



COMMUNAL DIMENSION →

(Note: please read chapters 9 – 11 in Jesus Brand Spirituality for background on this class session.)

[INTRODUCTION]

Together we've explored three of the four dimensions of Jesus brand spirituality: the **active** (doing) dimension, the **contemplative** (being) dimension, the **biblical** (learning) dimension.

Today, we finish with **the communal** (relating) **dimension**. Jesus brand spirituality is a path that leads beyond individualism toward community.

The aim of Jesus' work in relationships is to gather a _____
_____.

[EVERYTHING ABOUT GOD IS RELATIONAL]

In the Bible, we don't have a soul in a body; we are bodies and we are souls.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Gen 2:7, KJV)

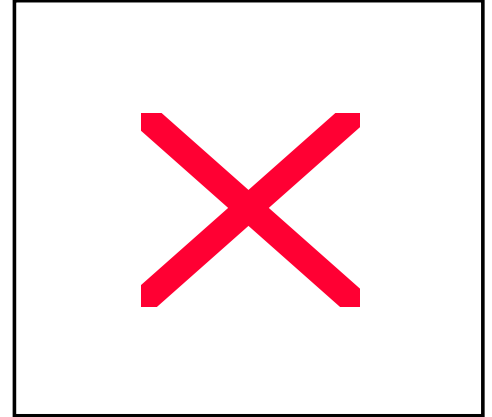
_____ creates soul.

God, in his very God-ness, is ongoing relationship. The word for this is

_____.

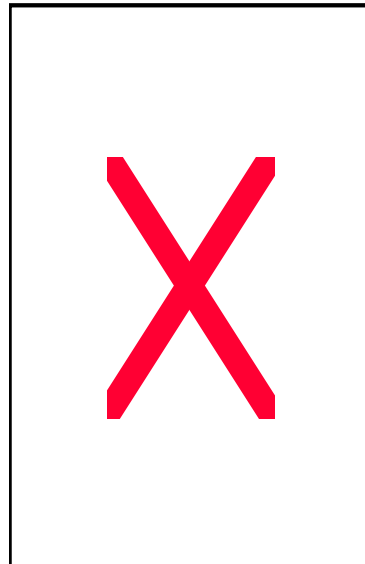
God is a **community of persons**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God is _____ relationship. Everything about God and everything that comes from God is relational.



People need connection with God, and they also need connection with other people.

The myth of _____: that we need only to rely on ourselves and should not dependent on others.



In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, sociologist Robert Punam describes the decline of what he calls

“_____.”

Jesus brand spirituality is a path that leads beyond individualism toward communities organized around his teaching and empowered by his presence.

The Greek word for such communities is _____, translated “church.”

There are three expressions of “church” mentioned in the New Testament.

1. **The church _____**: The members of the body of Christ throughout time and space; the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1)
2. **The church _____**: The church in a particular town or city
3. **The church in the _____**: Like a bible study or small group

Jesus prepared his first disciples to participate in these communities by giving them a new commandment: “you must love one another” (John 13:34).

[FORGIVENESS: THE REPAIR MECHANISM]

Communities that form around a shared commitment to Jesus become _____ of love.

Forgiveness is the repair mechanism for our damaged connections.

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

[ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE, PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD]

The preeminent revelation of Jesus: “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Not just “God is loving,” but “God IS Love.”

God is love because God is, within himself, irreducible, loving relationship.

God is:

A _____ ever generating Love

A _____ ever receiving and reciprocating Love

A _____, generated by the Love between Father and Son

It is in the nature of love to generate more love and to share love;
hence God is _____.

Understanding Jesus is a different process than mastering Christianity. Objects can be mastered, but persons want to be understood, known, loved.

God is love.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

[DISCUSSION GROUND-RULES]

1. **What's shared in the group stays in the group.**
2. **No one is expected to share on any given topic; it's fine to pass.**
3. **No unsolicited advice giving.**
4. **Take your fair share of the time.**
5. **Be respectful of the viewpoints of others.**

[QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSION]

Note on discussion questions: questions are drawn from both the book and the class, so feel free to develop your own questions if class attendees haven't read the book.

1. How do you think you've been affected by what the author describes as "the myth of individualism" or what Robert Putnam describes as "the loss of social capital" [see pp. 184-187]?
2. What opportunities do you see in your own life to participate more meaningfully in the communal dimension of spirituality?
3. What one thing about the church (your own, those you know of, or your impression of the church at large) would you change to make it more in keeping with the spirituality of Jesus as you understand it?
4. Do you see any difference between saying "God is loving," and "God is love"?
5. What differences do you see between a spirituality that seeks understanding and one that seeks mastery? Have you ever felt that your approach to spirituality was more about seeking mastery than understanding? Describe what that was like.
6. What are your thoughts on the tension between the certainty we crave and the idea that our knowing is always partial, at best? Have you ever found yourself acknowledging less certainty than you once had concerning a matter of faith or spirituality?