

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends

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The book of Acts gives us a picture of the very first church. A church in the first century that God surely wants us to imitate in the twenty-first century. After the Apostles had received the Spirit and Peter preached the Gospel to a large crowd, we read:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

Our 1st Century Example

The passage above is the snapshot that the Holy Spirit took at the birth of God's Church. This was the first church. This was authentic Christianity. These first Christians lived life the

way God intended it to be so that we, almost 2,000 years later, could follow their example. We believe the Authentic Christianity described here, and throughout the New Testament, can best be summed up in one phrase: "Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends."

Authentic Christianity is sacrificial, a life of serving Christ by serving others, and doing all of this in a fellowship of real friends. It is the continual pursuit and surprising pleasure of this Authentic Christianity that is the "heart" of New Life Community Church.

Accordingly, our hope is to reproduce Christians, families, small groups, and churches that are joyfully serving Christ with their best friends. Our purposes define Authentic Christianity, our strategies help accomplish it, our history is a legacy of pursuing it, and our membership is a promise to pursue it until the King returns.

They Were Devoted

The snapshot of the first and best church begins by telling us, **They were devoted**. The Greek word here is *proskartereō*, taken from the word *kartereō* which means to be strong, committed, and persevering.

In Greek Jewish literature, the word referred to “the patient endurance of Jewish martyrs” (*NIDNTT*). *Proskartereō* is a strengthened form of *kartereō*, and “gives greater emphasis to the time element; to hold out, to persist, persevere with a person; persist in an activity.” Quite honestly, a stronger word could not have been chosen to communicate unwavering, red hot, absolute, all-out commitment to God and His church.

They Were Devoted First to Christ

An increasing number of people, both in and outside the Church, are devoted to nothing. They commit to no one, and are not dedicated to anything, except the pursuit of personal gain and fame.

But these first Christians were devoted to Christ. The passage tells us of several activities **they were devoted to**. But the foundation, strength, and motivation of their devotion to these things was their devotion to a Person. A Person who said, **“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple”** (Luke 14:33). Everything? Who could possibly have the right to expect us to devote **everything** in our life to him?

God. The God who created us, died for us, rescued us from eternal Hell, and recreated us into a new and unique kind of human being that has His Spirit living in them. And while Christ has done all those things for every Christian, not many Christians have devoted everything to Him. And this is why there is so little Authentic Christianity in American Christianity.

American Christianity too often defines “success” in terms of buildings, budgets, programs, and excited crowds which need not require any love at all, and all of which may simply serve our worldliness, selfishness, and pride.

The foundation of Authentic Christianity is humble, sacrificial, unconditional love for our Father, His Son, His people, and all others — to serve them, rather than to be served.

Unlike American Christianity, our Lord defined “success” as sacrifice, suffering, self-denial, and even slavery. Accordingly, He said, **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”** (Matt 20:24-28).

The kind of devotion that Christ demands is expected from not just Pastors, but everyone who wants to claim to be one of His followers. We can be forgiven for our sins if we do not **give up everything** for Him, but Jesus said you **"cannot be My disciple"** (Luke 14:33). Obviously then, giving Him just a little of our time, treasure, and talents is not Authentic Christianity.

And it is the King of Kings that we are to be serving. Recently, I wrote the following for a devotional publication:

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit (Judges 21:25).

"For centuries most people throughout the world lived under the authority of a king. Whether it was the king of France, the czar of Russia, or the lords of Chinese dynasties, such men exercised a great deal of control over their people. Their commands were law, and they demanded that their subjects give their land, money, and even lives for the purpose of extending their kingdom, power, and glory over the earth.

Americans, of course, are proud of the fact that they have never had a king. That was what the Declaration of Independence was all about, and our freedoms are immense compared with those who have lived under kings. Unfortunately, it is easy for this democratic, independent attitude to affect our Christianity.

Americans are not used to having a king, but, unlike most Americans, Christians have a King and need to learn how to live under one. It is easy for American Christians to live as if we are only in the free, democratic country of the United States of America. However, no matter where a Christian lives, we live in a Kingdom, with a King who demands absolute allegiance in everything, just as any mere human king ever has.

What system of government is most reflected in our life? Do we live more like citizens of a free, democratic America, or like subjects (even slaves!) to an all powerful, autocratic King?

Are we as loyal to our King as anyone has ever been to theirs? Will we sacrifice land, money, and our life to advance His Kingdom and glory? Of course our King is a wonderfully benevolent monarch who loves us, but He is still a King, and we should be living like it! Christ is our Savior and Friend, but far too many people are content to confine Him to these roles. We want to remind ourselves and others that He is the current and soon-coming King of the Universe who demands and deserves our whole-hearted devotion." (*Daylights*, Feb. 2014).

