

The Foundations of Truth

A FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY

FELLOWSHIP AND THE CHURCH

PRE-GAME

There is an increasing trend in America toward individualism. Marriages and families break, neighbors stay in their homes and even church congregations take on a “What’s in it for me?” attitude. In many ways, our sense of community has been lost and replaced by an “above all else, look out for number one” mantra. This cultural influence toward privatization leads to loneliness and indifferent communities. But God has always had a better plan in mind. Throughout all of Scripture, we see God bringing his work of salvation in and through communities and households. God has called us not only to be individuals who believe in him but a community that belongs to him. He is our God and we are his people (Exodus 6:7). He has formed us into a body and invites us to live, worship, serve and grow in the context of community. We should not be ‘just-me-and-my-Bible’ Christians. We must seek out fellowship and the church as the foundation for community and growth.

THEME

The foundation for community in our Christian lives rests on God’s Trinitarian nature and his personal interaction with his people. Believers are called to participate in the richness of fellowship with God and fellowship with others in the context of community.

PRACTICE

Understanding the foundation for community that we have in God, should motivate us to intentionally pursue fellowship through purposeful Christian relationships, active involvement in a local church, and loving engagement with non-Christians.

SYMBOL KEY



Indicates discussion questions



Indicates Biblical passages to look up



Indicates application questions to be discussed

The Foundations of Truth Series

A Foundation for Confidence

A Foundation for Trust

A Foundation for Growth

A Foundation for Community

A Foundation for Life



I. THE BASIS FOR FELLOWSHIP

✦ One of the unique elements of Christianity is that we have a God who is both infinite and personal. What about God enables us to relate to Him in a personal way?

God's Nature

We don't have a distant, impersonal God. He is immanent. God is relational by nature, being three in person (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) but one in essence – the Trinity.



Read Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 10:21-22
- How is God shown to be relational within himself?

Our Nature

In Scripture we find that humans were created in God's image. As a result, we reflect God's communal nature and are called to live in relationship with one another.



Read Genesis 1:26-27, 2:24
- The Bible sees men and women as completely equal, called to be united together, just as the three persons of the Trinity are equal and united. We should celebrate our equality and union knowing that both men and women were created in the image of God to serve him and one another in unique ways according to the different callings and gifts he imparts to us.

God's Initiative

The great news of Christianity is that God has stepped down into history to take on flesh as a man and to walk among us. In doing so, he is not only identifying with us, but he is inviting us into relationship with Him.



Read John 1:1,14
- Who was the Word?
- What does it mean for the Word to become flesh?

Christ is identified as the Word of God (v 1). This title carries with it the connotation of God's transcendent rationality which is above and distant from man. Flesh (v 14) describes the earthly sphere, the arena of human emotions, history and decisions. The infinite God humbles himself by taking on finite humanity through the incarnation.

Fellowship =
koinonia in Greek,
meaning "holding
something in common"

For other passages
about the Triune nature
of God see Matthew
28:19, Genesis 1:26,
Ephesians 4:4-7, and
Romans 1:1-6 to start.

Word =
logos in Greek,
meaning word, law or
rationality

flesh =
sarks in Greek,
meaning flesh, earthly
nature, humanity



Read John 17:20-24

- Just before Jesus was arrested he prays for all believers. How is Jesus' plea a reflection of his desire for relationship with us?



What are some practical ways in which you need to rely more on community to help you grow in your relationship with God?

II. FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRISTIANS

In an increasingly individualistic society, Christians tend to avoid deep fellowship in favor of a privatized faith. We would rather stay at home to read our Bible and pray on our own than to engage and share with other believers at a Bible Study, a fellowship meeting or a church service. But God has called us to experience him in community, knowing that we are hard-wired relational beings in need of support and input, acceptance and belonging. Not only do we need others but others need us.



What sorts of things stand in your way of having fellowship and purposeful relationships with other Christians?

We need other Christians



Read Proverbs 27:17 and Hebrews 10:24-25

- Why are relationships with other Christians important?

Fellowship is more than just being friends with Christians and hanging out sometimes. It is friendship with a spiritual purpose. Deep, meaningful Christian friendships encourage us, keep us accountable, help us grow and challenge us.

Other Christians need us

Not only do we need communities, but our communities need us. The Bible uses the metaphor of a "body" to describe Christian relationships.



Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:7

- How might you view your relationships differently when you think of your self as one part of a body?
- Our fellowship with other believers is to be prompted and sustained by love. What might this practically look like?



In what ways do you seek out Christian fellowship now? How can you actively encourage fellow laborers in the ministry?

“Friendships are formed around a common vision of virtue and the good life, and friendship serves to sustain, foster, and strengthen each friend in his or her commitment and progress in a life well lived.”

- J.P. Moreland

Consider Paul's prayer in Eph 3:14-21. What does this prayer show about Paul's view of his fellow believers and his desires for them?

III. FELLOWSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

We have to be intentional about building community. Fortunately, God provided the structure of the local church as his primary avenue for Christian fellowship. In all of Scripture, we see the central role of the church in the building of the Kingdom of God.

✦ What is your background with church? Has it been a positive or negative?

The definition of the church

Scripture uses the term 'church' in several different ways:



- Read: Colossian 1:18 _____
 Acts 14:23, 2 Th. 1:1 _____
 1 Corinthians 10:32 _____
 1 Titus 3:15 _____

The church - The living, visible community of those who have responded to God's call.

The importance and purpose of the church

In Scripture, a commitment to Christ (salvation) always includes a commitment to a visible community. The privatized "just-me-and-my-Bible" idea of faith that is rampant today is never seen. From Genesis through Revelation, salvation and community are closely linked.



- Read Jeremiah 24:7 and Genesis 17:7-11
 - Who were the people of God in the Old Testament?
 - What was the outward sign that accompanied being a member of the covenant community?



- Read Acts 2:37-41
 - Who are the people of God in the New Testament?
 - What always accompanies a profession of faith? What did this symbolize?



- Read Acts 2:42-47
 - What should we experience when we are a part of a local church?

Every believer's foundation for community rests in their active participation as members of a local church. It is through the church that we will experience a lifetime of growth, service and ministry.

✦ Have you found it difficult to be involved in church at college? Why? Considering the important role of the church for believers, what changes do you need to make?

In the Old Testament, the community of believers is referred to in two ways:

- those who have responded to God's call
- the visible congregation

Baptism, like circumcision in the OT, is an outward and visible sign of being in a covenant relationship with God.

Acts 2:37-47 is a great passage to turn to for the need and purpose of the local church.

For a list of gospel-believing churches in the area, visit:

www.princeton.edu/~aia

IV. FELLOWSHIP WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

The importance of community also extends to our interaction with non-Christians. Yet many Christians are hesitant to engage with those who do not follow Christ and are content to remain in their Christian ‘huddles.’ It is legitimate to be wary of the influence of the non-Christian world, but what if Christians never interacted with anyone else? How tragic that would be! Christians have a responsibility to live and interact with the rest of the world. This is not only an unavoidable reality but a method God has ordained to bring glory to himself and to make himself known in all the earth.

Community is “practicing the presence of God”

✦ What are some non-Christian communities you are in? What challenges do you face as you try to lovingly engage with these individuals?

We typically respond to fellowship with non-Christians in one of three different ways:

- **cultural embrace** - We sacrifice our Christian identity and adopt a lifestyle that is virtually indistinguishable from non-Christians. We are motivated by a fear of not being accepted by our non-Christian friends.
- **cultural defiance** - We sacrifice loving engagement and avoid non-Christians. We are motivated by a fear of corruption and tend to be judgmental and critical towards non-Christians.
- **cultural negotiation** - We balance loving engagement and our Christian identity. We are motivated by love to strategically connect with non-Christians and demonstrate the love of Christ through our service, friendship, words and witness.

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” – John 13:35

In order to have fruitful fellowship with non-Christians, we must be committed to being cultural negotiators. In this way, we can pursue natural, authentic relationships within our network of non-Christian friends through which we can demonstrate the love of Christ in every aspect of our lives.



Read Matthew 28:19-20

- In what ways is Jesus’ command to his disciples a call to cultural negotiation?

Matthew 28:19,20 is referred to as the “Great Commission.”

➤ Do you tend more towards cultural embrace or cultural defiance? What changes do you need to make in order to become a cultural negotiator?

IV. POST GAME

The foundation for community in our Christian lives rests on God’s Trinitarian nature and his personal interaction with his people. This should motivate us to intentionally pursue fellowship through purposeful Christian relationships, active involvement in a local church, and loving engagement with non-Christians. Understanding the foundation for community in our lives should lead us to enjoy and participate in rich fellowship with God and others.