

## ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY

### 1. Brotherly Love

#### Hebrews 13:1-2

I believe that the Lord has opened an amazing door for us to be a part of His mission to proclaim the Good News of His Kingdom in West Park and the surrounding area by providing us this amazing facility for us to gather in on Sundays.

I thought that we would be ready to launch our outreach into the immediate area of WPHS by the first week of October. But because of the changes in leadership in our worship and media teams I think it that a more realistic “hard launch” will be in January 2022. But even before we had to reset the outreach launch date I believed that the Lord wanted to refresh and recalibrate our hearts on a couple of levels in much the same way that before you have an “open house” you need to do a little house keeping.

**THE FIRST BIT** of house-keeping that needed to be done was to establish firmly in all of our hearts the certainty of the place of God and the heart of God for us in light of the fear and resulting disunity we encountered during the pandemic at the start of 2020 and in the face of the disunity we encountered during the racial tension during the summer of 2021. That’s why I was very intentional to teach through a curated selection of moments in the life of Joseph to re-establish in all of hearts the tremendous and comforting truth that *God Is Not Absent in the Chaos*.

**SECOND** — I believe that before we made a concerted effort to invite men and women in this area to meet the God of infinite worth and to worship Him with us that it was crucial for us to be reacquainted with the dynamic range of expressing our hearts to our King that is set before us in Scripture.

*Psalm 33:1 (CSB) <sup>1</sup>Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous ones; praise from the upright is beautiful.*

*Psalm 40:3 (CSB) <sup>3</sup>He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many **will see and fear**, and **they will trust in the Lord**.*

**THIRD** — I believe that 2020 revealed / exposed how so many believers in so many churches around the country had a low or inadequate view of Biblical community. It wasn't that they undervalued the *idea* of community. Much is said today about community. Much is said and written about how beautiful community is and the great need for community. What we saw happen in churches around the country was owing to the fact that people who call themselves "Biblical" failed to grasp the Biblical vision of community. You see, Biblical Community is not some philosophical/esoteric thing for Christians to talk about or dream about. **Biblical Community is a very real and very challenging way of living.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer —

*"Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it (that community of believers) had sprung from a wish dream." But God speedily shatters those dreams."*

*"Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great sense of disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves."*

That's why this morning we are beginning another mini-series titled: "**ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY**".

es·sen·tial

adjective — absolutely necessary • fundamental or central to the nature of something or someone

noun — a thing that is absolutely necessary:

**The first essential** of Biblical community is Brotherly love.

**Hebrews 13:1 (ESV) Let brotherly love continue.**

**Hebrews 13:1–2 (NLT) Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.**

I think it would be fitting for us to start this series by praying this prayer of confession and dependence upon God to shape our lives

*“God of our creation and re-creation, you who are constantly at work to shape me in the wholeness of Christ, you know the hardness of the structures of my being that resist your shaping touch. You know the deep inner rigidities of my being that reject your changing grace. By your grace soften my hardness and rigidity; help me to become pliable in your hands. Even as I read this, may there be a melting of my innate resistance to your transforming love.”*

**Brotherly love** is the Greek word *Philadelphia*.

The prefix is from *phileo* — love

*Adelphos* = from the same womb

The Bible Sense lexicon gives us this —

The affection befitting the relationship between siblings; especially the affection of those who are now siblings in God’s family.

**Brotherly love** is not a side note to, or optional add-on to the Gospel (like a condiment that you can choose to put on a hamburger or not). It occupies a central place in the Gospel living.

**Romans 12:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup>*Love one another with **brotherly affection**. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

**1 Peter 1:22 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup>*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a **sincere brotherly love**, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*

**1 Thessalonians 4:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup>*Now concerning **brotherly love** you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,*

*2 Peter 1:7 (ESV) <sup>7</sup>and godliness with **brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with love.*

We just read this morning these words of Paul in our calendar of reading through the Bible. You can FEEL the depth from which these words came from in his heart.

*Philippians 4:1 (CSB) <sup>1</sup>So then, **my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters**, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.*

It's tragic that the idea of being spiritual siblings has become pretty much a cliché. In church culture we can refer to one another as "Brother" or Sister" in the Lord without any sense that what we just said is incredibly glorious — carries infinite weight! Think about this: In **Hebrews 2:11** we read —

*Hebrews 2:11 (NLT) So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. **That is why** Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.*

I believe that a major part of the reason why community in modern church culture doesn't resemble Biblical community is owing to the fact that the average Christian has **no idea** of what it cost God for us to be the brothers and sisters of Jesus — and by way of our relationship with Jesus become forever related to one another as spiritual siblings!

