard deviation.[17] This result is significant. Instead of seeing intervention as a pastoral or deacon duty only, the members now understand it is the responsibility of the entire church.

A counter-cultural movement was revealed in the response to statement 27— "The Bible focuses more on the well-being of the individual than on building new communities."[18] With a mean increase of 1.3, from 3.57 to 4.87, and a standard deviation decrease of 1.01 between the pre- and post-assessment responses, the cultural juggernaut of radical individualism has, at least cognitively, been challenged by those who completed the study. Collective decision making also made its mark. In response to statement 35—"having a genuine care for every member of the church should inform my decision-making process"—respondents went from 4.3 to a perfect 5.0, reducing the standard deviation from 0.952 to 0.00.[19] This positive response to decision making as a family is a step in the right direction.

It is the hope of the elders to have covenant members bring major life decisions before the church for prayer, consideration, and counsel. In no way do we want to limit the believer's freedom in Christ (1 Cor 10:23) or pry into a member's personal affairs (1 Thess 4:11). What the elders want to encourage is familial consideration—understanding that major decisions made by one member of the family affect the whole family. With this

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[16] See table A6, A7, and A8 in appendix 10 for a complete list.

[17] See table A6 in appendix 10.

[18] See table A6 in appendix 10.

[19] See also questions 27 and 28 on table A6.

understanding, the elders want to encourage members to seek the counsel and prayers of other members prior to making major life decisions. By modeling this for the church, the elders want to cultivate a community that embraces 1 Corinthians 10:23b-24 practically: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

Individual questions under the *attitude* section also brought some encouraging and edifying results. One of the greatest changes was seen in the members' understanding of neediness. The pre-survey mean for statement 29, "one of the greatest gifts I can give my church is expressing my need for help," was 3.93.[20] The post-survey mean was 4.87, a 0.94 difference. When the members begin to see their needs as a blessing rather than a hinderance to community, cultivating biblical interdependence will become more feasible. Another counter-culture shift came in relational prioritization. Statement 23 scored a pre-survey mean of 3.83.[21] The same statement—"My relational priorities are: God, family, church, others"—scored a recalibrated mean of 4.50 in the post-survey and a standard deviation decrease of 0.50.[22] The Western church has long trumpeted this individualized, relational paradigm. To see the members of CPBC begin to challenge it by considering a more biblical understanding of God's alternative family is encouraging.

Three statements on the survey with pre-survey means of less than 4.0 did not see significant improvement.[23] Statement 1—"I am satisfied with my relations at my local church"—saw a meager 0.03 mean increase between the pre- and post-assessments and a standard deviation decrease of only .012.[24] Statement 2—"I am satisfied with the level of accountability members have in my life"—failed to reach the 4.00 mark, edging

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[20] See table A7 in appendix 10.

[21] See table A7 in appendix 10.

[22] See also question 24 on table A7.

[23] See table A8 in appendix 10.

[24] See table A8 in appendix 10.

up from 3.03 to 3.43.[25] Statement 6—"I feel a strong sense of community at my local church" did move from 3.90 to 4.20, but the standard deviation remained high at 1.10.[26] These results are not surprising. I did not expect the average member's experience of community at CPBC to be transformed in eight-weeks. However, it is my hope that as members begin to exercise what they have learned in the months and years to come, relational satisfaction, accountability, and that deep sense of community will become the normative experience for members at CPBC.

Goal 4: Practicing the Mutuality
Commands

The fourth goal of this project was to practice select mutuality commands that foster authentic community. This goal was implemented in three of CPBC's weekly small group gatherings. This goal was measured by administering a hybrid survey at the end of the eight weeks to a minimum of 50 percent of the small group participants, and collecting oral observations from the small group participants.[27] This goal was met during week 15 of the project when 23 out of the 24 small group participants completed the small group hybrid survey and participated in the oral question and answer session. The survey and oral responses were organized into four separate tables and then analyzed by the elders, successfully completing goal 4 of the project.[28]

The purpose of goal 4 was to "practice" community. Specifically, members were given weekly opportunities to exercise a variety of mutuality commands in one of three CPBC small groups. The commands were drawn from the teaching series on community and intended to supplement the primary teaching time with person-to-person interaction. Due to Covid-19 regulations, I petitioned Dr. Cheong to have this goal

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[25] See table A8 in appendix 10.

[26] See table A8 in appendix 10.

[27] See appendix 3.

[28] See appendix 11.

dropped from the project; however, he encouraged me to keep it in and I am thankful he did. It proved to be the most rewarding part of the project.

The data gathered was very encouraging. Of the 23 participants who completed the small group survey, 96.7 percent responded "true" to the eleven, community affirming statements.[29] The oral feedback also corresponded with the true/false data. Fifty-seven percent indicated that exercising the one another commands drew them closer to Christ by increasing their love for God and the church. This increased love for the church was revealed in the following ways: 65 percent expressed an increased love for other members and a greater desire to be in their presence; 35 percent said practicing the one another commands increased their awareness that everyone struggles and, as a result, they were compelled to be more compassionate; and 30 percent indicated that they want to be more transparent and intimate with other members. All these data points reveal a greater desire for the members to engage in authentic, communal life.

Analyzing the specific mutuality commands practiced over the eight weeks also proved revealing. When asked, "Which two commands has God's grace enabled you to fulfill best," 21 percent said encouraging and comforting one another.[30] This result was not surprising. CPBC is a very encouraging community. The mutuality commands of burden bearing, instructing, and stirring up one another each received a 16 percent vote.[31] This second grouping was not predicted. Mutual instruction and stirring up are two areas the elders have taught for years without much success.

When asked, "Which two commands do you find yourself struggling with most," 30 percent said speaking the truth in love, 21 percent said instructing others, and 16 percent said confessing and forgiving.[32] The 30 percent figure for speaking the truth

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[29] See table A9 in appendix 11.

[30] See table A10 in appendix 11.

[31] See table A10 in appendix 11.

[32] See table A11 in appendix 11.

matches the culture and affirms the struggle of mutual instruction and confession. Privacy, personal autonomy, and a desire to be liked continue to overshadow this essential communal attribute of truth telling. When asked to identify "one or two of the mutuality commands that you need members ministering to you most," 29 percent indicated encouragement and comfort, 26 percent said speaking the truth in love, and 17 percent said stirring one another up.[33] These numbers reveal an interesting dilemma. Thirty percent indicated they struggle speaking the truth to one another, and yet 26 percent indicated that is what they need most. Moving forward, this tension will need to be addressed and taught in greater depth by the elders.

