

ABC's of Christian Community

I did some google research the other day because I wanted to know what sorts of things happened accidentally to people. Here's a few of the most common searches.

- **Accidentally** in love
- **Accidentally** deleted an app
- **Accidentally** shot
- **Help** I accidentally
- **Accidentally** engaged
- **Accidentally** vegan (Worse things could happen I guess)
- **Accidentally** ate mold
- **FBI** agent accidentally shoots
- **Instagram** model accidentally kills herself
- **Woman** accidentally shoots friend

Most of the time when something happens accidentally, it's not good.

Theologian Miroslav volf puts it this way, "It's easy to **change** the world. It's hard to improve it."

Here's another way to think about it: No one accidentally becomes a **stronger** Christian.

The book of Hebrews was written particularly to persecuted Jewish Christians. As a result much of the book is written to encourage people to keep the faith and strengthen the faith.

You can see the task that the author is up against – People are being killed for their faith and he needs to remind them that their physical life isn't as valuable as their spiritual life. So all throughout Hebrews the author says, "This is why Jesus is your trustworthy authority and this is why it's dangerous to leave him."

Sprinkled throughout Hebrews the author basically says – No one accidentally becomes a stronger Christian – you need **Christian Community**.

Today I want to share with you the ABC's of Christian Community that we see sprinkled throughout the book of Hebrews but I want you to know – this isn't child's play. This isn't some cutesy talk that we listen to and then do absolutely nothing about. You don't know where you'll be 10 years from now. You don't know who you'll be 10 years from now. You don't know what crisis awaits you. You don't know what life will throw at you. But we know one thing – you won't accidentally be a stronger Christian in order to do that you need each other.

As we go through this – I want you to be thinking – in what ways do I have this in my life? If you're a part of a small group I want you to be thinking – in what ways can I make sure this is a reality in my small group.

Accountability

Verse: Hebrews 3:12-13

¹²See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

The word for "encourage" here is parakaleo and it means "To call to one's side." It means more than encourage. It can also mean to counsel, to urge, to strengthen, and to instruct.

What it's not about: It's not about showing the **best you**

I think sometimes in Christian Community we think we need to have it together. We might think "Christians shouldn't worry so I shouldn't admit to my people that I'm worrying. Christians should always be joyful so I can't tell my people that I've had it up to here with the world today. Christians should always be happy to get together so I can't tell my people that I'm just really feeling introverted. Christians should look like Jesus so I can't tell my people about the parts of me that don't. Christians should _____ so I can't tell my people about _____.

It's easy for us to mistake looking good for being good. Yes we want to pursue righteousness but no – faking it doesn't count.

Sharing your life in Christian Community is not like sharing your Instagram account – it's not a place to cultivate your image and showcase your life.

What it's about: it's about showing the **real you**

So many of us think we need to dress up for church – I'm not talking about clothing but I am talking about appearances.

When you sterilize your life, when you present a façade to the world – it doesn't make Christianity appealing it makes Christianity inaccessible. Christian community ought to be more like a hospital gown and less like a ball gown. It should be a community where we go to be exposed and healed not shown off.

There's two people in this room that I'm talking particularly to and they need to be handled differently.

The first one is the Christian that is still struggling to throw off the old self.

Chances are you've lived the majority of your life according to the flesh – even if you grew up in the Church. It's completely natural for your new life in Christ to be a work in progress. Old habits die hard. And pleasurable things that are bad for us are so much easier for us to make habits out of than difficult things that are good for us.

Your job isn't to pretend. It's to fight, it's to get beaten down, it's to allow others to help you get back up, it's to allow others to heal you, and it's to keep fighting. It's to pursue Jesus with all you have even when all you have is very little. It's to put yourselves in the means of grace even if you don't feel like it. Not legalistically – not to save yourself through your own good works but to give God opportunity after opportunity to change you.

My last year of college was rough – my girlfriend and I (who I planned on marrying) had broken up and I didn't like how my future looked and I wasn't happy with God. I felt like I had listened to Him and obeyed Him and yet doing things His way seemed to fail me anyway. So I drank and I disobeyed and I did the things I wanted to do because God's way wasn't a guarantee either so at least I'd enjoy myself. Some nights I drank just so I could fall asleep without being tortured by my thoughts. But I also showed up to accountability every week. I confessed my sins every week to a group of brothers in Christ. Some days I showed up to accountability drunk. Because I knew the only way for me to get better was to put myself in the means of grace. The only way for me to grow was to give God opportunities to grow me. That involved letting others see the whole me.

That's the first person I'm talking to – if you're struggling to throw off the old self and to kill the flesh and to surrender parts of your life to Jesus – You have to let people know. You're not making Christianity more appealing by hiding your sin - you're making it inaccessible. This faith is not for people who have always had their lives together and never struggled with doing the right thing. It's the sick who need a doctor. He came for the unrighteous not the righteous.

The second person I'm talking to is the Christian who has matured beyond their old self.

I've known Christians who didn't want to tell their own children that Mom and Dad were both previously married because they didn't want to set a bad example. There are Christians who change the story of who they were and what they've done in order to make it more palatable for themselves and for others.

