

Community - Brad House - Book Summary

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Part I The Foundation: Building Blocks for Life

Intro - community within the church today is hemorrhaging, small groups not solidifying community enough
 -small groups will thrive when they become the place where we experience life-giving transformation
 -community group refers to the scattered church involved in the mission of making and maturing disciples
 -Foundation: base small group ministry on the why (theology) before the how (done well by author)
 -Health Plan: create groups defined by mission ownership, participation, creativity and engage with culture
 -Treatment: facilitating change and how we can inspire our church toward a new paradigm for community
 >>we need community groups as an expression of the image of God that has been restored thru the cross

1. **Image** -goal is to re-establish the basis for community and why it is essential for the Christian life
 - sin always separates, leads to isolation, even while we all have an intrinsic need for community
 - Jesus suffered for sin to bring us reconciliation to God and others, making community possible
 - we are saved to be a community, not a church of individuals -a physical demonstration of God's grace
 - isolation is our response to sin, community is our response to reconciliation

Created for community: if our identity is wrapped up in being self-sufficient and autonomous, we will not experience life-giving community - made in His image means made to represent Him to all creation
 -we cannot image God's relational nature in isolation and we are incomplete without it
 -we are created as a reflection of God (who we are) to reflect God to all creation (why we are) -Gen.1:26
 -the church is a community that reflects the mercy, grace, love and faithfulness of God -Col.3:12-17

Inspired by His glory: the motivation that will sustain such community is not that we will glorify God, it is the glory of God itself - that we have seen His glory and this motivates us to prioritize making disciples

Empowered by His grace -1Pet.2:9-12, our identity is the people of God, the purpose of our community is to proclaim His excellence, sanctification is a corporate process, our community is a powerful witness
 -our individual witness is backed up and amplified by how well our community attracts culture into it
 -the goal of having our neighbours see how we live in godly community is that they will worship God

2. **Body** - as culture reflects the values of its citizens, community groups reflect the values of the church
 - programs must become support tools thru which a gospel-saturated community engages the world
 - *community won't gain life if we marginalize it thru resource allocation or ministry dilution (busyness)
 - if community is vital, it should have a prominent role in the life of the church and the individuals

Functions of the church: community groups the primary vehicle for discipleship, pastoral care, mission

- a) Discipleship - is about providing a means by which we can shepherd people toward maturity
 - stream analogy instead of processing plant analogy because discipleship is a life-long pursuit
 - must be perpetual and build to accommodate the whole church, especially the largest part of it
 - discipleship modes of mentoring or classes good for smaller populations, at ends of the curve

- community groups leverage 1-on-many preaching with one-another discipleship (teaching + intimacy)
- allows us to concentrate on discipling new believers and developing leaders
- transformation cycle: connects the church gathered (attraction - word - worship - conviction) with church scattered (incarnation - living the gospel - repentance - good works in the community)

- b) Pastoral Care - in the larger church it assumes majority are ok and the needy get the attention
 - Jethro principle (Acts 6) - community groups have pastoral care responsibility
 - majority cared for in community groups - special groups or 1-on-1 provided when necessary
- c) Mission - believers are unengaged in mission because they are unengaged in community
 - the people of God have relational connections and must be leveraged - don't rely on technology
 - as the gospel transforms us, our communities become places we want others to experience
 - maturity happens when people are meeting Jesus in our groups, where there is depth + numbers

3. **Ownership** - change only occurs when the church is saturated with and owns the mission of God
- the church doesn't have a mission, the mission has a church that God sends to be His outworking
 - missional means to be on mission with God, every believer into every sphere and domain of society
 - we participate as believers who remember what it was like to be lost and are inspired by compassion
 - "Jesus rebukes religious people who see the culture's needs and do nothing to meet them"
 - *if we aren't concerned to advance kingdom by sharing the gospel, we neither love God or neighbour!

- ownership means we internalize to the point that we can reiterate it, teach it, defend it and live it
- treat it like owning a car or house vs renting it: owning it makes us more passionate to steward it
- we don't need to manufacture ownership, but to awake the church to the reality it is our mission
- without ownership, leaders become landlords of a rented mansion -congregation is passive & apathetic
- agreement without ownership shows in casual attendance, wanting to be served (which we help create)

Inspire Ownership - to inspire we must lift up the Son in all His glory, grace, truth and life

