

Sermon Title: Cultivate Community, On Mission, Week One

Preacher: Greg Lavine

Date: January 4, 2026

Sermon Questions:

1. What are some cultural obstacles to you having healthy community? How much do busyness, phones, screen time, or other factors fight against you?
2. America prizes rugged individualism. How much does your mind think individually as apposed to communal?
3. God prizes community. Which of the six principles in the sermon stood out to you the most regarding how important community is to God? (1. All God's purposes flow from the trinity. 2. Designed for community. 3. God is redeeming a family. 4 Heaven on earth. 5. Light in darkness. 6. Fruit of the Spirit).
4. How would you evaluate the health and depth of community in your lives right now?
5. How can you prioritize cultivating community in your life?

Sermon Transcript

So it's possible as we dive into God's word this morning that you feel a little bit hoodwinked or boondoggled or schmoozed, I don't know, you know, that there's a bait and switch going on. Because if you've seen the title of the series we're going to, it's on Mission. And it talks about our purpose and in a sense, discovering our purpose in the world. Our mission in the world. And this morning we're going to dwell specifically on cultivating community.

Now we say this phrase every week to cultivate a community that enjoys God and transforming the world through the gospel. But cultivate community is oftentimes just viewed as this little add on, like enjoying God. Yes, transforming the world through the gospel, yes. But cultivating community, maybe that's okay for the church, but it doesn't sound like this invigorating, exciting mission or purpose for us. We look at callings in scripture.

So this is in the book of Jeremiah, in the first chapter. Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you were born, I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations. We hear things like that and we think. I mean, Jeremiah was called by God for a purpose.

Abraham was called by God for a purpose. David was called by God for a purpose. Isaiah was called by God for a purpose. I mean, angels came down, anointing him, taking a cold Isaiah's mouth, cleansing him so that he could proclaim the gospel in the world. And we're called to make a difference in this world, to push back darkness and shine light.

And so we get invigorated with the idea that that is a calling on our lives and we want to make a difference. And yes, we should all make a difference.

So cultivate a community. We think of purpose and mission individually because we're a rugged, individualist country. We think individually. But hear me well, if we do not start with community, what we do as individuals becomes perhaps worthless.

Worthless. I know that's a strong statement.

All of God's purposes flow out of community. Community. We don't have much community in today's world. My grandma had this belief that God or that Satan was destroying America with the creation of the air conditioning. That kind of tells you the generation.

She also said the air conditioning, that's how Satan's destroying this country.

When I had a family, we all sat on the front porch every evening. Neighbors would walk by and there's a sense of community. And the whole family was together in about a 10 foot square. Now People just drive by and go in their garages like it's this private fortress. There's no community, no one walking by.

Everybody goes inside. Air conditioning in every room. Now you're split up in different places. It's the destruction of the family and of community. That's what she said.

I don't know that that's entirely true. Although everything in our culture does push against community. Screen time, entertainments, busyness. We are pushed further and further away from community. Even if we just went back a generation ago, like 1950.

Like the number of bowling leagues in 1950 is pretty astounding. You don't have that stuff anymore. Everybody's scattered around, going so fast. You don't really have relationships in any given place.

I'm going to walk through five principles in scripture that tie community to. To mission. And

we have to. We have to start here. The first principle.

All God's purposes flow from the Trinity. All of God's purposes, all of God's mission, all of God's work. It flows from the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So from eternity past, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have lived in perfect community.

The Father has essentially had a mindset of how can I glorify the Son? The Son has essentially had the mindset of how can I glorify the Father and draw attention to Him? The Holy Spirit has had a mindset, how do I lift up the Father and the Son and how do I shine their glory throughout all space?

Community in its purest form. Encouragement and love and blessing flowing from one to another. I'm going to go back to the beginning. In the book of Genesis. In chapter one, it says this.

Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heaven, and over the livestock, and over all the earth and. And over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God. He created him.

Male and female. He created them. When we read God saying, let us make man in our image, there is a trinitarian background to that. It is God saying, let us make man in our image. At the bare minimum, you have a scene here in which God is gathered in a throne room with a multitude of angels.