Strengths of the Project

The project had a few compelling strengths. First, the concentrated time of study and practice offered a direct and thoughtful challenge to the radical individualism that has infiltrated the church. Grounded in God's Word, the project elevated biblical community to its proper place by filling a knowledge gap in the church's ecclesiology. For example, by addressing relational priorities and the impact of decision making on the unity of the church, several members are now considering major life decisions as members of the CPBC family. Decisions such as relocating, making a career change, and going away to college have already been brought to the elders and church for consideration and prayer. Counter-cultural changes like this are encouraging to see.

Second, the curriculum was intentionally systematized, diversified, and then synchronized with the small group practicums. To promote long-term retention, each week the curriculum built on the previous week's lesson and was reviewed at the beginning and end of each class session. The curriculum was also diversified to accommodate for multiple learning modalities. By using visual aids, whiteboard outlines, reflective in-class assignments, class discussions, and lectures, students with different learning styles were

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[33] See table A12 in appendix 11.

better equipped to learn. Lastly, by synchronizing the teaching and small group practicums, members were able to hear a lesson on Sunday, and then practice it on Wednesday. This coordination between the classroom and small groups proved to be very effective. The Holy Spirit graciously took unfamiliar teachings and equipped the members to not only understand them, but also agree with them and desire their implementation.

Third, the small groups cultivated and enjoyed community as they practiced community. Each small group session was designed to be member-driven. As the members taught, encouraged, comforted, and stirred up one another, biblical community took place. During the oral assessment, members indicated how they had grown in their intimacy and trust. As they shared stories, confessed sins, and asked for prayer from one another, community was being cultivated. By the end of the eight weeks, the members had a greater love for one another and, in turn, a greater love for God and the community at CPBC.

A fourth strength of the project was the classroom dynamic. Members had anticipated this teaching series for over a year. Their eagerness was evidenced in their faithful attendance and active participation. The result was a vibrant learning experience where I was able to convey God's Word in a serious but light-hearted environment. Laughter, tears, and healthy debates were normal parts of the weekly learning experience.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project had several weaknesses as well. First, time was an issue. I originally intended to do a ten-week study. However, with the Covid-19 regulations on public gatherings in Santa Clara County, I decided to add fifteen minutes to each lesson and then cut the number of sessions from ten to eight. However, the additional two hours of class time gained by going from one to 1.25 hour sessions did not translate into two additional lessons in practice. Consequently, having prolonged in-class discussions and providing additional application points were limited due to time constraints.

A second weakness of the project was follow-up. Each small group session

ended with a homework assignment. Members were encouraged to take the one another command from that week and apply it directly to one or more members in the body. Most seemed eager to implement what they had learned, but without an accountability structure in place, the large majority failed to complete the weekly homework assignments, thus limiting the practice of these commands to the small group sessions.

A third weakness of the project was technology. The county's regulations surrounding Covid-19, coupled with a general fear of contraction, limited attendance. To combat this, the lessons were recorded and sent out each week via YouTube for those unable to attend. Although I am thankful for this technology, those who participated virtually were unable to experience the person-to-person interaction essential for cultivating community. I am thankful for the consistently high attendance week after week given the circumstances, but ideally a series on community would require members to meet in person without a virtual option.

A fourth weakness of the project was curricular. Trying to cover a topic as broad as biblical community in such a short period of time was challenging. For example, in selecting the mutuality commands for the small groups, I tried to pick commands that I thought the members of CPBC needed to work on most and could be practiced in a small group setting. However, with over thirty-one mutuality commands in the New Testament, limiting interaction to eight did not accurately reflect the Bible's emphasis on one anothering. Additionally, some of the mutuality commands were difficult to practice in a small group setting. For example, the command to "bear with one another," although essential to a healthy community, is not best expressed in a small group environment.

What I Would Do Differently

There are a few modifications I believe would make the project better. First, I would take the class *Foundations to Teaching* before *Applied Empirical Research*. In *Applied Empirical Research*, I developed a sample survey and tested it on a pilot group. This process was very helpful, but because I had yet to develop the course curriculum,

the pilot survey had to be substantially revised. Taking *Foundations to Teaching* first would have enabled me to develop the curriculum and then construct the survey directly from the subject matter of the class. Changing this order of operation would have saved me significant time.

A second change I would make to improve the project would be assigning accountability partners in the small groups. As mentioned, most of the homework assignments were not completed. Having accountability partners would have increased the percent of those completing the assignments. A higher completion rate would not only have equipped the participating member to practice the mutuality commands more effectively, but it also would have blessed other members of the body and, as a result, cultivated community on a broader scale.

A third change I would make to improve the project would be further modifying the curriculum. Four areas come to mind. First, I would expand on the teaching of the gifts, providing context for how the gifts, when used together, promote community. Second, considering the socialistic movements in the broader culture, I would make a clearer distinction between Marxian and biblical collectivism. Third, it would be helpful to describe in greater detail what collective decision-making looks like and provide real-life examples of its profitability. Lastly, the teaching on relational prioritization could be improved by clarifying the relational boundaries of various models and providing more examples of what those priorities look like in practice.

Fourth, I would increase my time with the elders leading the other two small groups. If I had spent more time on Wednesday afternoons reviewing the lessons and my expectations for that evening, then each small group would have enjoyed a more harmonized learning experience. Because I made some poor assumptions, the allocation of time in other groups was not always as I had intended. The result was less important areas being overemphasized and key takeaways being neglected or not covered at all.

Lastly, I would make the course longer. Due to time constraints and Covid-19

regulations, the length of the course was decreased from ten to eight weeks. I believe the same material taught over ten to twelve weeks would have provided for a better pace and greater, long-term retention. Extending the course would also have allowed for more real-time questions and in-depth discussions. Lastly, a ten-to-twelve-week series would have provided for more details on the practical application of community. Specifics regarding hospitality, the sharing of resources, and decision making in the body, all deserved greater attention.

Theological Reflections

In 2001, I read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Communion of Saints.* His treatment of the church and community permanently altered my ecclesiology. The past three years of study have sharpened this understanding, revealing the essential role biblical community plays not only in the sanctification and preservation of God's people, but also in revealing the power of the gospel to a lost world. Several theological reflections have come from my studies during this project.

First, because we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), authentic community is not optional for God's people. The church cannot approach community in a frivolous manner, as a perk enjoyed by some churches and not others. Rather, because biblical community is necessary for the sanctification and preservation of God's people (Eph 4:15; Heb 10:24-25), pastors must champion it. Because biblical community is indispensable for the church to be the most accurate reflection of the gospel to the world (1 Pet 4:11), local churches must fight for it. In other words, there is no room in the Western church for a laissez-faire attitude toward community. Neither the Word of God nor church history allow for such a perversion of God's original design.

