

Real Community

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We are backing up to cover some important parts that we skipped in chapter three. This week community, next week marriage. Today's passage paints a picture of real community. What makes community real? 1) Our vision of community? What do we expect? 2) The action of community. What we do? 3) The motivation of community. What keeps you going? Vision, Action, Motivation.

Vision of Community

Vision of community: what do we expect? In the film, Notting Hill there's an iconic dinner party scene where some family and friends get together. After years of divorce and heartache, Hugh Grant has found an American girl, Anna, and reaches the point of introducing her to the family. Table conversation is marked by laughter, candid confessions, and fighting for the last brownie. There's depth, levity, and intimacy. The old word for this is *conviviality*. It comes from the Latin word meaning "banquet," and suggests a mood of full-bellied joy. Everyone wants to be there. Conversation moves effortlessly from topic to topic. Each person is valued. Joy hangs over the table like canopy. It's a gift when we get it, conviviality. It's something we all long for but rarely experience. Why? Well, consider who's at the table—a young wife who is bound to a wheelchair facing reproductive challenges, a single man who struggles with loneliness and career advancement, and a socially awkward sister who declares, upon meeting Anna, that they will be *best friends*. And then there's Anna who confesses, *"One day not long from now my looks will go and they will discover I can't act and I will become some sad middle aged woman who looks a bit like someone who was famous for a while."* **Why doesn't community equal conviviality? Because life is not a dinner party (and people are not the feast).** Life moves into the living room, the bedroom, the garage, and out into the real world where we experience loss, conflict, pain, anger, loneliness, frustration and disappointment. And as long as we hang onto the expectation of conviviality, in the place of community, we will be continually disappointed. Not that you won't experience full-bellied joy from time to time, but a proper vision of community refuses to demand it as the norm. You'll get out of the dining room and into the whole house, experience the full gamut of life with people, warts and all. This is what Peter's getting at when he says, **Finally all of you.** Not just the pretty, the married, the successful, the spiritual, the culturally attune, the easy to get along with. All of you **have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.** Here's the key to community, a vision of virtues that sustain true fellowship, and at the heart of the list, the chiasm, the poetic structure of five, is **brotherly love.**

Action of Community

When we read over this phrase, we often drop the brotherly and emphasize love. Modern society is very confused about love. When we hear love, we think affection, emotion, feeling. It's why we say things like, "We fell out of love." Or how can I love that City Group when I don't even like them! Our definition of love is biased, rooted in personal preference and feelings. And as a result, we treat relationships, community, marriage like verse 9: **repaying evil for evil.** There's a principle here that works against community, it's the anti-action, evil for evil. What is it? Tit for tat. And the people Peter is writing to were in a lot

