

## GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY

Dannah Gresh, Revive '21

TEXT: ACTS 2:42-47

Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even when there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if, on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and the riches which are there for us all in Christ Jesus . . . a [leader] should not complain about [her] congregation, certainly never to other people but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to you in order that you should become its accuser before God and men. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

If we're truly grounded in community, we will reflect the same qualities of the early church. **The early community of Christians were *devoted*, they were *together*, they were *generous*, and they were *glad*.**

The Greek word for devoted means “to stay, to persist, to remain.” What we are impassioned for, we are devoted to; they were impassioned for the church, so they gathered day by day (Acts 2:46). If your church is going through any kind of difficulty right now, stay, persist, remain!

They attended the temple for large, formal gatherings which are similar to our Sunday worship. They also broke bread in their homes at smaller table gatherings. The symbolism of the table in the tabernacle represented the presence of God. The table was set each week with twelve loaves of the bread of presence, one representing each tribe of Israel. **Christians are people of the table: through gathering around the table we can experience the presence of God.**

Women set the tone as well as the table for Christian fellowship. We are to show hospitality to each other without grumbling, not just passing each other in the aisle on Sunday mornings (1 Pet. 4:9). We don't need a flawless house; we just need faithful hearts. I'm thanking the Lord for the opportunity to make my table a space where people experience His presence.

The early church was grounded in community together (v. 44). Together is an important word which means, “with or in proximity to people; in companionship.” There are many lonely hearts in our churches every week, feeling isolated and not together. We must tend to that and do something about it.

In Hebrews 10:21, the prescription for loneliness is drawing near to God. He alone can truly erase our loneliness. In Hebrews 10:24–25, we're also told to draw near to each other: “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

During the pandemic, some people got in the habit of not meeting together. Forecasters predict one-third of them will never return to church. Don't be one of them. Isolation in the body of Christ is the medium that Satan works in. He wants to devour you with sin, selfishness, and temptation (1 Pet. 5:8). Roaring lions look for lone prey. Don't be alone; be together!

True community does not happen when we come together as pious, perfect people. The breakthrough to true togetherness comes when we become humble, broken sinners who desperately need Jesus together and aren't afraid to tell our sins to one another. The church is a hospital for those who understand they are sick and in continued recovery from a fatal condition.

When we're alone in our sin or the sins committed against us, we are utterly alone. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another . . . that you may be healed."

My life is a testimony to the truth of that verse. On the other side of telling your secret sin is freedom. God alone can forgive sin, but He's given us each other for the healing of our hearts and our souls! Tell someone, and be thankful for the sisters to openly confess your deepest secrets to.

The early church was grounded in community through generosity. It should have already been happening under the Old Testament law, but it wasn't (Deut. 15:7-8). Jesus said He came to fulfill the law. When the Holy Spirit came, they were able to give spontaneously and naturally! The presence of Christ in them enabled them to do what they could not do previously.

We're called to meet the needs of one another in a way that the rest of the world is not. It's highly inconvenient to bear one another's burdens; it's messy and frustrating. We tend to resist becoming burdens to each other, but it is as it should be. You are a burden, so that I can receive the blessing of carrying it with you. When we do not ask for help, it's due to false pride. The Christian life is a cross-bearing life (Matt. 16:24).

If we allowed the Spirit to fill us so fully, the presence of Christ to work in us so completely that we became the bearers of one another's burdens in a way that the rest of the world didn't understand—wow! We live in a cancel culture that discards inconvenient, burdensome relationships. When you're in a difficult relationship with a sister in church, you do not cancel your sister, you cancel the debt because we forgive one another.

When you're in a marriage that's messy, and living in a world that discards relationships to the point of divorce, you are never a fool to be a part of the redemption story of Christ in a man's life.

In a world that discards inconvenient, burdensome relationships to the point of calling it a woman's right to abort a baby, then when God forms a child inside of you, He's inviting you to put yourself on a cross, as He did. He's inviting you to give up living the way you want to live. He's bringing a whole new meaning to your life—an opportunity to receive one another, care for one another, serve one another. We have to be women who say, "Thank You, Lord, for the messy and very inconvenient burden of bearing the burdens of my sisters."

The early church experienced community with glad hearts. Christian fellowship changes us. Gladness is not a condition of our circumstances. It's like joy, which is a miraculous work of God in spite of what is going on around us. When we go through burdensome, hard, and painful times, it is the presence of Jesus that helps us hold on to our glad.

Have you been hurt or disappointed by someone in the church? It's not us that make each other glad. We are sick. We are sinners. We are needy. No matter who we are, we will disappoint. At times, we will make one another sad. That's when the rest of us bear the burden—we pick up the hurt one and carry her. She is our cross for a time. When we do that, the Spirit stirs inside of us, and He makes us glad.

Sin will try to take the glad right out of you. That's precisely why we need the presence of Christ, because we are no match for sin. Only His Spirit can overcome sin.

The world is shaking, but I will not be shaken. I will get myself into the community that allows me to experience the presence of Christ. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20). I am going to be thankful for that community, no matter how messy it is. I am going to be thankful that the Lord, not the people in the fellowship, is the source of our gladness, no matter the circumstances.

Our plumb line is not the world; it's His Word. He wants me to be glad and thankful for what's happening in the body of Christ. That means I have to practice devotion and togetherness. That means I have to practice generosity and gladness. Confess to Him where you've been grumbling instead of glad, because oh, sisters, I long to see revival, and I want it to start in me.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Explain how having a thankful heart without complaining influences the way we view our church communities.

Dannah said, “Christians are people of the table: gathering around the table we can experience the presence of God.” Can you share a time when sitting across the table conversing about the Lord refreshed your heart?

How would you rate yourself on offering Christian hospitality without grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9)? What are the hindrances to opening your home to guests more often? Comment on Dannah’s statement, “We don’t need a flawless house; we just need faithful hearts.”

There are lonely people feeling isolated in our churches every week. Describe the effects of loneliness you’ve felt in your life or observed in the lives of others. What encouragement would you give to someone who is lonely?

Discuss how our churches would be different if we became humble, broken sinners, who aren’t afraid to confess our secret sins to one another (James 5:16). Do you have a friend or mentor that you can share honestly with?

We live in a cancel culture that easily discards inconvenient, burdensome relationships. How were you challenged or convicted by Dannah’s teaching on difficult relationships? Identify right and wrong ways to handle hurt and disappointment within the church.

Who has picked you up and carried you when you were hurting? Is there someone God is asking you to pick up and carry now?