Second, living in a culture that has celebrated radical individualism for decades, the church must be vigilant not to conform to the ways of the world (Rom 12:2). Individualism and isolation appeal to the flesh. Starting in Genesis 3, one sees the heart of man bent on his own self-interest (Gen 3:6) and a desire to hide (Gen 3:8). If the church

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expects not to conform to a culture that champions personal autonomy as the highest virtue, then sacrificial, others-centered, biblical community must be brought back to the forefront of our dialogues. Membership covenants must be taken seriously. The church must be seen and embraced as God's alternative family (Mark 3:34-35). Again, not as an ecclesiastical add-on, but as a distinguishing mark of a healthy church.

Third, the Scriptures are not silent on community. The meta-narrative of God's redemptive story has always emphasized "a people" set apart for his own glory (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9). However, the Western eisegesis of communal passages from the pulpit has shaped multiple generations to think more like Americans than members of the household of God. Even with a keen awareness of these communal truths, I have unwittingly overemphasized the individual at the expense of the community in my preaching for the past twenty years. I now believe that without a paradigm shift in seminaries and churches, the Western church will continue to struggle in its mission because it struggles to live in community.

Fourth, over the eight-week study it became apparent that a Romans 7 dynamic is part of the problem. Every member acknowledged the importance and truthfulness of biblical community. In addition, according to the surveys and oral feedback, the members desire to live their lives in community. And yet, the members seem to be living in accordance with Romans 7:15, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." They want to live in community, but they want isolationism more. They want to think communally, but have been trained to think as autonomous beings instead. This spiritual battle for community will not be easily won. CPBC must rely completely on the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, encouragement, and discipline if it desires to see sustained community in action.

Lastly, biblical community will not be experienced through a program or eight-week doctoral course. Sustained community will be cultivated by the Holy Spirit through the devotion of the saints. In Acts 2:42, following Pentecost, the church in Jerusalem

experienced community as the saints "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Faithful devotion to the means of grace over time, not a program or ministry, can change the way Christians live and consequently change the way Christians commune together.

Personal Reflections

The subject of biblical community has been a meditation of mine for many years. Having the opportunity to research, write, and teach on community was a tremendous blessing. However, as edifying as the process has been, I am praying for a generational transformation to take hold. If Millennials and Gen Xers begin to embrace biblical community as a way of life, then there is great hope of turning back the tide of radical individualism within the church. For this to be a possibility at CPBC, I must be faithful to teach, pray, and live communally as well. This fidelity to communal living will require several movements of my own heart.

First, I must be satisfied with the work God is doing and will do through the members at CPBC. With the average member fellowshipping at CPBC for only two years, I have seen dozens of brothers and sisters come and go over the past two decades. Just this year, six households—sixteen souls—left CPBC for a variety of reasons. Some of these departures were warranted. And yet, I believe Pohl is correct in saying, "communities in which we grow and flourish . . . last over time and are built by people who are faithful to one another and committed to a shared purpose."[34] Holding onto this hope without being discouraged by the comings and goings of members will be essential if the elders and I want to model community well.

Second, I must strive to remain transparent and relationally accessible. Due to the transient history of CPBC's membership, trusting others has become a challenge. Trust and commitment are essential building blocks to authentic community. If I desire the

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[34] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 4.

members to be relationally accessible to one another, then I must be accessible as well. This type of transparency will require my identity and joy to be firmly grounded in Christ, enabling me to love my brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of what they do or how long they stay.

Third, my heart must be patient. Following the eight-week series on community, Santa Clara County reinstituted a restrictive, shelter-in-place mandate. This mandate made our Sunday and weekly small group gatherings illegal once again. Any momentum gained during the eight weeks was stifled by the county's forced isolation. Regaining this momentum through additional teaching and modeling will take time. Additionally, for those who have been swimming in the culture of Western individualism for years, it may take years for them to see the importance of biblical community. Patience and longsuffering will be essential if I am to remain an effective witness to the patience and longsuffering of Christ in my own life.

Fourth, my expectations must align with my ministry context. Most members leave because they do not believe they have compelling reasons to stay. In other words, their communal relationships to the members at CPBC are not intimate enough to keep them from leaving. Their relational capital in the church and call to ministry at CPBC is insufficient to prevent their departure. The problem with this approach is its self-fulfilling nature. Members leave because they do not feel connected to community. Members do not feel connected to community because people keep leaving. Until God establishes a critical mass of members at CPBC—members committed to one another and the mission in San Jose—transiency will remain high. This realization does not diminish the faith and hope I have of God doing a mighty work at CPBC, but it does equip me to see clearly my ministry field and teach and pray accordingly.

Lastly, my studies on community have increased my resolve to see every member of the church actively engaged in ministry. Henri Nouwen argues that one of the primary reasons "why the ministry cannot accomplish all that it ought is that it is too weak

without the help of the universal priesthood."[35] In other words, community is essential not only for the sanctification, preservation, and testimony of the saints, but also for the work of the ministry. Christians living in isolation work in isolation. However, when believers commit to living out the Christian life in biblical communities, where the varied gifts of God can be exercised by the collective priesthood of believers, much kingdom work will be accomplished. Understanding and practicing biblical community, therefore, is instrumental in equipping the saints "for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

Conclusion

The true success of this project will not be determined by the *t*-test results or positive feedback from the participants. The true success of this project will be determined by the ongoing community cultivated and enjoyed for the glory of God at CPBC. Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop were right in saying, "The point is not community; the point is God. Community is merely the effect."[36] To the degree that the members of CPBC pursue God through Christ in the context of community—seeing that they have been saved into God's *new family*—authentic community will grow. It is my prayer that the teaching and practice of community takes root in the hearts and minds of members for years to come. By God's grace, the members of CPBC will begin to live out the truth declared by Paul in Romans 12:5 and affirmed in this project, that "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

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[35] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 29.

[36] Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 30.

APPENDIX 1

PRE-ASSESSMENT AND POST-ASSESSMENT
COMMUNITY SURVEY

Agreement to Participate (18 years and older):
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your
understanding of the purpose and practice of authentic, Christian community. This
research is being conducted by Keith Booth for the purposes of collecting data for a
ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to (1) provide basic biographical
information, and (2) answer questions pertaining to the purpose and practice of authentic
community. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no
time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.
Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study
at any time.

By your completion of this survey and entering your Email address below, you are giving
informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

        Name: _____
        Email: _____
        Date: _____

Participation Number (Pre-Survey): Please create a non-sequential 5-digit participation
number. This number will be used to correlate your pre- and post-survey results. Please
write it down. You will need to remember it for the post-assessment survey.

