

True Community, Part 1

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 1 John 1. I'm going to begin reading there. It says, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The life that was made manifest, and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

Verse 3. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you. So that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Verse 4. And we are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

[1 : 16] This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Verse 8. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Verse 10. And if we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. Chapter 2, verse 1. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the world.

[2 : 42] That is the word of God. The only authoritative and inerrant word we have.

Well, school is back, and we're all looking forward to fall break. You know, each of the last several years, I've enjoyed reading a list each August put out by several college professors to describe this year's freshman college class.

And so these are just a list to describe them. Begins, when they see wire-rimmed glasses, they think Harry Potter, not John Lennon.

Got a few there. Pressing pound means nothing to them, only hashtag. They've grown up treating Wi-Fi as an entitlement.

And thankfully, they've never known dial-up. They have never licked a postage stamp. The NCAA has always had a precise means to determine a national champion in college football, which everybody disputes.

[4 : 05] Their proud parents recorded their first steps on camcorders mounted on their shoulders like bazookas. The Unabomber has always been behind bars.

At just a few weeks of age, two planes blasted into the World Trade Center, becoming something they were taught in school, though never a personal memory.

The notorious B.I.G., Kurt Cobain, John Candy, Andre the Giant, Princess Diana, and David Koresh were never alive in their lifetime.

And they never saw a new episode of Saved by the Bell, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, or Full House.

And perhaps most grievously, the Tennessee Vols football team has never been good. Most interesting at all, since this year's college freshmen were born, the world of technology has vastly changed the way we relate to one another.

[5 : 13] They have never known life without the Internet. They've never known a day where cell phones were not everywhere. Google was always there.

They were three years old when Facebook began, five when Twitter launched, nine when Instagram started, and it keeps coming. This week I received an email from a pastor saying, these are 15 apps every parent should know, and I only knew three of them.

So this world of technology keeps coming at them. With all these advances, our ability to communicate and connect with one another is seemingly endless. We're not in Kansas anymore. We're connected to the world.

In a moment, we can tweet musings to the world. We can recruit the likes of others through Instagram. We can catch up with that weird guy from seventh grade on Facebook. And these advances are vast and powerful.

Just two weeks ago, we were Facebook video chatting with Kim's aunt in Vietnam, which is incredible. No longer do you have to talk through Skype and make sure they have a camera and make sure they have a desktop.

[6 : 20] You just do it right there through your phone. But they connect us. And yet, all these advances have left us feeling more and more alone.

The very likes and comments we long for confirm the loneliness we feel. We're struggling to fit in and more disengaged than ever before.

A recent study reported that the number of people Americans discuss important matters with has dropped from an average of three to two in the last 20 years.

Now, that may seem three to two. That's not a big deal. That's a precipitous. That's a great drop. There's a growing consensus that the number one health crisis facing America right now is not cancer, obesity, or heart disease.

It's loneliness. One of our senators recently wrote a book I read. He said, What's wrong with America starts with one uncomfortable word. Loneliness.

[7 : 22] I mean, what should we do? I mean, should we delete all the apps? Move into the country? Throw our phones away? No, I don't think that would help that much.

Should we all move into a commune together so that we can really depend on one another? I think that would just be weird. Should we give up on finding friends that make a difference?

I mean, you know, if you have low expectations and you won't be disappointed, they say, Is it worth fighting for? Sometimes I wonder. Is true community worth fighting for?

This morning, we're going to look to 1 John, and I think we're going to find help. God calls us to honestly share our lives in community. Community simply is sharing our life in Christ together. Sharing our life in Christ together. And God invites us to share it. Let's dive into this passage and dive into God's word.

[8 : 28] First point is why. Why? Jesus calls us to honestly share our lives in community, but why? Why does he call us into community?

I mean, wouldn't it be better if we just took care of ourselves? If we minded our own business? You know? I mean, wouldn't it be better if we just did our thing and made sure few notice and know? Jesus calls us to share our lives in community, firstly, because the gospel restores fellowship with God and with one another. Remember, the first four verses of this passage, if you have it handy, it would be good to keep your nose in it.

