

## 40 DAYS OF COMMUNITY SERIES

*“Why We Need Each Other*

**Dr. Al Detter**

**October, 2 2005**

Well, church, it's finally here. We've been getting ready for a special season at Grace called "40 Days of Community" and we launch this weekend. Last year we did "40 Days of *Purpose*". We learned that God put each of us on this planet for five reasons. If we can live for these purposes, we'll hit the target for why God created us. *By the way, you'll get more out of this sermon today if you'll use the outline provided in the program.*

So let's review the five purposes God wants us to fulfill:

\***Worship God.** We need to place God at the center of our lives.

\***Reach out to others.** People need Jesus and we need to share that Jesus is the way to Heaven and fulfillment.

\***Serve others.** Each of us has something to contribute to somebody else's life.

\***Grow in maturity.** We need to grow in our faith and see positive changes in our behavior.

\***Fellowship with others.** We each need to experience the richness of deepening friendships with others.

That's what we spent 40 days talking about last year.

This year we're going to go one step further. The reality is—we can't truly fulfill any of the five purposes for our lives on our own. God designed us so that we can only fulfill His purposes for our lives in relationship with other people in our lives. It can't be done alone. We need each other. That's the "big idea" we'll be looking at for the next 40 days.

We have a big hurdle to jump over right from the start. Our culture takes us in an opposite direction. It lifts up the value of *individualism*. We tend to elevate personal autonomy, freedom, privacy, and self-fulfillment above seeking the wellbeing of others around us. But true happiness doesn't come from being independent, isolated, living life with all the barriers up and masks on, keeping people at arm's length. Real happiness comes from being together with others in the richness of authentic relationships. That's how God wired us!

Notice what the Bible says in I Corinthians 12:14, "The body is not one member but many." The church is not primarily about the individual but the group. Verses 20-21 go on to say, "There are many members but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you.'" The truth is, we're all one body in Christ. We belong to each other and each of us needs others. So turn to someone and say, "You need me!" Go ahead, "You need me." Now turn to someone and say, "I need you!"

Actually, we don't realize how much we need each other. So as we launch "40 Days of Community", we're going to look at five reasons from the Bible why we need a church family. More than that, these five reasons are about why we need to be in a small group with a few other friends you get to know on a deeper level than just a casual acquaintance. All five reasons start with the letter "W" to help you remember them better.

Here's the first reason you need a group of Christians around you:

## #1—Walk

---

We need others to *walk* with us. The Bible calls how we live our lives as a Christian, our walk. Colossians 2:6 says, “Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so *walk* in Him.” The Scriptures also tell us to walk in the light, to walk in love, to walk in obedience, to walk in the Holy Spirit, to walk in wisdom, to walk as Jesus walked. In other words, we’re supposed to live each day according to the directions of the Bible for the glory of God.

But God never intended for us to walk this kind of life alone. We’re on a journey from where we are now to where God wants us to be. We do that best when we do it with others. We need people who will help us live our lives the way Christians should. We need people to walk with us.

Genesis 2:18 says, “It is not good for man to be alone.” That’s the first thing God said after He created Adam. Everything was perfect, yet it wasn’t good for man to be alone. I know that God was setting the stage for people to find a fulfilling relationship in marriage. But our need for others goes beyond marriage.

As best I understand the Bible, God created two groups to walk with us. The first group is our physical family—the people in our household. It’s the family God gave us to share life with. God wants the family to be on a spiritual journey together so that all are growing and that no one feels alone.

God also created a second group. It’s our spiritual family. It’s the church. But I want to be clear about something. You can’t get the benefits of the spiritual family God has in mind in just a worship service. Why? A worship service is a crowd. Its purpose is to come together to honor God. You need a spiritual family in the form of a small group—five, six, eight, ten people who can walk with you through life. A worship service is great, but it can be a very lonely weekly experience because it’s not the forum for walking together in relationships.

So mark this down on your outline. Deepening relationships are God’s answer to *loneliness*. We need a few people in our lives to walk with us. People we know really well and they know us well. We need a group who cares about how we’re doing; people who love us deeply and to whom we matter. That’s the first reason we need others. We need people to walk through life with us. Here’s the second reason, the second “W”.

## #2—Work

---

We need others to *work* with us. Ephesians 2:10 says that we were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Before we were even born, God decided where we would live, who we would know, and what talents and abilities we would have. He planned all these things in advance so that we could benefit other people in meaningful ways.

But the thing I want you to notice is that God never intended for us to do good things for others by ourselves. He had in mind a group effort. Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” That’s talking about individuals working together for the good of the whole. We minister or serve each other in tandem. That’s why we’re so big on teams here at Grace. We believe in working together.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 makes the point well, “Two are better than one because they get more done by working together.” When we work together, we always get more done faster. It’s when we do all the work by ourselves that we get tired, that we get worn out. When you’re tired all the time in ministry, that should be a signal—you’re doing too much work alone. You don’t have other people helping you. That’s where the small group in your life comes in. They can work with you when you need them and it goes much better for you. At some point in our lives, we’re all going to need people to work with us or we’ll be overcome by the magnitude of the task.

