

The Compelling Community Summary

Please remember that this is a book and not Scripture. Therefore, everything it teaches should be vetted through the lens of Scripture. Our corporate reading of this book is meant to be a launchpad for discussion for our church. How might we learn and grow from what is being taught here?

Below are some brief summaries of the content of each chapter. This is NOT meant to replace your own reading of the resource. It is a resource to help boil down the contents of each chapter. These first four chapters were articulating the problems in many evangelical churches. The next six chapters will step through different practical ideas for how to better embody biblical community.

Introduction

Poses the question - What is *community* in your church?

Raising and lowering ambition for church community.

- Raising the bar above just small groups.
- Lowering ambition in the sense of what *you can do* to create community in your church. Scripture teaches that the community that matters is community built by God.

Defining local church community as a togetherness and commitment we experience that transcends all natural bonds – because of our commonality in Jesus Christ. Community is core to who you are.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has power to create community in your church that is evidently supernatural. And that community in your church is part of what will propel both you and me into praise forever around his throne.

1 - Two Visions of Community

Beware the danger of building community without the gospel. These communities can be wonderful and helpful, but their existence says nothing about the power of the gospel.

Twofold goal of the author:

1. To recognize that building community purely through natural bonds has a cost as well as a benefit. The cost is that our community ceases to be remarkable to the world around us.
2. To adjust our aspiration. To aim at community characterized by relationships that are obviously supernatural – meaning they wouldn't exist without God's unifying work.

Vision #1 - Gospel-plus community

- Uses similarity to build community
- Results in building a community that says little about the power of the gospel
- A group of people who would assemble without it being a church (i.e. similar interests, stages of life, etc.,)

Vision #2 - Gospel-revealing community

- Where many relationships would never exist without the truth and power of the gospel – either because of the depth of care for each other or because two people in relationship have little in common but Christ.
- Two dimensions – **breadth**, including peoples as divergent as Jew and Gentile; **depth**, being so tightly committed to one another that we are like family/new humanity.
 - These make the glory of an invisible God to be visible.
- We are gathered together because of our affinity for God! The fact we are in Christ is what unites us.

God has great purposes for the community of your church: to safeguard the gospel, to transform lives and communities, to shine as a beacon of hope to the unconverted.

Study Ephesians 2-3 to see God's plan for the church as a place of redemption, reconciliation, and unity.

The point is not the community, the point is God. Community is merely the effect. Our affection for each other is derivative. It derives from our worship of God – a God who saved us from a million different “communities” of this world to become his family.

Questions to consider:

- What do you talk about with other church members outside of church?
- To what extent do casual conversations differ from what you'd expect to hear in a local bar/neighborhood picnic/Little League game?
- How many of your friendships at church would likely exist even if you weren't a Christian?

Thesis of the book: Authentic, gospel-revealing community with supernatural depth and breadth is a natural outgrowth of belief in God's Word.

2 - A Community Given by God

Poses the questions - What would happen if God's Spirit left our church? Would the church carry on as normal because we were operating in a manner that didn't require God's supernatural work? Or would there be tangible results because the community that had been built was only possible when God was present?

“If community in your local church is not dependent on God's supernatural Spirit for its lifeblood, it is not *evidently* supernatural. If it is not evidently supernatural, it is counterfeit community. It's posing as biblical community but fails to accomplish its purpose. It fails to show off the wisdom of God to the world (Eph. 3:10).” (36-37)

“When we cultivate local church community that is not evidently supernatural, we compromise both thrusts of our commission. We compromise our evangelism and we compromise our discipleship.” (37)

Consider Ephesians 4:11-16 – God gives leaders to the church to prepare them for service. As a result, the church grows in unity and maturity. This growth protects the church from false doctrine.

Supernatural forgiveness drives supernatural love. Because we have been forgiven much by God, we are able to love God and others extravagantly. (44) Our love for one another is a visible sign we grasp the love of an invisible God. And vice-versa if we do not love! (45)

Questions to consider:

- Do we understand our sin?
- Do we understand the depth of the forgiveness in Christ?
- Are we allowing these twin realities to fire up an incredible love for others?

Two guiding principles for leaders seeking to cultivate this type of community:

- Regeneration proceeds community
- Theology precedes practice
 - “Our love isn’t proportional to our forgiveness; it’s proportional to our *understanding* of forgiveness.”
 - Theology is not the problem, lack of understanding that leads to love is!

3 - Community Runs Deep

Consumerism is dangerous. Healthy churches need providers, not consumers.

Two types of commitment:

- Comfort-based commitment tries to ease people into commitment to the church through an assimilation process. Comfort-based commitment doesn’t necessarily demonstrate the gospel’s power.
- Calling-based commitment is a commitment to other believers in the local church because it’s part of God’s *calling* us into his family.

