



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Firstly, you will notice that at the start of each lesson there are three important bits of information. These will be the basic tools you need to lead the study.

All Scripture will appear in this BLUE colour. All Scripture references are taken from the NIV version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

All discussion questions are in this GREEN colour. These discussion questions are meant to help open up times of sharing in your group.

Occasionally you will see text in RED. Red text are some ideas and thoughts that you may want to use for your group.

The bulk of the text will be in BLACK. This is the script and information for your lesson. However, please do not stick to the script word for word. The information is there just to serve as a guideline. Please feel free to lead or facilitate the discussion in the way which GOD is leading you.

Call To Community: Authentic Community
Mark Graham
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Getting-to-Know-One-Another Questions:

- What is your favourite book that you read besides the Bible?
- What is one thing that you think you are good at?

Opening Discussion Question:

- In what settings do you feel like you can be your true self? Why do you think that is?

In our message series, we are exploring what it means to respond to Jesus' call to community. In week one Pastor Steve talked about the prophetic call for us to begin to build a "contrast" community that is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God here in Tauranga. We discussed together a definition of biblical community and from that definition highlighted six key themes – Christ-centred, authentic, hospitable, active, missional, and sacrificial. Every week we have been touching on one of the six key themes to unpack the kind of community God is calling us to be.

Authentic Community:

In this study, we are touching on the second theme of our biblical definition of community – authenticity. This theme of authenticity flows naturally out of being a Christ-centred community. "If the very foundation of our call to community is to be rooted in the radical, sacrificial love of Christ, then our ability to build community out from this foundation will naturally involve an authentic, true, and honest response. We are not showing the world the love of Christ if the way in which we live in community with one another is inauthentic, insincere, and fake."

- Why do you think to be authentic with each other builds community?
- What causes you to be inauthentic around people?
- What sort of feelings and thoughts do you experience when you step into an inauthentic and insincere community?
- Why do you believe an inauthentic community keeps us from showing the world the love of Christ?

Jesus' call to community is not an invitation into an inauthentic community, but an invitation for our real selves to show up. "For Christ knows you deeply and fully and loves you completely right now just the way you are. And it is this person – you with all of your good, bad, and ugly – that Christ invites you to bring into the kind of community He died on the cross to create. It is the kind of community where because He fully knows you, you are called to be fully known."

- What does it look like to bring all of you into community?
- Internally, what keeps you from bringing all of you into community? [Hint: personal barriers]
- Externally, what prevents you from bringing all of you into community? [Hint: external barriers are such things as the safety of the group, group culture etc.]
- Are there previous bad experiences that make you cautious when it comes to sharing your true self?
- What does a group need to do to create a space for others to be fully known?
- How do you think your Community Group is doing with creating a space where people can come and be authentic about who they are and where they are at this point in their life?
- Does being authentic mean you share everything with everyone?

“A Christ-centred community creates an authentic-centred opportunity to love. To know someone fully and still love them completely is one of the most Christ-like acts we will ever do.”

- Have you ever experienced being vulnerable and authentic with a group of people and being fully loved?

What was that experience like?

- Can you think of an example when you have loved someone in that way, or you have seen someone loving another person in that way?
- What sabotages our efforts of loving others or loving people that have made themselves fully known to us? [Hint: Comparison – not struggling with what they are struggling with; fear that when we love them we “approve of their lifestyle/ behaviour” etc.]

We are created for authentic, intentional, and relational communities of Christ-like love. It is these sorts of communities that are the seedbed to consistent and deepening personal growth in Christ.

We are created for authentic community

The creation story that we find in Genesis 1-2 lays out God's creation purposes for the type of relationships and community we are designed for. In [Genesis 2:25](#) we see the climax of God's creative purposes:

“[Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.](#)”

It is interesting that the creation story culminates with the couple being naked and them feeling no shame. “The Hebrew word for naked here is the word "Arumin" which means 'to be opened' or 'to be laid bare'. The concept is less about nakedness in a physical way but more about openness and vulnerability. To arumin is to be completely exposed, not to hide anything, to have no secrets. It is the ultimate expression of trust, to be completely known by the other without any reservations, and to be known in the same way by them in return.”

Thus, we are created to be fully and completely known by God and each other.

Our sinful nature undermines our ability to live authentic lives

But then the Bible narrates how sin enters the world in the fall narrative and how it corrupts community and the relationships God created us for. Read [Genesis 3:1](#):

“Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’

In Genesis 3:1 Satan is described as being “crafty/shrewd” which is the complete opposite characteristics that humanity is described to be created for in Genesis 2.