        5-Digit Participation Number: _____

Participation Authentication (Post-Survey): By your completion of this survey and
entering your Email address below, you are (1) affirming you have participated in at least
7 out of the 8 classes on authentic community, either in person or via YouTube, and (2)
giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Participant Number: (Post-Survey): Please use the 5-digit participation number you
used in the first survey. This number must be the same. It will be used to correlate your
pre- and post-survey results. If you do not remember it, please email Pastor Keith at
pastorkbooth@gmail.com and the number will be sent to you.

        5-Digit Participation Number: _____

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION – Please answer the following questions honestly. In this section, "member" refers to a covenant member of your local church who is not your spouse or a biological family member.

1. Gender
___ A. Male
___ B. Female

2. Age
___ A. 10-19
___ B. 20-29
___ C. 30-39
___ D. 40-49
___ E. 50-59
___ F. 60 and up

3. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

4. How long have you been a Christian?
___ A. 0-2 years
___ B. 3-5 years
___ C. 6-10 years
___ D. More than 10 years
___ E. I am not a Christian

5. Are you a member of a local church?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

6. How long have you been a member of your local church?
___ A. 1 year or less
___ B. 2-4 years
___ C. 5-10 years
___ D. 10 years or more
___ E. I am not a member of a local church

7. Does your local church have a membership covenant?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

8. When you joined the church, did you understand and agree to the membership covenant?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
___ C. My church does not have a membership covenant

9. Do you consider the Word of God to be the sole authority over your faith and life?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

10. How often do you read your Bible?
___ A. Once a day or more
___ B. Every other day
___ C. Two to three times a week
___ D. Once a week
___ E. Once a month or less
___ F. Never

11. What percent of the Sunday worship services do you attend annually?
___ A. 25% or Less
___ B. 50%
___ C. 75%
___ D. 90% or more

12. What percent of the morning prayer services do you attend annually?
___ A. 25% or Less
___ B. 50%
___ C. 75%
___ D. 90% or more
___ E. Not applicable

13.   What percent of the fellowship lunches do you attend annually?
___ A. 25% or Less
___ B. 50%
___ C. 75%
___ D. 90% or more
___ E. Not applicable

14. What percent of the Sunday afternoon seminars do you attend annually?
___ A. 25% or Less
___ B. 50%
___ C. 75%
___ D. 90% or more
___ E. Not applicable

15. What percent of the Wednesday night gatherings do you attend annually?
___ A. 25% or Less
___ B. 50%
___ C. 75%
___ D. 90% or more
___ E. Not applicable

16. I meet at least once a week with a member of my church outside of the regular church gatherings.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

17. I meet at least once a month with a member of my church outside of the regular church gatherings.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

18. In the last thirty days, I prayed for one or more members of CPBC.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

19. In the last thirty days, I spent time ministering to a member who was struggling in the faith.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

20. In the last two months, I have had one or more members into my home.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

21. In the last two months, I have been in the home of one or more members.
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

SECTION 2: COMMUNAL KNOWLEDGE – Please give your opinion regarding the statements below using the following five-point scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree." Please circle the most appropriate answer.

1. I need my fellow church members to help me grow spiritually.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

2. My fellow church members do not need me to help them grow spiritually.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

3. Being devoted to one another is not essential for a healthy community.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

4. Having an accountability partner is essential to my persevering in the faith.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

5. God uses biblical community to ensure his people persevere to the end.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

6. Healthy churches consist of members living independent lives.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

7. Gathering regularly with the church is not essential to building community.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

8. Members who neglect biblical community bring harm to themselves.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

9. Members who neglect biblical community have little to no impact on the church.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

10. Provoking other members to love one another is not my responsibility.
       Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

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11. It is my responsibility to intervene when a member forsakes the gatherings.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

12. There is no legitimate connection between members missing church and their turning away from God.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

13. I am responsible to motivate other members to exercise their spiritual gifts.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

14. I can enjoy fellowship with God without being part of a local church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

15. Loving one another in biblical community is a powerful testimony to the world.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

16. God saves individual sinners to create a new community.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

17. God has always planned to reveal the power of the gospel through the intimacy of local churches.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

18. I understand the "one another" commands in the New Testament.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

19. The Bible teaches that every church member is vital to the flourishing of the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

20. Biblical Christianity is a communal experience and can only be fully realized in relationship to other Christians.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

21. Authentic community requires members living interconnected lives.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

22. God gives Christians spiritual gifts to be used for their own spiritual maturation.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

23. The members of my church depend on me to exercise my spiritual gifts.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

24. Hospitality is a concrete expression of mutual love within the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

25. Living an autonomous life contradicts the type of community described in the Bible.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

26. Collectivism—putting the needs of the community over the individual—is not the type of community described in the Bible.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

27. The Bible focuses more on the well-being of the individual than on building new communities.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

28. God expects the church to function as an alternative family.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

29. Commitment free communities produce deep, abiding relationships.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

30. Healthy churches start by attracting members and then seek to establish committed relationships.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

31. Speaking the truth to one another is not essential for authentic community.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

32. Gathering regularly with the church is essential to building community.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

33. Without the local church, a Christian is unable to affirm his or her profession of faith.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

34. Christians bring glory to God by loving and serving one another in community.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

35. Having a genuine care for every member of the church should inform my decision-making process.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

36. Communal decision making will help preserve the unity of the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

37. Instructing one another is the responsibility of every member.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

38. Sharing one another's possessions is a form of communism and should not be encouraged in the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

39. Virtual community is a reasonable replacement for gathering physically.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

40. The story of the gospel is best told through the story of the healthy churches.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

SECTION 3: COMMUNAL ATTITUDES – Please give your opinion regarding the statements below using the following 5-point scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree." Please circle the most appropriate answer.