“We should stop viewing commitment to a local church as a *process* and start viewing it as an *event*. The event is our salvation, and commitment is something that inevitably follows – not something that merely happens as we mature.” (54)

The Bible Assumes Significant Commitment:

- Love one another deeply and sacrificially (Rom. 12:13-16)
- Assemble regularly with one another (Heb. 10:25)
- Encourage one another (Heb. 10:24)
- Guard one another (Heb. 3:12-13)
 - “Encouragement is an antidote to unbelief. To encourage means to strengthen each other’s faith. It means being merciful to those who doubt (Jude 22). It means helping each other hold the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16). A commitment to encourage is a commitment to fight for faith together.” (57)

The most basic level of commitment by a Christian to his church is surprisingly substantial.

The Bible Assumes Formalized Commitment (1 Cor. 5:9-13; Mt. 18:17; Heb. 13:17)

Formal Commitment Catalyzes Informal Commitment:

- It serves as affirmation of informal commitment.
- It makes informal commitment visible.
- It makes informal commitment accountable.

“When we commit to a local church, we hand to other believers the authority to instruct us on how we should live our lives.” (66)

4 - Community Goes Broad

Check out the content of page 70. Very helpful clarifications about identity and the significance of diversity within the church.

“As people with little in common in the world’s eyes love each other as if they are closer than family, all heaven looks on with wonder at what the gospel has created.” (72-73)

Questions to consider:

- Does our community reflect the kind of diversity that points to the power of the cross? Or would we be together regardless of the gospel’s power in us?
 - Diversity of...
 - Age
 - Economics
 - Politics
 - Social ability
 - Cultural background
- What boundaries has the gospel overrun that society fiercely respects?

Recognize that God is the one who creates the unity in diversity. We are not responsible for creating it; however, we are responsible for keeping it healthy! We are to live out our unity in Christ within the church.

Three Impediments to Unity and Diversity:

- Ministry by similarity
 - This isn’t always bad, but we must be aware of the dangers it poses, especially if this is the primary way you do ministry! Pay attention to what characterizes community in your church.
- Consumerism
 - Realize that sacrifices will need to be made in nearly every aspect of our life together. (Consider Romans 12)
 - “It’s very possible to enjoy the idea of attending a diverse church, and yet never lift a finger to love someone who’s quite different from you.” (81)
 - What kind of sacrifices help foster unity in diversity?
 - Sacrifice your comfort to reach out and associate with someone you’re not naturally drawn to.
 - Sacrifice your preferences.

- Sacrifice your resources and time to serve fellow church members in need.
- Sacrifice your habits to spend time with those you'd otherwise never see.
- Invisibility of the majority culture
 - For the majority, culture is invisible. If you are a young church, young people will likely not notice how their prayers are shaped by their demographics' concerns, but older members will notice.
 - "How can you bear one another's burdens if you don't understand them?"

"The community of the local church has supernatural breadth. This diversity is not something we need to accomplish; it flows from the accomplished work of Christ on the cross. Yet hard work remains if we are to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3)." (83)

5 – Preach to Equip Your Community

This chapter poses the question – "Where does supernatural breadth and depth of community come from? How do we cultivate it?"

Their answer is, "Supernatural community comes from supernatural faith, which comes from God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Your church needs to hear God's Word." (87)

"At its core, every problem in your congregation is a problem of unbelief." (89)

Understanding the Needs of Your Congregation:

- Don't just preach to them; pastor them
- Involve your congregation in writing your sermons
- Get feedback on your sermons

Preach to Help Your People Use God's Word:

"A sermon doesn't stop when it reaches the ears of your people. Instead, it continues its ministry through them day after day, all through the week." (96)

- Clarify the congregation's responsibility for preaching
 - You must pay attention to what you're taking in and speak up against false teaching.
 - Obey James 1:22 and be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.
 - Remember that you are called to help others change too.
- Equip your people to better read the Scriptures
 - Preach expositional sermons that study and apply the main point of a text.
 - Preach in a way that helps people understand the context of a passage.
 - Preach in a way that helps people connect the dots for themselves.
 - Encourage everyone to read next week's passage in advance so they are prepared.
- Provide sermon application that is corporate and collaborative
 - "The Bible is mainly addressed to God's people collectively: the community of faith. Is your sermon application similarly corporate in nature?" (98)
 - Application that stirs up intentional conversation or prayer emphases in the body.
 - Application that challenges the church at large.

Preaching to Ongoing Controversy in Your Church:

- Be patient and allow the Spirit to work through His Word
- Only with reluctance should you address disputable issues
 - Discernment is needed!
 - Prioritize addressing issues that undermine the Gospel.
- When possible, speak with people individually rather than through a sermon
 - Be willing to have hard conversations to shepherd others.
- Give people principles and let them work out the implications
 - It is good for the church to wrestle through specifics of application.