The fact that we are the brothers and sisters of JESUS — and brothers and sisters together IN Jesus is so UNDERAPPRECIATED — so **not** radical — that the word *Bro* has become a verb! Have you ever been "*Bro'ed*"? *Bro! can I borrow...can you.*

But when the Hebrew Christians read the words, **brotherly love**, it was truly RADICAL within culture! Lucian of Samosata was a 1<sup>st</sup> century satirist who ridiculed religion. He fully understood how radical it was for Christians to call each other *brother* or *sister*. In a story (The Passing of Peregrinus) he satirized Christians by saying

*"These deluded creatures... It was impressed on them too by their lawgiver that... they are all brothers."*

**HERE'S THE DEAL** — the radical way the 1<sup>st</sup> century community of believers lived and breathed — the radical nature of community was never intended to have a shelf-life.

Community is radically intense. It is rooted in the nature of the New Birth! In the biological world, you don't choose your brother or sister. Your biological siblings can never *not* be related. It's a genetic bond! In the spiritual domain we don't choose our brothers and sisters in Christ. They're born again into the family of God. Those born again by the Spirit of God are forever united by the new nature they have received in Jesus — no matter what, in spite of fallings out and failures Christians are related by blood — related by the blood of Jesus!

Let's look at some of the components of the essential of [brotherly love](#)

## **1. Intimacy and Transparency**

[brotherly love](#) presumes intimacy and transparency of relationship. If you grew up with brothers or sisters a few years younger than you, you have an idea of the kind of intimacy and transparency wrapped up in brotherly love. If you were four or five years older you wiped noses and wiped bottoms, or else at least you saw those things being wiped.

That kind of intimacy and transparency has consequences! You know who they are and they know who you are. If you're a girl, your siblings have seen you without make-up! They know what you are. They know who you are.

THAT is what [brotherly love](#) looks like — THAT is the way we live and breathe in community with each other. We're with one another in grace. We're to be growing up with one another. As we live out our relationships with Jesus together, we're going to be more fully known — which demands *brotherly love*. REMEMBER — our big brother Jesus knows us fully and loves us fully!

## **2. Shared Space and Resources**

In an emotionally healthy family siblings share the same space — they have a claim on your resources. This was a big deal to those reading the letter to the Hebrews.

*Hebrews 10:32-34 (NLT) Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. <sup>33</sup> Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. <sup>34</sup> You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.*

We see this in the very first community of believers in the city of Jerusalem

*Acts 2:45 (ESV) They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*

This was such an **observable reality within** the communities of believers — **and to** the culture they lived in — that Lucian of Samosata satirized it!

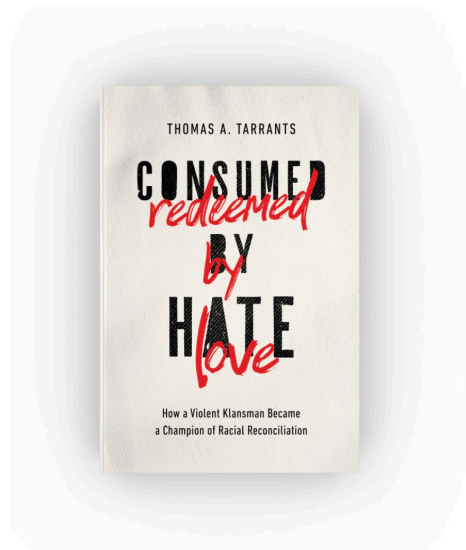
**Lucian of Samosata** (The Passing of Peregrinus) — *They take his instructions completely on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods and hold them in common ownership. So any adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who knows the world, has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is quickly made; he plays with them."*

### **3. Racial and Cultural Diversity**

Biblical community is racially and culturally radical! In the New Testament we see people of different cultures and different ethnicity living in community and living on mission together.

*Acts 20:3–4 .... he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.*

Brotherly Love slays racial and cultural bigotry! You have to read the book "Consumed by Hate — Redeemed by Love"



*Tom Tarrant In 1969, while attempting to bomb the home of a Jewish leader in Meridian, Mississippi, Tom was ambushed by law enforcement and shot multiple times during a high-speed chase. Nearly dead from his wounds, he was arrested and sentenced to thirty years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman Farm. Unrepentant, Tom and two other inmates made a daring escape from Parchman yet were tracked down by an FBI SWAT team and apprehended in hail of bullets that killed one of the convicts. Tom spent the next three years alone in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell. There he began a search for truth that led him to the Bible and a reading of the gospels, resulting in his conversion to Jesus Christ and liberation from the grip of racial hatred and violence.*

*Astounded by the change in Tom, many of the very people who worked to put him behind bars began advocating for his release. After serving eight years of a 35-year sentence, Tom left prison. He attended college, moved to Washington, DC, and became copastor of a racially mixed church. He went on to earn a doctorate and became the president of the C. S. Lewis Institute, where he devoted himself to helping others become wholehearted followers of Jesus.*

### **Community lives and breathes as a family**

A lot of people LOVE the idea of community, but in reality, they have a “professional” relationship with church. They come to a service every week, maybe even two or three times a week, but they never **devote themselves to** developing fellowship where brotherly love is exercised.