The first four verses of this letter is just one long, tangled sentence. And you see the tangles almost immediately by this relative pronoun of which, which, that just keeps referring back to a noun, which we'll find out what that is.

But you see right there at the beginning, that which was from the beginning. Which we have heard. Which we have seen with our eyes. Which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands. Concerning the word of life. Life of this man met us, and we've seen it, testified to it.

[9 : 41] Which was with the Father and was made manifest. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you. So all these pronouns, all these relative pronouns are pointing back to the life that was made manifest.

Look down there in verse 2. So all those witnesses and then the life was made. That which we have heard, seen, looked upon, and touched with our hands.

So John's writing, and in some ways John's letter right here, it just sounds much like his other letter when he says, in the beginning God, the word was with God, and the word was God.

Here he says that which was from the beginning, but not just back there, but it was something which we touched. I mean, John began telling us that what he wants to tell us is not a dream or a story.

John's writing about something personal to him. Something he touched. Something he saw. Something he heard. Something touchable. The life made manifest.

[10:48] Simply put, Jesus Christ. John was an eyewitness. You know, at the scene of a crime, you know, they're trying to find a witness or a couple witnesses to testify to the crime.

Well, John heard, see, saw, and touched Jesus Christ. Again, we're reminded Christianity is tied to history, to the literal flesh and blood, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, of Nazareth, the man from Nazareth.

Historians say John lived, now this is just an anecdote, but historians say John lived well into his 90s in Ephesus. He continued to work closely with the churches there, and he continued to tell others the stories.

Isn't that incredible? That which he's all excited about. He's into his 90s telling these stories. Old men, we all know, love to tell stories, and young folks, when they do, just listen.

But can you imagine hearing those stories about the Christ? The sentence continues down there in verse 3.

[12:01] Before we get a subject and verb. So it's kind of going for, I don't know how many words, in verse 3, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you.

That which we have seen and heard, all about Jesus Christ, that which we touch with our hands, now we proclaim to you. What John is saying is, I'm telling you all that I've seen and heard and touched, so that by hearing you too may have fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ.

I love this. You know, in so many ways what he's saying is, most people tell their really good stories so that we ooh and ah. So that we look on them with admiration.

Most people tell their really good stories so they create this distance between you and them. I don't really have any good stories. I'd insert it right here.

But there's this thing that you'll never believe what happened to me. I won the lotto. Donald Trump invited me to his office to run the country for a day. I don't know what it would be, but immediately when we begin to tell them, we begin to tell them so that there's this distance.

[13:11] But John's not telling his story that way. He's not telling us about his friendship with Jesus Christ so that we might become envious. John's telling us about his friendship with Jesus Christ so that we might become friends too, so that we might have fellowship.

He writes at the end of verse 3, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Fellowship is a word used all throughout the New Testament. It just means sharing. We have fellowship meal. You all share together. You know, it's giving and receiving.

It's giving of what I have and receiving of what others have. That's what fellowship means. You know, it's also translated partnership some places. But the idea is that all true friendships are built on fellowship, on sharing with one another freely and joyfully.

And John's saying that the essence of who God is is fellowship. Before he begins to talk about fellowship between us, he begins to talk about fellowship between God.

[14:24] He says, God existed eternally in fellowship, sharing joy, delight, happiness, and peace with one another as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Familiarity breeds contempt, so they say, but not in the Godhead, which we're moving in the deep end of the theological pool very quickly.

But God existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not experiencing the least bit of irritation from all eternity, just fellowshiping and delighting in one another, a ceaseless delight, content, happy, overjoyed.

You know, in so many ways, we see it spill out at Jesus' baptism. And Jesus is baptized by John. The Father announces, this is my Son with whom I'm well pleased. And the Spirit descends as a dove.

[15:26] Remember, they're all there. You know, we get close to the Godhead when we see a Father pour out affection over a Son. That's what eternity was.

God delighting in His Son and the love fest, being joined in with the Spirit. Contrary to what our grandmothers might have told us, not to throw them under the bus, God did not create us or save

us because He needed us, or because He was lonely, or because He was looking for the right asset for His team.

John is telling us, though, that God did create us and save us so that He might draw us near. That He might become friends with us. Not because we're great, but because He is.