Questions to consider:

- How does unbelief hinder building a culture of discipleship in my life? In our church?
- What would it look like for God's Word to reverberate through the life of our congregation through the week? In my home? In my small group? Within my friendships?

"Community with supernatural breadth and depth can only come through supernatural faith." (101)

6 – Pray Together as a Community

This chapter carries on the idea that supernatural breadth and depth of community comes from faith. It focuses on a second ingredient of real, God-given faith: prayer.

"Prayer is an ordinary means to accomplish supernatural ends. So as ordinary people seeking to cultivate supernatural community, how can we ignore prayer? ... But can you think of anything that's as important, yet less prayed for, than the local church? On the one hand, the supernatural community of the local church is the focal point of God's redemptive plan to make the nations his inheritance. And that supernatural work is entirely outside of our control. Sounds like the perfect recipe for fervent prayer, doesn't it?" (104-105)

Reasons to Spend Significant Time in Corporate Prayer:

- Corporate prayer is how we publicly ask God to act
 - "Public prayer results in public praise when God answers. And God's overriding concern through all of history is that his glory be known publicly." (106)
- Corporate prayer teaches our people how to pray
 - "How can we lift our focuses out of our own circumstances to join God's grand purposes for this world? ... By praying corporately, we emphasize spiritual priorities over physical circumstances." (107)
- Corporate prayer is a collective experience that builds unity

ACTS as an Outline for Corporate Prayer:

- Adoration – Praising God for who He is
- Confession – Saying what God says about our sin
- Thanksgiving – Giving thanks for God's work and treatment of us
- Supplication – Coming before God with our requests because he has told us to do so
 - Pray through a reasonably comprehensive list of biblical priorities

- Develop a list of things you hope will increasingly characterize your church
- Work to shape the requests that come from your congregation

“The centrality of the local church to God’s redemptive plan should lead your people to spend much of their prayer time interceding for your church.” (115)

Questions to consider:

- How much time do you spend praying for your church?
- If you were to build a list of things you hope will increasingly characterize our church, what would be on that list?
- What does your private prayer for the church currently look like? How did this chapter challenge you to grow in this area?

7 – Build a Culture of Spiritually Intentional Relationships

This chapter challenges us to recognize that not all church activity is valuable in God’s eyes. We must beware the danger of simply being “busy” in ministry rather than investing in spiritually intentional relationships that will bear eternal fruit. The argument is that people are eternal and investment in spiritually intentional relationships will bear eternal fruit.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 paint a sobering picture of how God evaluates our “activity”.

“On the last day, God will reveal every action—even every word (Matt. 12:36)- for its true value. Despite the best of motives, some church activity will be judged as worthless.” (118)

“So where can we invest to bring about eternally lasting fruit? We can invest in building spiritually intentional relationships... Love for other Christians shows us to be true Christians (1 Jn. 2:10-11). Love for other Christians demonstrates the power of the gospel to the watching world (Jn. 13:35). Love for other Christians makes for an eternally rewarding investment (Lk 16:9). Love for other Christians is primarily how we live out the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).” (118)

Three Strategies to Foster a Culture of Spiritually Intentional Relationships:

- Advocate for simple and informal relationships
 - Keep it simple
 - Discipling relationships
 - Church members meeting with other members on a regular basis to study God’s Word, a godly book, or to encourage one another’s spiritual growth.
 - “A churchwide habit of discipling builds *depth* of relationship into a church culture.” (120)
 - Hospitality relationships
 - Expend yourself in sacrificial love towards others. This could be sharing a meal, talking to someone you don’t know, or another form of relational investment.

