

## **The Value of Biblical Community**

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Let's open our Bibles today to Acts chapter two, Acts chapter two. I want you to find your place there, and then I want to invite you to participate with me for a moment. I want to welcome those of you that are in the chapel right now worshipping this hour, and here in the life building as well. You may be new here, maybe a first time attender, or first time back in a long time. It's exciting to have you here. Just a little information about our day, we have a nine o'clock hour here in this building we call the Life Building. Then at 10:15 we're in this building and the Chapel at the same time and we have live music in both rooms and then we sync the message. We have a group of worshipers right now just a few feet away that are joining us here for this message time. And then today we add back our 11:30 service. And so when you leave in just a moment, be careful leaving the property, watch for cars coming on the property. We haven't had that for several weeks this summer and so people want your parking place. All right, and so just be prepared for that as we see people, most of those cars will be coming from my left. They'll be coming from the Athens area as we welcome thousands of university students back to our area. We're looking forward to many of those students coming to be a part of our worship in this hour and nine o'clock as well. We always have college students and I've already been able to speak to some of you that are back from a summer of being away and we're excited that you're here and a part of worship at Watkinsville.

I want to invite you as a guest if you could take the Sunday paper, it has a connect card that's a part of that. I'd love for you to drop it off at the guest service desk, the little kiosks that are around the buildings, on your way to the car. You'll see a flag and a table and there's some people there that want to say hello to you. They'll take that connect card from you, put a gift in your hand, and they want to know your name and welcome you here to Watkinsville. I know we've gotten settled in a little bit and you found your place in Acts two but I want you to do this with me. Let's stand, both rooms, would you stand together with me right now? Let's stand up. Hold your place in Acts chapter two and here's what I need your help with. I want you to look beside you or behind you or in front of you. Find a person or two and here's what I'm asking you to do. Say, "Hey, my name is", and you tell them your name and then you say to them, "Someday in my life I want to go to..." And fill in the blank right there. All right, so if you say today, "Hey my name is Carlos and one day, I'd love to go to six flags", and if you're that person, listen, I want to pray with you after the service. You got to dream bigger. And right now, lets do this in both rooms. Would you do that? All right. You can began to take your seat. I've lost the room. I've just lost the room right now. Just be seated as you finish that up, in the chapel and here in the life building. I want to apologize for the person that came in late during

the middle of that. All right. Cause you're thinking, "What are they doing? I don't know." But somebody explain it to you on your way out.

We're in a four week series right now called Boarding Now. It's an emphasis for us to take four weeks and say out loud to one another, there's a sense of urgency about what we're doing as a church. And what we're doing as a church is that we're going somewhere, we are a part of something. We're on mission and we're taking this trip, and it's now. It's not a year from now or two years from now. It's now, we're boarding now. We're taking this trip today, and what I'm inviting you to do over these four weeks is to participate, to not just observe and not just spectate, but to participate and be a part of this journey. Be a part of this mission. Now listen really close. I want to say this statement. I want you to grab a hold of it. I want you to just hear me out on this. It is more, let me start again. More important, more important than you going to our church is for you to go with our church. More important than you going to our church is for you to go with our church. Now, I'm not trying to change our culture or change our way of talking about church. Somewhere before the day's over. I'll probably say to somebody, I went to church today at Watkinsville. Alright. No big X is going to go off in Heaven when you say, "I went to church today", but I do want us to know and think and have on our minds that being a part of a local church is much, much more than just going to a church. And the invitation is for us to change that preposition from going to church only to go in with our church. That we're doing this together. We're on mission.

