

Influence Ministries

30-DAY CHURCH CHALLENGE

LESSON 1

TITLE: CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY.

Welcome to the 30-Day Church Challenge!

Turn to the person next to you and say, "I'm glad you're here."

And say, "What we're going to experience together will change your life - if you let it."

Acts 2:42-47 -NIV

42 The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together. They broke bread and ate together. And they prayed.

43 Everyone felt that God was near. The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs.

44 All the believers were together. They shared everything they had.

45 They sold what they owned. They gave each other everything they needed.

46 Every day they met together in the temple courtyard. In their homes they broke bread and ate together. Their hearts were glad and honest and true.

47 They praised God. They were respected by all the people. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

I heard recently about a little guy who was playing out in his yard one day. A man came down the street looking frustrated. He said to the boy, "Son, I'm lost. Can you tell me how to get to the post office?"

The boy said, "Sure, just go to the stop sign and turn left. It's right around the corner."

The man thanked him and said, "By the way, I'm the new pastor in town. If you come to my church on Sunday, I'll tell you how to get to heaven."

The little boy thought for a minute and said, "No thanks. You don't even know how to get to the post office."

Folks, I actually DO know how to get to the post office.

And over the next thirty days, I want to help you get to a place you've never been before.

I want to help you and our church reach our God-given potential. Today we're starting an adventure we're calling, "The 30-Day Church Challenge."

The dictionary defines a challenge as: "a call to take part in a contest or competition."

We are going to do what the church once did, in Acts chapter 2, to become the church God wants us to be and to experience spiritual life at a deeper level.

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1. The Power of a Challenge

In 1930, a Scotsman named Kurt Hahn invented a wilderness learning experience that he called, Outward Bound. Have you heard of it? Think backpacking, white-water rafting, dog sledding, rock-climbing ...

Hahn believed that character development is as important as academic achievement, and he found that when people were put in challenging, adventurous situations, they gained confidence, redefined their perceptions of their personal capabilities, demonstrated compassion for others, and developed a spirit of camaraderie with their peers. In his leadership of Outward Bound, what Hahn discovered was that ...

A. Personal growth accelerates in challenging situations.

His wilderness challenges were so effective that over the past eighty years thousands of people have given up weeks of their lives and paid significant amounts of money to climb mountains, hike challenging trails, canoe down river rapids, and rappel off wicked cliffs.

Today, Outward Bound sponsors wilderness adventures in more than thirty countries, helping people grow in character through the power of a challenge that stretches them in ways they wouldn't normally stretch themselves.

B. People grow better when we do it together.

By our very nature, we grow better when we decide to tackle challenges together. Every Sunday during this series, I will issue a new challenge related to one of the four purposes of the church that we'll be studying.

Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to step up to the challenge.

By this time next month, you'll have discovered how our church can help you reach your God-given potential, strengthen your own relationship with God, and how we can become a church that transforms our community and our world!

Our objective is that at the end of this four-week 30-Day Church Challenge we won't just come to church, we will become the church: a community of faith—powerful, inspirational, and transformational—touching our community and the world with the power of the Gospel!

So, are you ready to begin the challenge? If so, say, "I'm up for it!"

Every one of our challenges will be related to one of the four purposes of the church. According to the passage:

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2. The Four Purposes of the Church are to.

- a. Cultivate authentic community.
- b. Experience worship as part of your daily lifestyle.
- c. Take successive steps of spiritual growth.
- d. Reach out to the world around us.

So those are the challenges we'll be mastering over the next four weeks, and the first is cultivating authentic community.

The Acts 2 church excelled at that; they devoted themselves to the church and to each other.

The people in that church made time for relationships. *Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the fellowship."*

They cultivated authentic community.

One of the things you discover when you get involved in a really good church is that the church isn't a building you go to, it's a family you belong to.

So, how do you experience that?

C. How to Experience Authentic Community

You make time for it.

You commit to a group of people on a weekly basis.

You make it such a priority that you show up every week.

Because relationships don't just happen, you and I need to deliberately make time for them.

We can't have deep relationships with everyone, but we can cultivate some authentic relationships with a few.

Our first week's challenge in the 30-Day Church Challenge is to commit to attending church so that you can experience the power of authentic community.

Can you commit to making church a priority for the next four Sundays?

Once you've made that commitment, the second step in authentic community is:

You contribute to it. A good church bonds and gels when the members of the group make a conscious effort to be contributors to the church.

The bottom line is that you learn to do life together, speak the truth in love to one another, and make each other's lives better as a result of it.

The third step in building great community is ...

You take a genuine interest in the lives of others.

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This is usually fairly easy for women, but it's not all that easy for men. Men compartmentalize things. But men, at least during your group every week, I'm going to ask you to take a genuine interest in what's going on in the life of the other people in your group. Then, in your prayer time, which I hope you'll have every morning, I hope you'll take a minute to sincerely pray for God's hand on each of the members of your group each day.

So, what does authentic community feels like? What is its effect?

D. What authentic community feels like and its impact:

Psalm 133 -Common English Bible

Look at how good and pleasing it is when families live together as one!

That phrase, "when families live together as one," is what we call "community".

Many of us are too busy looking for the good life elsewhere.

We're involved in our kids' Little League, which is a good thing.

We're involved in a career, which is a good thing.

There are family chores, exercise, paying bills, watching TV, taking vacations, and so many other things that are at our fingertips that it's easy to miss one of the most important things.

Let me ask you a few questions:

Do you want the joy and unity that community brings?

Do you want the spirit of celebration that doing life together with others brings?

Do you want to bring life and refreshment to your family, your friends, and your acquaintances?

Are you willing to invest some time in order to do that?

Shout YES.

Say: "I want that. I'm up for that. I'm willing to invest in that."

In my opinion you'll get the most out of this 30-Day Church Challenge by attending the weekend service so you're up on the subject for the week.

For the next thirty days we are entering into an accelerated learning challenge where we will do things together to make us better every week and every day.