- “When people grow in hospitality, they grow in inviting others into their lives. And they grow in reaching out to those with whom they don’t share much natural affinity.” (121)
 - “This simple model of relationship helps shape a church culture. In this case, the result is a culture with relational *breadth*.” (121)
 - Keep it informal
 - “Discipling should be a mind-set of spiritual intentionality that flows into all manner of friendships – not a program you “sign up for” and then do in a particular way.” (121)
- Advocate for lives centered on the local church
 - “A quick skim through the New Testament leaves the unambiguous impression that the local church is exceedingly important in God’s economy. It makes his gospel visible (Jn. 13:35); it protects the vitality of our faith (Gal. 6:1-2); it safeguards us from self-deception (1 Cor. 5:4-5); and it grows us in love (Heb. 10:23-25). Consequently, a life centered on the community of the local church is significantly more likely to be lived strategically in God’s sight than a life where the local church languishes as a peripheral detail.” (123)
 - “God *loves* his church! It is his glory made visible in this world and the centerpiece of his redemptive plan. Each Christian in your church will one day give account for a lifetime spent in Christ’s service. You will serve your people well if you help them center their lives around the focal point of God’s plan: the local church.” (125)
- Emphasize the privileges of church membership
 - “Church membership tells us to commit to a body of believers simply because we’re followers of Christ – even if we hardly even know them.” (126)
 - “The covenant of church membership is the ecosystem in which a relationship-focused church culture can thrive.” (126) – helpful analogy to marriage commitment
 - “If you decide to follow the advice for fostering community that I’ve laid out in this book, you must believe that God’s plan for reaching the lost is for local churches to burn brighter and hotter. You must believe that in the long run, the exclusivity that fuels a blazing hot community of believers can do far more gospel work than watering down breadth and depth of commitment in order to feel inclusive.” (127)
 - Analogy of heating a room with burning coals.
 - “In the long run, building up your church community to burn brighter and hotter will normally produce far more fruit than the flashier strategies suggested in its place.” (129)
 - “To nurture a culture of intentional relationships, membership must become meaningful. And that starts by removing from membership those unwilling to fulfill their commitment as members.” (130)

Four P’s that can Lead to Persistent Cultural Change:

- Personal example – do not undervalue the long-term power of good examples.
- Preaching – do not undervalue the ability of faithful preaching to change church culture.
- Prayer – ask God to do this supernatural work in your church.

- Patience – “as Christ’s servants, our job is not to ‘effect change.’ It is to be faithful. We work diligently to guide our churches in the right direction. And then as much as we long for change, we can rest content with whatever pace our Lord deems best.” (132)

Questions to consider:

- How are you seeking to foster a culture of spiritually intentional relationships at Harvest? What are the greatest hindrances in your life to this pursuit?
- Do you agree that it makes sense to center your life around the local church? What needs to change to make this happen in your life/family?
- Do you agree with the authors’ contention that the local church will burn hotter and brighter for God and accomplish more Gospel work if they emphasize membership and the commitment that follows over an approach that values ease of access and inclusivity? Why or why not?

8 – Structural Obstacles to Biblical Community

“We want to see supernatural breadth and depth of community in our churches. But we often discover resistance that’s designed deep into the fabric of our churches – from our philosophy of small groups, to staff job descriptions, to the composition of ministry programs. So think of this chapter as a top-to-bottom review of your church, an opportunity to identify and address structural resistance to biblical community.” (134)

Church Staff:

- Structural Resistance: ministry positions designed to *do* ministry
- Corrective Action: redesign ministry positions to *facilitate* ministry instead
- Dangers of Church Staff
 - Depth: A congregation might pass their responsibilities over to the staff
 - Breadth: A proliferation of staff positions can lead to “ministry by similarity” if not careful
 - Fascinating example of this danger on page 135.
- Purpose of Church Staff
 - “The goal of community (unity and maturity) comes as the *congregation* does ministry – equipped by their leaders.” (136)

Church Calendar:

- Structural Resistance: a weekly schedule of activity that crowds out informal relationships
- Corrective Action: consider the relative value of unprogrammed time when adding activities to the calendar
- False Promises of a Crowded Schedule
 - “Participation in church activities can be more comfortable than the hard work of building relationships.” (138)

Church Music:

- Structural Resistance: music that’s better performed than congregationally sung
- Corrective Action: aspire to a musical style that a broad range of people can use

- Three errors of musical style that can stifle community
 - Music that's difficult to sing corporately.
 - Music with limited emotional breadth.
 - "When you select music with a variety of emotional starting points, you teach your congregation that God's promises hold true no matter our emotional condition." (143)
 - Music that feels like a performance.
 - "Little can build a feeling of congregational unity more than hearing the whole church sing their hearts out in passionate praise to God. We should design our musical style with this in mind." (143)

"If we're serious about displaying the diversity that the gospel brings to a local congregation, then each of us will make sacrifices in the type of music we sing." (144)

Church Services:

- Structural Resistance: service schedules packed so tightly that people are rushed in and out
- Corrective Action: create space in the schedule for the congregation to congregate
 - Time following the service
 - Second weekly gathering

Demographic-Based Ministries:

- Structural Resistance: demographic-based ministries that substitute for church-wide community
- Corrective Action: manage these ministries to emphasize the upside and limit the downside; reprogram them to serve the entire church
 - Consider the cost/benefit of these ministries and manage accordingly
 - Example of the newly married couples' small group
 - Three questions to ask on page 148 of these ministries
 - Reprogram existing ministries to serve the entire church

"Don't lean on any one ministry to cultivate community." (149)

- Relying on a single ministry to reprogram your entire church culture will not work!
- "If the battle for community is a battle for church culture, we must wage it on all fronts." (149)

Questions to consider:

- How should I respond to Ephesians 4:11-12 about being trained up to do the work of the ministry?
- How can our church members ensure that the congregation is doing the work of the ministry?
 - What would this look like in addressing the volunteer shortage Harvest Kids is experiencing at 11am? In the worship ministry? Students?
- Do I believe the 2021 church calendar has helped or hindered building biblical community? What would I change and why?
- What would it look like for me to utilize the times before/after services to build community?

