

Community
11-29-09
Pastor Jason Bankhead

My name is Jason Bankhead and I'm the Connections Pastor here. I've been here about three months and this is my first time to preach here this morning. We're going to talk about community this morning and I'm going to go out on a limb and sing about 10 seconds of a song that would bring excitement to me every time I heard it growing up; well mainly in high school. If you know it I want you to raise your hand, you don't have to sing. *Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name...* can anybody identify that? Cheers; that was one of my favorite shows growing up. I grew up in a Baptist Church and in high school my favorite TV show was about a group of people at a bar when I had never been in one...I don't know how that happened and how my parents allowed it, I don't know why but I loved that show. I didn't watch a whole lot of TV growing up. I have a brother that is two years younger than me and if it was decent weather which is about ten months out of the year, we would be outside in the evening playing whatever sport was going on right then. But on Thursday nights Cheers came on and the really cool thing is I got into Cheers a little past when everybody else had but at that time they were already doing reruns at 6:30 and 10:30 so Thursday nights I'd watch Cheers at 6:30 after the news and then come in and watch it at 8:00 and go back outside and then they'd show another one at 10:30. As I look back I didn't know what I liked about it but one of the cool things is there is a community developed in that show and in the characters. I never thought about why these people are coming to this place all the time. There was a sense of community among the people there. I never thought much about community even growing up in the church. A lot of people say there are five things a church is supposed to do. Worship, fellowship, missions, discipleship and evangelism; those are the five key components of what a church is meant to do and in Baptist life growing up I would say well fellowship and community is the one thing we knocked out of the park. But the only reason I would say that is because we would get together and eat all the time. In fact I had professors in seminary and college that said as churches we do a great job with fellowship and community. Now that I look back I don't really know how great of a job we've done. I was on staff as a youth minister at First Baptist Church in Prosper, Texas from about 2000 to 2005. 2005 my wife and I felt led by God to help start a missions organization with two of our friends. We did that until just a few months ago and went from four people to about twenty people. God blessed and it and it's still going. We're going to be taking trips with them in the future but what we would do is we would take high school and college students on these trips and we would work with churches internationally and we would help plant churches. What happens is ninety five percent of the world walks to a church. Now I don't know how many people in here walk to church. I would guess that ninety five percent didn't walk to church. In fact, most families with two drivers may have driven two cars. Most people do not have a ride to church so if there is not a church within walking distance of where they live, they don't go and so what we would do is we would partner with churches internationally. We would cast vision and do some training with their pastors and leaders and say if you look at the book of Acts they planted churches and there are

places all around you that don't have a church so can we come in a help train your people and help establish people in the community to help start a church. The students would go door to door and do evangelism and discipleship and then we would have discipleship meetings which are really the first gatherings of the church. Now, if you look at that entire plan kind of like having a baby we came in for the birth and then would leave. If you've had kids you know that's the easy part compared to what's about to happen over the next years and so we would leave this group of new believers with some people that have worked with us daily helping lead them to Christ and disciple them but every time we left we knew that if these twenty believers in this little neighborhood don't continue to meet together and they try to do this on their own, there's not a chance this church takes off. There's not a chance that these people are disciplined if they say, cool, these American's came to my door and I prayed this prayer and now I'm going to take off. I began to really realize the importance of community and what community can do and be in the life in the church so we're going to talk about that this morning. This is not just about Life Groups or Sunday school classes because you may have a Life group that has been going for two or three years but there's really no community in it. It's just a group of people who get together and there's really not any community being built. You may have a Sunday school class that's been meeting for years and the depth of community and what they're doing is just off the charts compared to what everyone else's doing. What we are trying to get towards is community so we're going to watch a video that can give us some tips how to develop community.

We are going to look at a passage in John chapter 17 so if you have your bibles you can turn there. While we read this passage I want you to look for a reoccurring theme in what Jesus is praying here. Now in Matthew Jesus gives us an example of the Lord's Prayer for us how to pray. This is probably more the literal Lord's Prayer because this is Jesus after he's washed the disciples feet, they've broken bread, Judas has betrayed him, this is a prayer that he prays hours before being arrested. This prayer may of happened in the upper room, this prayer might have happened in the garden, we don't know where exactly he prayed this but what is going on in his life, Judas has just left the room, he's called him out and he is hours from being arrested. He knows what is about to happen. He knows that his earthly ministry is done so this is a deep prayer. This is not just a routine send up a prayer here. I pray with my daughter Julia who is almost four; I pray with her almost every single night before she goes to bed and even though I try not to make what we say very routine, a lot of times I just fall back into God thank you for mommy and daddy and for Julia and Jonathan and help them sleep good and protect us and thank you for everything that you do for us, but it kind of becomes routine. There are only so many different ways you can pray with a four year old without making it pretty routine and anyway when I was working with Next, the missions organization and was traveling six or seven times a year for a week or so at a time, those nights before I would always make sure that I was the one who would put her to bed and pray with her. My prayer changed and she knew I was going to be leaving but my prayers with her were totally different. It was not out of a, we pray because we pray and that's what we do before we go to bed. The heart behind the prayer would change. God please protect Julia, please protect my family, please provide for them, take away the little things that might come up while I'm gone that I won't be there to help provide but really the emotion of what I was praying would change and there were some nights

