

The Bible uses collective pronouns to describe the Christian life because our spiritual journey is not intended to be a private matter.

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another
—John 13:35



koivovía

koinonia—association, contribution, sharing, participation, intimacy

Dave Legg, People Resources Team Leader

Love and grace expressed in community . . . Sound familiar? It should, because it is one of our Navigator core values. However, it is one thing to desire community, and quite another to understand and produce it. My personal definition of community is that *community is a group of people who associate because of common beliefs, relate intimately, and communicate deeply while contributing to and participating in one other's lives.*



Dave Legg

For several years, a team of Navigator staff has been leading forums around the country to help laymen contribute effectively within God's Kingdom. We cover several topics that we believe are important for a person to maximize their contribution, and one of those topics is community. We have found that when we talk about community an interesting thing happens. People's interest level increases and their interaction is almost uncontrollable. We've come to conclude that people know they want and need biblical community, but they experience very little of it.

Larry Crabb in *The Safest Place on Earth* says that "in spiritual community people reach deep places in each other's hearts that are not often or easily reached." He defines community as a group of people who are on a journey toward God together. We call it a small group of people who are living out their lives in Christ together. However you define it, we know it's something important. It is God's way. We were created in His image and, like Him, we were designed to live and minister in community. The Bible uses collective pronouns to describe the Christian life because our spiritual journey is not intended to be a private matter. It is personal, but not private. Community is God's intended environment for spiritual growth and the context for ministry.

The giant sequoias are the largest living organisms on the planet, but they do not stand alone. Their root systems are connected, because their bulk is so great that alone they would blow over in a strong wind. We are like that. We, too, were designed for community. Apart from others we can never fully understand, appreciate, or become who we were created to be. Growth outside of community is often deformed. Character is tested in isolation but developed in community. Without community we will live lives of denial, pretence, and self-protection. Without community we will not experience life as God intended.

Eugene Peterson says, "The formation of community is the intricate, patient, painful work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot buy community or make community. We can only offer ourselves to become community."

Do you ever wonder why you don't experience a greater degree of community? Consider the four biggest hindrances to community

- ⊕ Independence—having an attitude of self-sufficiency that functions apart from the support and contribution of others.
- ⊕ Task orientation—focusing on goal accomplishment at the expense of people and relationships.
- ⊕ Unreconciled relationships—harboring hurt and anger and withholding forgiveness.

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it ain't easy

Jim Mock, People Resources Team

Community! It is a challenging concept for cultures like ours that are well-trained in self-sufficiency. But we were created for community, for companionship, and for spiritual unity. Our effectiveness



and our very survival are closely linked to our ability to live and work together.

This issue of *Up-Front* emphasizes the importance of spiritual

community and gives us some ideas about how to experience and reflect it more fully. The concept of spiritual community grows out of the nature of the Trinity we serve and represent to the world and out of our shared life as a Body (1 Corinthians 12:12). What makes it work are the principles of love and unity on which it is founded (John 13:34,35; Ephesians 4:1-6).

No doubt, forming biblical community is a challenging endeavor. As G. K. Chesterton put it, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." May these offerings encourage you to take up the challenge!

Up-Front

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 17-19

Personal Contribution Assessment Workshop
Colorado Springs

October 3-4

Listening and Healing Prayer Seminar
Colorado Springs

October 14-17

Sabbatical Orientation Workshop
Colorado Springs

November 12-14

Personal Contribution Assessment Workshop
Colorado Springs

For more information contact (719) 594-2555.

community assessment and evaluation

On a scale of 1-5 assess your experience of each of the following aspects of your community and identify where you experience it the most. Total your scores and rate the totals as Low (1-13), Medium (14-28), or High (29-40). Think in terms of where you receive these from others, not primarily where you provide them for others.

Area	Level (1-5)	Who/Where
Care Giving You experience the "one anothers" of Scripture		
Transparency You are able to be open and honest about your life		
Vulnerability You allow others to speak into your life		
Safety You feel the freedom to be who you really are		
Affirmation Your strengths are affirmed		
Acceptance Your weaknesses are accepted		
Protection Others guard you from your vulnerabilities		
Missional You are encouraged to focus outward		

1. List the primary people with whom you experience biblical community.
2. What observations, conclusions and applications would you make concerning your experience of biblical community?
3. What is your plan to increase your experience of community?

Lessons learned about creating community

Dave Legg, People Resources Team Leader

Terri and I are part of a group of seven couples who are committed to living in Christ together. We call it The Covenant Group because we have covenanted together to relate to one another on a deeper level than social relationships sometimes allow. We are all Navigator staff and have been friends for many years. We are at similar life stages and share many life experiences. At times we have struggled as we sought to develop biblical community. But we are still together, still enjoying each other, and still spurring each other on in our pursuit of God.

Another community experience is with our People Resources Community. This group includes our leadership team, administrative team, and numerous resource staff and spouses—about 25 people. This community is important to us because of our commitment to bring our whole selves to work and to have more than just work relationships with our co-workers. We meet once a month for a meal and sharing. From these times together we have learned seven lessons about community:

1. **Be intentional and deliberate.** Someone must take the initiative. Most people want to experience more community, but few are willing to be the initiators that make it happen.
2. **Share the leadership.** In our group whoever is hosting the

meeting facilitates it or asks another to take the lead.