And that's how great His mercy and grace is. In so many ways, this is the ultimate, I've been welcomed to a place I don't belong. because God's inviting us into that eternal fellowship.

Look at the way Jesus prays on the night He was betrayed. I think we have that for you from John 17. He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their words.

[16:45] So He's saying, I'm not asking for just the disciples, the apostles, but those who will believe in Me through their word.

I'm asking for everyone who believes in Me through the word. You know, sometimes the Scripture comes to us by a few different channels, but this one's coming directly at us.

What He's saying is, I prayed for you. Not just for the apostles, but for everyone. All the way down to Athens, Tennessee, who believe in Me through their word, that they may be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me, the glory You have given Me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Now John gets naughty real quick. I mean, these phrases, that all be one, you and Me, I in us, they in us. I mean, John is pushing the limits of language to communicate the scandal of what's going on.

He's saying, so we're all in this together, and I'm asking that they may be in us, that we may be invited into the fellowship God shared for all eternity.

[18:05] Jesus did not come to save you. Jesus did not come to rescue you from hell. Jesus definitely did not come to make sure you give a few hours of your week and make sure you mind your P's and Q's.

Jesus came to become friends with you. He came to have fellowship with you. I mean, this could change our Christianity from the top to the bottom.

Like, we're not here because it's the right thing to do. We're not here to feel good for another week. We're not here to make Mom happy.

Mom is, she wouldn't even know. It changes everything. I mean, why do we pray? What makes a good prayer time? Is it the right words or the least amount of mental drift or the right amount of time, or is it just the realization that God wants to make friends with you?

That's what this is saying. God wants to make friends. He's inviting you into fellowship. All of the Bible and all of what God has done in Christ is the Lord saying, I want you, I want to tell you about me.

[19:10] I'm not lonely, but I want to tell you about me. I want you to know me because in knowing me is life. I want you to have joy. I want your joy to be full.

Come into me. It's just crazy even saving me. That's what he's saying. That's the whole reason he created the world. That's the whole reason he saved sinners. I just want you to know me. I want you to know the grace in me.

The great glory of the gospel is not fire insurance or forgiveness. The great glory of the gospel is God and fellowship with him. This is the why. This is the core of why we're made the way we are. It's really why we love so many gadgets and try to connect us to people and get lost in those things because we were wired for God. We were wired for this.

I mean that's what was spoiled in the garden and what he came to restore. Point two, how? How? Jesus calls us to honestly share our lives in community but how?

[20:14] How did you make it happen? Let's get practical. The gospel eliminates every obstacle to real fellowship.

The passage continues in verse 5. He says, This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

So this is the message. This is the message from Jesus. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. Now that's an interesting thumbnail of the gospel, isn't it?

I mean shouldn't it be God is love and in him there is nothing but love at all or God is glory and in him there is nothing but glory at all or God is holy and in him there is nothing but holiness at all or

God is joy or whatever you want to put in there but John starts here to emphasize who God is. God is love, yes, he says, chapter 4, but God is light. He has no darkness or shadows. [21 : 29] He has no hiddenness or secrecy or surprises. He has no imperfections or blemishes. There's nothing to cover up. God has nothing to cover up, nothing to be ashamed of.

Positively, he's pure, perfect, excellent in every way. God is light. He's radiant and beautiful in every way. All his perfections are wonderfully glorious and radiant.

in heaven, there's not going to be a sun or a moon. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is going to fill it. I don't even know what that means.

It's incredible. But most importantly here, God, he is light but he gives light. Light shines, right? Light doesn't shine for itself. It shines for others, you know? You don't turn on the lamp just so it can have its time in the light. I just want you to have a little time to yourself over there, lamp.

[22 : 33] You know, you don't do that, right? That'd be lunacy. You know, the light, the whole purpose of the lamp is to light the room up. I mean, lighthouses are some of those beautiful things that pepper our coastlines and they're tall and impressive but they don't shine to show off how impressive they are.

I mean, look at my brick layout. I mean, that's not what the lighthouse is doing. I mean, look at my perch. I mean, look where I'm situated. That's not what it's doing. Lighthouse is calling out into the ocean saying, there's land here.