that I would get caught up in God this is tough to leave my family and go overseas for a little bit. I think at times she would kind of be shocked by my prayer. Jesus at this point, this is a deep, heavy, the last time recorded words before he is arrested that we will hear. So I want you to look for a reoccurring theme in what he prays. John chapter 17, ***“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” ⁶“I have revealed you^[a] to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify^[b] them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. ²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. ²⁵“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*** Reoccurring theme in here, over and over, Jesus prays for each of those groups and he prays they may be one as you and I are one. Now when we think of community or fellowship it’s pretty easy to think of the life of a church. Since Jesus came he said the way this is going to happen is you to be in community with one another but I’ve never thought about it much past that. There’s a verse we’re going to read that every single one of you have heard a thousand times. It’s Genesis 1:26, ***Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,”*** I’ve heard that verse thousands of times and never really thought much about how God says this. He doesn’t say let me make man in my image he says

let us make man in our image and out likeness. God in the beginning is working in community with the Son and the Holy Spirit and a little bit later in Genesis 1:2 it says ***“Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”*** John chapter 1 the first three verses says, ***“¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”*** So from the very beginning God chose to be in community. He could have just done everything by himself but he chose to be a god that operated and worked in community with the Son and the Holy Spirit and he made us in his image so God has created us also to be in community to not be a lone ranger. That’s not the way to do the life that God’s given us but to work in community and even in Deuteronomy 6:4 God said he is the one and only God so this is not God kind of contradicting himself by saying I’m Father, Son and Holy Spirit but I’m the God in one God but that they work in such a nature that they work as one and they are doing things as one. I’m trying to think of an illustration for this and one I thought of is marriage. When we get married we are no longer making decisions just based on us. We’re making decisions or you should be, your making decisions based on another person now. Whenever I would travel if I wasn’t with Jennifer it didn’t change the fact that I was married. My decisions were still based on the fact that she and I are one and whether it was spending money or relationships or friendships. So God is saying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but they are operating as one and they’re working in community as one and Jesus prays over and over and over not that we would just be one or that the church would be one, but that we would be one like they were one. So that’s quite an example of what God really has created us to be. Not to just have this sense of community, but to have a deep, authentic community and relationship with each other. Since God lives and works in community and since we’re created in his image, we too are created in and for community. This is not just a church thing. Church goers may go yeah I know we were created for that but this is not just for people in the church. This is a cultural thing as well. Think about when prisoners go into prison they take you away from the community. You’re locked up, taken away from the outside community and then even inside of there if there’s an issue and you’re put in solitary, which is one of the worst forms of being in prison. They strip you of all community to where there is no contact, no relationship and that begins to drive people insane. Senator John McCain talked about when he was a POW in the Vietnam War he says this, *“After coming out of solitary and being reunited with fellow prisoners I was overwhelmed by the compulsion to talk nonstop, face to face with my obliging new cell mate. I ran my mouth ceaselessly for days. One of the more amusing spectacles in prison is the site of two men just released from solitary, talking their heads off simultaneously, neither one listening to the other, both absolutely enamored by the sound of their voices.”* It’s not just believers or church folks, everybody in the world has been created for community and all of life we see community. You may be an introvert thinking you don’t really care about community. Well, you’re here, you’ve got some relationships with people you may not do life with a large group of people that you would consider part of the community you’re in but you’ve got a couple people. That’s why we seek out a friendship, that’s why we date, we get married. God has put in us a desire for community. If you know of somebody that has excluded from all of form of contact, they’re in a pretty bad place. They’re probably not right. They’ve got some things going on there. It’s not a normal thing for a human to fully pull away from community. In fact,