So write this down on your outline. Deepening relationships are God’s answer to *fatigue*. We get exhausted when we don’t have anybody helping us. When everybody does a little bit the work gets done so much more quickly and it’s actually fun.

I saw this truth in my own life recently. My son’s roof sprung a leak and the house needed a new roof. Financially, it was best if I tore the shingles off myself. I spent a month dreading the project because I was already overloaded.

Over the past two years, I developed deepening relationships with some guys in the church through small groups. I violated what I’m talking about today. I was too timid to ask for help from this circle of guys. Two Friday nights ago, Marie and I stepped out with another couple. The husband was from the group of men. In the course of conversation, he caught wind of the need. When I started at 8:00 am the next morning five guys showed up to help. When I saw how big the job really was, I realized I could not have handled it well alone. But with help, by 2:30pm the shingles were off, the roof repaired, and the roofing paper installed.

When I got home, I wasn’t tired. And for the next 24 hours, I kept saying, “I praise you God. Thanks for those guys!” I think God was tired of hearing me say that. But I realized I would have been a basket case without them.

I’m here to tell you, when others in your life come to work with you, it just isn’t that hard. God puts us into each other’s lives not just to serve each other at church, but to work together when we need each other during the week. I’m hearing exciting stories on a regular basis about how small groups work together for each other in our church.

So, we need people to walk with us and to work with us. Here’s the third “W”.

### #3—Watch Out

---

We need others to *watch out* for us. We need others who will defend us, protect us, stand up for us, hold us accountable, and warn us.

Philippians 2:4 says, “Look out for one another’s interests, not just your own.” I want to ask you, “Is anyone helping you on your spiritual journey? Who’s watching out for you to make sure you’re growing? Who’s watching out for you when you feel depressed and discouraged and feel like giving up?” We often can’t see everything we need to see. Others who are close to us can see stuff we’re blind to.

You see, we all have blind spots. If your tail light goes out, you’ll never know it. Somebody’s got to tell you. So we need people in our lives who watch out for us, who know us well enough to tell us some things we may not see and may not really want to hear. I’m thankful for my wife, Marie. She’s one who watches out for me. I don’t always appreciate it. But she has a way of seeing my blind spots.

A few summers ago, it was almost impossible to eat out on the deck, the yellow jackets were so bad. It was frustrating and one day I got an idea. I poured out a jar of barbecue sauce into a container. Then I hauled out the vacuum sweeper. My theory was this. I'll gather all the yellow jackets around the deck to one spot. They'll go for the barbecue sauce and all I have to do is point the vacuum hose at them and suck them into the sweeper.

I didn't think my theory through far enough. I pointed the hose at the bees with great delight. But, along with the bees, I sucked up the sauce. It smeared the entire interior of the hose and went right into the sweeper. What a mess! When Marie came out of the house just after the experiment, she was able to help me see my blind spot. For months, we smelled barbecue sauce whenever we ran the sweeper.

Let me tell you why we need people close to us to tell us what's in our blind spots. Satan loves to take advantage of blind spots. We're in a spiritual battle and he knows where he can defeat us. Often it's in areas we can't see or are unwilling to look at. He hurts us in our blind spots—habits we can't break, hurts we can't let go of, insensitive ways we treat other people, lack of discipline in key areas.

We often experience defeat in these areas and sometimes don't even realize it. It's harder to beat the devil on our own. We need other people in our lives watching out for us—people who are willing to tell us the truth in love. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated. But two standing back to back can conquer, and three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." Who's watching your back right now? Who's close enough to you that they talk to you and make sure you don't fall into some trap that can really mess you up? If there isn't, you've got a big bull's eye on your back for the devil.

Here's another question. Whose back are *you* watching out for? It's a two way street. You need to be close enough to others that you can talk to them about blind spots Satan tries to exploit in them.

So write this down in your outline—Deepening relationships are God's answer to defeat. When people build relationships in small groups, this is the kind of honesty we're shooting for. Together, we have more power to defeat the devil in our lives.

We need people who will walk with us, people who will work with us, and people who will watch out for us. Here's the fourth "W".

#### #4—Wait and Weep

---

We need others to wait and weep with us. What am I talking about? There are going to be times in our lives when crisis strikes—an illness, a broken relationship, a death, a ravaging loss of some kind. We need someone to be there in the inevitable crises of life. When we get bad news, we need people in our lives.

We're not meant to face crises alone. No one should ever have to sit in a hospital waiting alone during life and death surgery. No one should ever have to sit at home alone when news of the death of a loved one has come. No one should ever have to be alone when a spouse has walked out. I could go on and on. We don't need a whole crowd of people in times like these, but we need that support group, those people who have become close in our lives to be there when we need them.

