

# 1 The Idea of Community

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A baby is born and the family rejoices. A neighbor comes with food for the family, and a friend arrives to help care for the new family member.

Perhaps you have experienced a happy occasion like this. How encouraging to see such kindness and concern for the well-being of the entire family! This is the spirit of community.

In this lesson we will study the background and biblical basis of community. The spirit of community was one of the first principles taught in the early church. It was also a principle of Christ, who taught us to love one another and care for one another. This lesson will give you a clearer understanding of how wonderful it is to be a part of the Christian community.

As you study this lesson, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to express the spirit of community in all of your activities with others.

## **The Plan**

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- A. The Meaning of Community
- B. The Completeness of Community
- C. The Biblical Basis for Community

## **The Goals**

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- 1. Define *community*.
- 2. Indicate what is required to make community possible.
- 3. Give examples of community as seen in the Bible.

## **A. THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY**

### **Goal 1.** Define *community*.

In the English language, *community* usually refers to people with common interests who live in a certain place. However, in the Spanish language, the word *comunidad* does not refer to the area or place in which a person lives. It refers to love and concern that one person feels for another. This is a higher use of the word *community*.

Community can also be used to describe a group of people held together by a common cause. For example, in some countries, people doing the same type of work form an organization known as a trade union to better advance their common interests.

The second section of the Bible, the New Testament, was first written in the Greek language. The Greek word *koinonia* in the New Testament is often translated as “fellowship” or “partnership.” It implies being involved in something with someone else and indicates a two-way relationship with emphasis placed either on the giving or the receiving. *Koinonia* is also translated as “participation,” “communion,” or “contribution.” The word is used for a close partnership such as a marriage relationship.

Here are some important examples of how *koinonia* is used in the Bible. Read the Scriptures carefully.

1. John 12:6—a common purse which Jesus and the disciples shared (a fund which they used to pay their expenses)
2. First Corinthians 10:16—sharing in the blood of Christ as we take part in a communion service
3. First John 1:3, 6–7—fellowship between believers and God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ
4. First Corinthians 10:20—partners; a warning not to be partners with demons
5. Romans 15:26—an offering or gift of money which was taken to Jerusalem from the Greek Christians

In these references, the ideas of sharing, fellowship, and participation are seen. This is a good explanation of community.

## **Application**

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1. Circle the letters in front of those words listed below that define *koinonia* or community.

- a) An offering
- b) A desire
- c) Partners
- d) Fellowship
- e) To govern
- f) To share

Check your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

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## **B. THE COMPLETENESS OF COMMUNITY**

**Goal 2.** Indicate what is required to make community possible.

Certain ideas are understood by almost everyone. Most of us understand the basic idea for farming. Soil must always be prepared to receive the seed. In some countries, people with

hoes prepare the soil. In others, a team of oxen pulls a wooden plow. In still other places, tractors are used. However, the basic idea of plowing remains the same—loosen and turn the soil so that seeds can be buried and the rain can cause the seeds to grow. Then comes the hard work of keeping weeds out of the soil so that plants will have room to develop. Then, when the plant is mature or ripe, the crop is harvested.

This basic concept of plowing, planting, waiting, and reaping is found in almost every country. The methods may not be the same, but the end result is similar.

We can say the same thing about community. It makes no difference if you live in a small family group or in a big city. The basic idea of community is the same—it is people living with people. Community is possible where 500,000 people live together or where only two live together.

Community is expressed by concern. Jesus told a story about a man named Lazarus and a rich man (Luke 16:19–31). There is no indication that the rich man was ever cruel to Lazarus. He simply was never concerned about Lazarus or his condition. In the story, the unconcerned rich man died and went to hell, because he did not accept the truth about God while he was alive. God teaches us to have concern for others.

Jesus told another story about a Jewish man who was attacked by robbers and badly beaten. He was left to die by the side of the road (Luke 10:30–37). Two very religious people came by, but they did nothing to help the injured man. At last a man from Samaria came by. It was not the custom for Jews and Samaritans to associate with each other. But immediately the Samaritan stopped, bandaged the Jewish man's wounds, put him on his own donkey, and took him to a hotel. He told the owner to take care of the injured man and that he would pay for his care. This is a beautiful example of the spirit of community.

