

Convening A Construction Crew: Nobody Builds Alone  
Acts 2:42-47

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A cartoon in a Saturday Evening Review features a young boy sitting under a tree taking inventory of his relationships. So far, I have fourteen people who love me, twenty-two people who like me, six people who tolerate me, and I have only three enemies. When it comes to relationships, how are you doing?

John Donne said over 400 years ago, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. Any man’s death diminishes me...therefore, never ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”

Christians, particularly, are not called to isolation, to individualistic indulgence, to materialistic mono-vision. Christians are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, formed as the family of God. We are called to belong as well as believe. And I’d like to talk about that today.

#### WE WERE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

When God hung the planets in space and put the stars in place, when God made each little flower that opens and each little bird that sings, he crowned his creation with a human being made from the dust of the earth and the breath of heaven. He put Adam in the Garden of Eden with the responsibility to take care of the place. Then God suddenly discovers something is missing. *“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for a human being to be alone.’”* We are created for community.

Look at your hands for a moment. Oh, go ahead. Don’t be embarrassed. Our hands are wonderfully and uniquely made up of twenty-seven bones and a bunch of ligaments and muscles. Our fingers and palms have distinctive ridges which help us get a grip on things and identify us with unique fingerprints. With a hand we can throw a ball, drive a car, pick up a child, or help a friend. But our hands are so made that we cannot shake hands with ourselves very well, nor pat ourselves on the back very well, nor give ourselves a meaningful hug. We need other hands for that. We were created for community.

The worst form of human punishment is solitary confinement. No child likes to be sent to his room for disciplinary reasons. Vietnam POW’s survived the horrible isolation of the Hanoi Hilton by developing a tapping code that kept them in communication with one another. As former Air Force pilot, Ron Bliss, said, “Sometimes we sounded like a den of runaway woodpeckers. On Sundays we joined together in the Lord’s Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance without our captors ever deciphering our system.” We were created for community.

On a hot July night in 1977, the lights went out in New York City. That night looters took to the streets, smashing windows, robbing stores, injuring hundreds, including fire fighters and police officers. One woman was seen returning a stolen black and white TV cursing disgustedly that she had failed to steal a color one. This week the lights went out again in New York City. Tourists were stranded outside their hotels; commuters were grid-locked from getting home. Reporters wondered out loud what might happen when darkness came. Instead of panic, there seemed to be a party. People slept safely on the streets. Strangers tried to help one another and eateries opened their doors to the hungry. An obviously pleased mayor said to the world, since 9/11, the people of New York have learned to be a community. Can we employ in everyday life the principles we've learned in an emergency?

It is a paradox that we have both a hunger for and a cultural inclination against community. Since 1950, supportive social connections and informal networks of people have weakened. Eye-to-eye interactions are waning in an age of "loose connections," say sociologists. People visit less, belong to fewer groups, and more often live alone.

Robert Putnam, in his book, Bowling Alone, reports that over the last 25 years civic club memberships are down 58%, families eating dinner together have dropped from 50% to 34%, inviting friends over to your house dropped 45%. The more affluent we are the more isolated we tend to be. We have quickly become a generation of people who live cocooned lives tethered to our home entertainment systems, barricaded behind our electronic alarms, isolated from one another even in our own homes. One of the greatest mistakes I made in the early part of my ministry was assuming life to be a competitive "Lone Ranger" accomplishment rather than a cooperative fireside fellowship. I lived by the simple motto if you wanted something done right, do it yourself. It led to intense loneliness and great depression and near burn out. So I appeal to somebody here who is trying to make it on your own:

No, never alone, no, never alone,  
You were never created  
To do it all alone.

## WE ARE CALLED TO COMMUNITY

What institution on earth is better equipped to build community than the Church? The Church is not a place to see different things but a place to see things differently. As Paul said to the Romans, "*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead fix your attention on God and you will be changed from the inside out.*" The absolute genius of the early Church was the ability of 120 believers to take 3000 converts and form them into a community of faith—a community so unique that they had to coin a word for it. They called it koinonia. The numbers themselves are staggering. Acts 2:42-47 is a summary of how they did it.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, fellowship, to the breaking of

bread, and prayer. Community calls for covenant, commitment, and concentration.

A covenant is an agreement made in a moment of strength that carries us through the temptations of weakness. There are times when it's inconvenient to attend church, show up at Sunday school, make a small group meeting or come to choir. That's when a covenant gets you there anyway.

One of the most significant friendships of my life came when I made a covenant to meet with a physician friend of mine every Wednesday morning at 7:00 a.m. We met at my office. He brought the donuts. I made the coffee. The format was simple. We inquired about each other's family. We read a few verses of scripture. We prayed for each other. What neither of us could have guessed is that both of us would wind up with cancer—his in the colon, mine in the lymph system. As Lyman was dying he said to me one day, "Howard, the last of life is the best of life." He had discovered at the end of life the real meaning of life. He found community. That made all the difference.

*"They devoted themselves"* (Acts 2:42). It doesn't take second-hand emotion, but first-hand devotion to be a community Christian. Are you willing to make the commitment?

Verse 43: *"Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."* The word most characteristic of the early Christian community was "Awesome"!

Over the last few weeks Sandy and I have developed a ritual. We get the mail, sit down side by side, then laugh and cry our way through the hundreds of cards and letters from each of you and countless friends around the world. Only one word can describe that experience—Awesome. I don't know about tomorrow but I know that today you have brought us out of the miry clay and put our feet on a rock to stay. You have lifted us from the depths of despair and given us a reason to go on from there. You have reminded us that our living has not been in vain, and that life is more than any of us can explain. You have gently placed us in the everlasting arms of a loving God, which is exactly where we need to be. Awesome!

Verse 44: *"They had everything in common...and they gave to those in need."*

Community minded people seek the common good over personal gain. They seek not be served but to serve. They ask not what they can do for themselves. They ask what they can do for others. People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

One of the great phrases of the Bible is *one another*—love *one another*, pray for *one another*, encourage *one another*, admonish *one another*, greet *one another*, serve *one another*, teach *one another*, accept *one another*, honor *one another*,

bear *one another's* burdens, forgive *one another*. Community is not just a place for the suffering to find comfort but for the comfortable to find suffering and thereby draw closer to the cross of Christ who suffered for us all.

Verse 47: *"The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* There is a difference between a church and a clique. No church group should ever meet without an open door and an empty chair. Fellowships major on hospitality and sensitivity. Groucho Marx once said, "I wouldn't want to be part of any church that would have me as a member." The Church exists for people like Groucho Marx.

WE CAN CONSTRUCT A COMMUNITY.

The same Spirit that swept over the believers at Pentecost is present here today. Hundreds of you stepped forward last weekend and said, 'Yes—I want to live a life that really matters.' We now have a Construction Guide to show you the way.

We need to think for a moment about a construction crew. No one is an island. Nobody builds alone. What might happen if your family got together once a week to discuss the Sunday sermon and explore a life that really matters? What difference would it make if a few friends or couples got together to intentionally explore a purpose-driven life? Why not try it for six weeks? Maybe you already belong to a Sunday school class or study group. Are your doors open? Is the WELCOME mat out? Maybe you need to make a connection today at our Construction Zone in the gym. People are there to help you personally begin a life that really matters.

When God made you and God made me, He made us for community! Isn't it about time we discovered our reason for being?

Amen.