

## WEEK 5: ROOTED IN COMMUNITY – EXPERIENCE CHRIST’S TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

**Scripture References:** Acts 2:42–47; James 5:13–16; Romans 12:3–13; Galatians 5:13–15

**Focus:** Christian community is not just desirable, it’s essential. This week emphasizes how transformative biblical community is. True Christian community goes beyond social interaction—it invites Christ to form us through shared life, service, and spiritual unity.

**Opening Prayer:** "God, thank You for creating us for relationship. Teach us how to love and serve one another well by strengthening the bonds in this group. In Jesus’ name, Amen."

**Icebreaker:** What’s one of the most meaningful experiences you’ve had in a Christian community?"

**Recent Statistic:** Close friendships triple life satisfaction (Harvard, 2023).

### **Read: Acts 2:42–47**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

**Summary:** This passage gives us a snapshot of the consistent rhythms of the early Church—devoted to teaching, fellowship, meals, and prayer. The result? Unity, awe, generosity, and growth. This section highlights that vibrant community happens when believers prioritize God and one another.

The early Church wasn’t just a gathering—it was a family. They were devoted to teaching, prayer, meals, generosity, and worship. This is the

blueprint for the New Testament community that moves in power and meets real needs.

**Illustration:**

- Community is like a campfire—one log alone won't burn for long, but many together produce enduring warmth and light.
- Social media creates the illusion of connection but often leaves people lonelier. Real biblical community is incarnational and transformational.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What stood out to you from the early Church's example?
- How is their model different from modern Western Christianity?
- How does your group reflect the values seen in this passage?
- What's one rhythm from Acts 2:42–47 that you could pursue more intentionally?

**Read: James 5:13-16**

*Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

James ties healing not only to physical prayer but also to spiritual accountability. Confessing sins and praying for one another brings spiritual renewal. A safe, grace-filled community is essential for true transformation.

**Illustration:**

A wound heals faster when cleaned and cared for. Confession exposes what's hidden and allows God's grace to restore.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is confession such a hard practice in today's culture?
- What's the connection between prayer, confession, and healing?
- How can we build trust in our group to foster this kind of openness?

**Read: Romans 12:3-13**

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. <sup>4</sup>For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup>if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. <sup>9</sup>Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup>Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Paul urges humility, selfless love, diligence in service, and hospitality. Spiritual gifts must be activated in community. Every believer has been given gifts to be used in the body of Christ—not for personal gain, but for mutual edification. This passage teaches that unity in diversity is a mark of a healthy church.

### **Illustration:**

Think of the Church like a symphony—different instruments, same song. When each plays its part, the result is beautiful harmony.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage?
- What role might you play in the Church's "symphony"?
- How do spiritual gifts help strengthen community?
- What does "practicing hospitality" look like in real terms today?

### **Read: Galatians 5:13-15:**

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup>For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup>If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with selfish ambition. Freedom in Christ isn't for indulgence but for loving service. Community breaks down

when we “bite and devour,” acting in pride rather than Spirit-led humility.

**Illustration:**

Think of a team working in unity versus players fighting each other—one wins, the other collapses. The Church should always reflect grace, not rivalry.

**Discussion Question:**

- Paul contrasts the temptation to indulge the flesh versus serving one another. How can we guard against our natural selfishness?
- What would it look like if we lived out ‘loving others like we love ourselves’?
- How can we recognize and address “biting and devouring” in ourselves before it damages others?

**Potential Additional Discussion Questions:**

- How open are you with others?
- What makes it hard to be vulnerable?
- How can confession bring healing?
- What inspires you about Acts 2 community?
- What relationships in your life need more depth?
- When has spiritual community helped you?
- Biblical community is a persistent theme throughout the New Testament. What are some of the potential dangers/pitfalls of not doing life with other Christians?
- What does burden-carrying look like?
- Where do you need spiritual support now?
- What can our group do to better live this out starting today?
- How can you reach out to someone else?

**Group Exercise**

There are more than 50 “One Another” commands that can only be lived out within the context of biblical community. What are some of those commands?

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Love One Another – 15 times       | • Live in peace – 2 times   |
| • Encourage – 5 times               | • Bear in love – 2 times    |
| • Greet – 4 times                   | • Have compassion – 2 times |
| • Be humble – 3 times               | • Be like minded            |
| • Forgive – 2 times                 | • Be patient                |
| • Have the mind of Christ – 2 times | • Be devoted                |
|                                     | • Be gentle                 |

- Admonish
- Spur to love
- Be kind
- Honor
- Live in harmony
- Confess
- Pray
- Accept
- Instruct
- Offer hospitality
- Have equal concern
- Serve
- Build up
- Spur to good deeds
- Etc.