You're adrift. There's land here. There's safety here. Home is here. You can dock up here. The idea is that light invades and invites.

Light chases away darkness. You turn on light in the room, the darkness is chased out. Light provides safety, security, and sanity from the darkness.

This is what John's after. This is what he means when he says that the gospel is God is light and in him there's nothing, no darkness at all, is that God has come to light up the darkness, to invade it, to rescue.

[23 : 43] The message of the gospel is God is light and gives light. Once we walked in darkness and now light has come, light shines in the darkness, darkness has not overcome it. Light shines into our dark hearts so that we might see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's what Jesus came to do. In him is light and the light of men. We just sang in shining to our night about the darkness.

That's the message of the gospel. Light has come. Let us confess our darkness and go to the light. You know, they said in John 3, they didn't go to light lest their deeds will be exposed. Yeah, there is a double purpose of light. Light exposes who we are and yet in exposing us, just like the power of the gospel, it saves us from who we are and makes us secure.

Now, this passage just continues and I cannot walk through every detail in this text as much as I'd like to, but I want to underline a few things because this how, so the gospel's light in him, there's no darkness at all.

[25 : 16] But how, how does it work out such that we have fellowship with one another and this is where John continues. So he's like, he is way in the, in the, in the philosophy and in the hard stuff and then he drops down very practically and we're going to see why.

Look in verse 6, he says, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth but if we walk in light as he is in light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

So walking in darkness, I mean, we don't walk anywhere anymore, right? We had a little discussion of our family where we're going to walk over to our neighbor's house for dinner the other night because it's so hot, you know, I didn't want to wake up like a sweat ball but we decided to walk and sweat it out but anyway, you know, we walk very rarely but walking is the most basic and most common form of transportation in that day and so when they say walking, when John says walking, he just means living.

It's just a metaphor for living. So John's saying you cannot be friends with Jesus if you're presently living in and settled in darkness. You cannot be friends with Jesus if you're presently living in and settled in sin.

You cannot have Jesus in darkness. If you think you have both, you lie. That's why he's so blunt. Your relationship with Christ is a sham.

[26 : 48] It's completely empty. You see? He's very black and white. He's light and dark. That's kind of the way he's presenting it. You cannot have both. But the promise is there though.

This is what I want to underline. You can have Jesus. If you think about that. In that argument, he's saying your hidden sins and your secrets and all the shame that come with them cannot keep you from Jesus Christ.

I mean, that's how. That's how the light reconciles us to one another and through the gospel is that your hidden sins, your secrets, all those things you don't want anybody to know about you cannot separate you from Jesus and his cleansing blood.

Now let's keep going. Verse 8. He says, if we have sin, if we say we have no sin and we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us. Verse 10. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his truth and his word is not in us.

You know, he's saying you cannot say you are friends with Christ if you say you are not a sinner and if you say you do not sin.

[28 : 05] Now John was writing to a people that boasted or at least they had people in the midst of that assembly that boasted that they no longer actively sinned against God.

And I think what he means by that is they're no longer conscious. They may admit that yeah, yeah, yeah. Sometimes I stumble and cut somebody off at track of the light. I don't know if that's a sin but you know, I guess I'm trying to think you know, I don't know.

I'm not going to go down that road anymore but this idea that you can unconsciously sin or you can consciously sin so they don't consciously sin anymore. They don't fudge the number on the taxes. You know, they don't. do sin constantly. That makes sense. Now I doubt any of us would say we're there.

Or if we will. Let's meet up after the meeting. But would we say that sin is still our main problem? Or is our main problem the bad hand we've been dealt?

[29 : 17] Or the wrongs others have done to us? Is our main problem our parents, our personality, our genetics? I don't know.

I mean, there's so many excuses for why the way we are but John wants us to call sin, sin. Not by any other name. When we fail to do this, the point is we make God look ridiculous because His solution is ridiculous.

To send His Son for our personality. No, He sent His Son to rescue us from sin but the promise is there too. The idea is that your continuous tendency to sin and all the discouragement it brings cannot keep you from Jesus justifying and welcoming blood.

