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**NEXT/ Week 2/ EVERYONE IN A GROUP; EVERY GROUP ON MISSION/ MEGAN MARSHMAN, WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH, FEBRUARY 21, 2021**

By Mary Fairchild [mairlady.com](http://mairlady.com) . All emphasis mine.

Willow its good to be with you all as we continue this NEXT series... Where we get to talk about God's vision for this church and this week we're on week 2 —Everyone in a Group, and Every Group On Mission. This is a personal one for me..because its all the lessons I learned on community..**Community is God's best** and I think we all KNOW this to be true. This isn't news to you, but I wonder if you'll hear it today as an invitation FOR YOU to maybe even look at community different.

You see for years my life illustration is that of a cup and I've shared it before when it comes to parenting but really this is how to live as God intended. I remember growing up in the church and they'd tell me go love people so I said okay and I took my little metaphorical cup of love and I ran around and splashed love on people... and then I got married and I had kids—you know what I'm saying. And I remember when I had kids and I found myself running on empty that I wondered if I wasn't living as God intended when it comes to community and I realized there was actually a problem with my cup and I wonder if you can relate... here's what I was doing-- I would love people and that's all well and good, but then I would hold out my now empty cup in their direction to be filled up by their opinions of me or to be loved back(1:48). Or, I'd love my family and want to be filled. I'd work my job and then want to be fulfilled there. And you see here's the problem is I found myself running on empty in far too many areas in my life—especially in community and I was waiting to be appreciated, invited, noticed.

You see the beauty of the cup and the significance of it for me when it comes to community is we can tilt our cup away from others. Tilt our cup upright the way a cup was designed to stand because here's the truth we don't need to be filled by the love of others because we're already loved by God. See Paul prayed this in Ephesians 3 that we might be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. And the reason I bring this up this cup Willow is because I want us to live in these groups as God intended not waiting to be satisfied because in Christ we already are. And then as we are imagine this baby cup up underneath Niagara Falls. See God doesn't want to just fill us he wants to overflow out of us(2:58) so that we are not only in groups in groups on mission living with the purpose he intended. But if you find yourself and you've been running around trying to be filled and satisfied 2020 has only made it more apparent as we're entering into what's next 2021 this year and beyond the future vision of Willow its time to be part of groups that teach us to tilt our cup upward to empty ourselves of all the places we've been filled so that we might be filled to overflowing and live for the purpose He intended and we find that purpose in the beginning.

See in the beginning we see why God created and how we created us and we see it in Chapter 1 beginning in verse 26 and it says(3:44) this, “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

**God created us in community** on purpose(4:33) with a purpose. But the God who created, see we all know that in the beginning God created, but did you know that God was before the beginning? In fact,

God has always existed there's no starting point for God. I don't know about you but that blows my mind I can't quite comprehend it but I'm coming to be more and more with a God that I can't fully comprehend because a God that I could really comprehend is a very tiny God and our God is massive in fact our God has always existed. His triune nature, God the Father has always loved God the Son who has always loved God the Holy Spirit who glorified God the Father who glorified God the Son who glorified God the Holy Spirit and you see that in the beautiful community of the Trinity who has always existed when you get to Genesis 1 and He chooses to create we can know something about our God.

He chooses to create not because He has a need. **He has everything He could ever need in and of Himself (5:44) in community** but then He creates us not to fill a need but to share that which He already has. And then we read in chapter 1:27 that He creates us in His own image not to run around trying to fill a need but to share the fullness that's possible when we are living as He intended.

Are you living the full life or are you waiting(6:13)..longing? Here the invitation. The invitation for community is an invitation to be filled but not by others. Learn how to be filled by the true source of life as he intended. **See God created us on purpose but specifically in community(6:32).**

How important do you think community is to God? Well, **God is a community in and of Himself** and then created us according to His kind. He built us for community. ...When God created you He says yes that's precisely how I want you... I know you live in a world that says you lack. Hear the Word of your Father--you lack nothing you need to honor and glorify me with your life. **When you live as He intended, and He created us in community...** in fact He said it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for Him. ..Are you isolated? Its not good. And I know I know I don't need to convince you of that because you've experienced it so hear this invitation...hear it from our Lord--it's not good I have something better for you I created you for it."

See when it says this, verse 26, "Let us—this is God speaking—Let Us create mankind in Our image—**do you hear the communal language?** "Us" --God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit--"Let Us create mankind in Our image"(6:49) **How important do you think community is to God?** Well, **God is a community in and of Himself and then created us according to His kind. He built us for community.**

In fact as you look through Genesis 1 and 2 whenever he creates he goes "ew it's good", "ew it's good," "ew it's good" and then He creates us. He doesn't just say good , what He says is this, Chapter 1:31, "Now God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." When God created you he went "yes, that's precisely how I want you." Would you hear the word of the Lord over you today? He made you like that with that personality, with those giftings, those specific ones. Not the ones the person to your right or to your left or the person you are thinking about(7:42). See I believe we can miss out on what God intended for us if we are comparing ourselves, right?

