

Valuing Community

Angela Pound

What Now? / Acts 2:42–47; Romans 12:4–5; Hebrews 10:24–25; Galatians 6:2

(Acts) This passage captures the early Church's commitment to deep, Spirit-led community—learning, sharing, worshiping, and growing together.

Pg. 23-24 in Living Faith (about the Christian Fellowship being part of his family)

There is a little town in Pennsylvania called Roseto. In the 1960s, this small community of Italian immigrants stunned researchers and doctors across the country. People there were dying of old age—but not of heart disease, which at the time was one of the leading causes of death.

Curious, a team of physicians and sociologists descended on the town. What caught the attention of researchers was something extraordinary: the people of Roseto were virtually free from heart disease and many other stress-related illnesses that plagued the rest of America. Doctors were baffled. They expected to find something unique in their genetics, diet, or exercise habits. But here's what they found: the people of Roseto ate rich Italian food—lots of meat, cheese, and pasta cooked in lard. Many of the men smoked cigars, and few of them exercised regularly. Genetically, they were no different from their neighbors in surrounding towns. What was their secret?

Two weeks ago we began a four week series with a final unveiling on June 8th as our mission statement on our One Day/Anniversary service for this year. It will spell out an acronym as our mission statement.

I started with the letter L, which stood for learning and living the gospel. Last week's letter was O - Obedience in prayer. This week's letter is V - Valuing Community.

The secret of Roseto was a community where *everyone knew each other*. It was a community. Deep, consistent, relational connection. Three generations often lived under one roof. Neighbors visited daily, cooked for one another, and celebrated every milestone together. There was no isolation, little status competition, and a culture of deep respect and mutual care. They went to church together, walked the same streets, and looked out for the vulnerable. Their lives were built around *relationship, rhythm, and responsibility* to one another.

Scientists would later call this the Roseto Effect—the power of community to protect physical health. What if science was just discovering something God designed from the beginning? We were *created* for connection. Not just Wi-Fi or social media, but real, life-giving, burden-sharing, joy-celebrating connection. In a world growing more isolated by the day, we have the chance to reclaim something sacred. It points to something we as the Church should already know: God designed us to thrive in community.

In today's fast-paced world, technology has become the thread that weaves our lives together. As we navigate this digital age, the real question isn't *can* we connect—it's *how* we choose to. Today, we're going to look at what real, biblical community looks like, why it's so essential, and how we can push back against isolation in our modern world. Because in a time when loneliness is called an epidemic, the Church has a chance to offer something radical and life-giving: *true connection*.

Let's go back to the very beginning. As the Bible says in Genesis 2:18 "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." Just before this the man had been placed in the beautiful garden of Eden, but God knew this beauty wasn't all that man needed at this time, it wouldn't help his loneliness. As we continue into Genesis 2:19–23 "So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman

and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.””
From the very beginning God designed us to thrive in community, man was not to be alone, and even living creatures weren’t enough, we needed other humans to connect with.

Earlier today we read John 13:31. But let’s take a look back a bit before this. At the beginning of chapter 12, Jesus has come to Bethany and is having a dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, at which point Mary washes Jesus’ feet with perfume.

At the end of chapter 12, Jesus is telling his disciples in John 12:25–26 “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” He then predicts his crucifixion for the first time. Then if we look at the beginning of Chapter 13 Jesus washes the disciples’ feet, demonstrating servanthood. One of the many remarkable things about Jesus is that he demonstrated everything with his life. He uses himself as an example of one who serves, while exhorting his disciples to serve one another. If you look to the account of the Last Supper found in Luke 22:24–27 “A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be

regarded as the greatest. But he [Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

Hear what Jesus says in John 13:12–17 which is before the passage we read today “After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Using Mary’s anointing of his feet in the previous chapter as a model, Jesus washes his disciples’ feet. Their savior, their king, was washing their feet. The one who came to save, was doing what a servant would usually do, and washing their feet, they probably were at a loss for words at first. Peter objects at first saying “You will never wash my feet.”

Like Peter, we might want to object, but we must admit our need and welcome his grace. Loving one another wasn't new. The Old Testament had commanded love in Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." Other Jewish sources make love of neighbor a central teaching, but other early Jewish groups do not speak with the same sort of consistency found among the earliest Christians. What makes Jesus' commandment new is the new standard and example: "as I have loved you" - in the context, to the point of laying down one's life for others. Ancient writers regularly invoked positive models that invited imitation (as well as warning against negative examples). Jesus loved and served us; now he invites us to do the same for one another. Following his model, we should be ready even to lay down our lives for one another.