He's saying, let us make God in our image. And so he makes us in his image with community knit inside of us. Our need for community, our dependence on community, to encourage, to bless, to care for, to forgive, to love others. All of God's purposes flow out of this. The passage just goes, so God created man in his own image.

The word man there is simply the word human in many respects, Adam or Adam, although Adam and Eve are not mentioned yet. So chapter one, Genesis, deals with creation of male and female. Chapter two goes into the story of Adam and Eve. But here it says, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female. He created them. You say, who's the them? It's not Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve come about in chapter two.

This is a story of creation over all. And a universal mindset of all of church history would unify that. When it says male and female, he created them. He created humanity. He created human beings, male and female, not simply Adam and Eve.

That's true, but he made all human beings, male and female, creating them. We are created in his image, you and I, not just Adam and Eve. We are created in his image.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, submitting to each other, loving each other, encouraging each other, glorifying each other, with a dependency between them. And he makes us in that image. We all the purposes of God, all the mission of God flows out of the Trinity. A second principle we are designed for community. Staying here in Genesis, at the very beginning, we'll go into chapter two.

Now, into the story of Adam and Eve specifically. But it says this. Then the Lord God said, verse 18, chapter 2. It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

Now, this passage stands out in scripture because in the six days of creation, everything is good. He creates light. On the first day, there was evening and morning. And it says, and God saw that it was good. Day two, God saw that it was good.

Day three, God saw that it was good. Over each of the days, God saw that it was good. But now on day six, after. After creating all the animals and Adam specifically, God steps back and says, it's not good. It's not good.

Sin has not entered the world. Adam and Eve have not fallen into sin yet. That's chapter three. So here before sin, in the perfect paradise of the Garden of Eden, something is not good. And what's not good is that Adam was alone with all the other animals.

He didn't belong. And God said, it's not good for human beings to be alone. It's not good for Adam to be alone. So he made a helper for him, and along comes Eve. Now, that applies to every single one of us.

And it's not an application directly to Marriage, you could say, well, wait, wait. In that passage, it's not saying that it's not good for any of us to be alone. It's just not good for man to be alone. And so he created marriage. It's not a marriage passage.

So if you assume that, you assume it wrongly.

But let's just say you want to assume it wrongly. Even if you assume it wrongly, I'd go to Ephesians, chapter 5 and say marriage itself is pointing to Jesus Christ and the church.

Every marriage, every husband and wife relationship, Christian or not, is simply a reflection of the true intimacy that Jesus has with the church, his bride. We are designed for community. Genesis points us there. We're made for it, we're created for it, we're designed for it. All of God's purposes flow from the Trinity, and we are designed for community.

Number three, God is redeeming a family. This is an enormous one. So first Peter, chapter two. We read this in chapter nine, or verse nine. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Now, strong aspect of this passage. First off, it's quoting numerous Old Testament passages from Deuteronomy and elsewhere, saying, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. There's communal language all through the beginning, and it ties with purpose, saying, you're a holy nation, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies. Your purpose flows out of your community.

It doesn't flow out of simply individuals.

You could step back. Okay, wait a minute. Pastor. Like Abraham, he had his own calling. Isaac had his own calling.

Jacob had his own calling. Moses had his own calling. Isaiah had his own calling.

I don't want to walk away and say there's no application to individuals when we talk about the purpose of God for your life or the mission of God for your life. Certainly there are applications individually. But hear me well when I say the primary application of God's purposes are not for any individual. We are not Moses or Isaiah or Daniel. First off, none of them, none of them, not a single one of them walked in that promise of really being the holy nation, the royal priesthood.

For none of them had the Holy Spirit inside of them. None of them were born again.

A Christian is someone who has the Holy Spirit of God inside of them, making them new

from the inside, who has made them a part of a Family, a royal priesthood, a chosen people. At the highest extreme, God anoints and ordains a family. He is redeeming a family.

The work of the cross was not primarily to save simply individual people.

The work of the cross is to redeem a family with God as our Father, with Jesus as our firstborn brother, knit together as a family.

Consider the words and names and images used for the Church. I'm not going to go to references for each one of these, but I want to just glance at a passage for the first one. So in Ephesians chapter two, reading of the church, we read this in verse 19. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens. In other words, you're no longer alone.