It is God's desire for you to be **devoted to gathering** with other believers to be **taught** the Word of God. It is His desire for His Word to find a rich dwelling place in your heart — a rich dwelling place in the realm of our being where we make choices, where words and actions are birthed. He wants it to find a rich dwelling place there so our lives will be shaped by it. But Paul doesn't merely pray that the Word of God would dwell richly in our hearts — period.

*Colossians 3:16 (ESV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing one another** in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

The Holy Spirit wants to take the things you've learned — the truths that He has used to shape your life — and He wants to **use us** in bringing the transforming truth of God's Word to the lives of those around us. Valerie and I have been shaped by the word of God that was lived, modeled, and shared by those who **invited us** into **their** lives — AND gladly **stepped into** our lives.

Trust me — we were not on the inside with those people. We were in a very real way outsiders. Valerie and I (and our children) have been shaped by intimate, transparent relationships; people we shared meals with, people we talked with, even argued with! The framework of our thinking and our faith that our lives and our ministries are built on today were forged in community! Valerie and I (and our children) haven't been molded by information.

If you sit down with Valerie you're getting a lifetime devoted to being taught the Word **AND** fellowship — wisdom that's has its origin on the Word of God — but has been hand delivered in real life by experiences shared with other believers. That was behind our vision for the way we did our Monday Night bible studies — seated around tables. That's behind the way we break after corporate praise and worship to have coffee together. Valerie and I want you to connect with people — meet with people — build those same kinds of connections so that over time there is the possibility for the Lord to continue to build those relationships outside of these walls.

The same is true for our community groups. The point is to connect spiritual siblings in a home, around a table, connect lives around Biblical truth; share in the richness of the Word of God with each other — share how God's Word has and is



shaping them — connecting lives in prayer for one another. THAT is where brotherly love is nurtured!

For some — those settings are the **first *shared space*** with their spiritual siblings. For a lot of people those moments are where people begin to treat one another as spiritual siblings. They are where they began to let people in to their lives — where they begin to let people know who they are. And that shared space begins to expand in to more of your life outside of these walls.

### **THIS COMMUNITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE IS NOT A CLOSED SYSTEM**

Verse 1 — “Keep on loving each other as brothers.”

Verse 2 — “Do not forget to entertain strangers ...”

Verse 1 says — “Work at *philadelphia*,” which means brotherly love. Work like crazy at loving the insiders, loving the people you know who trust Jesus like you, love Jesus like you, serve Jesus like you!

Verse 2 says — “Work at *philoxenia*.” The word *philoxenia* means love of strangers. Make sure you work incredibly hard at loving outsiders.

It’s interesting that after the city of Philadelphia was founded no one went down the road and founded the city of Philoxenia!

The Greek word ***xenia*** means a stranger. As a verb it means to take in a guest.

So *philoxenia* is a such a gospel word. The Gospel is God opening His heart, His heaven, His Kingdom to strangers!

Real community not only involves *brotherly love* — *spiritual siblings* opening their living space, their resources to spiritual siblings. It also involves *philoxenia*!

AGAIN — this is why the 1<sup>st</sup> century community of believers was SO RADICAL in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Greco-Roman world. And when it is real — it’s just as radical in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

In the Greco-Roman world you only loved those you knew would be able to repay you. THAT is not how things worked in a 1st century community of believers. They were TRULY countercultural! They opened their lives — and their homes — to the unbeliever — to the person who couldn't repay. And when they did that they made the Gospel accessible. When an outsider stepped into the home of a Christian it was like stepping into a glass bottom boat in Tahiti! The grace of God was suddenly opened up to them — like a coral reef seen through a glass bottom boat.

The Local church should live and breathe philadelphia **and** philoxenia. This beautiful facility is Metro's home in West Park on Sundays. We should entertain strangers here! We should be inviting people who are yet outside of the Gospel into our home. When they walk in, they should see our brotherly love — see and hear the beauty of God's grace.

REAL COMMUNITY IS NOT CLICHÉ!

THAT is the way the local church should live and breathe!

For you and me to live and breathe like that DEMANDS relationship with Jesus who said

*John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*