- obedience inspired by law or fear is religion - obedience inspired by love is missional
- a) profit-sharing: give ownership of the blessings, the vine-work of seeing the Spirit transform lives
- b) programming that tries to meet every need robs people of opportunity & initiative to meet needs
 - what if we expected the church to love and serve one another rather than doing it all for them?
 - evaluate programs by how it helps or hinders ownership - less programs = need more community
- c) leading from the edge: allow people on front lines to make decisions instead of coming from top
 - responsibility begets ownership; allow community groups to contextualize and express community in whatever way best reaches the individual neighbourhood /oikos of that group
- d) raising expectations - it is time to swim upstream when it comes to expectations, especially leaders
 - when we raise expectations, people rise to the occasion by dependence on the Holy Spirit
 - when leaders take ownership they inspire people around them and groups practice community
- e) bite-sized mission - communicate vision & mission in clear terms that inspire and invite participation
 - articulate the greater vision then break it down so that it is accessible to everyone
 - help people see their parts in such a great mission will inspire ownership in the mission

Part II Health Plan: Redefining Community Groups

4. **Community**: how would we live in community if we started from scratch?

-we tend to develop groups out of pragmatism, not conviction

*Visionary instead of reactionary: start with a vision, not a reaction to particular need of the church

Purpose instead of product: purpose of community is pointing to Jesus, product is outcomes (belonging)

-when product is the focus, we elevate people above the kingdom and help create consumers

-our purpose in community is to receive grace, respond by imaging God and lifting up Jesus

-4 defining characteristics of disciples: our identity is in Christ, defined by what Jesus did on the cross

- we are worshippers - we are the body of Christ - we are missionaries, sent to actively engage

Who we are vs what we do - my identity is not what I do, I act out of my perceived identity

-1Pet.2 community -chosen race: a people, not a collection of individuals, worship-sanctification-war-reputation are corporate -we must be a community that is *seen* as loving one another and neighbours

Lifestyle vs event: when community is seen as a series of events, we see it for what it offers us

-community as a lifestyle: we consider one another, we prefer one another, we sacrifice for one another

-we include one another in the rhythms of our life (it will be hard to change our individualistic mindset!)

Life-giving vs life taking: when we see involvement as obligatory, that takes the life out of it

-speaking the life of Jesus into all of life i/o talking about Him only in Bible study - many don't know how

-equip people to apply the truths of the gospel so they can speak about it to all the aspects of their lives

Creativity vs conformity: goal is to see unique expressions of community that encompass Acts 2 elements of study-fellowship-hospitality-mission-service, not dictating to groups a one-size-fits-all style

-groups that follow the sermon series connect the proclamation of the word with weekly life of people

-confession & repentance: be open about our struggles & confident grace will be expressed by the group

-encourage one another towards worship - committed to prayer as a community leads to worship

-exercise hospitality, exercising our gifts to edify one another, be outward focused as a group on mission

This vision of community is what God intended for us - when we don't have it, take the opportunity to call one another back to the Acts 2 vision.

5. **Neighbourhood** - how your group can get their boots on the ground - mission the most neglected aspect

*incarnational ministry means we need to go into the culture, not invite the world to come to us

-neighbourhood approach builds groups around distinct cultures and people groups in regions

-we are to contextualize the gospel in specific place, time & ways it can be understood without diluting it

-generational to unchurched, campus to the city, community to neighbourhood, disciple to person

Transience -transient lifestyle makes belonging difficult but their isolation makes community compelling

Affinity groups: tension between belonging & autonomy runs against corporate identity - people tend to belong to something for what they can get out of it -reinforces consumerism -loses diverse perspectives
 -we want a group that makes us comfortable -Jesus brought together all sorts to a true community
 -community doesn't happen when our focus is about "how will it benefit me"

Geographic groups: anchor cultural need to belong to their location with mission of reconciliation
 *church should be a place where the cultural longing to belong and to be known is satisfied, not echoed
 -the church can be the vehicle for society to be transformed so we can localize while we are globalizing

Missional strategy - built on community groups reaching their neighbourhoods:

- a) is it accessible: break down the greater mission of the church into a neighbourhood sized mission
- b) does it inspire ownership: staff doing all the planning, creativity and fishing (teach a man to fish...)
 -give leaders responsibility to interpret neighbourhoods; they inspire members to carry out a plan
- c) is it effective: do our groups make disciples, are people growing and are we seeing conversions?
 -connect people who have gospel to people who need it - Great Commission a gift, not an obligation
- d) is it scalable: build a structure that can grow and not have to change when growth occurs
 -leader oversees 12 people, coach oversees 6 leaders, pastor oversees 6 coaches > develop coaches
 -value leaders at every level and give young leaders opportunity to rise up

Define neighbourhood -help define an attainable mission field to which a community of God can minister
 Size: define a neighbourhood as a region, so groups can work together and not feel isolated

