

## **Introduction:**

Why do so many good and sincere Christians get “spiritually stuck?” They love God, they want to grow, they have seen some measure of spiritual transformation, but they “stall,” they hit a spiritual ceiling. Some habits or attitudes seem to never change. Trying hard and making “re-commitments” last only for a short time. What do you do when you’re spiritually stuck?

**Axiom:** The greatest seed, in the greatest soil, cannot grow in the wrong environment.

- The **COMMAND** of Jesus requires a very specific spiritual ecosystem.

John 13:34-35

- The **EXAMPLE** of Jesus’ ministry to develop His disciples demands a specific ecosystem.

Mark 3:13-14

- The **PRACTICE** of the early church and its impact argue for a specific ecosystem.

Acts 2:42-47

- The **HISTORY** of the Church, past and present, confirms a specific ecosystem for spiritual growth and transformation.

The Spiritual Ecosystem: **AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY**.

The form this system takes is: **A SMALL GROUP**.

A critical distinction: **AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY** **≠** **A SMALL GROUP**.

**The principle:** We must be engaged in the spiritual ecosystem of authentic community for spiritual maturity to occur.

**Two big questions:**

1. What is authentic community?
2. How do you get it?

**Authentic community occurs when...**

**Romans 12:9-13**

***The real you...***

verse 9

***...meets real needs...***

verse 10

***...for the right reasons...***

verse 11

***...in the right way.***

verses 12-13

**The *real* you** – Not a **PROJECTION** of yourself.

Romans 12:9

- **Authenticity** – *“Let love be sincere.”*
- **Purity** – *“Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good.”*

**Meets *real* needs** – Not **SUPERFICIAL** ones.

Romans 12:10

- **Devotion** – *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”*
- **Humility** – *“Giving preference to one another in honor.”*

**For the *right* reason** – Not to **PLEASE** people.

Romans 12:11

- **Motive** – *“Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”*
- **Method** – “Genuine service to God is characterized by:
  - Diligence – excellence
  - Enthusiasm – passion

**In the *right* way** – Not in our own **STRENGTH**.

Romans 12:12-13

- **Upward Focus** – “*Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.*”
- **Outward Focus** – “*Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing (pursuing) hospitality.*”

### **Why is authentic community so important to Jesus?**

<sup>20</sup>“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.

John 17:20-21

### **Application/Discussion Questions:**

1. Share a time when you’ve experienced authentic community in a significant way with brothers and sisters in Christ. (What made it so special to you?)
2. Describe a time when the hypocrisy of a Christian was a stumbling block for you.
3. Why do you think authenticity is so important in relationships? In having a positive impact on others?
4. What’s the difference between “real needs” and superficial ones? How does motive play into meeting “real” needs?
5. What specific step of faith/obedience do you need to take to build authentic community for you or someone else in order to be an answer to Jesus’ prayer in John 17?

### **Resources from Living on the Edge to Help You Apply Romans 12:9-13**

Love One Another – (CD series) – Chip Ingram

Five Lies That Ruin Relationships – (CD/DVD series) – Chip Ingram

Small Group Bible Studies – Available online at [LivingontheEdge.org](http://LivingontheEdge.org)