1. I am satisfied with my relationships at my local church.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

2. I am satisfied with the level of accountability members have in my life.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

3. I believe that without community, living the Christian life is difficult.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

4. I feel it is important to gather when the church gathers.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

5. I strive to make the corporate gatherings a priority in my life.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

6. I feel a strong sense of community at my local church.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

7. I feel that I am an active member of my local church.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

8. The more time I spend with other members, the more willing I am to be transparent.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

9. Studying the Bible with other members makes the Scriptures more relevant to me.
   Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

10. I feel encouraged when I know others in the church are praying for me.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

11. Confessing my sins to others encourages me to pursue a more holy life.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

12. Spending time with my brothers and sisters at CPBC increases my love for the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

13. The more time I spend in community, the closer I feel to God.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

14. Hearing the struggles of others encourages me to share my burdens with others.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

15. Hearing the struggles of others causes me to pray for others more fervently.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

16. I find it easier to forgive those I am in community with.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

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17. I feel a greater sense of intimacy the more time I spend with other members.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

18. Meeting regularly with other members increases my desire for hospitality in my own home.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

19. I feel it is important to encourage other members in the church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

20. I feel the church is a safe place to hold other members accountable.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

21. I understand that in a biblical community, I will sin and be sinned against.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

22. I believe biblical community should be a place where it is normal to have deep, honest conversations about life.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

23. My relational priorities are: God, family, church, others.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

24. My relational priorities are: God's family, my family, others.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

25. I believe healthy churches should strive to include people of diverse racial, ethnic, national, and political identities.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

26. I don't need the local church to know myself well.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

27. I believe that every major decision I make affects my local church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

28. I believe all the major decisions in my life should be made with the prayers and wisdom of my local church.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

29. One of the greatest gifts I can give my church is expressing my need for help.
    Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Agree

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Authentic Community Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson to be Evaluated:					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson plan is clearly relevant to the purpose and practice of authentic community.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on authentic community.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The lesson utilizes appropriate sources that are documented accurately.					
The main idea of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The subpoints of the lesson clearly support the main idea and flow logically.					
The lesson offers appropriate points of application for the learner.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the stated material.					
The lesson supports the overall objectives of the course.					

APPENDIX 3

THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF AUTHENTIC
COMMUNITY SMALL GROUP SURVEY

DIRECTIONS: In light of the past eight weeks, respond to the following statements with either a "True" or a "False." If your response is not binary, answer with what is generally "True" or generally "False" for you.

1. Spending time practicing the one another commands in my small group has given me confidence to exercise them more regularly on my own.
   True   False

2. Over the past eight weeks, I have become more intimate with those in my small group.
   True   False

3. I am more comfortable being transparent with those in my small group now than I was eight weeks ago.
   True   False

4. Hearing the struggles of others in my small group helped me see that I am not alone.
   True   False

5. Hearing the struggles of others encourages me to share my burdens with others.
   True   False

6. The closer I draw to my brothers and sisters, the easier it is to forgive.
   True   False

7. Meeting together has increased my desire to see members more regularly.
   True   False

8. My small group has helped me understand that God has equipped me to encourage and edify others.
   True   False

9. Meeting regularly will make it easier for me to discuss difficult issues with those in my small group.
   True   False

10. I enjoyed practicing the one another commands with my brothers and sisters.
    True   False

11. Over the past eight weeks, I have gained a better understanding of what it looks like to love one another.
     True   False

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following short-answer questions honestly. Your responses will help the elders know how best to encourage the members to practice community.

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1. How has exercising the one another commands impacted your relationship with Christ?

2. How has exercising the one another commands impacted your relationship with members of CPBC?

3. What was your greatest takeaway from the small group time?

4. How could the small group study have been improved?

5. Which two commands has God's grace enabled you to fulfill best? How do you plan to exercise them faithfully going forward?

6. Which two commands do you find yourself struggling with most? What can you do to overcome these hurdles and be faithful to the commands?

7. Identify one or two of the mutuality commands that you need members ministering to you most. Briefly explain why?

8. Please offer any other comments, questions, observations, or recommendations about the small group time.

APPENDIX 4

PRE-SURVEY RESULTS PER POPULATION

Table A1. Pre-survey results—M_k, M_a, and M_t, based on all participants' gender, age, years as member, prayer meeting attendance, and small group attendance

Population	Knowledge (M_k)	Attitude (M_a)	Total (M_t)
All Participants	4.25	4.27	4.26
Gender: Male	4.28	4.30	4.29
Gender: Female	4.23	4.24	4.24
Age: 50 years and older	4.17	4.29	4.22
Age: 49 years and younger	4.34	4.25	4.30
Member: 5 years or more	4.21	4.28	4.24
Member: 4 years or less	4.30	4.26	4.28
Prayer Meetings: 75% or more	4.25	4.36	4.29
Prayer Meetings: 50% or less	4.25	4.17	4.22
Small Groups: 90% or more	4.27	4.38	4.32
Small Groups: Less than 90%	4.22	4.11	4.18

APPENDIX 5

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC RESULTS

Table A2. Curriculum evaluation based on four evaluators, 36 evaluations,
and 144 points possible per lesson

Curriculum Evaluation Totals Per Lesson						
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary						
Lesson #	1	2	3	4	Pts. Poss. 144	% Earned
Lesson 1	0	0	7	29	137	95
Lesson 2	0	0	7	29	137	95
Lesson 3	0	1	5	30	136	94
Lesson 4	0	0	6	30	138	96
Lesson 5	0	0	4	32	140	97
Lesson 6	0	0	11	25	133	92
Lesson 7	0	0	4	32	140	97
Lesson 8	0	0	5	31	139	97
Mean	0.0%	0.35%	18%	83%	137.5	95%

PRE- AND POST-KNOWLEDGE RESULTS

Table A3. Pre- and post-knowledge *t*-test results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Knowledge	*Post-Knowledge*
Mean	4.302	4.867
Variance	0.124522989	0.038893678
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.437479232	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-9.665	
P(T<=t) one-tail	7.11131E-11	
t Critical one-tail	1.699	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.42226E-10	
t Critical two-tail	2.045	