### **Acts 2:42-47 Commentary**

2:42–47 So what did the fledgling Church do? Luke says the early Church was known for four activities that should be foundational for every kingdom-minded local church. First, there was devotion to the apostles' teaching (2:42). The Church was learning divine truth from God's Word (only the Old Testament was written at this point, but in the years to come the apostles would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what would become the New Testament). You cannot grow beyond what you know. The teaching of the apostles was to give believers God's perspective on every matter so that they could learn, obey, and experience spiritual growth and make kingdom impact.

Second, they devoted themselves to fellowship (2:42)—mutually sharing the life of Christ within the family of God. We are not to live as Lone Ranger Christians but to engage in the life of faith together. We are called to “love one another” (John 15:12), to “carry one another's burdens” (Galatians 6:2), to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32), to “encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and the list goes on. A disconnected Christian is a disobedient and unfruitful Christian. Each of us is an integral part of the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:12–26; Hebrews 10:23–25).

Third, the Church regularly prioritized worship, reflected in the breaking of bread (i.e., Communion or the Lord's Supper) and prayer (2:42). Worship is the recognition and celebration of Who God is, what He has done, and what we are trusting Him to do. The Church is called to make a big deal about God because this is what He deserves.

Fourth, the Church was clearly engaged in outreach because every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (2:47). Everyone was involved in evangelism. They weren't merely letting the apostles take care of it. All the believers were living out their faith publicly (2:44–47). Such public love, devotion, joy, ministry, and testimony convinced unbelievers to trust in Jesus Christ.

As a result of these activities, everyone in the Church was filled with awe and experiencing wonders and signs ... performed through the apostles (2:43). The Holy Spirit will cause amazing things to happen when the Church is unified in its devotion to God and to its members in fulfillment of God's kingdom program.

### **James 5:13-18 Commentary**

5:13 If you want to gauge your spiritual life, look at the thermostat setting on your prayer life. Your knee-jerk reaction to suffering should be to pray. Likewise, if life is smooth and you are cheerful, you should sing praises (5:13). These responses acknowledge that affliction and blessing both come from the Lord, Who works through them to accomplish His purposes.

5:14 In these verses, James addresses one who is sick. The Greek word from which this is translated can mean “weak.” Thus, it can refer to any kind of weakness not just physical, but emotional and spiritual as well. Those beaten down and struggling to pray, then, can seek help from the elders—the male spiritual leadership of the Church. The oil would have been used for soothing or grooming the body (5:14; see Matthew 6:17; Luke 10:34).

5:15 We must be careful here. The verse does not say that *every* physical sickness will be healed. That would suggest we would never die. The application is wider. The elders were to express the love of Jesus tangibly through prayer, encouragement, and refreshment. The idea is that the Church should have practical ministry in place to aid members who are weak. The prayer offered in faith will provide divine encouragement in the mist of problems (5:15).

5:16–18 Suffering and sickness do not necessarily result from sin. Job, for instance, was afflicted though he didn’t sin (Job 1). Moreover, Jesus made it clear that a person can be stricken with an illness or condition that has no connection to wrongdoing (John 9:1–3). On the other hand, a sinful lifestyle *can* result in weakness and suffering. Therefore, if needed, **confess your sins to** a trusted, spiritually mature believer (5:16). If you deal with your sin, you will see God work in your life.

God will do extraordinary things with an ordinary person who is righteous (walks with Him by faith) and makes an energized prayer (5:16). Elijah not only prayed earnestly but persistently (see 1 Kings 18:42–44), and God worked miraculously in response (5:17–18). Elijah was a human being like us (5:17), yet he knew he had a God Who is sovereign and expects His people to pray to Him. Do you? When righteous believers pray passionately, biblically, and persistently, they like Elijah can look with expectation for divine reversals in their earthly circumstances.

### **Romans 12:3-13 Commentary**

12:3 If we understand the grace given to us, our worship will overflow in service to others. Whatever abilities, skills, or resources we have, they are the grace of God. They are gifts. Paul says nobody should think of himself more highly than he should, because everything we have is a gift. You don’t brag about a birthday present as if you made it and paid for it. Don’t brag about the God-given gifts you have, either. On the flip side, don’t disparage yourself as if God has given you nothing. God has distributed a measure of faith to each one, including you. Don’t think too highly of yourself, but don’t think too low either.

12:4 Paul compares the local Church to a human body, in which all the parts do not have the same function, but every part *does* function for the good of the whole. If I cut my finger off and put it in a jar, it’s still technically a part of my

body, but it's worthless. I'll say my point bluntly: any Christian who is not a functioning, serving member of a local church is living outside the will of God.

12:5 There are no Lone Rangers in the Christian life, because though we ... are many, God has put us together as one body in Christ. We are members of that body, not for ourselves, but for one another. Because you're a part of the body, you matter. But because you're only one part, it's not all about you.