9 – Addressing Discontentment in the Church

Asking the question: What if the basic culture of your church leaned strongly toward unity?

“In God’s inscrutable wisdom, he has left the task of displaying the glory of his *perfect* character to the very *imperfect* people of his church.” (154)

So how can we live out God’s plans for us despite our sin?

- “So often, threats to church unity don’t come from offenses against one another, but disappointed expectations and perceived rejection.” (154)

“Discontent is inevitable; broken unity is not.” (155)

- Why is this true? How is it possible?

Acts 6:1-7 is an example of discontentment in the early church and how the apostles addressed it.

“The gospel asserts that unity in Christ is stronger than worldly difference.” (156)

- This is shown in Ephesians 3 between Jew and Gentile and in Acts 6 between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews.

Several Principles from Acts 6 to Address Discontent in Our Context

- Threats to church unity deserve the attention of church leaders
- But ultimately, it is the congregation’s job to protect unity
 - The apostles instruct the church to select 7 men to address the issue
 - “This issue is too important to ignore. But it is not important enough to distract us from the ministry of the Word. Go solve it yourselves.” (157)
 - See Ephesians 4:3 as another example.
 - How sweet it is when people who see problems take steps to address them and make the church stronger!
- Be reluctant to take sides
- Act in a response to tangible, structural problems
 - “Generally, we are wise to listen patiently to those experiencing challenges with our churches. But we should wait to apply any kind of solution until we see a tangible fix to a tangible problem.” (159)
 - Example of moving the service time forward one hour to make things easier for families.
- Temper expectations for what church leaders can do
 - “Can I fix all this? No! I can pray that God would ignite real change; I can teach the congregation of God’s priorities in his inspired Word; and I can address structural issues where they appear. But the problems that most pain us in our congregations are problems of the heart – and only God can do that work.” (160)
- Put our hope in what the Spirit can do through the congregation
 - Example of how the church appointed 7 Hellenist men to care for all the widows in Acts 6. The church bent over backwards to care for their Hellenist sisters.

Playing the “Trust Me” Card

- Is someone’s reputation at risk?
 - Consider winsome ways to protect others.
- Does the concern pertain to a specific decision?
 - If not, it is probably unwise to say, “trust me”.
- To what degree do church leaders have better information than the congregation?
 - If you have proprietary information that cannot be shared, leaders may need to say, “trust me.”
- To what extent does the issue affect church unity?
 - Very hard example of having to excommunicate a member for being divisive. (Titus 3:10)
- How clear is the issue in Scripture?
 - If it’s clear in Scripture, then show them there.

“Some leaders err by playing the ‘trust me’ card for nearly everything – failing Paul’s requirement that elders be gentle and not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3) and Peter’s that they not be domineering (1 Pet. 5:3). Other leaders err by never asking for their congregation’s trust, leading only where the sheep are inclined to go.” (163-164)

Equipping Your People to Weather Discontentment

Turning from defense to offense. Here are four topics to cover in preaching, new members classes, and other teaching ministries:

- The Importance of Unity
 - Teach *why* it is good
 - “Ultimately unity is valuable because it reflects God’s character and being (1 Cor. 1:13).”
- Christians Act and Speak as Providers, Not as Consumers
 - “Christians are spiritual providers, not consumers. The New Testament assumes that Christians ask, How can I serve? Rather than What’s in it for me?” (165)
 - “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.” (165)
- How to Publicly Disagree
 - When an issue is clearly taught in Scripture and essential to the gospel or the preservation of the gospel, then getting to the right answer is more important than unity. “By *clear*, I mean something that nearly everyone in a local congregation has historically seen as taught in Scripture.” (166)
 - Most disagreements fall outside of the above categories; therefore, they should be debated privately but not spill out in front of the rest of the church.
 - “In almost no circumstance should a church dispute spill out into the world (1 Cor. 6:1).” (166)
- When to Leave a Church
 - “If someone feels they can no longer trust their church’s leaders, they should find a church where they can obey Hebrews 13:17.” (167)

- “Especially as a church changes direction, it serves no one to only make changes that everyone agrees with. Just as Abraham parted amicably with Lot in order to preserve their friendship, sometimes the way a member loves his church is by leaving it.” (167)

Protect the Flock

See 1 Pt. 5:8 for the ongoing work of the devil.

