



# Community

“Community” may be defined as a “unified body of individuals.”<sup>1</sup> The basis of “unity” may vary, including shared location, customs, beliefs, interests, relationships, etc. Members of a community share a sense of belonging to the group. What does the Bible say about community?

## Christian Community

The word “community” is not always used in English translations of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> However, other words and concepts convey the sense of community. *Christian* community is conveyed by terms such as “fellowship”<sup>3</sup> and “the body of Christ.” The basis of true unity in *Christian* community is relationship to God *in* Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

📖 “And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (*1 John 1:3b*).

## Created for Community

Mankind was made for human relationships. After creating the first man, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (*Genesis 2:18*). Community is part of God’s design. Christians were created anew for true fellowship. As Christians, we were born into God’s family (*John 1:12-13*) and baptized into “the body of Christ” to fulfill God’s purpose for us.



## Formed for God’s Family

We become part of God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ.

📖 “Yet to all who did receive [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (*John 1:12-13, NIV*).

Family members have a special love for one another. Paul wrote, “...let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (*Galatians 6:10, NIV*). God’s children should honor and reflect the Father. Paul wrote, “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (*Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV; also see 1 John 3:1-10*).

## Baptized into “the Body”

Every Christian is a part of “the body of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> The body metaphor is a helpful illustration of Christian community. To be “in the body” we must be united with Christ through faith, for he “is the head of the body, the church” (*Colossians 1:18*). The body is dependent on “the head” who leads and directs it, and supplies what it needs “as each part does its work” (*Eph. 4:16*).

<sup>1</sup> *Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1998), 232. This is a ‘strong’ definition of community. Many definitions emphasize commonality (sharing something in common) over unity (oneness, togetherness).

<sup>2</sup> The word ‘community’ is not used in the English Standard Version (ESV). The New International Version (NIV) uses the word 84 times in the Old Testament but only once in the New Testament (*Acts 25:24*).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Fellowship’ (*koinonia*) means ‘having in common, sharing, participating together, partnership.’

<sup>4</sup> ICF (International Christian Fellowship) provides a ‘community.’ In a broad sense, this ‘community’ involves all regular participants who voluntarily associate because of common interests, whether it be Bible study, general interest in Christianity, or just the desire to be around Christian people. However, the ICF ‘core community’ consists of Christians who are united in Christ through faith in him. Non-Christians should be able to learn more about Christianity by observing how Christians love one another in ‘Christian community’ or ‘fellowship.’

<sup>5</sup> Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 3:6; Colossians 1:18; 2:19; 3:15.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.<sup>6</sup> In general, how would you summarize the main points of this passage? List words or short phrases to summarize it.<sup>7</sup>
2. How should this correct or encourage Christians, as they view themselves, and as they view their brothers and sisters?



## Cultivating Community

Community needs to be “cultivated” (helped to grow, develop, and strengthen). Cultivating community involves particular human actions and attitudes. What does the Bible say?

3. Considering the following Bible passages, what actions or attitudes are needed to cultivate community?
  - Acts 2:42-47<sup>8</sup>
  - Hebrews 10:24-25
  - Ephesians 4:1-6<sup>9</sup>



Cultivating community involves loving others. We need to pray that God would fill us with his love and empower us to love one another (*1 John 4:7-21*). We need to understand how we are to relate to one another. It is helpful to reflect on the “one another commands.”<sup>10</sup>

4. What are other practical ways to cultivate community? What are practical ways to cultivate community within ICF?

## Reflection/Application

- Do you desire *true fellowship* in the Christian community? You must first have true fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you need to trust in Christ?
- Brothers & sisters, are you regularly involved in Christian fellowship? Are you doing your part? Make specific commitments to participate in and cultivate Christian community.

<sup>6</sup> This passage is in the context of Paul’s instructions concerning ‘spiritual gifts,’ particularly Christians’ attitudes concerning their gifts compared to others. This lesson will not focus on the spiritual gifts themselves but rather the general idea of unity and diversity within the body of Christ. For a more detailed study of this passage, see ‘Unity and Diversity’ under ‘Being a Christian in the Modern World (A Study of 1 Corinthians)’ on the ICF website.

<sup>7</sup> Suggestions: unity (*12:12-13*), diversity (*12:14-24*), God-arranged (*12:18*), interdependence (*12:21*), value of each part (*12:22-24*), concern and empathy for each other (*12:25-26*). Concerning unity, we might observe much disunity among ‘Christians.’ However, there are two aspects of unity. The *fundamental* unity of genuine Christians is union with Christ, regardless of disagreement on particular issues. The *realized* unity of Christians requires effort. Thus we are instructed to ‘Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ (*Eph. 4:3*).

<sup>8</sup> ‘breaking of bread’ (v. 42) probably refers to the Lord’s Supper, though sharing meals in general is also good!

<sup>9</sup> Attitudes include humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, commitment to unity *in Christ*. A similar passage (Colossians 3:12-15) adds compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and peacemaking. To have these Christ-like attitudes, we need to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We need the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (*Galatians 5:22-23*).

<sup>10</sup> Go to BibleGateway.com and search for the exact phrases ‘one another’ and ‘each other’ in the New Testament.