

# CORE FOCUS 2: WHAT'S OUR NICHE?



## INTRODUCTION: CULTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN

### 1. A/D and Why:

- a. "Engagement in church life is clearly on a downward slope as well. It is more likely that individualized forms of faith activity will grow, especially through various forms of media and technology, than return to corporate religious activity in local church settings."

- George Barna, *America at the Crossroads*

- b. "With our automobile-driven culture of climate-controlled suburbia, anonymous individualism deposits us in our garage without having to bother with others. Add to that now the isolation of having the world at your fingertips in front of a screen – TV, Internet, and phone – and it's easy to see why we've become quite different people in barely a generation."

- Michael Horton, *Ordinary*

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN SCRIPTURE

2. Read the following Scripture passages and consider what they reveal about Christian community from the perspective of 1) attitude; 2) activity; or 3) both.

a. Colossians 3:16

f. Hebrews 3:12,13; 12:15

b. Ephesians 4:11,12

g. Galatians 6:1

c. Romans 12:4,5

h. Deuteronomy 6:7

d. John 15:1-5

i. Leviticus 19:17

e. John 13:35

3. Based on these passages, how would you succinctly define or describe Christian community?
4. The picture of Christian community presented in Scripture is, in many ways, a far cry from what we see today – especially given contemporary American culture. Consider the cultural attributes discussed below.

**Individualism:** This is the degree to which an individual is expected to look out primarily for personal interests (individualism) versus the interests of a larger group (collectivism). The United States ranks high in individualism, to the point that Barna Research notes that 56% of American adult Christians consider their spiritual life entirely private.<sup>1</sup> How do you see this play out today?

**Compartmentalization:** This is the tendency to separate the spiritual from the secular, to establish barriers in life and experience within which faith applies and outside of which faith has little place. How can such a separation be harmful to one's Christian walk? How can Christian community help address this?

- a. **Digitally-mediated relationships:** Today the world is more mobile and in-touch than ever before. And yet, many Americans feel more isolated than ever, suggesting that it's not only connection that matters, but the *quality* of the connection. "The medium makes a difference," asserts Michael Horton. Do you agree? What are some applications to Christian community?
- b. **Consumerism:** This can be defined as a preoccupation with acquisition to satisfy personal needs or wants. As consumer goods have proliferated in modern society, so too has a consumeristic mindset – and Christians aren't immune. Come up with at least three ways or examples in which consumerism negatively influences the Christian community Scripture encourages.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/discipleship-friendship/>

## ASCENSION'S CORNER OF THE KINGDOM

Like passion, the concept of an organization's niche also comes from *Traction* by Gino Wickman. Niche is simply that which differentiates an organization, its particular focus. Like any organization, a church can have a niche – a particular focus or emphasis in its ministry.

**Ascension's Niche:** *Discipling in biblical, Christ-centered community.* That is, as we carry out our passion of rooting people in Jesus Christ, we especially emphasize the unique, Scriptural role a local body of believers plays in building one another up in Christ.

5. Pull it part: What does each component communicate? What are the implications?
  - a. Discipling:
  - b. In biblical community:
  - c. In Christ-centered community:
6. How does Ascension encourage or facilitate such Christian community well? What are some opportunities for us to improve or extend our Christian community?