I think His point is yes, there is no grace for those who do not call sin, sin but for those who do there's abundant grace. That's what He's after. Your continuous sin, your present ongoing daily sins cannot keep you from Jesus your advocate and the Savior.

Look down in verse 9. This is that wonderful promise if we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Verse chapter 2, 1, if anyone does sin, so if you say you have no sin there's no hope for you but if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous.

[30 : 48] The point seems clear. Sin continues to disrupt and disturb the community but God's solution is enough. When He's right in His community that's what He's trying to say.

God is in the light, calls us into the light, all the sin that makes us sick and leaves us wallowing in the darkness is cleansed and all obstacles are removed through Jesus.

In the light we find a community unlike any other. That's what John's talking about. We find a community, we find fellowship with God, we find fellowship with one another with Jesus Christ in the midst of it, in the center of it.

He's the one who binds us. He's the one we share. He's the center. You know, in these first days at Trinity Grace Church we must not be a community who are together because of a common race, social status, life stage, political party, way of schooling or something else.

If we're just another group of people with commonalities, no one in Athens will be blown away and we will fail.

[32 : 02] But if we're a group of people that are gathered around Jesus Christ, we'll be a light to the world, a city on a hill.

point three, what? What? What? Jesus calls us to share our lives in community but what do we do?

So we know that God's in the light and there's no darkness at all. We know that he has fellowship and invited us into fellowship. We know that he's torn down all the obstacles of sin to fellowship but how do we live it out?

In a word, what I want to call you to do is readily and regularly admit you don't have it together. I'm going to define that a little bit more but readily and regularly admit you don't have it together.

Look at verse 6 of chapter 1. He says, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in light, we have fellowship with one another blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

[33 : 14] And so the idea if we walk in darkness, we walk in lie and deceit but if we walk in light, we walk in honesty. You see, that's what he's doing. If we walk in darkness, we walk in lying and deceit, shading the truth, these things.

If we walk in the light, we walk in honesty. To walk in light means we turn from deceit, half-truths, and withdrawing. To walk in light means we put on honesty.

We're sincere, truthful, candid. We confess struggles. We confess sins. We admit we're not okay. We refuse to be okay with staying in the shadows.

We take off our mask. Sadly, church is often the last place people are honest about personal struggles.

They may go get counseling on the side, in the shadows. I'm not standing in judgment of those people, but it just reveals we often put on a mask.

[34 : 29] Just a couple weeks ago, I called a friend and said, we have to get together as couples to talk. Because Kim and I were one of those moments where we were having the same conversation over and over again.

Y'all ever done that? Hope you have so I don't feel alone. But the same conversation, same points, same disagreement, and sadly the same conflict.

We needed someone to take it off. I said, hey, we need help.

We need help. Sometimes that's all taking a mask off is. Hey, we need help. Would you help us?

You know, we want to be a church where we can take it off. We want to be transparent, straightforward. We want to stop hedging, stop spending. If all this is true about Jesus Christ and who we are in him, let's stop trying to look better.

[35 : 39] One of the most under celebrated attributes of the Bible is its honesty. It is a brutally honest book.

Reading the Old Testament for the first time, you may begin to think, how could God permit polygamy? Or polygamy? when we see the great King Solomon who's celebrated in the Bible and had 300 wives.

The point is, the Bible's honest about who he is. Not that God encourages polygamy, judges Solomon. How could God encourage abandonment? You remember when Abraham did that whole she's not my wife, she's my sister thing?

The point is, he's showing the warts of Abraham. You know, this is especially striking to me in the story of Jacob. Now, he is one of Scripture's biggest scoundrels and it's a race.

Jacob is one of Isaac's sons. You remember that? One of his 12, or no, he had 12 sons, but Jacob and Esau are one of Isaac's, they're his sons and Jacob's name in Hebrew literally means he cheats and that's what Jacob did.

[36 : 54] He just cheated his whole life. He had a twin brother, they wrestled in the womb and they wrestled out of the womb. At a young age, he cheats his brother into giving him his birthright.

You remember that? A little argument, he cheated him. It continues. As the younger brother, he's not destined to receive the blessing from God. Nevertheless, when his father is old, his brother Esau goes out to hunt for game and to prepare a meal for his father.

