

**The Early Church Had a Big Front Porch
(Whatever Happened to Community?)**

Acts 2: 44-47

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The last time I remember seeing my grandmother alive was on the front porch of her house. She was in the porch swing, chatting with a friend, still recovering from heart surgery.

I used to sit in that swing in the summertime during stormy weather. I enjoyed listening to the rain fall on the tin roof.

At night time, when storm clouds formed way off, I enjoyed watching the night sky light up and hear the distant rumble in the clouds.

While the front porch could be a place of solitude, out in the country it was also a place where you visited with friends, just like my Granny was doing just before died on that sad, June day 40 years ago. But she was doing something we all need to do more of, spending time with friends, talking about life.

Her sister lived just down the road. She died this year at the age of 104. After my Granny died, she became a second mother to my mom and an even more important member of our family.

To the community, my Aunt Mimi's porch was a place of comfort and refuge. It was an inviting place. Like her sister's house, it was a place where you could pull away from the business of the day, sit and talk, and share life for a little while.

Before you left, it was not uncommon to leave with a slice of pound cake and if you hadn't been in a while, perhaps a jar of jelly.

I shared many conversations with her on the porch in my younger years.

Most modern homes don't even have a front porch, not one that is used for the types of gatherings of days gone by.

I remember when the front porch was the place people retired after the dishes had been washed and put away.

It was the place that the last bit of daylight could be shared with the evening sky.

It was a place where a boyfriend and girlfriend could court or a husband and wife could sit and discuss the day's events.

It was a place where the children could play on a rainy day.

It was a place where you could hear a concert of insects singing on a hot summer night.

A rocking chair or a swing on a porch could provide therapy for a restless soul.

A porch was a good place to shell a pan of peas or read while the dog or cat slept nearby.

The front porch was a nice place to think and to grab a few moments of solitude.

But more than all of this, the front porch used to be a connection to the community.

Whenever you were seated on the porch of your home, it was an open invitation for company. When you were on the porch, you might as well have had a sign flashing, "Stop in. Pull up a chair and sit a while."

If you've never had this experience, watch a few episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show," and you will get a little idea of what front porch living was all about.

Front porches in the South were the friendliest places in the universe.

Eventually, television and air conditioning moved more people inside. We stopped building screen doors and we stopped building porches.

We started building decks on the back of our homes and fences for privacy.

Whether it was intentional or not, we lost a lot of contact with our neighbors after that.

Dorsey Brooks lived to be 100. Many of you knew him. He was a member of our church for a long, long time. The Tucker baseball field was named after him because he was legendary in coach in the state of Georgia and he coached Tucker High School to their first state baseball championship. We took a bus full of friends to the dedication ceremony.

In his late 90's, he would come by my office and sit and talk. He'd say, "I've come to sit a while on the 'front porch.'"

He told me that his father used to have a house on a stretch of road during the days when people pulled wagons with horses.

In his later years, his father would sit on his porch and people would often stop and talk with him before they would continue on their journey.

His father had something to offer those people or they wouldn't have stopped. I think those people had something to offer Dorsey's father, or he wouldn't have sat on his porch, hoping they would be traveling by.

That something was community. Dorsey's father looked for community by sitting on his porch. He waited for it to come to him and people offered it by stopping for a while.

That worked for Mr. Dorsey, but if you want community, you are going to need to be a little more proactive.

Many of us have cocooned ourselves inside our homes and have become content with finding community with social media, not realizing how superficial that kind of community usually is.

There are so many people that can create their own realities and fake selves on social media, it's difficult to know whom to believe or trust.

Sure, there is a lot of great benefits to the community that social media creates. A lot of people have found their life mates on social media. I've done many weddings of people that have been connected through social media.

However, that is the exception, not the rule. Social media stunts authentic community.

There are people that will go out as a group but spend most of their time texting other people because they don't know how to enjoy the presence of each other.

One MIT professor's research shows that eighty-nine percent of Americans say that during their last social interaction, they took out a phone, and 82 percent said that it deteriorated the conversation they were in.

(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_smartphones_are_killing_conversation)

We are all social creatures. Most of us want some form of community whether we are introverts or extroverts, but we are not very good at forming it.

Perhaps we need some of our old ways brought back to us.

When we read the New Testament, what we discover is that a new community formed around the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead and lived in the hearts of men and women through the gift of His Holy Spirit.

These believers came together on a regular basis to break bread with one another. They observed Holy Communion each time they gathered and they cared for the needs of those within their community. They helped widows that were in need of food.

Luke says that there was such a strong commitment to community, that 44 "All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

Because of their strong commitment to community, to the bond they had in Christ, to the help they gave one another, to their worship, their numbers grew.

So, we could say that the early church had a big front porch.

How big is our front porch?

I'd like for you to think of this church as God's house. We've often called the church the "House of God." When people arrive here that you don't know, I'd like for you to think of yourself as porch sitters.

Now if someone arrives at your house and you are sitting on the porch, what are you going to do? Are you just going to sit there? Are you just going to let them go on in your house and take a seat without saying a word to them?

No, that would be rude and unwelcoming.

