

Does Your Heart Long for Meaningful Community?

If I were to ask you for your thoughts on the purpose of the word “community,” what would you say? Is it more about the people or the place? Is it about what is offered or what you can give? Maybe it’s about whether you want comfort or an environment in which to be stretched. I think if we’re being honest, we would probably find many varying definitions of what we believe the word community means.

There are probably some common instinctual responses to that question from American Christians. Most of them have formed their understanding of the word from what they have or have not experienced inside the church. The fact is, many American churches have promoted their product under the guise of community, only to fall well short of the promised outcome.

It’s not for a lack of effort. It’s more about the execution. And more accurately, the unrealistic expectation. You see, deep inside each one of us is a desire for community. It’s in our DNA. As children created by and in the image of, a triune God, we long for companionship. We yearn to be a part of a community. It’s not something we have to learn. It’s something we are born with a passion to be a part of. Whether your search continues inside the four walls of the church or elsewhere, there are factors worth seeking when following this heart’s desire.

3 Things Conducive to Finding a Healthy Community

Accessibility—Healthy community should be accessible. Simply put, it should be easy to join. It should be inclusive. If it’s meant for you, you will know it primarily by how easy it is for you to join in and participate. It will quite literally be a “match made in heaven.” If you have to work hard to be

something other than who you are, believe me, there are better options available. If you can't find accessibility there, let's find it somewhere else.

Authenticity—I've heard it said that authenticity is simply giving someone permission to minister to your heart. It's a process that requires trust and trustworthiness. I don't believe we're called to be authentic with everyone. Giving your heart to certain people can be quite reckless. But it's vital that we have a community, big or small, that can serve as a safe environment for authenticity to be practiced. It should be a major factor in your search for community.

Loyalty—Loyalty is more of a byproduct than a root. It is the result of good stewarding of the other two factors. This fruit is recognized in more ways than just what the church may consider attendance or tithing. It's more a matter of the heart. A feeling. A belonging. It comes from within and manifests in many ways, including acts of service. If it's a healthy community, you'll see loyalty in the lives of the people.

So, no matter if your pursuit for community has solely been within the constructs of the church or if you've been looking for like-minded individuals in other places, your desire for community is important. It's worth the intense exploration. Your heart matters. Your life matters. And there are people who were put on this planet to learn from and pour into you.

For more on how to cultivate meaningful community in your life, listen to the *Next Level* podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network here. {eoa}