I'm going to just blatantly say to you that there are expectations, okay? There are expectations to be a part of Watkinsville First Baptist. If you're a member of a family in your house, there are expectations that you have for those that are members of that family and there may be just a cultural thing for you that you push back, that there might be expectations for you to be a part of Watkinsville First Baptist, but I'm saying to you, if you're going to take this journey, there's some things that are expected for us to be whole hearted in this mission. And last week we talked in the most simple form of this first expectation is that we would be committed to big group. We would be committed to the big group, and the big group is a way of just referring to who we are corporately. Who we are as a body of believers, as the family of God, as a community of faith. This big, overarching group of people that identify with Watkinsville First Baptist as the local church expression in the kingdom of God. We're saying that's where it starts. Commit to this big group. Now, hear me out. Being committed to the corporate body, being committed to the big group does mean that we meet together physically. Being committed to big group. Being committed to the corporate body does mean that we find our place in a seat. We find our place in a room weekly in corporate worship. That is an expectation that physically, unless we have a God honoring reason, that we're going to be in corporate worship together. There is a gathering, there is a body, there is a seat. There is a place. We meet at Simonton Bridge road and we worship as a body of believers, but it doesn't stop there. To be committed to the big group, to be committed to body of Christ does mean that we gather weekly, but it also has to do with how we live daily.

When we walk away from this room, we're not walking away from our identity with Watkinsville First Baptist and Jesus Christ. When we walk away from this room, we're no longer the church gathered, we are the church dispersed. We scatter into this community and into our world. We're unleashed into this world. We talked about it last week, we're like an aircraft carrier. We come back in here and we gather, we refuel, we're encouraged, we get our mission and we launch back out into the week and we live for Jesus. And the way we live to honor Christ and bear his name and bear the name of our church is a way that we demonstrate our commitment to the whole body. Listen, the way you live affects me and the way I live affects you. In the same way, what my right arm does affects what my left arm does and our body members have to work together for us all head in the same direction. And that's big group. It's an expectation.

Secondly, what I want to talk to you this morning about is the expectation of biblical community, Jesus centered community. And by that I mean that we're in relationship with other people. We have a personal relationship to our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, and the overflow of that vertical relationship is our horizontal relationship with other people. And I'm calling you today to think about this question. Are you connected in biblical community? Are you connected in Christ centered community? Maybe you're new to this community, and the challenge today would be for you to not let many days go by without being able to be in some kind of gathering or group where people know who you are, where you are, and how you are. And that you are also in that group of people where you too can know others, who they are, where they are, and how they are. We're talking about fellowship. We're talking about Christ centered community.

The social media generation is the one that feels most alone. Those are not my words, those are the words of a writer for YouGov named Jamie Ballard. Jamie Ballard has written in the last few days about a survey that YouGov did of many, many millennials and other generational groups. According to this recent survey, millennials, those raised on social media, say this, 30% of the millennials say they always or often feel lonely. 30% always or often feel lonely, significantly higher than gen X'ers and baby boomers. 22% of those millennials surveyed said that they have no friends, zero friends, and they're not talking about how many friends they have on Facebook or Instagram or WhatsApp or whatever social media you're using. It's saying that just personally, interacting, zero, no friends. The university of Pennsylvania released some information about a connection with loneliness and social media networks and this is what The University of Pennsylvania researchers said, using less social media than your normal, using less social media than your normal leads to significant decreases in both depression and loneliness. So whatever your level of participation is, you drop that and there is a significant decrease in depression and loneliness. Now, this is not a sermon on the negatives of social media, all right, but this is a time that I want to give some attention to the power and necessity of biblical community. Biblical community.

God's word gives us the answer to loneliness. God's word describes for us the dangers of isolation and God's word gives to us the richness of doing life with one another. Now, in our mind we can say amen to that in a church service, but reality is that we push back against that a lot. We push back and you say, "You know what? I'm done doing life with others." It's hard. Doing life by myself is a lot easier than doing life with a lot of others, including church people. We can feel that and sense that from time to time. So you may say, "Oh, I tried that. I'm not going there again." Notice I did not say that God's word gives us the answers to how relationships are easier. I'm saying to you that God's word pictures and shows for us the richness, the fullness of doing life together and the dangers of doing life in isolation.