“Few areas pose as much risk to our churches as discontentment. What begins a critique or moment of insecurity turns sinful and tragic as members pursue selfish desires and sink into unhappiness and discord. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:6 that ‘godliness with contentment is great gain.’ To promote this godliness, we must teach our congregations how to disagree well.” (168)

Questions to consider:

- How am I personally doing at addressing discontentment in my own life?
- How is our church doing at addressing discontentment in the body?
- Do I know how to disagree with someone in a God-honoring manner?
- Do I trust the leadership God has given to me? If not, what can I do to grow that trust?
- Am I willing to do the hard work of addressing discontentment?

10 – Addressing Sin in the Church

“We seek a church culture where it is normal for people to have deep and honest conversations about their spiritual lives. Where people are willing to ask that one last question that, while awkward, saves a brother from a difficult dynamic in his marriage. *And* where the gospel of grace is an everyday answer to struggle with sin.” (171)

When our greatest concern is for Christ’s reputation, we calibrate our conversations according to how we can best help others image Christ. We put off selfishness and put on serving others.

Equip Your People to Address Sin in Private

“In a fallen world, waves of sin will inevitably break over our churches. These verses offer crucial guidance for how our congregations should respond. How can we cultivate a culture of grace-filled honesty about each other’s sin?” (173)

- Recognize That Addressing Sin is Our Responsibility
 - Jesus shows us in Matthew 18:15 that it is our duty to address sin. Ordinary church members must address each other’s sin.
 - Pair this with Matthew 5:23 and you’ll see that whether you are the offended or the offender it is still your responsibility to pursue reconciliation with your brother/sister.
 - Ideally, both parties would meet in the middle as they are pursuing one another for reconciliation!
 - “No matter ‘who started it,’ it is always your job to initiate reconciliation.” (173)
 - Galatians 6:1 helps us realize that even when the sin is not against us, we are responsible for helping restore our brother/sister.
 - **“Turning a blind eye to sin is not an option.” (173)**

- The goal of Matthew 18 is to “gain” our brother, not merely discharge a duty! This is all about reconciliation and holiness!
- “With few exceptions, conversation about another’s sin should either be confession (e.g., confessing my poor response when I was wronged) or collaboration (e.g., talking together about how we can encourage that person toward godliness).” (174)
- Not only must we address other’s sin, we should make ourselves open to being addressed.
- “The Christian life is not one of posturing and preening; it is a life of honesty... At least a few in your congregation should know pretty much everything about your life.” (174)
- “Following this portion of Jesus’ instructions goes a long way towards fostering the kind of culture we desire. It battles against passivity as we embrace a God-given responsibility to rescue each other from sin and deception. And it protects against a self-righteous desire to speak about the sin of others instead of speaking to them.” (174)
- Keep the Circle Small
 - At first, the conversation is just between you and your brother alone. If they are unrepentant, then you are to bring one or two others in (Matt. 18:17).
 - “With our own sin, we should be open and transparent; with the sin of others, we should be discrete.” (174)
 - Realize that venting, seeking pity, or rallying friends to our side are not God-honoring ways to respond to conflict.
 - “When my goal is the exaltation of Christ through the restoration of a brother, I will keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible.” (175)
- Be Slow to Judgment
 - Matthew 18:17 encourages us to have additional witnesses to clarify and confirm the facts of the matter. Is there agreement that there is sin involved?
 - “Having the humility to recognize the limitations of our own judgment can take a culture that’s rightly serious about sin and fill it with grace as we give each other the benefit of the doubt.” (176)
- The Goal is to Gain Your Brother
 - “Yet here we must recognize the supernatural element of what Jesus describes. Only God can work heart change. Our job is merely to lift a mirror to a believer’s heart so he can see his sin. We are reporters, not doctors.” (176)

Seek Unity as You Address Sin Publicly

“Despite our enemies of the world, the flesh, and the Devil; despite the unyielding deceitfulness of sin; despite our own corrupt nature – the grace of God at work in small, private conversations leads to repentance and restoration. But on occasion, we must read further in Matthew 18 because unrepentant sin has risen to a level that requires action by the church. Now that sin has gone public, the stakes are high.” (176)

See Matthew 18:17 for Jesus’ teaching.