it's interesting some businesses have picked up on the community thing and picked up that's how we were created. I was thinking about Starbucks. If you go into a Starbucks, what are the chairs like in Starbucks? Pretty comfortable, maybe couches, recliners, comfortable chairs, little tables with a couple of chairs put together; it is a place that is created for people to come in and be able to sit down and commune or talk and have this sense of community in there. If you walk in on any business day, there will be people in there with laptops doing work from there. Now, Starbucks doesn't have anything they can't get at home. I'm not a coffee drinker so they may have better coffee than you can get home, but they really don't have anything there that these people can't get at home. People go there and stay there. It's a place that's warm and inviting and Starbucks wants to create that sense of when you walk in there you feel like you're a part of something. You feel like you're a part of this little community that's a Starbucks community. Other restaurants like McDonalds don't want you to come and stay. They've got hard seats. They want you to get in and get out and serve the next person. They don't really care about creating this sense of community, but that's not their job. They want you to come in, eat a meal and get out. But Starbucks has done a great job of knowing this is something people want and we're going to help create that. That and their coffee; they're doing pretty well because of it.

I talked a little earlier about I think churches would have graded themselves as doing pretty well in the community aspect. I think some of us do pretty well and some of us don't but there are four different blessings we're going to talk about this morning that should be evident in the lives of people who are truly in community with other believers and are truly in a group to where they are sharing things and are able to develop some relationships. The first one is they should gain strength. ***Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"*** Some of may be thinking I don't really need to listen to this because I'm a self made man or women and I don't need this, I don't need anybody else around me. My relationship with God is fine. I don't need any of this. John 16:33 says in this world you will have trouble. There are times and if there are not yet, there will be times there some stuff going on where you need other people. God has created us for community to get through some of those things. It doesn't say you *may* have trouble, it says you will. Most everybody in here is either coming out of something like that where their world has just been rocked and there's been trouble, we're in the middle of it or we're heading into it and we're about to be there. In John 17 Jesus knows what's to come of his disciples. Those disciples, all of them except for John, died a martyrs death so he knows what is about to begin happening in the lives of these men. Everything in the world had been great up to this point and he also knows that if they head off on their own they're done. If they go on their own there is no way they make it. So they had to come together. They had to build community and build those relationships. 1 Samuel 18 you can see the story of David and Jonathan. David has killed Goliath and the Israelites begin saying Saul's killed his thousands, David's killed his tens of thousands and Saul gets jealous and tries to kill David, Jonathan, Saul's son speaks on David's behalf to his dad and helps protect David but in a time of trouble Jonathan was an incredible encouragement to David one of the heroes of our faith but even the heroes of our faith needed community. Jesus chose to live in community with the disciples. He could have done if he had

chosen however he wanted to but he chose twelve and even there he had three that were closer to him than any others so we can develop strength in community.

We can develop wisdom. **Proverbs 15:22, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."** Many times when we have a big or small decision and we're just not sure and we're wrestling with what we should do a lot of times it may be in our nature to find the person that we know what their answer will be and go ask them. Like if I'm asking should I get a new car and I've got a friend who's got a new car every two years and spends money like it's nothing and I go to them and go hey, do you think I should get this new car? What's his advice going to be? I know what his advice would be and that is why I would seek him out. But in Proverbs, if we're truly developing community, there ought to be a group of people around us that we know will be looking out for our best interest. Jennifer and I were part of a group of people about three or four years ago, just some friends of ours from different churches and we just began meeting for Bible studies and one of the guys most difficult things was the money thing. Eighteen years old, his dad had cancer and passed away two years later and left him a fortune. Him, he was twenty years old when he got this and it's been a struggle and he's had just about everything he wants but it's been a struggle and it's going to run out. But he got to a point that he would begin to come to us who didn't have a fortune and were several years older than him, trying to be wise with how we were spending money. It was kind of a cool thing. He began to get to a place to where he would seek us out knowing that we had his best interest at heart for him. Me, coming here from leaving Next was the most difficult decisions of my life. God has overwhelmingly blessed us with being here but it was very difficult to leave something that I loved but there were a group of friends that I knew that would know what was the best and help me and pray for me and I sought them out and began to talk with them. If we have a sense of community and a group of people like that who can help us gain wisdom in decision making.