Look at Acts chapter two, I want to pick up with verse 41. It's a connecting verse from what's just happened to what's about to be said about the local church. It connects the two passages. There's been a sermon by Simon Peter and people have responded to the message of Jesus Christ and people believe, they received the good news of Jesus, and they're saved. Verse 41 summarizes that and then connects to the next passage. Acts 2:41, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3000 souls." That's the invitation time. That's the response. Peter preaches about Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, caused people to repent and believe. They receive his word and are saved and then they publicly testify to their salvation through baptism. The writers of Acts described this belief in Jesus and being baptized as what it looks like to be added to their number. And it says, "They're added that day about 3000 souls." And then here in Jerusalem, you get the summary verses of what's going on in the local church in the book of Acts. Look at verse 42, here's those 3000, what did they do? It says,

"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers and awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

I read a passage like that and I think, what an awesome headline, what an awesome testimony, what a great testimony that would be to be able to write that about the church, universally around the globe. What an awesome testimony it would be to be able to write that about Watkinsville, that we were devoted to one another, devoted to the teaching of God's word, fellowshiping together, seeing miracles accomplished in our lives and around us. Meeting needs of one another, meeting together and then fellowshiping together in homes, praising the Lord, finding favor, generous, grateful hearts. In this passage here, you see big group, it says that day by day they were attending the temple together. And then you see small group and

breaking bread in their homes. You had this mix of all coming together and then relationships going out into their homes. I want to give you kind of a biblical apologetic for community, a biblical defense for community and why it's right for us and good for us and worth the risk to be engaged with the lives of others.

Number one, biblical principles of community, number one, our Creator operates within community. Our Creator operates within community. You can listen or you can turn back to the first book of God's word, Genesis chapter one, and in Genesis chapter one there's a very simple statement but very profound, and it sets the course for the rest of God's word. It speaks to the nature of God and who he is and how he operates. In Genesis chapter one verse 26 it says, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." That phrase, he says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." It is this first indicator that our Creator operates within community. The big picture for this as you work through the 66 books of the Bible is that we refer to this as the Trinity, the Godhead. And we speak about God being in community and that there is God the father, God the son, and God the Holy spirit, God the Father, the son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy spirit. Three in one, equal, and they operate together in fellowship, in community. They have roles, they have functions. Here you see that together in community it says, "Let us make man." They're operating in community. You see it as you read through the New Testament. We talk about prayer and we think about the Trinity and how the Trinity comes to into play when we pray. We talk about praying to the Father, through the Son, in the spirit. And so we go to the Father, through the Son, in the spirit and we pray. It's the community of the Godhead, it's the fellowship of the Godhead. Our creator operates within community and it's an indicator to us that if the Infinite One values community and operates in community, that it certainly is critically important and it leads to this second biblical principle, and it's this. We were created for community.

Not only does God operate within community, but we were created for community. He says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Look at verse 27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him, male and female. He created them in his image." We've been created. We pick up this image of God in that community is valuable. It's part of who we are. It's what we need. We're not built for isolation. Another example of this is verse 18 of chapter two in Genesis, Genesis 2:18 it says, Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.' It's not good. It's not good for man to be alone and so it's a reminder to us. Listen, teenagers, college students, senior adult, middle-aged, whatever age or season of life, nothing good happens in our life in isolation. There times we pull apart and we're alone, but as a pattern of life to isolate is to set ourselves up in the cross hairs of the enemy to pick us off. We were created for community. Do you know how it is when something operates that was created for

community but doesn't have it? Misses something? Sports are a lot like this. You have some sports that are individual sports, but think about basketball and football and baseball and even tennis, it's meant to be done together with others.