-ie. Economy-Bass River, Gt Village-Londonderry, Debert-Onslow, Glenholme-Masstown, Truro-Bible Hill

Affinity: without diversity, its harder to galvanize affinity groups towards mission (likely depends on group)
 -make sure every affinity group has a defined mission - a missional group not a Christian club

Mix: people have an easier time identifying mission with their neighbourhood that they live in

- make geographic #1 structure - allow affinity groups for those with passion for particular peoples
- if we have too many options, it is harder to cast a clear vision - have 1 option and allow exceptions
- geographic groups makes it simple to know who is responsible to shepherd whom
- groups organized by relationships may break down when there are no preformed relationships

6. Spaces - equip the saints for community ministry

Barriers and Bridges: see culture in terms of people - don't dehumanize culture when we critique it
 -missiology: what language, perceptions, behaviours are present in our gatherings that hinder others?
 -partner with local organizations that have a common goal in our communities
 -engage in ordinary life contact with our neighbours - events, clubs, walking, meals etc

Spaces physically defined: public = 12ft, social = 4-12', personal = 18" to 4', intimate 0-18"

-explains why traditional small groups have difficulty engaging culture with the close interaction we enjoy
 -belong before belief: people are willing to participate in a community before they share its beliefs

4 basic spaces in which community groups can exist within their neighbourhoods (like Acts 2:41-47)

-inward focused = fellowship /hospitality -outward focused = service /participation > find balance!

- a) Fellowship - groups tend to be devoted to worship, study, prayer, sharing, confession /repentance
 - build groups where these are natural and authentic, then bring others into relationship with Jesus
 - fellowship is the most intimate of spaces & the most intimidating place for new relationship to build
 - keys: Christ-centered, intentional-authentic, grace filled-truth telling, avoid the holy ghetto
- b) Hospitality - 1st step to being missional, your turf but safe place to invite - relearn how to party!
 - welcome people into the group by lowering the energy barrier for them to feel they belong
 - be more aware of others preferences, a strangers home is intimidating, find a neutral 3rd place
 - as they get more comfortable with us, they may stick their toes in the water of Christ
 - keys: be self-aware, lower the barrier, meet people where they are, offer a welcoming experience
- c) Service - find out what practical needs your group can meet - start by asking, look for the obvious
 - ie. helping seniors, mechanical and household help for widows, beautify the area, etc
 - keys: meet practical needs, find common purposes, use local organizations, combine passions
- d) Participation - in activities and events as a community group - overcome our rep of being separate
 - isolation says Jesus isn't big enough for neighbours to deal with -our fear ignores the gospel's power
 - meet people on common ground - join events rather than starting your own - offer to help them
 - must be done consistently over time, one event won't build it - we tend to give up too soon
 - keys: join instead of create, build relationships, prioritize participation, emphasize consistency
 - >link spaces to build bridges - invite people: biggest roadblock is failure to be invited!

7. Rhythms - event based community vs opportunity based community

-traditional event groups are based on personal priorities of time, place, substance

-need new wineskins that break out from rigid rhythms and be modeled after group rhythms

-opportunity group is based on people, like a family enjoying a rhythmic lifestyle of community

-shepherd the group to be self-organizing, get the ball rolling then let them carry it

-goal is not more time together as much as it is inspired by Jesus to live differently, transformational

Time - time-oriented barriers are self-imposed, choices that are a reflection of our choices

-can we find a balance of actual time demands and gospel-centered priorities?

-idea that people can give 2 times a week is a crock -when community gives us life we find time for it!

*issue is desire >> find out what is strangling the life out of our community and inspire people again

Scene - spaces and locations can deaden or inspire, be barriers or inviting places

-build rhythms to take us into different locations with lower barriers = transforms us to engage others

Substance - find what is appropriate for a particular time and place

- groups can't always swim in the deep (high barrier) or shallow end (low transformation)
- in spaces: participation - keep light, service - a physical presentation of gospel,
hospitality - focus on building relationship, fellowship - the space for deeper conversations

Leaders as students of the neighbourhood:

- observe the natural rhythms of the culture and incorporate some of them into your group
- join local associations to find out what is going on, who they are (*a long term strategy)
- p161, trad groups not effective at mission or service if they are event based with low community
- groups must find their own rhythms -ie. mid-week group + bi-week hospitality meal + bi-week service
- groups that experience true community begin to self-organize and opportunities multiply