You used to be, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. The church is the household of God. The church is the family of God. The building of God. In Ephesians 2.

The family of God. First John, chapter 3. The temple of God. The dwelling place of God. First Peter 2.

The city of God. Revelation, chapter 21. His people. Revelation 21. Of Christ on earth.

First Corinthians 12. The flock of God. John, chapter 10. The bride of Christ. Ephesians chapter 5.

We are the vineyard of God, the people of God. And every single one of those titles goes back to mission and purpose.

Every title for the church. When we say the body of Christ, we're not just looking at some kind of image. We're saying we are the physical body of Christ. The hands and feet of Jesus Christ. The presence of Jesus Christ here on this earth.

God has ordained that he would redeem a people, not simply a group of individuals, but a people. For he has a mission and a purpose for a people. All God's purposes flow from the Trinity. We are designed for community. God is redeeming a family.

A fourth principle in Scripture showing our need for community. Heaven on earth. The disciples came to Jesus. They said, Jesus, would you teach us how to pray? How ought we

to pray?

And Jesus taught his disciples how to pray and gave what we oftentimes call the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If you've ever prayed the Lord's Prayer, you've prayed for heaven to be manifest on earth.

Heaven is manifest on earth through the community of God's people. In John chapter 13, Jesus is teaching the disciples about this new commandment of loving one another. And he says this in verse 35. By this all people will know that you are my disciples. If you have loved for one another, all people will know that you are followers of Christ by the way you love one another, the way you forgive one another, the way you carry one another's burdens, the way you take care of one another, encourage one another, share grace with one another in Jesus.

High Priestly Prayer In John chapter 17, he continues this thought by saying these words. This is verse 21 and 22 of John 17. That they may all be one. He's praying specifically for us. That they that we may all be one.

Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you. That they also may be in us. You can say, well, that sounds like it's Trinity talk that goes back to the very beginning, that all God's purposes, all God's mission flow from the Trinity. But hear the words of this passage. That they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.

That they may also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me. Our mission flows out of our oneness. It flows out of being that redeemed family. Heaven on earth flows out of people loving each other. In a world in which it seems like human beings can't disagree respectfully, in a world in which human beings are constantly driven towards war, there is a people of God who show what it's like to love.

A people of God who forgive. A people of God who have mercy and compassion for one another over and over and over. This is our calling. There are lots of ways that you can see the glory of God in this world. You sit back and watch a sunset and the colors fill the sky.

It's beautiful. It's radiant. You see a blue whale crest and twist on top of an ocean surface, and it's majestic, it's powerful, it's beautiful. You see the rain across a valley over a mountain. You see a rainbow fill the sky as the rain falls down.

You watch a saguaro pop its ribs out and absorbs some of the water. There's lots of ways to see God's glory. But there is one way above every other way. You see God's glory in this world. And that is when Christians love each other.

It's how you see God sent his son. It's how you see that we are born again. It's how you see the work of the cross, the miracles of God, the glory of God, Jesus saying. You see these things primarily most clearly when two human beings forgive each other, when two human beings walk in the splendor of redemption and the cross, to love each other, to encourage each other to care for one another. Principle number Light in darkness.

Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. It says, you are the salt of the earth. Now when he says that, he's not saying individual people, you are the salt of the earth. He's looking out at his people saying plurally, you together are the salt of the earth. Now is there an application in this where we could each say, well, yeah, I need to be salt in this world.

Yes, every individual can apply it, but it does not start there. We are the salt of the earth. Jesus says, you are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bushel. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine.

Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world.

How is that accomplished in community? Again, when people forgive each other, love each other, care for each other, we're driven to this. If we're going to consider our purpose, if we're going to consider our mission, we have to start with community. We have to.

A sixth principle. Fruit of the Spirit. Fruit of the Spirit. In the book of Galatians, a fairly prominent passage about what it is when the Spirit of God is in us. Anybody want the Spirit of God in them?

What is it when the Spirit of God is in us? But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. Against such things, there is no law. You ever noticed you can't practice the Fruit of the Spirit alone?

I mean, maybe you could stretch it out. Well, I'm patient with myself.

Patience doesn't get tried. Love doesn't get tried. Peace doesn't get tried. Until there's community.