My cousin Barry said this about his grandmother, ""She met every person who came to her door (and it often seemed to me that the whole county came to her door on a weekly basis) as if she hadn't seen them in years and was more pleased to see them than anything that had ever happened to her. That ability to make everyone love her, almost instantly, followed her throughout her life right through the nurses and assistants who helped care for her the last couple of years."

The porch is the place where we meet people. It is where people feel welcomed or rejected. It is the place where they know whether they are accepted unconditionally or not. It is a place where strangers can become friends.

When you think about it, the front porch is the place where Jesus first came to us. We met Jesus one the front porch once and Jesus said, "20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Rev. 3:30).

How many times has Jesus stood on your front porch, knocking, asking to come in and have communion with you?

How many times has Jesus wanted you to sit on the porch and contemplate life, to have some solitude with you, but you were too busy?

How many times has Jesus asked you to stop and sit on the porch with someone else but you passed by them because you were too busy?

How many times has Jesus asked you to carry another's burdens, but like the Priest and the Levite, you passed by on the other side?

You know, I think there is a lot of value in creating front porch opportunities.

A lot of people don't know what they need until they find it. Sometimes people need a little help. Some people don't know how much they need a friend that will listen until you take the time to listen.

Some people will not pull away and sit on the porch unless they are invited.

We also have to be like Dorsey Brooks. We have to be intentional about seeking out a friend and in some cases and have some good conversation about life.

It's good for our souls. It's good for our journey. It helps us stay on track, whether we are 26 or 96.

This is not just true for the extrovert. It is also true for the introvert.

There are some people that expend so much energy being around people during the day that by the time they come home, they don't want a big front porch. They are ready to recharge into some quiet solitude.

Believe me, I understand this. I am one of those that need to recharge away from people, but it doesn't mean I don't need a real community.

I have a small group that I meet with monthly. They help me stay grounded and emotionally healthy. In between those meetings, our closed Facebook circle is used for encouragement and advice.

If you are an introvert, like me, your energy can be recharged by having solitude. However, just because your energy gets depleted by being around people doesn't mean you don't need real community.

If you are an extrovert, just because you are around people doesn't mean you are experiencing real community. A lot of what happens in crowds of people is shallow and superficial.

Real, authentic community actually builds us up, not tears us down.

When you find an authentic community as God intended, it gives you energy, encouragement, and spiritual freedom. It doesn't delete it.

To those of you that are starving for social interaction and need community but often don't seek it because it is out of your comfort zone, I encourage you to risk yourself enough to seek it other Christians. It is worth the effort!

In order for us to become the church we have envisioned it to be in the year 2028, we need to build a larger front porch onto our church.

That happens through the building of relationships.

We can get to know other people well enough that we can share parts of our spiritual pilgrimage together.

As a part of our future story, we want to see small groups expanded beyond Sunday school.

With today's schedules, not everyone can meet on Sunday mornings. Some people are working on the weekends. Travel ball and vacations take people away. That does not mean people do not need community. They just need other ways of connecting and being discipled.

In small groups, trust, accountability, brotherhood or sisterhood develops.

With the addition of RightNow Media, which is an online service of video-based discipleship material, we have resources to use to form small groups.

Small groups can choose their own meeting places, times, and how often they meet.

So, today we are inviting you to the Front Porch.

Our suggestion for Front Porch Groups is as follows.

1. No more than six people to a group.
2. We want to form Men's Group's and Women's Groups. We are not opposed to couple groups if that works for you.
3. We suggest that groups meet once or twice a month from September till Thanksgiving; Reconvene again in January and meet till May before you disband.
4. New groups can form anytime.
5. Groups decide their own meeting time and place.
6. A staff member can help with video-based curriculum.

If you are not involved in Sunday School, either find out how you can connect with a class or talk to me about starting a new class.

Always be welcoming and friendly. Try to learn the names of people you don't know.

Today, we have response cards for you.

Here are your options:

- 1) I want to be a part of a small group. Please contact me.
- 2) I want to be a part of a small group. I will recruit others for my group and contact you with names.
- 3) I don't want to be a part of a small group, but I will pray for this ministry to grow. Jesus once said, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full." (Luke 14:23).

To paraphrase, Jesus said, "Get off the porch and go let other people know where they can find a Christ-filled community so your house will never be full."

Our staff stands ready to assist you in helping you form a small group. If you want to be a part of one, we will help connect you to one, just let us know. Perhaps this morning, you feel called to

start one, we would pray with you if you want us to, asking God to bless your efforts and bless you with people in your group.

Sermon Notes:

1. Do you have a memory of a house that had a front porch or does your house currently have a front porch that is functional? 2
2. Like Dorsey Brooks came to my office for some “Front Porch” conversation, where do you go?
3. Are there people who need community that will never find it if we do not take the time to stop and offer it?
4. True or False Some of us will not find community if we are not intentional about looking for it.
5. What can we learn from the New Testament church about community?
6. How can our church increase the size of our front porch?
7. What is Jesus saying to you today as He stands on your porch? What is Jesus asking you to do in regards to your church community?

BONUS: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit form the perfect example of community. Each interacts with the other in perfect harmony and unity, so much so that to encounter one is to encounter the other.

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