Theodore Roosevelt—Comparison is the thief of all joy. Because when God made that person He went "yes, that's exactly how I want them" and when He made you He went "yes, very good." Whole, complete, lacking nothing you need to honor glorify God with your life. I know we live in a world that says you lack, hear the word of the Father, "You lack nothing you need to honor and glorify me with your life." When you live as I intended—and He created us in community.. In fact there was one thing in the Scriptures in the first two chapters of what God intended that was not good. Chapter 2:18 says this, "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." And all my ladies said amen. "I will make a helper suitable for him." It is not good for man to be alone(8:39).

Are you isolated? It's not good and I know I don't need to convince you of that because you have experienced it so hear this invitation not just from me but hear if from our Lord--"It's not good I have something better for you. I created you for it. **"This "Everyone in a Group. Every Group on**

**Mission" is God's heart for us.** And if we simply just sit back and remain isolated or comfortable I fear that we'll miss the good that God intended. **Community is God's good for us. God created us in community because it's good,** but

It's not good for man to be alone--alone with his thoughts. Alone with his life(9:33). See if no one really "knows you" they won't know how to love you and I fear far too many of us aren't attending church or maybe we are a part of a group and we don't feel loved there and let me just say this: #1. Who really knows you there? Because if people don't really know they won't know how to love you. Do you have those thoughts that you think at night. Do you think that you're the only one that has those crazy thoughts so you turn on Netflix just simply to turn them off? You're not crazy if that's you. But if no one knows those thoughts you'll continue to believe that you're the only one that has those thoughts. This church wants to come alongside you but **sometimes have to be honest with where you are precisely at so people CAN LOVE YOU THERE! Jump into community and when you're in it be "known there" and get to know others so you can learn how to love.** God created us for it."

**"He created us in community. But not just in community. He created us on purpose.** How do I know? Because verse 27, "So God created mankind." We were created it's a simple point--**everything that was created was created on purpose.** Everything. I mean this cup was in a way so it could hold water it has purpose. You see they put the walls on the side there's a bottom to it there's no holes in it on purpose cuz everything that was created was **created on purpose.** Even this table. This table is flat on top, again this is the most obvious point, flat on top, why? So it could hold stuff, wow cuz someone created it and **Everything that was created on purpose. Everything that was created was created on purpose. Everything. That includes you. I don't know when you stopped believing it. Yes you do have a purpose.** How do I know? Verse 27, God created you. **You were created on purpose.** You uniquely have significance. Would you believe it? Would you not just believe it for someone else or just believe it for your kids. Would you believe it for you? You have something to contribute to the group(11:36).

I wonder if some people are not jumping into groups **or not being authentic there** because you don't know what you have to contribute there. **I'll say however God made you it's very good and its very good in community** and each of you brings something unique and distinct to the group. How do I know? Because of a small group I was a part of. I remember we were putting together small groups around the Book of Mark(11:59) and we were going to do a book study and we wanted to not just have a group for us. We didn't want the group's purpose to be just for us. We knew the purpose that it had to be purposeful.

**It has to be on mission.** So I remember we talked about everyone from the church, there was going to be about 7 of us, and then **each of us were tasked with bringing someone into the group that maybe didn't attend our church or church at all.** The whole point was to be purposeful with us gathering and we wanted to read the Book of Mark and see who Jesus was, but **learn from people with maybe varying beliefs about Jesus.** And I took the group seriously, I was the leader of the group so I had to, by example, invite someone and I remember thinking and praying who that someone would be and I thought of my neighbor Colin(12:41).

My neighbor Colin had never stepped foot in a church and never wanted to up to that point--step foot in a church. And so I remember having the conversation to invite him to the study trusting that my other friends were doing the same. And so I said, Colin, Colin's a bit rough around the edges, "Colin, you want to be a part of our book club?" And he's like "I've never been invited to a book club." I'm like, "Well this is your chance." He's like, "You know what, I'm in what book are we reading?" I'm like, "The Bible." He's like, "Ah, the old bait and switch." I'm like, "Did it work?" He's like, "Sure." And I said, "Because I want to learn from you." He goes, "What do I have to offer?" Ohhh, if only Colin knew what he had to offer. You see he showed up that first week(13:22). And there's the problem, all

of my Christian friends brought more Christian friends and it was all the Christian friends and me and Colin.

And I remember listening as we read through Mark 1 and all these were brilliant bringing these brilliant insights from brilliant past sermons they had heard and brilliant points and everyone's impressing everyone and I'm listening in a little bit nervous because to be honest with you I can't really relate to "know-it-alls" because I don't know it all.

And I'm thinking what Colin is thinking and only the imagining the uncomfortability he's thinking and everyone's making sense of everything that's happening until suddenly Colin speaks up with a(14:00), "What the (bleep)!" And the whole community stopped and looked over. **I think someone even dropped their Bible (snicker/laugh).**

And Colin goes, "What the \_\_\_\_\_. This makes sense to you?" And everyone's like, "Go on Colin. Thank you for sharing." And you know Colin continues he goes, "So, Jesus is baptized and then like a dove comes down and like sits on his shoulder and then a voice comes... what would that even have looked like? A voice? And what is it, what would that have looked like the clouds opened up and God spoke. I wonder what that sounded like?"

