

## **Growing by *Discovering Community***

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Jonathan Rue  
Luke 5:17-26  
Growing in God Series  
09.27.09

### **PASTOR PLUG:**

#### **Joshua House Campus Ministry Party in the Lobby, after the service**

Well we started a new series last week called *Growing In God* and this is our vision series for the year where we look ahead to where God is leading us as a community for this next year. And what I began to share last week was that as a community and individually we want to accelerate our spiritual growth this year. When we enter relationship with Jesus Christ, that is supposed to be the starting line of our spiritual growth, not the finish line. So we don't check out and think, "hey, I'm spiritually enlightened because I found Christ, so I can sit back and continue on with life as normal."

No. The words of Jesus in the gospels make it clear that when we enter relationship with Jesus, that is the beginning of God growing and shaping and pruning our lives in Him. So, what I said last week is that we have a process for spiritual growth here in Joshua House and that process involves doing three things: *encountering God, discovering community and loving the world*. That's what we're about here in Joshua House; that's who we are and that is our process for growing in Christ. So if you would commit yourself to encountering God this year, to engaging with God in our services and in your own personal life with God. If you would commit to discovering community: the way that we do that is through our small groups, which just began last week, a new session, that's going to last for 8 more weeks. So, you can jump into that right now. And a way to do that is to go onto our website, [www.joshuahouse.org](http://www.joshuahouse.org)

### **SLIDE:**

**[www.joshuahouse.org](http://www.joshuahouse.org)**

And lastly, if you'd commit yourself to loving the world, to stepping out and serving and giving of yourself this year. If you would do those 3 things this year, *you're going to grow!* Those are the conditions needed for our spiritual lives to grow. We don't have to try to make things grow; as long as the conditions are right things just grow. And so what we want to do is make sure that we have the conditions for spiritual growth—the conditions that would make for a fruitful year

for you in growing in Christ. And those conditions are *encountering God, discovering community and loving the world*. Well, last week we looked at that first part, *encountering God* and this week we are looking at the second part, *discovering community*. Every human being has a desire for community.

**SLIDE:**  
**The desire for community**

This isn't something that we have to try to manufacture or make up. Now, you might have a warped idea about community. You may have been hurt by people, you may have a fear of other people and groups but what I mean by community is simply this:

**SLIDE:**  
**To have people love and care about you**

There is nobody that doesn't want this. There is nobody that says, "I do not want anyone to love me or care about me." And if they do, there's really something broken inside of them because this is a foundational part of what it means to be a human being. We are relational people. God has hard-wired into us the desire to be loved and to be cared about. And this isn't just for the people that are emotional, the people that just love to hang out and talk and want to hug you every time they see you and are just touchy-feely people. This isn't just touchy-feely people that want to be loved and cared about, this is everybody.

I want to tell you about a man named Billy Queen. Billy was an undercover agent with the ATF, which stands for the Alcohol, Tobacco, & Firearms Department. And he went undercover in the San Fernando Valley with the most violent biker gang in the country, known as the Mongols. Now you might not have heard of the Mongols before, though you've probably heard of the Hells Angels. Well, the Mongols are not as large as the Hells Angels but they're much more violent and dangerous than the Hells Angels motorcycle club or any other biker gang. These guys mean business. They take pride in being the most violent, ruthless, and dangerous gang around; that's what they aspire to.

And so Billy Queen was able to infiltrate the Mongols under the pseudonym "Billy St. John". And he spent a total of 28 months in this biker gang. He was incredibly successful at infiltrating them and he rose through the ranks to become the treasurer of their club. But to do that, he had to cross lines of protocol. He beat people and was beaten himself. He was nearly stabbed to death. He broke into houses. He stole motorcycles. He mishandled women. He carried weapons and drove a get-away car when some of the guys would commit crimes. He did all this in order to gain the trust of the gang and record them so that they could

be prosecuted. Well, after 28 months, the dam finally burst and 700 law enforcement personnel descended upon the Mongols and they were able to accomplish 54 convictions of this Mongol gang due to the this single undercover agent, Billy Queen. Billy wrote about his experiences in a book called “Under and Alone”.