Everything about the Fruit of the Spirit requires a living in community in order to be played out over and over throughout the New Testament. There are one another passages. There's over 61 another passages in Scripture saying that who we are as the people of God is to be kind to one another, to forgive one another, to encourage one another, to. To serve one another, to wash one another's feet, to welcome one another, to greet one another, to bear one another's burdens, to exhort one another's, to show hospitality to one another, to live in harmony with one another, to comfort one another, to submit to one another, to confess to one another, to be clothed with humility towards one another. And the grand poobah of all of them, to love one another.

Sixteen times. It says, to love one another. To love one another.

Our purpose, our mission starts here. It starts in a communal relationship with others in which we are submitting and loving and forgiving one another.

So how do we apply the six principles? All God's purposes flow from the Trinity. We are designed for community. God is redeeming a family. Heaven on earth, light in darkness, fruit of the spirit.

How do we apply this? Two practical takeaways. First off, renew our minds. We think individually. We read scripture, you are the salt of the earth.

And our default as human beings is to apply that to ourselves. When Jesus said, you are the salt of the earth, he's talking to me. After all, Jesus would have died only for me. I have a personal relationship with God. Therefore I am the salt of the earth.

I am the light of the world. We think individually and we need to renew our minds. For while there's a measure of truth in all of those, and it's good to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God never designed any of us to have an individual relationship with Jesus Christ.

To have an individual relationship is to be born into a family.

If you are a Christian, you have brothers and sisters, and there is a calling to dwell in community, to live out purposes in community.

So let's renew our minds. A second takeaway is to prioritize cultivating community. Prioritize it. This applies to every person in this room, every person listening, every person in the Gladden campus applies to all of us. If you look at your life right now and think, well, community.

I'm in community. How do we go deeper? Or maybe you evaluate your life and you're kind of in the shallow places. I will be the first to raise my hand. Community is messy.

Community is challenging. Even to talk of family, family's challenging. Like, anybody get enough of family this week? You know, it's fantastic. So we had family living in our house, grandkids.

And it was awesome. But it's, hey, it had its moments.

There are very real preference differences between family members. We were at a grocery store picking up some Gatorade and snacks for a hike that we were going on, and the kids picked out some Gatorade, which I thought was great. They got the Gatorade and we're walking down and, and lo and behold, I led them to the wrong Gatorade. So I read them to the regular Gatorade and then it was pointed out, no, no, no, no, no, that has a bunch of sugar in it. Let's get the diet Gatorade, the zero Gatorade.

And I sat back and I thought, well, it's got a bunch of chemicals in it. So lo and behold, I'll just confess, I'm a sugar guy. I like sugar. I like it in all forms. I like honey, I like maple syrup.

I like sugar. I don't like chemicals. That's my line in life. If it has chemicals in it, the more chemicals, the farther I push it away from my body. But I have family members who are pro chemical and anti sugar.

And there we were and I had to be in the wrong. So we put back the good stuff and walked out with the chemical infused stuff. Family. The preference differences came out on a daily basis. There were some who wanted to just stay home and bake cookies.

There were others who wanted to be busy going, doing stuff constantly. There was some measure of siblings issues. My baby was the baby. And so she grew up being the baby, living

like the baby, being treated as the baby. But now she's not a baby anymore.

She's a grown adult, functioning on her own in glorious, beautiful ways. But she came home and slid into this mode where the siblings were treating her as the baby. And by her own admission, she started to act like the baby. Dad, I'm a grown adult. Why do I act this way?

Why do I let this happen? Hey, this is the joy of family. This is what it is. Every family's dealing with it. It's a complicated mess.

Our interests are different. There are people who help out with chores and people who don't. I don't want to talk too long about that one because.

But it's true in the church too. If you get together in community, I can promise you you're going to have someone in your group who just prays too long. They're going to pray and it's like a whole sermon. Like a couple of, you know, minute, minute and a half into the prayer, you're like, like, how long you praying for? He heard you.

There's other people that are going to be, fix it people. So if you share a prayer request, I just, I'm really struggling in this area. They're not going to mourn with you, they're not going to cry with you, they're not going to just pray for you. They're going to say, hey, have you read this book? They're going to give you all the solutions to fix you.