The town I grew up in, community I grew up with, the farm I grew up on. Out on land. Middle child. Brother, four years older, sister, five years younger, not many neighbors around. You know what that leads to when it comes to football, that means one-on-one with yourself when it comes to football. And many a day after school, I can remember being in the front yard, in the crab grass, with a football plan. And I'm telling you, I won the Heisman every year. And I know how it works when I'm just out there and I'm down and I'm looking at the defense and they're over here and they're over there when they're really not over there and they're really not over here. And I call out the plays and step back and you're going to pass and you're looking for the receiver and you just heave the ball as high as you can, heave it and then you just take off running with all your might. And then it's really embarrassing if you don't catch it because there's not a lot of defense out there. But you catch it and you dance across the goal line and you do your dance and you celebrate and you know the crowds are hollering, you're cheering. It's really not a lot of fun just to be honest. Why? Because football is made to be played with others, and there is a way that you can do life by yourself, but you're missing something. You're missing what you're created for and we're created in the image of God for community to do life together.

The third biblical principle here, and it's this, obedience to biblical instruction requires community. Obedience to biblical instruction requires community. I hear it. I know the argument, and maybe you've given it and for some random reason, God has you here. I'm telling it's not an accident. And you say, "I don't really need community. I don't really need the local church. Give me a sermon and I'll go about my business. I'll stay out of yours." And you just do life. Biblical instruction requires community. We're told in God's word to love our neighbor. We're also told in God's word to love one another. Love one another. And about 27 times in scripture you find what we call the "one another" statements, and it's this picture of life on life and interaction with people. And the way we love one another or to do those other "one another's", the Bible speaks to us about praying for one another, exhorting one another, encouraging one another, bearing with one another. Bearing the burdens of one another, confessing our sins to one another. It's scattered throughout scripture and as one of the guys said this week in our teaching team, he says, "You know what? You can't "one another" yourself." And that's the reality. We can't obey the one another statements if we're not in relationship with other people. Obedience to biblical instruction requires community.

Number four, the supernatural impulse of new followers of Christ is toward community. The supernatural impulse of new followers of Christ is toward community. When you look in the book of Acts and you start in chapter one and Jesus has risen and ascended to heaven. I'm back in the book of Acts now after chapter one and Jesus ascends to heaven. The

very next action, it says in verse 12, "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying", and then it gives a list of names and in verse 14 it says, "all of these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." And that pattern just flows right on through the book of Acts and the letters of the New Testament where that when they knew Jesus as Lord and Savior, their impulse was not to isolate and scatter. Their impulse was to come together. In fact, the only way that they wound up scattering was because persecution came into their city and it scattered them. It did. It made them do some things but it wasn't the impulse of their life and heart.

We see going through scripture, think about Jesus himself, surrounded constantly by crowds. The gospel of Mark, over and over and over again, the crowds came, the crowds, the crowds, the crowds. And Jesus takes a night and he prays and he comes back and he chooses 12 and the Bible says these specific words, "He chose the 12 to be with him." He chose 12 to be with him. And we know reading the pattern that even from among the 12 there was Peter, James and John that seemed to have a unique relationship with Jesus. You see Jesus sending the people out two by two to bear witness and you come to the book of Acts, it's Peter and John, Peter and John, Peter and John. Then it's Paul and Barnabas and Paul and Barnabas and then it's Paul and Timothy and Paul and Silas and and you just don't see believers in the New Testament operating as a long ranger. They're impulse, innocent. There's no conferences, there's no bestselling books. The Holy Spirit living within them, the supernatural impulse for the new followers of Christ is toward community. Here's what this means. It means that when you and I battle with isolation, that is the temptation of the enemy trying to pick us apart and separate us from the body of Christ. But when we're walking in the spirit and we're dead to self, we're crucified with Christ and the spirit of God is living in us, the impulse is to go toward community.