Two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$
Communal Knowledge

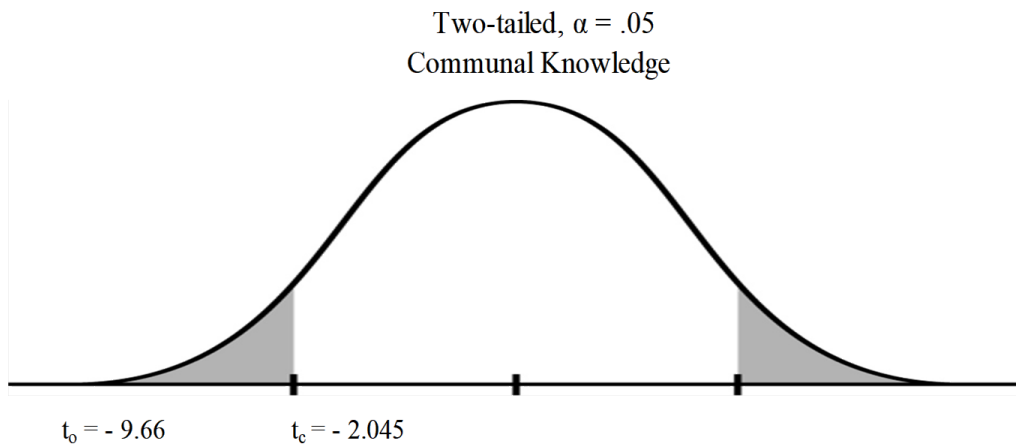$t_o = -9.66$ $t_c = -2.045$

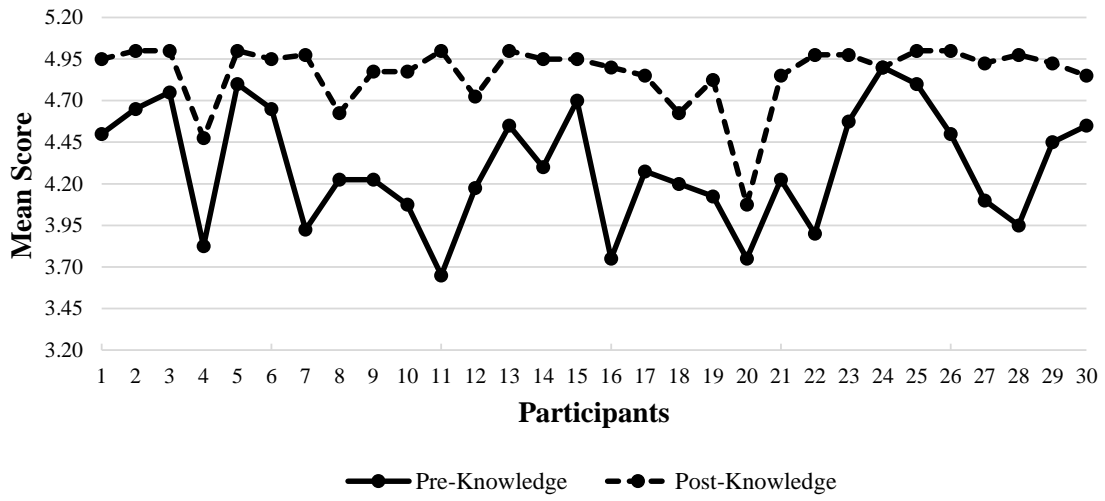Figure A1. Pre- and post-knowledge *t*-test graph

Figure A2. Pre- and post-knowledge means

APPENDIX 7

PRE- AND POST-ATTITUDE RESULTS

Table A4. Pre- and post-attitude *t*-test results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Attitude	*Post-Attitude*
Mean	4.333	4.726
Variance	0.181584594	0.037880465
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.011205894	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-4.616	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.68667E-05	
t Critical one-tail	1.699	
P(T<=t) two-tail	7.37334E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.045	

Two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$
Communal Attitudes
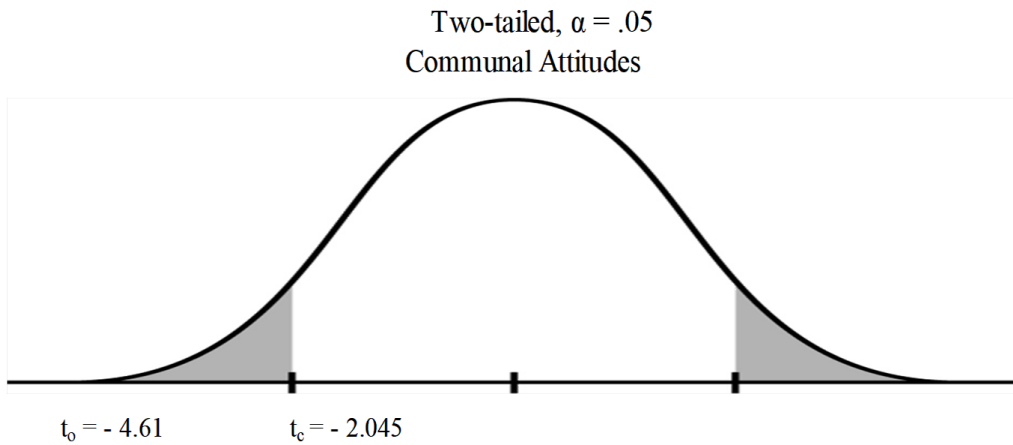

$t_o = -4.61$ $t_c = -2.045$

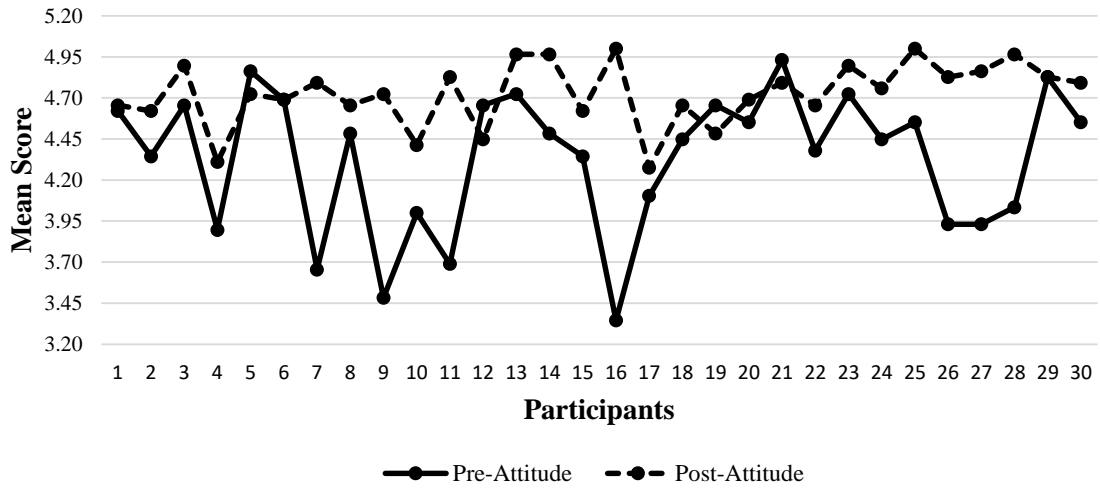Figure A3. Pre- and post-attitude *t*-test graph

Figure A4. Pre- and post-attitude means

APPENDIX 8

PRE- AND POST-TOTALS RESULTS

Table A5. Pre- and post-totals *t*-test results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Totals	*Post-Totals*
Mean	4.318	4.808
Variance	0.1193	0.0274
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.1836	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	-7.573	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.19351E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.699	
P(T<=t) two-tail	2.38703E-08	
t Critical two-tail	2.045	