- If He Refuses to Listen to Them, Tell it to the Church

- “When a person remains unrepentant through the first two steps of Matthew 18:15-16, when the sin is serious enough that we cannot overlook it, and when its existence is demonstrable, we must bring it to the church.” (177)
 - By overlook it, the author means letting love cover it as spoken of in 1 Peter 4:8.
- “Why is it important for the entire church to act, and not just those who know the sinner best?”
 - Verses 18:18-20 imply that when a local church acts as a congregation, it bears a special authority from God.
 - Also, public confrontation of unrepentant sin is good for the church:
 - Making sin public underscores sin’s seriousness and deceitfulness
 - Making sin public underscores the possibility of repentance
 - Making sin public teaches your congregation how to address sin privately
- And If He Refuses to Listen Even to the Church...
 - “In this step of Matthew 18, the church speaks with one voice to an unrepentant sinner. This kind of unity is critical for church discipline. When the church speaks in unity, it reminds us of our responsibility to guard one another from sin and deception. And when the church speaks in unity, it has power to stop a sinner in his tracks.” (179)
 - “How can church leaders strengthen unity through these difficult conversations?”
 - Lead with clarity
 - “Elders can serve the church well when they investigate, counsel, and deliberate until a matter of church discipline is pointed and clear.”
 - Lean on Scripture
 - Look for trust
 - Labor for unity
- Treat Him as a Gentile and a Tax Collector
 - “To excommunicate someone isn’t to say that he definitely is not a Christian, nor that we can see into his heart (as only God can). Rather, it is a ‘no confidence’ vote on his profession of faith based on the evidence of unrepentance.” (181)
 - “The nature of excommunicate as described by Jesus is neither heavy-handed nor manipulative; it merely observes a discordance between profession and action.” (181)

Amazed at Grace

Every day of our lives we want to stare in amazement at what God has chosen to do through the gospel. When we treasure salvation as underserved grace, we will take seriously our responsibility to guard one another from sin.

The more amazed we are at our salvation, the more we will foster a culture of honest, grace-filled conversation about sin.

Questions to Ask:

- Is our church’s culture one where people peg spiritual worthiness to relative holiness or fruitfulness?
- Is our church’s culture one that celebrates grace but where lives are shrouded in privacy?

- Or is our church's culture one that encourages honest, grace-filled conversations about sin and struggle?
 - What do we do if this culture is lacking? (*Hint: Read Matthew 18:15-17 about how to address sin in the church*)
- Do you see how careful attention to Jesus' words helps to grow the kind of church culture we desire? Do you understand why glossing over sin for the sake of peace is not an option?

11 – Evangelize as a Community

Evangelism is Both Personal and Corporate

"We should teach our churches that evangelism is something *they* do in their day-to-day lives, not something limited to our weekly gatherings or special church events. Evangelism should be personal." (187-188)

"In addition to being personal, evangelism should be corporate... Why would you ever share the gospel with a friend without trying to expose her to the supernatural community of the local church?" (188)

"We want faith to rest in the power of God. And where else is God's power more visible than in the local church?" (188)

A tour through the pages of Scripture reveals that God has made us for relationships and that His plan has always been to show the power of the Gospel through the community of believers.

Important distinction → "The local church is not evangelism. But the local church should be the power of evangelism." (189)

Personal – "it generally involves explaining the gospel in the context of a friendship rather than simply bringing someone to church."

Corporate – "without introducing non-Christians to the local church, evangelism ignores the greatest evidence we have for the truth of the gospel."

Is Our Light Under a Basket?

See Matthew 5:14-15.

How can the church shine its light in a day and age when relationships with neighbors is less common? When you drive 20-30 minutes to get to church? When you're the only Christian your non-Christian friends know?

Advice for Church Members

"How can church members expose their non-Christian friends, co-workers, relatives, and neighbors to the attractive witness of our churches?" (190)

- We Can Talk about Life in a Church
 - "You can describe the glory and reality of life in a church in a way that brings praise to God." (191)
- We Can Mix Our Circles of Hospitality

- “If you have non-Christian friends you’ve shared the gospel with, include some friends from church at meals with them. Invite them on a hike with your family and a few others from your congregation. Invite them to join flag football or a soccer match with a group from church on a Saturday...” (191)
- Invite Others to Join You in Evangelism
 - Utilize more of the body in ministering to your non-Christian friends/neighbors/etc.,
- Aspire to be a Neighborhood Church
 - Consider making the church the geographic hub for your life. Live near it. Be involved in your local community. Get to know your neighbors.
 - “If a neighborhood-centric mentality is unrealistic, consider locating your home near other church members.” (192)
 - This puts your relationships on display for the world to see!