Number five. Satan's strategy is to destroy community. That's his strategy. You see it when you get to the book of Acts, there becomes some conflict among the people and they respond to that in a biblical way and then there's dishonesty among believers and God responds to that. And Satan scheme has tried to divide, try to isolate, and we got to fight against that. In the book of Genesis, Satan comes to Adam and Eve and Eve at first and Adam's drawn in and he said, did God really say, the enemy speaking, Satan disguised as a serpent, and he says, did God really say? Did God really say? And then sin enters in, and here's Genesis three verse six sorry, verse eight, "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves." Hid themselves. You see the presence of sin had them in a place of shame and didn't want to be in relationship with God. Divided, they hid from God. And it's an early picture to show us the schemes of Satan is to pull us and tempt us away from relationship. Now, this is a picture of biblical community from God's word and I want to ask you, do you have that kind of connection? Maybe you used to,

and God would use this day as being a day where he would call you back and he would say, you know what? You've been away. Come back. Take the risk. Go after this biblical community.

Maybe your new here, coming as a college student or a new family coming into town. I want to exhort and encourage you to reach toward community. You're not going to be able to wait for it to come to you. A lot of times, we don't know how to do it, we try but we miss. You're going to have to reach toward community, take the steps toward community. Our community happens a lot just organically. It just happens by interacting with people, by just talking to people, by just meeting people, by just asking some questions, not in a real organized way. Just a moment ago in this room and in the chapel, did you hear the noise? Did you hear the conversation? Some of you today, for the very first time, went to a whole new level with a person that's been sitting behind you for five years. You told the person beside you that you've always wanted to go to Pittsburgh, and you found out that they spent a week in Pittsburgh this summer and now you're bitter. Because they got to do it and you didn't. Listen, but you know him a little bit better and they know you a little bit better. And maybe by the grace of God, you'll remember their name. And if you don't, you know what you do when you forget somebody's name? You look at them and you say, "I'm sorry, tell me your name again?" Did you get that? That's not hard is it? I do it all the time. I just do it, "Wait, what is your name? Wilson. That's right. You're my son. That's right. I know you, Wilson." You just ask somebody their name. But it's fellowship. It happens when you serve together. When you eat together, when you're walking out here and you see somebody getting out of the car, it just happens organically. We're in relationship, we're in fellowship, but listen, it's so important, it's so critical, for us as believers to be in community. We cannot leave it to chance and so we organize and we order to provide opportunities for people to be able to be in biblical community.

That's why we do classes. That's why we do mission trips. That's why we serve together. That's why we have small groups and I'm calling on you today to look at your life and say, Hey, I need to be in community. There's a lot of ways you can do that. Be intentional about that. One of the ways is just to go to our webpage, [watkinsville.org](http://watkinsville.org) and just take a little journey through their on where to find a class or a small group, where they meet or when they meet. One of the ways, you could just, you could email me and I can get that in the hands of the right people. Saying that you want to be a part of a class or a group, one that meets in the morning or meets at night. You can take the Sunday paper, it looks like a boarding now ticket, open it up, there's a connect card and you can put your name there and there's a place there for you to mark that you want more information about small groups. It's an ordered, organized way to not miss this critical value of being in biblical community.

And a lot of studies have been done that talk about the importance of relationships. In one was this, when they studied those who ate bad and had bad health habits compared to those who ate well. And they compared those who ate bad, who had strong social ties to those who ate healthy and lived a healthy life, to those who are isolated. And here's what they found

out. They found out that those who had bad health habits but had strong social ties lived significantly longer than people who had great health habits but were isolated. Now here's the moral, the moral is, in other words, it is better to eat Twinkies with good friends than to eat broccoli alone. Amen. I got a clap in the room. I just set some of you free. Here's what I'm saying to you this morning. Look, go today and find the hot light on at Krispy Kreme, get a dozen, and go find somebody and get together and spend an hour in prayer with them before the week's out. All right. Amen.

Listen, community biblical community, is valuable. Father, help us today to not miss this rich, rich piece of who you are and what you've provided for us. King Jesus, we praise you as our risen savior. Thank you that first we can have a relationship with our Father through you. And Lord, if there's somebody in this room that never has done that, I pray, God, you draw them to you today and that they'd be saved. Lord, then, would you move us all toward biblical community. In Jesus name. Amen.