Two-tailed, α = .05
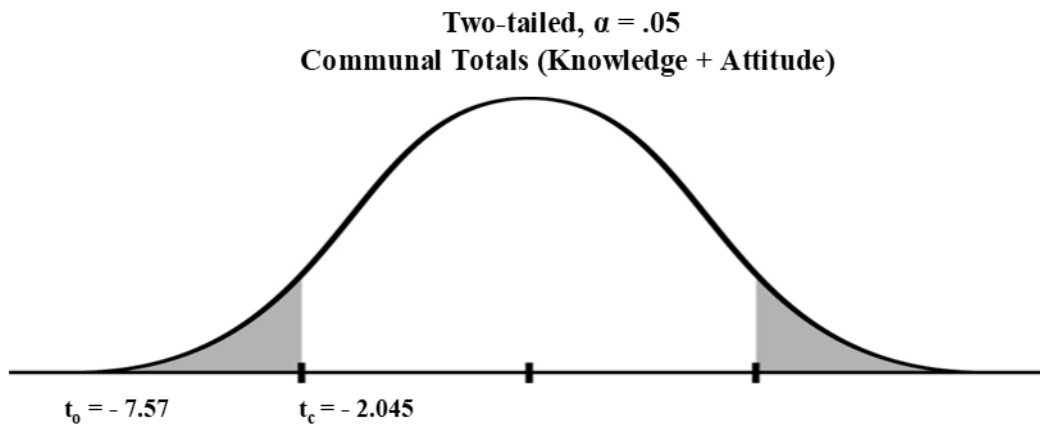**Communal Totals (Knowledge + Attitude)**

$t_0 = -7.57$ $t_c = -2.045$

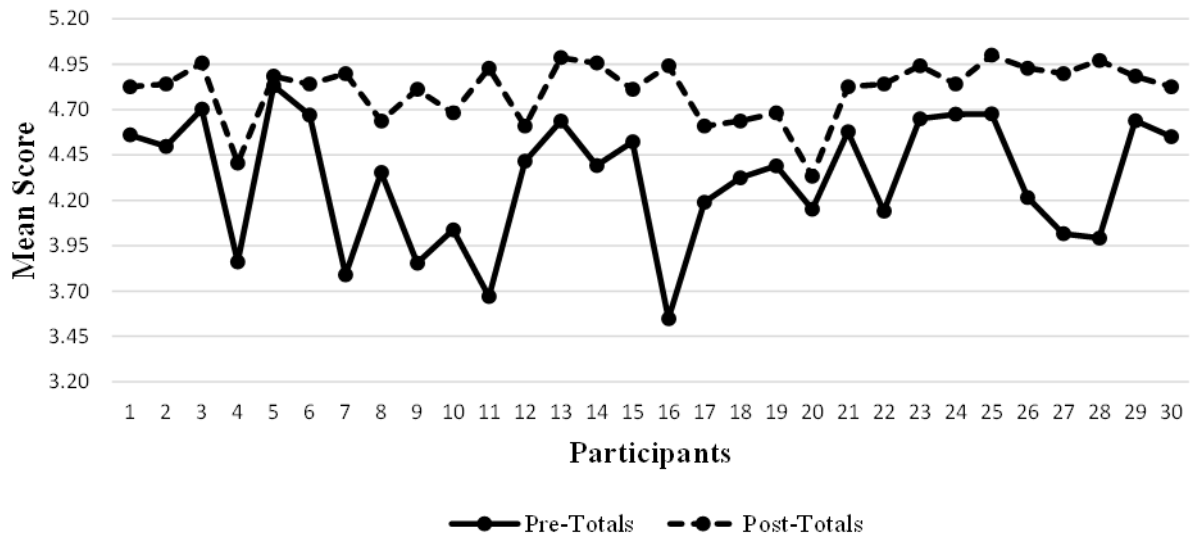Figure A5. Pre- and post-totals *t*-test

Figure A6. Pre- and post-total means for knowledge and attitude
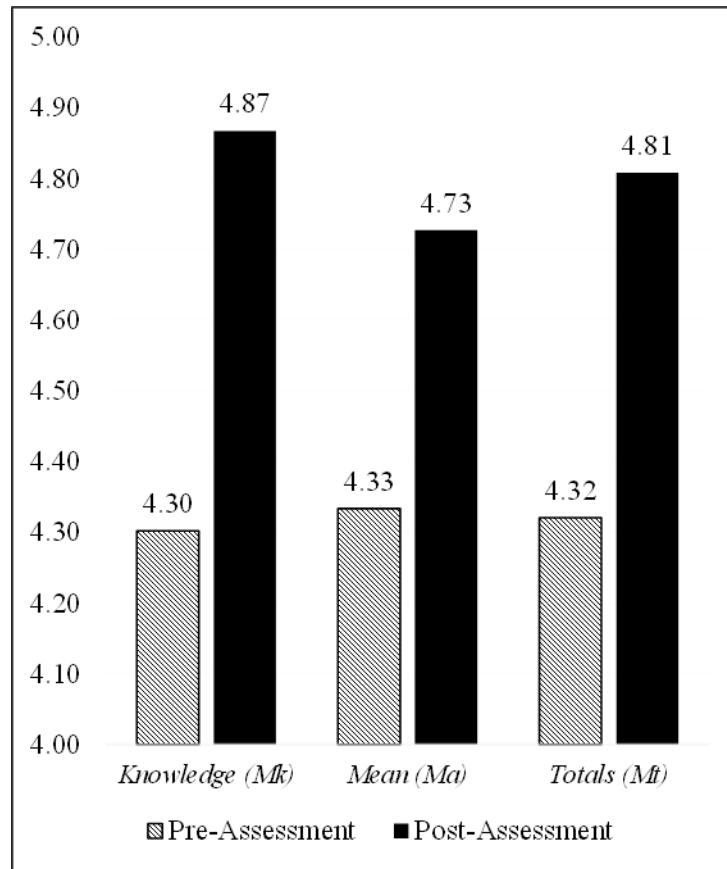
APPENDIX 9

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY MEAN RESULTS

Figure A7. Pre- and post-survey mean results for M_k, M_a, M_t

APPENDIX 10

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Table A6. Pre- and post-survey means and standard deviations for knowledge questions
with positive movements of ≈ 13% or greater