Accountability, friendships can provide unique opportunities for spiritual growth especially when we covenant to mutually vulnerable and tell the truth. This can't be done on the second or third time meeting someone so if doing the meet and greet time you just met somebody new and you say Jason is talking about community. I need to be this person to hold people accountable and I see Bob over here and he's got his Bible and it looks like it's brand new on the pages and the outside is kind of worn and it looks like the suns just been hitting it in the back windshield of his car, yet when he opens it all the pages are still crisp and maybe I need to talk to Bob before we leave and hold him accountable about how he needs to take his bible out of his car and read it and not just let it sit there. That's not the kind of accountability we're looking for. This is something that happens over the course of time. James 1:23-25 says, **"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."** There's a website that was emailed to me about a month ago called the People of Wal-Mart. I don't know if you've ever seen that and this is just how I think, when I read this verse about someone looking in a mirror and seeing things wrong and turning around

and forgetting everything they've just seen, if you want to see an example of that just go to peopleofwalmart.com because it is full of folks that people found at Wal-Mart's all over the world and took pictures of them like can you believe that the person left the house like that? I was thinking about that. How much do we do that spiritually though? We show up on Sunday morning or show up to a Bible study, God's speaking through a sermon, God's speaking to us through worship and God's saying hey, Jason, here's this thing you're holding. You've got to release it. You've got to let me help take it from you. How many times we have the spirit speaking to us and we're looking in the mirror and here we see a reflection of how God's seeing us and things that are gross in our life, yet when we go out the back door we do the exact same thing? We walk out and go I'll try to do it on my own. We need people in our lives that can help hold us accountable for that and that can have those difficult conversations and sit us down and say here's something that I've seen in your life that's just a mess. What can I do to help get this straight? We need people in our lives that can have those conversations. People who love us enough to have those conversations with us and love us enough to not let us just sit in what we're doing. Towards the end of Jesus' prayer he talked about sanctification. A salvation happens once but sanctification happens from there on until we leave this earth. The progression to becoming more like Christ happens in community. That doesn't happen on our own and that happens in accountability so we need to find people in our lives and have people in our lives that can sit us down and have those difficult conversations with us.

The last thing we need is acceptance. We need community to achieve lasting transformation and sanctification but during this change we need acceptance and care. Something that more than any other institution the church is uniquely equip to offer especially through a network of Life groups or Sunday school classes. There used to be many different areas in our culture where you could gain acceptance. Family was a place where you could be accepted for who you are. Most families now the divorce rates over fifty some odd percent in and out of the church, more people associate more pain and suffering in a family as they do love and care in a family. So that is not where they're getting acceptance. The workplace used to be a place that you started working at when you were eighteen or nineteen years old and you worked at the same place and you kind of built a family of people at your workplace. Well now with the changing economy, the globalization of jobs, it's a volatile place. We don't know how long we're going to be there so that's moved from being a place of love and care. In our neighborhoods, I don't know how many of us know our neighbors or have a sense of community. The world's kind of missing the mark on this community thing. The church has an incredible opportunity to be a place of community and to be a place to where people can find love and acceptance as we're being sanctified. There's a place of accountability but also a place of love and acceptance. There's got to be a tension there. We love and care for you but we're not going to allow you to stay the same either. We're going to try to move us down this road. ***John 15:12-13, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*** Where are you? What do we do here? I think there are probably three different areas we are. Some of are going, I can do this on my own, I just show up here on Sunday morning and my spiritual life's great. I check in Sunday morning then I'm out and I come back the next one. Well, we're not doing as God's called us to do. Sanctification takes place in the communities and growing to be more like

Christ takes place in a way that God has called us to do that. Not just showing up and being a lone ranger. Some of you may have been thinking that's what I can do but I want to let you know there are different ways you can get involved in Life groups or Sunday school groups. There are places that we're working pretty hard at trying to develop places that you can get in and find community and find things that can help us move down the avenue with our walk with Christ. Some of you may be going, hey I've got all this down. I know about community, I'm leading a group or part of a group and it may be for you, we're in desperate need of Life group hosts and leaders so God may be saying to some of you, you do have this community and I want to call you and another couple out of your group to help start another one and lead other people to that sense of community and then some of you may be saying what do you mean God? I don't know what all this community stuff is all about. One thing you need to know is that God created community not just for him but for us to be in community with him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** We're sinful separated from God. God wanted to have community with us so he sends his Son to die for us so that we could be forgiven and seen as righteous in the eyes of God so we could establish and have a relationship and we could commune with God on this side of heaven. Some of you may have had no idea of that but God did that for you and for me. In John 17 we see where Jesus even praying for us at that time. God that they would come to know who you are because they live as one. God they could come to community with you because of the way that they've seen how we've lived. So, are you the lone ranger type? Do you need to find a place to plug in? Is God calling you to be one that steps up and goes man we've got this sense of community and I feel God kind of leading me to help multiply that and help introduce others to this and help grow in accountability with others. Or this may be your first time. Our response time is just going to be for you personally. If this is a time for you to think about what God is teaching you and saying to you.