3. **Spend regular and consistent time together.** We meet monthly from 5:00-8:00 and include dinner and some planned interaction. Though sometimes other responsibilities

keep us from attending, we had to learn to cancel the cancellation habit. If only two couples are available, then those two couples get together. We also spend three or four days on an annual retreat.

4. **Make it a priority.** We have agreed whenever possible to schedule our travel around our meetings.

5. **Develop group expectations.** Spend some time discussing what community means and what that will look like for your group.

6. **Plan some significant content during your meetings.** Sometimes we just spend time updating and praying for each other. We have also read and discussed books. We enjoyed sharing our “genograms,” or our growing up experiences. That gave us understanding and insight into one another’s backgrounds and driving motivations.
7. **Beware of being too exclusive.** This can be difficult, because if the group is too large it can negatively impact your experience of community. But we have found that group dynamics are healthier when we include new people.



Retirement Resources

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κοινωνία

⊕ Busyness—being unavailable to develop close relationships. As LeRoy Eims often said, “If you want to be together, you’ve got to be together.”

You could add to this list fear, lack of margin, cost, mobility, and group size. But as Dick Keys says in *Chameleon Christianity: Moving Beyond Safety and Conformity*, “The biggest obstacle is that it’s just too hard. It demands too much sacrifice, too much of our security, freedom, time and resources.”

Biblical community is often referred to as an environment of grace, a place where you feel free to be who you really are and where your value is not based on performance. Environments of performance promote secrecy and self-protection, but environments of grace promote openness and vulnerability. True community gives us the freedom and safety to be honest about what is true about us so that we don’t relate on the basis

of performance and hide our sins. Grace enables us to stop worrying about being sinless and enjoy being blameless. Without grace we will hide our sin issues and try to please others by our performance.

Larry Crabb says, “A central task of community is to create a place that is safe enough for the walls to be torn down, safe enough for each of us to own and reveal our brokenness. Only then can the power of connecting do its job. Only then can community be used of God to restore our souls.”

Community is about Gospel relationships. Our calling to the Gospel should never be more important than our commitment to Gospel relationships.

John 13:34,35 and 17:20–23 teach us that love and unity expressed in community is God’s way of advancing His Kingdom. To not live and minister in community is to work contrary to God’s design.



overcoming omnicompetence

Wayne Haddock, Tidewater Metro Director

Living in community is vital to my walk with God, but that was not always true for me. As a young believer I thought that “me + God” could do anything. I would disciple a person with the idea that later “he + God” could do anything. I hadn’t yet made the connection that God might want to use a group of people to grow us.

What changed my perspective was failure. Even when I did my best I experienced failures in ministry, in family dynamics, and in relationships with other Navigator staff. I began to see that striving for “omnicompetence” was the wrong goal. God had placed people around me who were stronger in some areas than I was, and I could receive the benefits of their strengths if I would give them permission to speak into my life. Sometimes God allows failure in our lives so that we can realize God never intended it to be just “me + God.” He wants His Body to function together. And for that to happen the members have to be intimately connected.

Twenty-five years ago I was struggling with my team and my boss when a friend gave me some wise advice: “Wayne, the difficult part of the Christian life is not in relating to authority, but in figuring out how to relate with the people on your team. If you can’t have ministry with them, then you can’t have ministry!” That’s when things began to turn around in my relationships with team members.

In my next assignment as leader of a staff team I focused our staff meetings on developing relationships. Instead of working independently, we supported one other and served as resources in one another’s ministries, though the process was not easy. To serve as a catalyst in creating

community among others, I realized that I would have to be vulnerable and expose my inadequacies and failures, and I had to defer to the strengths of others. I wondered if people would trust me more, or if they would disdain my weaknesses.

Years before I’d heard the illustration of how two oxen properly yoked could pull five times more weight than two oxen



working independently, but my fear kept me from working that closely with others. Over time I realized I was loved and I was accepted, and my team became a safe place to be imperfect.

When we came to Tidewater, Virginia, we experienced this relational safety in the context of staff couples. Even though the spouses who were not full-time staff were less available to get together, we chose to defer decision-making until we could get everyone’s input. We made a paradigm shift from believing that those who contribute more time have more ownership and input, to believing that God valued all those He had brought onto our team. We discovered that deferring decisions until all the team members could participate resulted in better decisions.

We have struggled with incorporating new staff into our safe community, but I

always come back to something LeRoy Eims told me long ago: “If you want to be together, you’ve got to be together.” So we are intentional about forming community. There has to be an environment where people can be imperfect and can reveal problems. If that group dynamic already exists, group members have to choose to be vulnerable with new people. It is a risk

to welcome new people into a group, but when we stop risking then community stops growing.

One of the most significant experiences I’ve had with community involved a difficult personal decision. Our prodigal son asked to move back into our home and we were not at peace about it. We took it to the team, trusting God to speak through them. One woman asked, “What has God told you about having him back?”

I responded that God had told me to wait until I saw fruits of repentance. She asked if I’d seen that and I said, “No.” She then asked if God had given me any other direction since then. Again I answered, “No.” Suddenly it was so obvious! Our son shouldn’t move back in. I needed other people to help me see what God had already spoken to me.

As we look back over the years of learning and growing in community we have one significant regret. Miriam and I have realized that at times we negated the contribution of people who didn’t have as much time or energy to give to a team or the right gifts to lead. How might our lives and theirs be different if we knew then what we know now? Once you recognize the power of community, you don’t want to miss out on its contribution in your own life, and in the lives of others.