**SLIDE:  
Image-Billy Queen**

And the movie rights have just been purchased by Mel Gibson’s company Icon. So, it will be coming out sometime in the near future. But I haven’t read this book; the reason that I know about this story is from a radio interview that Billy did, that I heard in my car about 5 years ago. And it’s stuck with me ever since because I thought it was such powerful image of the human desire to be loved and cared for in community. So, I have an audio clip that I want to play for you, where Billy is going to tell a story about how confusing it was when this tragic event happened in his life—his mom died. And here he is, living a double life with his normal life with the ATF and his family and then he’s going into the Mongols and he’s developing these friendships and he is hanging out with these guys that are ruthless; they are violent and degrade women. They’re drug abusers; they kill people. They get into fights and injure people. They are alcoholics. And despite all of that, Billy finds himself powerfully drawn toward the care that he received from these guys. Let’s listen to this audio clip.

**AUDIO CLIP:  
Billy Queen**

The draw of the community that Billy found with the Mongols; the love and the care of those men was so powerful that he almost walked away from his whole life and walked into something that was contrary to what he believed was right. There was a powerful draw from feeling loved and cared about.

Well, tonight I want to talk about how crucial it is that we include community as an essential building block of our life and faith. You cannot lay a foundation of a strong spiritual life without the bricks of community with other believers. If you do not have other Christians that love you, that care about you, and that are walking with you in life, you will stunt your spiritual growth.

I’ve called tonight’s talk “Growing by Discovering Community”. Let’s pray.

**TITLE SLIDE:**  
**Growing by Discovering Community**  
**Jonathan Rue**  
**Luke 5:17-26**  
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Well, we are going through Luke 5 in this vision series. Last week, we talked about verses 1-11 in Luke 5 and tonight we're going to look at verses 17-26. So if you've got your bible, why don't you open up to Luke 5:17. And we're going to see a story here that pulls this concept of community down from the sky, from the abstract, theoretical world of ideas and concepts and brings it down to what it looks like to be in community with one another. What does it look like to really love and care for one another? So let's read this passage out of Luke 5.

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 5:17-26 (TNIV)**

**One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.**

**20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."**

**21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**

**22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."**

Now we'll begin by defining what community is.

**SLIDE:**  
**The definition of Christian community**

See, Christian community is not just drawing a crowd; it's not just a crowd of people in a room. We see that happening in verse 17.

**SLIDE:**  
**Luke 5:17 (TNIV)**  
**One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.**

So Jesus is teaching in this house and it's filled with these Pharisees and teachers of the law that had come from all over. He had attracted a crowd, not just locally, but from all over every village in Galilee from Judea to Jerusalem. Jesus was pulling from everywhere; people would come to hear him speak, but that was a crowd coming to hear the famous teacher, not a community. And some of these guys were probably coming with a great deal of skepticism and cynicism, wanting to evaluate the teachings of Jesus and look for holes in his arguments. They were looking to expose anything that Jesus might say wrong.

But some of these guys were probably genuinely interested in what Jesus had to say, but they still were just a crowd. Remember that the Pharisees, though they get a bad rap today and the gospels are pretty hard on them, were actually very devoted followers of God. These guys were not priests, they were lay-leaders that were very thorough and zealous with living the law of God in every area of life. So, they interpreted the Torah, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. And they made interpretations upon every aspect of life and what God would have you do. And this came from a desire to not have any area of life that was outside the scope of God's will. So there was a good intention behind it. But somewhere along the line they lost their way and they lost the love and the care of Christian community. It had been replaced by legalism and rule-following.