And it was weird because suddenly all the people who had all the answers to all the questions just sat there (14:44) as Colin brought authentically where he was at when it came to the Scriptures and his true questions and **his lack of knowledge** because that **was the catalyst for the best part of the group**. Suddenly, a well theologically sound answer wouldn't suffice in this moment for a person who's truly curious. What would that have looked like? Who is this Jesus?

**And it was Colin's authentic questions** that allowed an entire room of know-it-alls to lay down their know-it-alls because none of us actually knew it all and suddenly to be open to the fact that who Jesus is can actually change our lives and the reading of His Word in community can make a change and we can truly—and here's the fun part, week 1 we left there more amazed with Jesus and less impressed with ourselves(15:31).

Can I free you as you walk into your small group this week or the one you're gonna sign up for after this sermon. Can I free you from needing to bring anything except for you to that group? Why? Because you bringing you is very good. And you remaining in isolation or even being hidden in the group--not good! God created us in community on purpose. Just how He wants you. **And bring that authentically there people will be better for it.** Ask the questions, don't feel the pressure to be anything else because God created you and He said 'very good' on purpose."

([video start 16:09](#)) And if that's not good enough He even gives us more. He not only creates us on purpose, He gifts us with purpose. (16:13) Verse 28--God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." I love the order. God blessed them and then commands them.

I love that order. You're blessed, now live like it's true. Not obey me to receive the blessing. No, no, no. **See the gospel, the power of Jesus in our lives** is not that we obey in order to be blessed. It's **we are blessed because of Jesus' sacrifice therefore obey because it makes sense to live like it's true that we're already blessed. Wow! So he blesses us and he commands us fill the earth—with what? with his good, with his image.** We are created on purpose with purpose to fill the earth with knowledge of him as we walk around. Why? Because we're his image bearers--we were created for it. It's very good. We were created on purpose with a purpose that's why it makes sense for us not just to be a part of a group everyone in a group but for that for all groups to be on mission.

You see this is something I've learned because(17:33) it's very easy to be self focused in a group and I

just want invite us as we end our time together on a story of what it would look like to be free to live as God intended. You see when God creates he uses these words and these words speak power and they speak blessing into the lives of people around us and I want to invite us to start there in our small groups this week.

Why? Because I once heard a TED talk about a teacher(17:59) and just shout out for all teachers who are listening today. This teacher was working in an environment in which all the students were succeeding and she loved her job, loved teaching but she kept feeling this heart tug to go teach in a community where the students weren't thriving. And she thought "I want to contribute; I want to live on purpose here."

And so she makes a big leap and jumps into this new classroom and she hands out the initial math tests to see where these students are at and she gives out all the tests, and again, this is to figure out where these students are at, and she gets the tests back(18:34) and after that first day she starts kind of grading these tests and realizes what she's gotten herself into. The first test was a, okay, -37, okay not quite what I was used to but I feel compelled. And then she gets the next test -54/100 finding herself even more discouraged on where these students were at. She gets to a test, are you ready for it?, -97/100 and as she goes to write it down she goes, "Wait a second," and she sits back from her desk and says, "Who decided.. who decided that it's my job to tell these students how much they got wrong?" So instead she writes this, "+3/100 smiley face." Half of the test scores had minus numbers the other half after the +3 all had plus signs.

Next day hands back all the tests.(19:42) Bell rings, all the students go off and the one student with the +3 walks up and starts the conversation, "So, I think we both know I'm pretty bad at math." And she kind of laughed and he says, "But why did you write a +3 and a smiley face?" She didn't say anything profound, she said, "Because its better than +2." He said okay and they continued on to the next day of which the next test score was +15. Then +37, +65, +84 and he goes on to be the first in his family to go to college and then he goes and graduates and then he becomes a Christian—no he didn't but how cool'd have that have been?

But where did it begin? +3. **She didn't look at him and see everything that he lacked, she started with the good that she saw.** +3. It's easy for me to want to walk into a part of a small group that I am a part of and point out the -97 I know this because I feel like other have done it to me. It's easy to look at my spouse and point out the -97 but can I tell you where God begins? He begins with blessing and He (20:53) begins with these types of words "oo good, very good."

If we're going to be the type of community that God intends we need to fill ourselves with the good truth of how we were created. **We were created in community.** We were created on purpose and we were created on purpose with purpose. As a church I wonder if its time for us to empty ourselves from all the different places we've been filled and stop running to community to find filling from their opinions, but rather be a part of a community that tilts the cup upward. Not just everyone in a group, but every group on mission and that's only possible when we tilt our cup the way it was designed and then we have our prayers answered by Paul Ephesians 3 that we might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of Him that we might overflow blessing, life, love, the image of God into the communities he's placed us to be a part of . **And let me tell you where it begins--find the good, you'll find God there.**