Love and concern show the spirit of community. We must have concern for people who live around us, as well as a universal or worldwide concern for those who live in other parts of the world. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that

you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). This is the spirit of community.

### Application

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**2** Read in the Bible the stories of Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) and of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). Circle the letter in front of the example that shows the spirit of community.

- a) The story of Lazarus and the rich man
- b) The story of the Good Samaritan

**3** What attitude makes the difference in these two stories?

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**4** Circle the letter in front of those places where the idea of community is possible.

- a) In large cities
- b) In isolated villages
- c) In small groups
- d) Where a person lives alone
- e) Between two people



## C. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR COMMUNITY

**Goal 3.** Give examples of community as seen in the Bible.

The earliest example of community is found in Genesis 2 and 3—in the story of the creation of the first man, Adam. Community at this time was only possible between Adam and God. Because Adam was without sin, his communion or fellowship (*koinonia*) with God was very personal. Every day they talked together and shared with each other. Therefore, God and Adam shared community.

In a short time God created a wife for Adam, and Adam called her woman (Genesis 2:23). Now community was possible between two humans as Adam and the woman Eve

were in harmony with each other. They were also in fellowship with God and at peace with all of God's creation. A three-way community existed then. This was a perfect state of community!

However, this perfect state of community did not continue because sin entered the community when Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Genesis 3). As a result of their sin, Adam and Eve disrupted this perfect communion and were separated from God.

The story of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness is another example of community. (Read Exodus 3 and onwards.) For 40 years the Israelites traveled from Egypt, where they were in captivity, to freedom in the Promised Land. During this time they were wandering people without a permanent home. But even in this time of constant moving from place to place, they lived in a spirit of community. Exodus 17:1 records, "The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin." Israel was a community nation because community—a sharing, loving relationship—existed between the people. As you read the complete story in the book of Exodus, you will see that the Israelites shared many difficult situations as well as victories.

We read in Exodus 20 that God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. These rules of behavior showed them how to live in community. The Ten Commandments were binding laws of God that were not to be broken. They taught that people should have love and respect for God first, and then for each other. This is one of the earliest teachings that we have on community relations. God was saying, "Obey these laws and you shall live in perfect community."

In addition to the Ten Commandments, God gave many other instructions that would help Israel live in community. There were laws about altars, sacrifices, feast days, eating habits, personal conduct, and behavior toward others. These laws were given to help people live with devotion to God and

with a spirit of community—fellowship, love, and concern toward each other.

Look at an example of community in the New Testament. In the early church, after the Holy Spirit was outpoured on the Day of Pentecost, a strong spirit of unity and community existed. Read Acts 2:43–47. Verse 44 states that these people had “everything in common” and shared their belongings. Now think back to our definition of community. These words show that “love and concern” and “close fellowship” were present in the early church. The New Testament church was a church of community because the people cared and shared. Let us do this also.

### **Application**

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- 5** Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement.
  - a)** The Ten Commandments are one of the earliest sets of rules for living in community.
  - b)** The Israelites could not live in a spirit of community in the wilderness because they had no permanent home.
  - c)** Adam and Eve had perfect community with God, with each other, and with all of creation until they sinned.
  - d)** We know community existed in the early church because the Christians had love and concern for each other.

**6** List four ways the spirit of community is seen in the examples we have studied in this section.

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**7** What does this lesson tell you about how you can show a spirit of community?

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If you are a Christian, you are a part of God's wonderful community of believers. Do you care for other members of the community? Do you share with those in need?

## **Check Your Answers**

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The answers to your study exercises are not given in the usual order, so that you will not easily see the answer to your next question ahead of time. Look for the number you need, and try not to look ahead.

- 4 a)** In large cities
- b)** In isolated villages
- c)** In small groups
- e)** Between two people

- 1 a)** An offering
- c)** Partners
- d)** Fellowship
- f)** To share

**5** Statements **a)**, **c)**, and **d)** are true.

**2 b)** The story of the Good Samaritan

**6** Any of these: Sharing, fellowship, showing love and concern, showing respect, caring

**3** Love or concern

**7** Your answer