Question Number	Pre-Mean	Pre-SD	Post-Mean	Post-SD
2. My fellow church members do not need me to help them grow spiritually.	4.167	1.053	4.967	0.183
11. It is my responsibility to intervene when a member forsakes the gatherings.	3.867	0.819	4.867	0.434
13. I am responsible to motivate other members to exercise their spiritual gifts.	4.100	0.712	4.900	0.403
14. I can enjoy fellowship with God without being part of a local church.	4.167	0.950	4.700	0.535
18. I understand the "one another" commands in the New Testament.	4.000	1.017	4.767	0.430
20. Biblical Christianity is a communal experience and can only be fully realized in relationship to other Christians.	4.367	0.928	4.933	0.254
23.The members of my church depend on me to exercise my spiritual gifts.	4.033	0.809	4.833	0.648
25. Living an autonomous life contradicts the type of community described in the Bible.	4.400	0.894	4.967	0.183
26. Collectivism—putting the needs of the community over the individual—is not the type of community described in the Bible.	4.100	1.125	4.800	0.551
27. The Bible focuses more on the well-being of the individual than on building new communities.	3.567	1.357	4.867	0.346
28. God expects the church to function as an alternative family.	3.833	1.206	4.867	0.346
30. Healthy churches start by attracting members and then seek to establish committed relationships.	3.433	1.135	4.600	0.675
33. Without the local church, a Christian is unable to affirm his or her profession of faith.	3.733	1.172	4.667	0.802
35. Having a genuine care for every member of the church should inform my decision-making process.	4.300	0.952	5.000	0.000
37. Instructing one another is the responsibility of every member.	4.200	0.887	4.967	0.183

Table A7. Pre- and post-survey means and standard deviations for attitude questions with positive movements of ≈ 13% or greater

Question Number	Pre-Mean	Pre-SD	Post-Mean	Post-SD
8. The more time I spend with other members, the more willing I am to be transparent.	4.400	0.675	4.900	0.305
9. Studying the Bible with other members makes the Scriptures more relevant to me.	4.400	0.675	4.967	0.183
13. The more time I spend in community, the closer I feel to God.	4.367	0.850	4.800	0.551
14. Hearing the struggles of others encourages me to share my burdens with others.	4.333	0.844	4.867	0.346
18. Meeting regularly with other members increases my desire for hospitality in my own home.	4.367	0.718	4.800	0.407
20 I feel the church is a safe place to hold other members accountable.	4.433	0.774	4.900	0.305
23. My relational priorities are: God, family, church, others.	3.833	1.315	4.500	0.820
24. My relational priorities are: God's family, my family, others.	3.633	1.326	4.333	1.241
25. I believe healthy churches should strive to include people of diverse racial, ethnic, national, and political identities.	4.300	0.952	4.800	0.551
26. I don't need the local church to know myself well.	4.433	0.774	4.933	0.254
27. I believe that every major decision I make affects my local church.	4.033	0.928	4.700	0.877
28. I believe all the major decisions in my life should be made with the prayers and wisdom of my local church.	4.067	0.868	4.833	0.379
29. One of the greatest gifts I can give my church is expressing my need for help.	3.933	0.944	4.867	0.434

Table A8. Pre- and post-survey means and standard deviations for questions with positive movements of 13% or less and pre-survey means of < 4.00

Question Number (Attitude)	Pre-Mean	Pre-SD	Post-Mean	Post-SD
1. I am satisfied with my relationships at my local church.	3.600	1.276	3.633	1.159
2. I am satisfied with the level of accountability members have in my life.	3.033	1.299	3.433	1.165
6. I feel a strong sense of community at my local church.	3.900	1.213	4.200	1.064

APPENDIX 11

SMALL GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

Table A9. True/false questions and answers, 23 participants

Questions	True	False	No Answer
1. Spending time practicing the one another commands in my small group has given me confidence to exercise them more regularly on my own.	22	0	1
2. Over the past eight weeks, I have become more intimate with those in my small group.	22	1	0
3. I am more comfortable being transparent with those in my small group now than I was eight weeks ago.	23	0	0
4. Hearing the struggles of others in my small group helped me see that I am not alone.	23	0	0
5. Hearing the struggles of others encourages me to share my burdens with others.	22	1	0
6. The closer I draw to my brothers and sisters, the easier it is to forgive.	22	1	0
7. Meeting together has increased my desire to see members more regularly.	23	0	0
8. My small group has helped me understand that God has equipped me to encourage and edify others.	22	1	0
9. Meeting regularly will make it easier for me to discuss difficult issues with those in my small group.	23	0	0
10. I enjoyed practicing the one another commands with my brothers and sisters.	22	0	1
11. Over the past eight weeks, I have gained a better understanding of what it looks like to love one another.	23	0	0

Table A10. Which two commands has God's grace enabled you to fulfill best?

Mutuality Command	Respondents	Percent
Encouraging/Comforting (1 Thes 4:18; 5:11)	9	21
Bear One Another's Burdens (Gal 6:2)	7	16
Instructing & Teaching (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)	7	16
Stirring Up One Another (Heb 10:24)	7	16
Showing Honor (Rom 12:10)	4	9
Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:25; 5:19)	3	7
Confessing & Forgiving (James 5:16; Col 3:13)	3	7
Bearing with One Another (Col 3:13)	3	7

Table A11. Which two commands do you find yourself struggling with most?

Mutuality Command	Respondents	Percent
Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:25; 5:19)	13	30
Instructing & Teaching (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)	9	21
Confessing & Forgiving (James 5:16; Col 3:13)	7	16
Bear One Another's Burdens (Gal 6:2)	6	14
Bearing with One Another (Col 3:13)	3	7
Stirring Up One Another (Heb 10:24)	3	7
Showing Honor (Rom 12:10)	1	2
Encouraging/Comforting (1 Thes 4:18; 5:11)	1	2

Table A12. Identify one or two of the mutuality commands
that you need members ministering to you most

Mutuality Command	Respondents	Percent
Encouraging/Comforting (1 Thes 4:18; 5:11)	10	29
Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:25; 5:19)	9	26
Stirring Up One Another (Heb 10:24)	6	17
Instructing & Teaching (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)	4	11
Showing Honor (Rom 12:10)	2	6
Bearing with One Another (Col 3:13)	2	6
Confessing & Forgiving (James 5:16; Col 3:13)	1	3
Bear One Another's Burdens (Gal 6:2)	1	3

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF AUTHENTIC
COMMUNITY TO THE MEMBERS AT CAMBRIAN PARK
BAPTIST CHURCH IN SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert K. Cheong

This research project taught about and provided opportunities for the purpose and practice of authentic community to the members at Cambrian Park Baptist Church in San Jose, California. Chapter 1 describes the ministry context of the project and the rationale for its implementation. Chapter 2 explores the biblical and theological support for teaching to authentic community. Chapter 3 examines the practical and theoretical support for teaching to authentic community. Chapter 4 delineates, in chronological order, the preparation, implementation, and conclusion of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the project's goals and offers reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the project, as well as theological and personal reflections.

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