You hide your past because your present looks prettier but in doing so you rob God of His glory. God didn't transform you so you could trick people and impress people He transformed you so you could tell people and help people.

Accountability in Christian Community is not about showing the best you – it's about showing the real you.

Belonging

Verse: Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The New Testament Church was diverse. Kory illustrated beautifully last Sunday just how foundational diversity was to the early church and the spreading of the gospel. Foundational to fulfilling the Great Commission. From the day of Pentecost – the very start of the Church – there were believers of different languages, different culture, different skin color, and different socioeconomic status.

What it's not about: It's not about being like each other

So many people think that Christian Community is about finding a group of people that I have chemistry with. Here's a secret: You don't have to be like each other to like each other. In fact, it's better for us if we have Christians in our lives that don't look like us.

What it's about: it's about growing with each other

When we have Christians in our lives that don't look like us we learn more and we grow more. When we have people in our lives with different experiences, different perspectives, and different pasts than they challenge and inform our faith in ways that others couldn't. I think Kory highlighted this perfectly in his message last Sunday. Different people read and think about different parts of scripture differently because we're different. If you want this thing to really come alive in all of its beautiful breadth and depth then you'll have to pursue Christians that are different than you. Christian Community isn't about looking like each other it's about growing with each other.

Caring

Verse: Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. ²Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. ³Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

We have this verse out in our commons area. The reason we did it was to keep in front of us our commitment to partner with Together For Good and prison ministry. We want to care for strangers, for outsiders, and for the vulnerable.

But this verse is also about Christians loving ONE ANOTHER and caring for each other. The hospitality shown to strangers would've been opening your homes to persecuted Christians. Remembering the prisoner as if you were in prison would've been those imprisoned for their faith.

Early Christians were called to care for one another even when it's not convenient.

What it's not about: It's not about having time

It's hard to open our homes. It's hard to help our friends move. It's hard to give someone a ride to the airport at five in the morning. It's hard to watch someone's kids when they've got an appointment. It's hard to answer the phone at 11PM.

Crisis happen and life gets messy for all of us and it's never convenient. There's never a good time for someone to need help. No one schedules a crisis on the calendar and sends out a Save the Date.

What it's about: it's about making time

Christian Community means making time for people and their mess. It means intentionally caring for others even when it's not convenient. This is easy in theory but it's hard when you've got plenty of your

own stuff to deal with. We all have full schedules. We all have busy lives. We all have people and things that need and deserve our attention.

Caring for one another isn't something the pastors do, it's not limited to special ministry groups at the Church, it's not just for the hot dishes team or for our parish nursing group. But here's the deal. You can't care for everyone in here. As long as you never get involved in a small group all of this will just remain theoretical. Get in a small group and then make time to care for the people in your group.

Sharing

Verse: Hebrews 13:16

¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Christianity was never meant to be a spectator sport. When the New Testament offers descriptions of the early church – everyone is expected to contribute.

One of the very first descriptions of the Church is from **Acts 2:44-45**

⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

When Paul describes the **Corinthians Church** he says

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

And Peter tells the Church in **1 Peter 4:10**

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

What it's not about: it's not about all about you

I think we get used to thinking: how does this serve me? How does this fit me? Does this work for my schedule? Was the content good enough? Am I in the mood for this? Do I have the energy for this? Is this worth my time? Do these questions reflect scripture's description of the early church? Do these questions reflect what the Holy Spirit is saying about His Church?

What it's about: it's about us

The New Testament describes the church as a bride, as a body, as a house, as a family, and as a temple. We're to have the same mind, the same Spirit, the same love, and the same purpose. When Jesus sends letters to the churches in Revelation He sees them as a local congregation. He sees them as a group. He says, "Here's what your church is doing well, here's what you're doing poorly, Here's what you need to do to fix it." Jesus sees Waite Park Church and He knows what we're doing well and what we need to work on. You see it's not all about you – it's about us.

How many times have you asked these types of questions: Did I bring enough to the table today? Was I a blessing to others during that gathering? Am I using my gifts and talents to build up the Church? Am I being a good steward of God's grace to others?

Christian Community where there's

- Accountability
- Belonging
- Caring
- Sharing

Isn't impossible and it doesn't just exist as theory or as some vision to always be pursuing but never achieving. There's no reason that your small group can't look like this. There's no reason that you and a group of friends can't be intentional about doing this. I've done it and I believe our small groups are headed in this direction – more than ever before.

I want to end with one last thought.

According to pew research - in the Minneapolis Metropolitan area about 70% of us consider ourselves Christians and about 76% of us aren't regularly involved in intentional Christian community beyond the Sunday morning worship service. Remember what we said – no one accidentally becomes a stronger Christian. Ineffective and impotent Christians abound. **Minneapolis needs small groups that work.**

Intentional Christian community not only has the power to strengthen your faith and shape your eternity but it has the power to strengthen the faith of others and shape their eternity.

Practice the ABCs of Christian Community – Change your life and change the lives of others.