But as he goes out in the field, Jacob quickly kills two goats, prepares the meal, he puts on that fur so that he looked like his brother and smelled like his brother. And he delivers the meal to his father and repeatedly assures his father that he is in fact his brother.

And then he asks his father to give him the blessing. He cheats to get the blessing. And when his brother finds out, do you remember, Jacob runs. Jacob runs all the way to a neighboring country.

He perhaps finds the biggest cheater in the Bible there. He finds his family. Remember, he has two wives there. Jacob works for 14 years to marry this man's daughters and then he cheats him.

[38 : 15] He proclaims his honesty but then he takes the stronger goats from him. He promises not to flee but he does. He flees in the middle of the night. He heads back home, back to see his brother.

He's anxious and nervous because his brother knows who he really is. He's coming with all his children and all his flock but he remains at the back cowering.

You remember reading that? I mean, all the flock is in front of him. He's brought everything to try to show off who he is and he's standing at the back. He plots and prepares to attack his brother. After all these years and that night a man wrestles with him. Scriptures say it's the Lord. It's just a strange thing.

I think this is what's going on. Jacob wrestles with him and holds on to him. It's almost like he finally has some sanity to his life. Jacob has been running and fleeing and cheating his whole life but he's holding on to the Lord.

[39 : 17] He knows that only the Lord can bless him. He knows that only the Lord can rescue him. He knows that he's utterly lost without the Lord.

You remember what the Lord says? He says when the Lord asks what is your name? He says the name. He's been trying to hide his whole life.

He says I am Jacob the cheater. I'm the cheater. Jacob. And you remember what the Lord said? Your name will no longer be Jacob. Your name is Israel. He receives the blessing when he finally admits who he is.

The point is not we got to wrestle with the Lord and try to get the blessing from it. The point is we have to admit who we are. And then the story is just incredible. He looks up and his brother Esau is coming with 400 men not to take him out.

[40 : 21] He runs to him. He hugs him. He kisses on him. He weeps on him. It's honesty that pays the way to fellowship. As we walk in the light, he is in the light.

We have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. It's as if the scripture is trying to say to us, what's your name? What are you running from?

Where are you hiding? Are you willing to admit who you are? Is this a charade? Will you confess your sins, your fears and worries?

Are you willing to embrace honesty? I mean, do the folks in your life really know what you struggle with? or do they get a filtered version? Walking in the light doesn't mean we walk perfectly, but it does mean we walk honestly and openly before God and before one another.

God calls us to honestly share our lives in community. The Christian life is a community project. There is no context more carefully and deliberately focused on building relationships here than our community groups.

[41 : 48] Community groups are where the church gets smaller. They're groups where true lasting relationships form. They provide opportunities for prayer, encouragement, relationship building, and most importantly for today, they're places where we can be honest.

and we want you to find one. I just don't think you're going to prosper here in the ways that God would like you to prosper without these groups.

So I encourage you to throw your life into them. In a couple weeks we're going to start them back up. The week is September 8th and so we'll have all the groups meeting together and one change we are doing this year to hopefully facilitate deeper, more intimate community is each month on the first week of the month we're going to meet all together in individual groups.

So all you know the co-ed just like we normally do. On the second week of the month just the men are going to meet. We're going to go through a resource together as a church and then together in these groups.

My hope would be facilitate conversations that men need to have. And in the third week of the month the women are going to meet in the same type way.

[43 : 14] So it's a little bit of shift for what we have done but I hope it's a shift that propels us more deeply into meaningful and rich friendships because we need them and it is the life that God has called us to.

Let me pray for us. Father in heaven thank you for these few minutes today. We pray that you would help us to walk in the light.

We want to have relationships like these where we are set free from what people think and able to walk openly and transparently and most importantly to walk in the good of what we know about in

Jesus.

Lord we thank you that this fellowship is a precious gift. We pray that you would help us. We pray that you would knit us together as a church. and cause us to love one another more and more to live before one another and to live with one another in these ways we pray in Jesus name.

Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com who who!

[44 : 51] who knew! who! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! who knew! Thank you.