



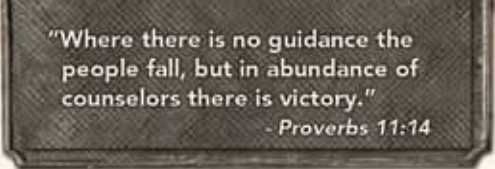
"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. If one falls down his friend can help him up. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

-Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Community

What comes to mind when you think of community? For some, community looks like best friends, vacations together, laughs, and quality time together. A good illustration might be when guests come over to our house. Often, it looks completely different than it does during the rest of the week. The sofa is always put together with pillows in the appropriate place. The pictures we frame almost always capture good and happy times in our lives.

The picture of community that many of us have in our mind is much like the neat, clean, and picturesque sofa. The whole idea of community looks and sounds great and why not? It's a biblical idea and a command by the Lord. What could possibly be wrong about growing together with people who will care for you, grow with you, encourage you, exhort you, and pray for you as you continue to let others know the real you?



The problem with this clean and neat community is ME and YOU. Think of the closest people in your life with whom you have had the deepest relationship. It could be your roommate, brother, sister, or best friend. There are always times in those relationships when you are unhappy, upset, disappointed, and frustrated with the other person.

In reality, community is messy. It doesn't always work in black and white. Many times it operates in gray areas (which drive many of us crazy). Relationships look more, at times, like a sofa that hasn't been kept and is very messy. The reality of the pictures in our picture frames, which

are full of smiles, are not always a true representation of our lives. Sure there are smiles but also tears, heartbreak, disappointment, and hardship. God has given us biblical community as His provision for us as we walk through this life.

When we're practicing real, biblical community, we get a first-hand look at the struggles, pitfalls, and challenges all of us experience in our day-to-day lives. And the truth is, God wouldn't have it any other way. So, guess what? Community is messy, but there is LIFE that you and I experience when we are known and cared for by others on this journey.

Questions:

1. What are you hoping to get out of your community group?

2. Do you think your expectations are more idealistic or messy? Why?

3. What are you most excited about in getting into a community group and what are you most fearful about?

Community 101

The goal of *Community 101* is to help your community group move through the 'get to know you' phase while establishing some of the vision and values of authentic community where members are spurred on to maturity and faithfulness in Christ. This book will help you begin to have conversations foundational for encouraging one another, caring for one another, handling conflict when it arises and building accountable relationships. True community doesn't develop overnight, but if you're committed, your community group will soon begin to understand that God is good in the countless ways He uses us in each other's lives.