There's going to be super spiritual people who spiritualize everything, who don't know what just normal life is. It always has to be this hyper spiritual reality. There's going to be people who eat different than you, who treat wine different than you. There's going to be people who one up your stories all the time. We are human beings.

I am not naive to this calling of community.

But here's the thing. The gospel, our mission and purpose in life depends on us getting community. Right?

We have to, we have to be a family or we leave our purpose behind us. It is a beautiful thing to forgive each other, encourage each other, love each other. It's why we talk of groups so much. You'll hear things like this around here. So next steps, you know, go.

If you have not connected, go to next steps. It's our pathway to partnership. But it's a way to

learn about the church and start an initial connection. If you've done that, we talk about service, discovering your spiritual gifts and serving. It's why you'll hear about those things all the time.

We share the dates with you. We got a couple coming up. We'll talk about rooted. So that's our launching pad for small groups. It's just a trial of a small group.

We hope many of them continue on as small groups, but it's just a trial of a small group. Why is it a trial? Because relationships are messy. But you'll hear us as a church, prioritize those all the time. There's rooted groups starting right around the corner.

There's next step groups starting around the corner. Why? Because community is that important. So when we say every week that we exist to cultivate a community that enjoys God and transforms the world through the gospel, there's a reason it starts with cultivating a community.

We have to be the church. We have to be the church now. A great privilege that we have to close. Today's service is coming before the Lord's table in communion.

It is the one thing that unites us. What makes us a family? Jesus. What makes us a family? The blood of Jesus flowing through our veins.

We become one because of the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ. So if you're at home, I would invite you to go and get communion elements here in the room. We have communion elements in the back, up front. If you have not grabbed them, please Come up and grab communion elements and you can take them back into your seat.

The Lord's table Communion is open to anyone who has surrendered their life to Jesus, who has come to Jesus and said, Jesus, I want you to be my Lord and my Savior.

You hear sometimes the phrase blood is thicker than water. And oftentimes people will use that statement today to talk of how family is the most important thing. Blood is thicker than water. The origin of that statement was not that family was the most important thing. In fact, it was the opposite.

Blood is thicker than water. The water of birth, the water breaks.

That being united in the family of God is the highest form of family in this world.

I spoke of family things earlier. Possible you listened to that and you thought I was alone for the holidays. I struggle to connect.

May you feel an invitation this morning into a family for no one to be alone, where brothers and sisters in Christ are knit together because of his word in us. On that night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and after giving thanks, he broke it.

He said, this is my body broken for you. We are to take this and eat this in remembrance of Him.

And so I'm going to pray that this spiritually becomes for us the body of Christ.

Lord, we're in awe of what you accomplished on the cross.

And on the one hand, we come as individuals and ask that you would cleanse and wash. We also come as community and ask that you would take us deeper into your presence together.

For your body was broken for us individually and it was broken for us as your people.

So would you anoint this bread to become your body broken for us spiritually and unite us even as we receive it. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. The body of Christ broken for you and for me.

Likewise, on that night, Jesus took the cup.

He said, this is the cup of the new covenant poured out in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. Again, the covenant of God is certainly for us individually.

May every person listening to this have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in which there is a conversation that is continual. May you have sweet moments of worship, losing yourself in his presence where you know that you are in the palm of his hand. This covenant is bigger than just us.

He is redeeming a family, a people, which includes Christians and includes some non Christians who are not Christians yet.

For his love is much bigger than just us. So as we receive the cup, may be that our prayer is not only to be washed clean, but that his power would flow through us, that there'd be more tongues to praise him. That his glory would be spread on this earth through his people. So, Lord, I do pray that you would anoint this cup to be spiritually your blood shed for us. And even as you died for us individually and died to redeem a community, may it be that drinking this cup, your work is done in our life in such a way that we live in a glorious way, in deep intimacy, loving each other so well, the world sits back in awe.

For this blood of Christ is a unique thing, a beautiful thing.

So anoint it, Lord, as we receive the blood of Christ shed for you and for me.

So, Lord, change us, mold us, shape us, draw us deeper into your presence and deeper into the sweetness of community with your people. In Jesus name we pray. And everyone said Amen. Amen. Let's go ahead and stand as we close in song.