Romans 12:15 says, "Weep with those who weep." Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Only those in close relationships can do this kind of thing. The safety net God has planned for your life when you hit a crisis is a group of believers who are committed to

you. When you go through deep waters, there's nothing better than for others to wait and to weep with you. Without this kind of support, we'll wallow in despair.

I have her permission to share this. Last May, Linda Hammer lost her husband in a devastating way. She said good-bye to him in the morning and when she came home from work, he was gone. As the waves of grief rolled through that house that day, I saw a clinic of waiting and weeping. People in Linda's small group as well as others at church and work rallied to her side. It was something to behold. Oh, the poverty of going through a crisis without deeply caring friends.

Please write this down—deepening relationships are God's answer to despair. People need friends around them when the wheels come off. We don't have to fix their problems. We don't need to give advice. What they need is someone to be there who will wait and weep with them, sometimes for weeks to come. There's one more reason why we need other people in our lives. Here's the last "W".

## #5—Witness

---

We need others to witness with us. What does that mean? Well, if you've been around Grace for any length of time, you know that God wants us to share our faith and life message with others. If we don't share it, it won't get shared. But sharing our life message with the people in our lives can get kind of scary. One of the great benefits of a small group is that we can validate our life messages and encourage one another to share them with others. We can tell stories in small group about what we see happening when we witness for Jesus. With others on our support team, we can calm the apprehension we feel about sharing our faith with others.

But there's another dimension to our witness with a small group. There's great power in the relationships that go on there. When you speak about your small group to others, people will see something very attractive. They'll say, "You have a group like that? Something must be going on there."

Friends, one of the key ways to witness for Jesus is to tell others about your small group experience without breaking any confidences. It's one of the best ways to witness to people who don't yet know the love of Jesus. Why? Because the love of believers for other believers gets the attention of people who don't yet know Christ. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Our love for people in God's family is a powerful statement to those who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus.

The thing that proves to the world that we're Christ-followers is not our buildings or music or sermons. It's our love for each other. That's such a powerful witness. Failure here is often the very reason people reject the gospel. They see people who profess to know Jesus fighting, hurting, or ignoring each other in the church. Someone has said, "To dwell up above with saints that we love, that will be glory. But to dwell down below with saints that we know that's another story." There's something magnetic about those who don't know Jesus seeing believers love each other this side of Heaven.

So would you write this down: Deepening relationships are God's answer to the fear of witnessing. It's a lot harder to be all alone trying to share your faith with those who are not believers. But it's a great fear reliever to simply share with others what's going on in your small group. The conversation will inevitably turn to Jesus. When people hear about how you care for each other and that Jesus is the strength of your lives together, it will be the witness of the group at work. The group witness makes it so much easier to tell others about your faith in Christ.

## Conclusion

---

Today I talked about five reasons we need each other. As believers in Christ, each of us needs other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch out for us, to wait and weep with us, and to witness with us.

At weekend services during these 40 days, we're going to talk about how we accomplish God's five purposes for our lives *in community*, that is, in deepening relationships with a few others around us. I'd like everyone in our church to be in a situation where you can practice what we'll be teaching on a personal basis with other people. I'm asking everyone to join a small group for six weeks.

I'm not asking you to make a lifetime commitment. Just six weeks in a row. Each week you'll watch and discuss a 20-25 minute video lesson especially prepared for this series. You'll get this book, *Better Together, What on Earth Are We Here For?* There are 40 days of readings on how to build better relationships. You won't be able to get this book without joining a small group because learning about community is worthless unless you're experiencing it.

It's not too late to get in a small group. All you need to do is go to the Community Center in the lobby and sign up. You'll be placed in a small group this week. God didn't bring you to this church to sit on the sidelines and watch it happen. He brought you here to be part of what's going on.

Inside your program is a little card. This one's for you. You'll keep it. I'd like you to put it someplace where you'll see it every day for the next 40 days. It's a "40 Days" commitment. It says that you'll participate in a "40 Days" small group. It says that you'll read a chapter a day from the book, "Better Together". And it says that you'll do your best to hear all seven messages on weekends during the "40 Days" experience. You can sign your name there to add to your resolve.

One of the surprises for me last year was my small group. Marie and I volunteered to host a group. I'll be candid with you. I did it to model it for others more than for myself. I intended to do it for just six weeks. One year later, our group is still together. We even met during the summer. I suggested that we take September off because we'll be meeting six weeks in a row during "40 Days". They ignored me. We're experiencing all five reasons for community that I talked about today and we have something very special. I want that for you too. Let's pray.

Lord, with all my heart I believe that You want our church to fulfill your purposes for our lives in the richness of community. I pray that You would forgive us for the times we felt we didn't need others in our lives. We want to be part of what You're doing in the world and we don't want to miss out on what You want to do in our lives through the lives of others.

We don't want these 40 days to be about our plans or just another program. I pray these 40 days would be about You and the changes You want to make in us, our church, and our community. I have a spirit of anticipation and I pray that You would really bless our church as we do these 40 days together.

In Jesus name,

Amen!