12:6a We serve one another because of the grace given to us. The more you understand grace, the easier it is to serve others. Imagine a boy leaving his mother a note, saying, "For mowing the lawn, one dollar. For washing the dishes, one dollar. For making the bed, one dollar. You owe me, Mother, three dollars." That's works-based service in a nutshell. Now, imagine a mother leaving her own note: "For being in labor with you for sixteen hours, no charge. For staying up with you all night when you were sick, no charge. For buying you clothing and food, no charge." That's grace-based service.

12:6b–8 In the body of Christ, like the human body, each member has different gifts (12:6). Paul lists seven gifts here: prophecy (12:6), service, teaching (12:7), exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy (12:8). We know from other lists of spiritual gifts that these are just a handful of the ways God's people exercise their gifts. We also know that every Christian has at least one. If you aren't sure what yours is, start ministering, because God only hits a moving target.

12:9 Contrary to what our culture says, love is not primarily a feeling. Love is an action that meets the needs of someone else, even at personal expense. Thus, Paul says our love for one another must be without hypocrisy. The Greek word for "hypocrite" was used of an actor who wore a mask. Some of the best actors and actresses I know come to church with their masks on. They fake it when people ask them, "How are you doing?" They fake it because they're worried that people won't love them unless they wear a mask. Paul exhorts all of us to be the kind of community where it's safe for people to take their masks off.

12:10 We can **love one another deeply** once we recognize that we don't have to like someone to love them well. Love is associated with emotion, but it starts with a decision to compassionately and righteously seek the well-being of others. That decision is founded in the truth that fellow believers are our **brothers and sisters**. We are a family. God even says that we can gauge our love for the Father based on our love for our brothers and sisters (see 1 John 4:20). Just like the small gauge on a boiler indicates how full the vessel is, our love for one another indicates how full our hearts are with the love of Jesus.

12:11–12 Behind the Greek word translated fervent is the idea of boiling water. If you're fervent in the Spirit, you're boiling for the Kingdom of God; you're fired up to serve the Lord (12:11). Have you ever noticed how kids, who otherwise



might seem tired, get a sudden burst of energy if you offer to play some game they love? They boil over with enthusiasm because they love it.

12:13 One way we can serve God and love one another is to share with the saints in their needs and to pursue hospitality. God gave you a job, which brings you money, which pays for your house. Grace got you the house. Grace got you your car. And grace wants you to use them to help the saints. If all the doors in your life stay closed, you don't understand hospitality—or grace.

### **Galatians 5:13-15 Commentary**

5:13 Though the Judaizers were trying to keep the Galatians in bondage, Paul tells his brothers and sisters in the faith that they were called to be free. Of course, “freedom” can be a slippery word. Many people think it means having the freedom to do whatever you want. But biblical freedom is liberty from illegitimate bondage so that you can enjoy the responsibilities of a new relationship with God and fulfill your divinely ordained purpose. Thus, the Galatians (and we) are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Fulfilling the desires of the flesh, after all, is what got us into our messes in the first place! To be a slave of sin is to be chained to your own selfish desires. Christ came to free us from this.

Spiritual freedom is not the absence of boundaries. Suppose a football player catches the ball and wants to play the game without restrictions. He proceeds to run out of bounds and into the stands to avoid being tackled. Eventually, he re-enters the stadium and crosses into the end zone from the opposite direction. He's no longer playing football but creating chaos. Football can only be football, in fact, when played within the boundaries of sidelines.

What, then, does Christian freedom look like? Serve one another through love. Remember: biblical love is the decision to compassionately, righteously, and sacrificially seek the well-being of another. Just as Jesus loved us, we are to love one another. For by such love everyone will know that we are His disciples (see John 13:34–35). In this way, we make Christ look good. We also foster our vertical fellowship with God when we show love in our horizontal relationship with fellow believers: “the one who remains in love remains in God” (1 John 4:16). And let's not forget that the supreme act of *service* was rendered by Jesus Christ (see Mark 10:45); this was also the supreme act of *love* (see John 3:16). Therefore, since the Son of God served *us* through love, why would His disciples expect to do anything less?

5:14–15 Paul tells these Christians who were being tempted to submit to the law that the whole law is fulfilled in what Jesus identified as the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself (5:14; see Matthew 22:35–40, quoting Leviticus 19:18). But if instead of neighbor love they chose self-love—if they chose to bite and devour one another—they were not to be surprised to find themselves consumed by one another (5:15).

When crabs are cooked, they're placed in a pot of water. As the water temperature within the pot starts to rise, the crabs attempt to climb out, only to discover that their fellow crabs pull them back in as they likewise attempt to escape. When church members assume an "every-man-for-himself" mindset rather than a "serve-through-love" mindset, they will claw and grab one another until all are roasted in the pot.

**Closing Challenge:** This week, reach out to someone in the group and check in. Ask how you can pray for them.

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord, help us become the kind of community that brings healing and hope. Give us courage to love deeply and serve one another