If we turn to the early Church in Acts. When the day of Pentecost had arrived they were all together in one place and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter gives his grand sermon at which he ends it with Acts 2:36 "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." If we continue into Acts 2:37-41 "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should

we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” Can you imagine, that day 3000 people were added, their community, their church was growing extensively. Then we come to the passage read this morning in Acts 2:42–47 “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” The early Church met daily, shared meals, prayed together, and held all things in common. God’s blueprint for a spiritually and physically healthy life.

As it says, in the early Church, “All who believed were together and had all things in common.” When I read this I don’t read it as everyone was exactly the same, for as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” We are all unique, with a variety of gifts, yet we are to use these gifts for our common love for Jesus and each other. What the early church had in common was their love for Christ, sharing this with the world, with each other, and taking care of one another.

I read a book years ago that forever changed how I interacted and have relationships with people, called *The 5 Love Languages*. Here’s a quote from the back of one of the books, “You know you love your child...but does your child feel loved?”

In his books Dr. Gary Chapman shares a powerful insight: people give and receive love in different ways. Just like we speak different spoken languages, we each have a primary *love language*—a way that makes us feel most valued and cared for.

Chapman identifies five love languages:

Words of Affirmation – Encouraging words, Acts of Service – Doing something helpful, Receiving Gifts – Thoughtful

tokens that say, “I was thinking of you.”

Quality Time – Focused, undistracted time spent together,
Physical Touch – Hugs, handshakes, or simply being physically present.

Here’s the key: What fills one person’s heart might not mean the same to someone else. If we want to truly love people—our spouse, children, friends, or our church family—we learn to love them in *their* language, not just ours.

This concept mirrors the heart of Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that love is patient, kind, and not self-seeking. Jesus demonstrated love in deeply personal ways—he touched the untouchable, spoke words of life, spent time with outcasts, served the broken, and gave sacrificially. He met people where they were, in the language their hearts could hear. For me recognizing that the way I feel loved isn’t necessarily the same for someone else means that I need to try to get to know them better to show them I care for them in whatever way or language they need, not in the way that I need.

Loving one another is not to be interpreted exclusively as loving just one’s little in-group, but think to what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, in particular Matthew 5:43–48 ““You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so

that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The early church would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. They took care of each other, just as we are called to take care of each other.

10 years ago almost to this day I got a call that would forever change mine and my family’s trajectory. Mackenzie was 6, Madi was 3, we were going to a church as a family and most of my Sundays I spent in Sunday school particularly since Madi was born as she didn’t want to go on her own just yet. You see, as many of you know, I started playing in church at the age of 16, I did this for 7 years before taking a break after Mark and I got married. I would play for churches here and there as they would call me to fill in, but I was enjoying sitting and listening to a service. Yet 10 years ago I was in a spot where I didn’t know what to do. I loved my kids and that we were attending a church where there was a Sunday School for them to learn about Jesus, but I didn’t want to be a Sunday School participant

every single Sunday. Mark and I had had this conversation and we were working on trying to work with the children, in particular Madi, so that I could take her to Sunday School, but leave shortly after to come back to the service. It was a slow process and after teaching all week with children I wanted some adult time at church. So, when I received a call if I would be interested in playing at Billtown Baptist Church for a year, I jumped on the idea, after first asking, where is Billtown? I had never heard of Billtown. I found my way here one Sunday to check out and meet the congregation. For me, it was a great option. It was just for a year, so we weren't going to move the rest of my family with me. Mark and the kids would remain at our previous church, which would solve the kids having to go to Sunday School on their own while Mark was singing in the choir, while I had the opportunity to use my musical gifts at a church once again. Things were going as planned, then the kids asked to come with me to church one Sunday. I mentioned to them that while they could, because I was playing during the service I couldn't go with them to Sunday School at all, they would have to go completely on their own. They agreed, and I wasn't sure how it was going to go, but it went relatively well. There were lots of kids, and they really enjoyed the community feel after the service was over (and who am I to kid, they really enjoyed the snacks). It was after this the kids decided they wanted to come with me every Sunday to church, soon Mark

followed suit, and well the rest is history, as we are still here. We love this community, we value this community, and we feel that love back.

Don't forget what Jesus said in John 13:35, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

As we reflect on what it means to love like Jesus, consider this: Are we loving others the way we prefer—or the way *they* truly feel loved? Ask God to help us love not just with words or intentions, but in a way that reflects His personal, sacrificial love for each of us. How can we serve our brothers and sisters in Christ better? Who in our community needs encouragement? How can we help make our church and community a place of love and belonging? Faith is not a solo journey. We grow in the context of relationships. We were made to walk alongside others, to build each other up, to forgive, to serve. Community is where we practice the gospel. It's where we learn to love like Jesus—with patience, humility, and grace. From the beginning, we were never meant or made to walk this journey alone. Thanks be to God.