And so, these Pharisees skeptics and likely Pharisee seekers come to hear Jesus and they're gathered in a great crowd around Him, but this is not community yet. And do you know that it's the same in churches today. Just because we gather together as a big crowd listen to somebody talk doesn't mean that we have Christian community. You know, if that is your own experience of church life, if your level of involvement with church doesn't not extend beyond coming on a weekend and being a part of the crowd at a church service then you

are missing out on Christian community. You may be encountering God like we talked about last week. God is very accessible in a personal way by coming to church. When people gather together like we're doing tonight and we invite God to come and to speak to us and we worship God all together that is a profoundly powerful way to encounter God. But encountering God is only one of the three necessary conditions for spiritual growth. You've also got to discover community by stepping into relationships with people that consist of three things.

Authentic Christian community consists of people that number 1: *Love God*

**SLIDE:**

**Christian Community consists of people that:**

**1. Love God**

You cannot have Christian community with people that don't love God. You can have other forms of community just like Billy Queen had a taste of what community meant with the Mongols, even though the Mongols were wicked men, that did awful, horrendous things to people. Yet, he was still able to experience a part of community. But to have Christian community you've got to be around people that love God. You may have lots of friend that don't love and know God and that's great. You can influence them with the love of Jesus and represent God to them. But you've got to have friends that DO love God in order to have Christian community. That's number 1.

Number 2: Christian community consists of people that love one another.

**SLIDE:**

**Christian Community consists of people that:**

**1. Love God**

**2. Love one another**

Henry Nouwen was a great spiritual writer of the last century and he said this,

**SLIDE:**

**The word community has many connotations, some positive, some negative. Community can make us think of a safe togetherness, shared meals, common goals, and joyful celebrations. It also can call forth images of sectarian exclusivity, in-group language, self-satisfied isolation, and romantic naiveté. However, community is first of all a quality of the heart. It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. Community is the**

**fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own... The question, therefore, is not "How can we make community?" but "How can we develop and nurture giving hearts?"—Henri J.M. Nouwen: Bread for the Journey**

His point is that real Christian community has to consist of us learning how to love one another, to think about other people and put other people first. And the third essential ingredient for Christian community is that we share life together.

**SLIDE:**

**Christian Community consists of people that:**

- 1. Love God**
- 2. Love one another**
- 3. Share life together**

And the great image of sharing life together as Christians, as people that love God and love one another comes to us at the birth of the church. One of the first glimpses that we see of the church being the church is in Acts 2.

**SLIDE:**

**Acts 2:41-47**

**Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.**

**42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

So the early church did life together; they ate together, they hung out together, they shared their possessions with one another. These were not people that went their own way and did their own life for 6 days a week and then came together for an hour and a half, one time a week. These were people that were living life together. And this is what God's intention is for us. God is gathering a people, not just saving individuals out of the world, but God is rescuing a people

and shaping us together into His image. That is the big, overarching purpose and goal that God is drawing us towards. Well, let's turn our eyes back to the Luke 5 text and I want to outline some major benefits of community.

**SLIDE:**

**The benefits of community**

This text shows us that community is not some burdensome command of God for us that we grudgingly accept but that community is something that has great benefit and rich reward for us. Well the first benefit of community that we see in this text, the first benefit of having people that love you and care about you is that you have people to help you when you can't help yourself.

**SLIDE:**

**Having people to help you when you can't help yourself**

Look at this in verse 18.

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 5:18 (TNIV)**

**Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.**

So this man is paralyzed, he can't walk. He can't get himself into the audience of Jesus to receive the healing that he needs. But he's got friends. He's got people that care about him enough to carry him to Jesus, to help him in the way that he can't help himself to find the healing that he needs. Now, have you ever had a friend do this for you? Have you had a friend help you when you couldn't help yourself? Have you ever hit the bottom of a deep, dark depression that made it feel impossible for you to initiate your own healing? You couldn't turn around your mood yourself but you had a friend, a family member, somebody that wouldn't give up on you but would come and be with you. They would take you out to do things, they would listen and process your issue, to pray for you, to speak God's word of truth and hope into your life; to help you pull out of the nose-dive of depression. Have you ever had somebody that walked with you through grief? You lost a loved one or you got diagnosed with a disease. Have you ever had one of these moments that are too big for you to handle? You need help; you can't do this alone.