8. **Structure** - without a structural foundation built on Biblical convictions, groups become anemic
- organic structure has organization as in nature - groups without it have low expectation > entropy
 - Moses syndrome: has the care for every sheep, born not out of pride but care and concern
 - Jethro principle: organize so all members get opportunity to lead at their level of calling

Purpose - structure of groups and leaders must support functions of community (see 5 questions pg190)

- pastoral care: every member shepherded by an equipped leader, coach or pastor (leaders cared for)
- discipleship: every leader/member being disciplined and discipling another within natural relationships
- mission: geographic groups emphasize neighbourhood strategy -mission focus + model of replication
- administration: communicate vision and values, lets issues bubble up to leadership

Span of care - average leader can look after about 6 relationships - as it grows depth of care diminishes

- future: every group develop a co-leader - develop 1 coach for every 6 community group leaders
- *can we be program and property oriented and also have true community? = not a primer for growth

Expectations of a Leader - leader ensures care, discipleship and mission happen, doesn't do it all

- shepherd: leaders protect, care for and disciple the flock - difficult to delegate so a primary role
- missionologist: someone to get out and interact with the neighbourhood - can be delegated
- administrator: good organization and planning a key - can be easily delegated
- apprenticeship: formally identify an apprentice /co-leader who will prepare for the next replication

Choosing a Leader - how to determine when a leader is ready

- character: never take a risk on character - showing consistency in right direction before leading
- calling: must have a conviction from the Holy Spirit so they will withstand pressures and needs
- competence: ability to lead at a given level - can be taught as long as character + calling are present

Training a Leader - use various learning styles, have 3 major components, avoid 1-dimensional approach

- basic training: establish baseline vision & expectation to ensure consistency - read & discuss this book
- regular equipping: equipping meetings + asking each what they need + articles and resources

Part III Treatment: Effecting Change in Your Groups

9. **Repentance** - a natural rhythm, begins w/pastors and spreads - where is the sense of urgency, passion?
 -2Cor.5, does it move us that God calls us reconcilers - or do we receive the grace of God in vain?
 -true repentance will change the bias of our soul -we will love the gospel and live as a holy nation
 *we won't get to community thru a new initiative or programs - give us false sense of accomplishment
 -Rev.2, only a heart change will bring us back to 1st love, embrace our identity, reject all idols
 -we are in a war, need wartime mentality, we fight for the lives of the lost, God calls us to the battle
- a) **Apathy** - indifference to sin, unholy contentment with the status quo - not seeing spiritual reality
 -the intentional closing of our eyes to the carnage on the battlefield -1Pet.5:8; Mark 4:15; 2Cor.2:11
 -instead of killing sin we try to manage it - like trying to put out a fire by talking, will burn down house
 ->repentance means we think & live as new creations, free from sin, free to worship, secure in Christ
- b) **Indifference** -Jn.12:25 symptom of the love of life -cant hold the temporal & make a kingdom impact
 -we are more concerned with our comfort and stuff than the advancement of the kingdom
 -war requires that we put our lives on the line -harvest requires us to get dirty and work
 >repentance means we are thankful for mercy, having compassion on our dying neighbours
- c) **Fear of man** - we fear rejection, mockery and loss of status from neighbours, co-workers
 -Mt.10:28, when we fear man we elevate them above God >> do we, you, I fear God?
 -we should fear God's wrath -2Tim.1:6-7, a spirit of confidence in the Lord is a gift to be received
 >repentance means we humbly submit our lives to Christ's service and boldly share with others
 Brighter future -authentic community is a constant battle against apathy, indifference, fear of man
 -believe what you are! -what could God do with a wartime mentality and a hazardous liberality?
10. **Boot Camp** - a concentrated process to equip + shepherd leaders to own and carry out the vision
 -make it compelling, so they will get the vision that we own -needs prayer & dependence on the Spirit
 -make it necessary: let leaders who do not embrace the vision opt out or they will slow you down
 -reinforce the vision by grouping leaders by neighbourhood or region so they can work together
 -make it interactive so they can fully understand and recast the vision in their own groups
 -make it practical: move from philosophical to practical steps that get them on the ground
- Elements of boot camp -worship: we need change of heart - life won't come just by adopting strategy
 -teaching: anchor lessons in Scripture, not pragmatism - give examples from Scripture and real life
 -neighbourhood interaction: leaders work together to build a plan for their own area
 -homework: gets them out of comfort zones and into engaging with culture
 -p213-226, a full boot camp plan to implement the above (adapt for our use)
11. Mars Hill History - recently church folded into smaller churches because of founding pastor problems
Appendix: Plans for group /area/replication - Job Description for group leader/coach/community pastor