worse condition. Friends and family were persecuted for their allegiance to Jesus, so people were tempted to want to lash out, get others back. If someone hurts you, hurt em back. Don't let em get away with it. The cold shoulder, social snub, Facebook smear. This kills community. You know what it is? A record of wrongs or rights. If you let me down, I will withdraw. If you don't anticipate my needs, I won't anticipate yours. If you hurt me I certainly won't encourage or serve you. If you don't offer the experience I'm looking for, then I'll pack up and look for it elsewhere. Evil for evil, reviling, is based not on brotherly love but self-love. If the service is bad, I'll write you a scathing review. If it's good I'll tip you. **But love looks to bless regardless of the circumstances.** It's the action of community--blessing. This is the single who, although they feel lonely, and wish families would invite them over for dinner, go out of their way to serve by babysitting or bringing dinner. It's the leader who feeling unappreciated or as if no one ever asks how they are doing, kneels down to ask God to help those who struggle. Love, St. Paul says, keeps no record of wrongs, good or bad. Do you have a record for your community, your spouse, your church, your colleagues? The opposite of repaying evil for evil is to **bless**: "**but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing**" (9). Now you could take this a couple ways. 1) You are called to bless people to get a blessing. 2) Bless, because you've already been blessed. Which is it? First, what is blessing? As the family of God, we're called to bless when cursed, to love our enemies, to give an extra tunic if one is taken. I have a friend that insists on tipping well when waiters do a poor job. Can you imagine? 20% and they didn't keep your glass full? Your food was cold! It runs right up against our record-keeping. [Blessing the Crowes] There was a Christian soldier in bootcamp who was picked on by his platoon. One of the soldiers would throw his boots at him. One night the Christian soldier shined the boots and put them back. He blessed an undeserving enemy. Isn't this the heart of the gospel? An undeserving enemy who turns their back on the kindest person in the world, mocks and betrays him, and Christ full of kindness doesn't just forgive, he gives them his shining glory. He clothes the prodigal son in his very own robes and puts a ring on his finger, while the record-keeping older brother storms about in the back. Gratuitous grace, tipping when it's not deserved, giving when it's hardly earned. Praying when neglected, babysitting when ignored. This is blessing: to confer on others the very favor that's been conferred on you. Not a record of wrongs, a feast of grace. See, there is a place to feast, to draw endless joy, and its under the canopy of Christ. When Christ calls a person he calls them to bless that they may obtain a blessing. Which is it? Bless to get or blessed or bless because you've already been blessed? Both. Yes, we confer the grace we've received from God on others, but in doing so we actually get more blessing. The more you give grace away, the deeper you go into it. EX. **The real way to learn about blessing is the same way you learn about forgiveness, not by studying it but by doing it.** Blessing is the action of community. Where do you need to bless? To give beyond what's deserved, to show someone the favor of God? How would blessing change the way you approach your employer, your prof, your city group? You wanna learn blessing? Be a blessing. And in the act of blessing you'll discover *more deeply* how much you've already been blessed. You get a sense of the wonder it is to be the sons not the enemy of God, to have a seat at the table of God not settle for the scraps of the world. [EX] In fact, v 10 motivates us to do good with the promise of blessing, "**Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.**" If you want to love life and see good days, bless not

curse, do good not evil; encourage don't gossip, affirm don't criticize. Speak the truth not deceit. In other words, we bless not just by serving but by speaking. **Some of you need speak more and serve less, others to serve more speak less.** Don't hold back that encouraging word that would build someone up. Don't hold back that loving warning to a friend flirting with sin and temptation. Bless community with your lips.

Motivation for Community

God motivates us with the pitchfork and the carrot. He prods us with his warnings and woos us with his promises: **For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil**" 12. Now he's writing to Christians, and the Psalm is a call to action, so we can't excuse ourselves saying, the Lord would never turn his face against me. You have to face the Lord to enjoy his blessing: **Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed (34:5).** But look away and guilt and shame will creep in. You say how can you talk about shame? I thought it was about grace? It is but you have to face grace to receive it. William Faulkner said, **"A man's moral conscience is the curse he had to accept from the gods in order to gain from them the the right dream."** When we face the wrong dream, have the wrong vision of community, conviction, guilt, shame will pile up but not to condemn, to save. Andrei Tarkovsky's film Solaris, **"Shame. The feeling that will save mankind."** The face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Evil is the absence of good, its turning away from the Lord and making something else more important, and if we continue in that we get away from his gracious gaze and fall under his judging face. You'll choose evil and not good, self love not brotherly love, tit for tat not blessing. A community made in your own image. But he loves you enough to say, to prod with the pitchfork, to push us along toward the carrot, the place of true blessing, to conviviality in the presence of the Lord, joy overhead. By saying, the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, who refuse to bless. If we'll live a life of blessing, if we'll be true to brotherly love, then the eyes of the Lord will be on us and his ears open to us. See the promise? When Scripture says the eyes of the Lord are on you, its typically a very good thing. 2 Chron 16:9, strengthen the heart. Isa 61:1, gaze of glory. Gen 6:8, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Are you gazing at God? Do you need to turn back, to swap conviviality for community, self love for brotherly love. And at the heart of it all, look to Christ? **Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed"** (Ps 34:5). He wants to take your rightful shame and guilt, and look right into your eyes with shining love, and radiant acceptance and say, I forgive you. I hear your prayer. My eyes are on you. Sit down at the table with Christ, taste and see that the Lord is good, and then let him take you into all the other rooms, with all the other people, and fill the house, the city, the world with blessing, the very favor of God.