The Hebrew word for “crafty/shrewd” is ‘Arum’. “It is a derivation of the same word used to describe humanity in the previous verse. Where humanity is created Arumin - to be opened, laid bare, without secrets or anything hidden, no shame – Satan is created Arum - ‘crafty’, ‘not fully disclosed’, ‘hidden’ or ‘closed’.”

“The result of humanity’s choice to sin in Genesis 3 radically changes how we approach relationships at all levels – where we were created to be authentic and unashamed we have become closed, secretive and hidden.” He then pointed out that “Our sinful nature will always invite us to choose self-protection rooted in fear over authenticity rooted in vulnerability.”

- Why do you think it is essential for us to be aware of our sinful nature’s default ‘to choose self-protection rooted in fear over authenticity rooted in vulnerability?’
- What do we miss out on if we go with our sinful nature’s default choice of choosing to self-protect and to hide from others?

“The very form of community that God created us for has become the very form of community we feel least comfortable in.”

- Does authentically sharing with others about your life make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- Does this call to be fully known make your nervous or does it excite you? Please explain.

[To dig deeper, please go to the end of the study]

Jesus enables us to live authentic lives

We are in need of experiencing redemption from our self-protection and fears that keep us living hidden, secretive and closed lives. Through his life, Jesus has modelled for us what authenticity – our true human nature – really looks like. Through His death, resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Jesus invites us into the kind of authentic community that we have been designed for.

The early church built their lives around this authentic community that Jesus had invited them into. Paul reflects theologically on this new life that we now have in Christ Jesus.

[Read Ephesians 4:22-25:](#)

“You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires (arum; self-protection); to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (arumin; authenticity). Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body.”

“Paul is making a clear point here – in Christ Jesus everything has changed and we no longer need to be slaves to self-protection and fear that leads to isolation, but can now actually live as God had always created us to live – in a new place of openness and vulnerability where we can put off our tendency to be fake and false with one another and now speak truthfully to each other, recognising we are all now members of a new community – an authentic community – in Christ.”

- Have you ever operated out of “the new self” where you set aside your self-protection and falsehood and started living authentic, vulnerable, open lives with others in Christian community? Share what that experience was like.
- How do you put off your old self/falsehood and “put on the new self” and start speaking truthfully to each other? What does that look like in practice?
- How can you encourage each other in being your authentic self?

Speaking truthfully to each other is further elaborated on in Paul’s famous words on Christian community in chapter 12 in the book of Romans. The context for this passage is that there are tensions in the church in Rome between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Paul addresses this tension in the first eleven chapters by using a levelling argument that shows that both Gentile and Jewish Christians are equally in need of Jesus’ saving and redeeming work. In chapter twelve Paul applies the gospel to the community relationships in Rome and explains how the Christian community is meant to relate to each other.

“Because of God’s mercy in salvation through Jesus we are called now to be living sacrifices, to lay our lives down for Him and one another, to not think too highly of ourselves but consider ourselves in sober judgement and understand we are members together now in a new community, called to be the body of Christ on Earth.” For Paul, the starting point for being this new community is to love sincerely. Read [Romans 12:9:](#)

[‘Love must be sincere. \[...\]’](#)

“The word Paul uses for ‘sincere’ here is a Greek word that was used specifically to speak of a kind of theatre in which the performers would put on a wide variety of masks to reveal different kinds of characters and personalities. He is saying the way in which we are to love each other must be sincere – we must drop the masks we put on all the time and reveal to one another the real person we are. We are to drop our masks, to drop our self-protection, to

drop our false pretences and our self-image and our filters and to be real, to let love be without a mask, without any sense of falsehood.” This is the kind of community we are invited into.

“In the cross, Jesus has paid the price for our sin and has now invited us into a new way of life – a renewed humanity centred in Christ where in our practice of sincere love together we are now able to experience once again the authentic kind of community God had in mind for us all along. This is the invitation that is before us through Christ, and I think the writer and poet Marisa Donnelly put it best; “Become the person who is open and soft, not harsh and hidden. And watch how the world opens to you in return’.”

- How can you take steps to ‘become the person who is open and soft, not harsh and hidden’?
- What is one step you can take this next week to live a more authentic life?
- How did Josh and Chelsea Wong’s story encourage you to be ‘open and soft’?

Digging Deeper

Read [Genesis 3:1-13](#):

“ 1 Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’ 2 The woman said to the snake, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’ 4 ‘You will not certainly die,’ the snake said to the woman. 5 ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ 10 He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’ 11 And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?’ 12 The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’ 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The snake deceived me, and I ate.’”

- How do you see sin corrupting relationships and authentic community in this Bible passage? [Hint: See especially verses 7-13]
 - How have you seen sin corrupt relationships and authentic community in your own life?

Pray

End