I have a friend named Joel that became my friend 15 years ago and will continue to be my friend for the rest of my life because he made such a monumental impact in my life that our friendship has been deeply stamped into my heart. I met Joel I was in the depths of grieving the death of my father. My dad died when I was 14 and for 2 years the way that I dealt with my grief was to shove it down inside of me. I did not talk about it with anyone for 2 years, not even my family, my sister or my mother. The level of conversation that I had with my family and my closest friends was surface. It had to do with what's happening today and what we were eating for dinner. We never had a conversation about how I was feeling about the loss of my father, how I was processing through that.

Then I started taking guitar lessons from a guy at our church named Joel. And as we got together on a weekly basis to study guitar, a friendship formed. And for some reason we connected on a level that allowed me the space to be able to open up and to talk about my grief and where I was at with the Lord and with my emotional life. And after I had opened up to Joel I was able to then open up to others, to my family and to other friends and to really begin a process of healing. But Joel reached out to me; Joel grabbed a hold of me and would not settle for a surfacy friendship. He wouldn't settle for conversations that never went deeper than a G chord on the guitar or went deeper than, "what did you do this weekend?" Joel reached into me and asked questions of substance and drew me out to a place of openness with Joel and openness with God. Joel prayed with me and he brought the truth of God's word to bear on the grief I was experiencing. And this is what friends do they help you when you can't help yourself.

Now, I want you to notice something there though in the text that is very important. Notice that the friends of this paralyzed man are not the ones that solve his problems. They're not the ones that bring healing to him. What the friends do to help this paralyzed man is that they bring him to Jesus so that Jesus can heal him. And this is easy to confuse, if you are in the place of receiving help from a friend or you're in the place of helping one of your friends, it's so easy to slip into the lie that it is my responsibility to heal my friend, to fix my whatever the problem is that's happening to my friend. And that just is not the case, that's impossible. We can't fix one another, we can't heal one another. What we can do to help one another is that we bring the person in need to God. We bring God's truth into their life, we bring God's power into their life by praying with them and we bring them into the place where they can meet with Jesus and receive healing from God.

So the first benefit of community is *having people to help you when you can't help yourself*. The second benefit of community that we see in this text is that *you have people that don't give up on you when things are hard*.

**SLIDE:**

**Having people that don't give up on you when things are hard**

And we see this in the next verse, let's look at Luke 5:19.

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 5:19 (TNIV)**

**When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.**

So these friends try to help the paralyzed man to get to Jesus but they find they can't do it. They cannot make the way into the house. But when they meet this resistance, this obstacle, they don't give up; they get creative. So they climb up on the roof and somehow hoist this paralytic up and they start digging through the roof. They go to extreme measures here in order to bring their friend to Jesus. And the text says, in fact, right in front of Jesus, was where the paralyzed man ended up. What an image of friendship, of community, of sticking with one another, even when things get hard.

What I love about our small groups is that I hear stories like this so often. I often hear that our small group leaders stick by people in their group through the highs and lows of the messy walk of faith toward Jesus. People in your small group may relapse back into addiction, back into depression, back into sexual sin, back into issues that you've been working with them on, praying with them about, counseling them on, and then they go right back again and stumble and fall. Part of what we do as Christian leaders and Christian community is that we don't give up on people when things get hard. We continue to love and to care for those that are in need, those that are suffering, even those that are causing destruction to themselves. Part of what the commitment of Christian community means is that we don't give up on those among us that are struggling even when it's hard.

The third benefit of Christian community is having people that believe God for you when you don't believe in yourself.

**SLIDE:**

**Having people that believe God for you when you don't believe in yourself**

The next verse, verse 20, contains a fascinating phrase, let's read.