Advice for Church Leaders

- Aim Your Church Services at Christians
 - “What is the main evangelistic value of your church service? Is it directly explaining the gospel to non-Christians? No. Church is for explaining the gospel to *Christians*, to fuel the supernatural witness of their community together. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul makes it clear that the church assembles mainly to edify believers. Everything we do should aim at glorifying God by edifying each other.” (193)
 - “Our greatest confirmation of the gospel is the community of the local church. Therefore, our best strategy for reaching the world is to fan that community into a raging inferno of supernatural witness that will be far more attractive than any adjustment to our music, small groups, or sermons could ever be.” (194)
 - “How ironic that in the name of reaching the world, some churches have embraced a consumerist approach that only encourages self-oriented concern.” (194)
 - What you win them with, you win them to...
- Make Church Services Accessible to Non-Christians
 - Preach sermons that address the unbelievers present.
 - Explain what you’re doing as you move through the service.
- Create a “Regulated Free Market” of Evangelistic Initiatives
 - “Rather than *telling* people who to live out the Great Commission, we watch to see what naturally takes shape as the Spirit convicts through God’s Word... We deliberately help the best ideas to prosper, and unapologetically use the resources of the local church to do so.” (196)
- Train Your People to Evangelize – Together

Aiming for a Deep Culture

“We want a church where a passion for the lost is core to its personality. There may not be banners on the website, brochures in the lobby, or infomercials between songs on Sunday. But when you open up a church and poke around inside, you discover a whole world of evangelistic fervor. People share the gospel with friends, neighbors, and relatives. And, whenever possible, they’re letting the congregation be both context and apologetic for evangelism. In a church like this, there may not be as much sheen on the surface, but the culture is deep. That’s our goal.” (198)

“But if we stop there, we haven’t fully seen what biblical community can do in a local church. The local church isn’t simply context and apologetic for evangelism. It is the goal of evangelism. Evangelism should result in new churches as we fulfill the Great Commission through church planting.” (198)

Questions to Ask:

- What does evangelism currently look like in your own life?
- How did this chapter challenge your view of the personal and corporate nature of evangelism?
- What specific advice given will help you grow as an evangelist?
- How does your convictions on this topic help the church at large go deeper in caring for the lost?

12 – Fracture Your Community (for the Community of Heaven)

“Church community is not an end in itself; it is to be a blessing to others.” (199)

“Your church community can bless others by giving birth to new community in other churches, both locally and globally.” (199)

Making Yogurt

“We can take the live culture of our own congregation and see it grow into a new, healthy church community.” (200)

“Sometimes the most strategic thing we can do for God’s kingdom is to take the precious fellowship he’s raised up and split it apart. Then new churches can bear witness to the gospel far more effectively than we could ever do by ourselves.” (200)

- Why would we want to do this?
 - “Quite simply, because nurturing church community is a long and difficult task... An existing church community will have a common perspective on so many divisive issues... How wonderful to take that agreement into a church plant!” (200-201)

Is Your Church Community Ready to Replicate?

Is our church’s DNA worth replicating? Is our church community sufficiently formed as to be a blessing if it is reconstituted into a new church?

Here are some questions to consider:

- Is our congregation clear on the gospel?
- Is our congregation telling others the gospel?
- Do our church members teach God’s Word to each other? Is ours a church culture where it’s normal to encourage each other with Scripture?
- Does our congregation take our responsibility seriously to guard each other from sin? Are those conversations both honest and grace-exalting?
- Is most of the pastoring in our church done by the congregation? Is it unusual for a pastoral problem to come to our attention where ordinary members of the congregation are not already at work?

- Do we already see a breadth and depth of relationships that cannot be explained by natural bonds alone? Have these types of relationships come to characterize your congregation?
- Does our congregation trust its leadership? Or is it still typical that disunity erupts when leaders make a challenging decision?

Think Beyond Planting

There are many churches in our communities that are not preaching the truth and are actively lying about the gospel.

“Church revitalization replaces an unhealthy church culture with one that is more biblical.” (203)

Here are a few guidelines for church revitalization:

- Consider it only when you can guarantee good preaching.
- Send some of your elders.
- Clarify that you don’t want to control the new church.
- Cooperate freely.

A Pace That’s Sustainable

“If your church aspires to the type of community you’ve read about in the preceding pages, transplanting those old growth trees to a new church will seriously affect your own church community.” (205)

Here are some ideas to help you monitor the health of your community so that church planting doesn’t stretch you too far, too fast:

- Periodically review various elements of your church culture with your elders.
- Ask questions during new-member interviews about how the church feels.
- Assess the quality of elder candidates.
- Monitor the median tenure of your eldership and membership.
- Consider the quality of your church leaders.
- Recognize your own bias.

Pastor Those Who Go

“You’ll need to help the members of your congregation decide if they’ll stay or leave. If you’ve endeavored to build biblical community in your church, this decision will be challenging for many. Your people should consider where they live, where they could live, what types of relationships they have in your church, how easy it is to build relationships, how well they’re doing spiritually, and so much more. Pastor them through these decisions.” (206)

Blessed in Order to Bless

“Pray that God would bless us, that community in our churches would be evidently supernatural. And pray that in evangelism and church planting, this community would bear fruit far beyond our own churches.” (208)