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 5:20 (TNIV)**

**When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”**

Isn't that interesting, that Jesus saw the faith of the friends and said to the paralytic, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." You would expect this to say, when Jesus saw "his" faith, the paralytic's faith, that he says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." But that's not what it says. It says that Jesus saw the faith that the friends had for the paralytic. And this is something that friends do in Christian community. That we believe God for a person's life even if they have lost hope, they don't believe in themselves, we believe God for them. And even if you can't see what your gifts are, what your talents are, often it's a lot easier for other people around you to see that and to speak that into your life, which is why encouragement is such a crucial part of being in Christian community. That we would be people that love and encourage one another. You don't just think secret, silent thoughts about the good things that you see in other people. As Christians we speak those out. It's so important to speak into somebody what they are great at, what you see in their life of benefit, the things that they do really well, the things that they're doing that are so valuable to others. It's good to speak that out and tell that person what you see in them. And to speak with faith of what God has for them in their life because often it's so hard to see that for ourselves.

So, these are three benefits that we receive when we open ourselves up to be a part of Christian community. But there's so much more that God has for us in community. Beyond just the benefits of community, in this text we see the blessing of Christian community.

**SLIDE:**

**The blessing of Christian community**

See the difference between a benefit and a blessing is that a blessing is something that God does. And when you open yourself up to real relationships with other Christians in the body of Christ, here's the blessing. That God will use other Christians to work His miracles in your life.

**SLIDE:**

**God uses other Christians to work His miracles in your life**

So back to this story, we see that these friends DID help this paralytic when he couldn't help himself. They didn't give up on him when things got difficult but they got creative and kept going and they believed God for him when he couldn't believe for himself. And the result is that God worked a double miracle of

forgiveness of this man's sins and a miraculous healing of his paralysis. Look at verse 20.

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 5:20-26 (TNIV)**

**20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."**

**21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**

**22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."**

So Jesus works this miraculous healing, he forgive this mans sins' and yet He never would have done any of this if it wasn't for the paralyzed man's friends, his community, people that loved him and cared about him. And this is why it's so important that you don't neglect this ingredient in the soil of spiritual growth, because God works miracles of healing, of restoration, of forgiveness, through the people that God places in our lives. One of the primary ways that God wants to work in your life is through other Christians that God has placed in your life, to speak to truth into you, to help you, to love you, to care for you, to listen for the Lord for you, to pray for you, to stand with you through thick and thin, through hard things and to celebrate the great things of life with you. This is part of how God works in our lives, not just through a spiritual IV that plugs in straight from heaven down into your body so God can pump his blessings and miracles into you, NO, God works through people in the church community. Through the people that God has placed in your life, if you're already connected into community and if you're not, the people that God desires to connect you in with. So if you're not yet connected into community in Joshua House, I want to invite you to make that commitment before the Lord tonight. That you would say, as a part of my commitment to spiritual growth this year, as a part of my desire to become more like Jesus, I am not going to neglect the essential component of community in my spiritual growth. So, even though it's not convenient to join a small group, you've got enough going on in your life with work, with school and family and other obligations, I want to ask that you might consider making this a

priority. That you would not neglect the conditions that you need for spiritual growth, but that you would make them a priority in your life.

**PASTOR PLUG:**

**Joshua House Campus Ministry Party in the Lobby, after the service**

## **Growing by *Discovering Community***

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Jonathan Rue  
Luke 5:17-26  
Growing in God Series  
09.27.09

### **The desire for community**

To have people love and care about you

### **The definition of Christian community**

People that:

3. Love God
4. Love one another
5. Share life together

### **The benefits of community**

Having people to help you when you can't help yourself (v. 18)

Having people that don't give up on you when things are hard (v. 19)

Having people that believe God for you when you don't believe in yourself (v. 20)

### **The blessing of Christian community**

God uses other Christians to work His miracles in your life  
(v. 20, 24)