Too many people in the Church are content to be a typical American instead of an Authentic Christian. Their values are the same as American culture. They spend their time, talent, and treasure on the same things any good American does.

But being an American falls far short of Authentic Christianity. If American Christianity is the standard by which we judge our lives, we will never even come close to God's brand of Christianity. When God pulls the curtain on this show we call life, He isn't going to be asking us if we were an authentic American. He will be asking if we were an Authentic Christian.

What was Authentic Christianity like for those people in the first Church? Was it boring? God says they were **filled with awe** (Acts 2:43). Was it just church on Sunday? God says, **Every day they continued to meet together" and "they ate together... in their homes** (v. 46). Were they slouches at work or isolating themselves from the rest of society? God says they, **enjoyed the favor of all the people** (v. 47). Was it worth it? God says these people had **glad hearts** (v. 46).

You will never meet a more committed bunch of people than Authentic Christians. Nor will you meet a more fulfilled, happy, and respected group of people. We can so easily shy away from commitment, but we forget the incredible blessings God can bring our way when we are committed to the right things. There is no better way to live your life.

They Were Devoted to the Apostle's Teaching

Authentic Christianity begins with a commitment to teach, understand, and obey the New Testament revelation we have through the writings of Christ's Apostles. Accordingly, when the Apostle Paul wrote Timothy and Titus concerning what church leaders should be devoted to (cf. 1 Tim 3:14-15), he said (by my count) 53 separate things about the importance or contents of teaching in the church. In the Apostle's mind, there was nothing more vital to the spiritual growth and health of Christians than the accurate teaching of God's word.

The Apostles' burden was that Christians would especially understand the doctrines of the Christian faith, not just the commands. While many Christians seem simply interested in what they are to DO, the Apostle placed a priority on teaching Christians WHO THEY ARE. For example, the first three chapters of Ephesians contain nothing for the Christian to do, but just doctrines to believe. The same is essentially true for the first 11 chapters of Romans.

This is because the Apostle understood that if we do not understand and believe Christian doctrines, we will not be able to consistently obey God's commands. The essence of who we are, and what we will do, depends on what we believe. We strive to accurately teach the Scriptures at New Life because we believe in the power of God's truth to change lives.

They Were Devoted to the Lord's Supper and Prayer

What does being **devoted** to **breaking bread** (Acts 2:42) mean? Can we say we are **devoted** to something as important as the Lord's Supper if we only celebrate it a few times a year, or even every month? We can be fairly certain the first Christians were **breaking bread** regularly. This is why we celebrate the Lord's Supper every week in our Sunday service.

Some have understandably thought that practicing this with such frequency will make Communion "less special." This is why we have selected godly men in our congregation to share a brief devotional about Christ's love and forgiveness for us before we celebrate the Lord's Supper. This not only helps them to grow as Christian leaders, but it reminds our members every week about the wonderful thing we are celebrating in Communion.

Likewise, Luke tells us the first Christians were **devoted** to **prayer**. How many churches devote a significant period of time during their Sunday service to corporate prayer? We have practiced this for many years and many people have told us they have never seen it before.

After celebrating the Lord's Supper, we encourage people to pray with the person next to them about items we have presented on a Power Point slide. United prayer is powerful prayer, and that is why every Sunday our members are praying together for 6-7 things regarding one of our four Purposes to Be Saved, Belong, Grow, and Give.

They Were Devoted to Evangelism

Our snapshot of the first church tells us that the Christians were, **enjoying the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved** (v. 47). Of course God was doing His essential part to give them favor with the people and to convert people to Christ. However, these Christians were certainly doing their part as well.

The reason they were, **enjoying the favor of all the people** was that they were demonstrating supernatural love and kindness toward others. Nobody loved people like the first century Christians did, and it attracted the lost to the Lord.

But while such kindness to the lost is an important step to leading people to Christ, love alone will not save someone. **The [communicated] Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes** (Rom 1:16; cf. Rom 10:14-15). These first-century Christians were boldly, clearly, and faithfully communicating the message of the cross and finding opportunities to share how Christ had changed them and made them the loving people they were. And as a result, **the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

Unfortunately, many Christians view evangelism as something they do alone. On the contrary, Jesus modeled His idea of outreach when He **sent them two by two** (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Especially friendship evangelism is best done with your Christian brothers and sisters. This is because **two is better than one** (Eccl 4:9) in almost anything Christian, and Jesus said the best proof to the world that we represent Him is if they see the friendships we have with one another (cf. John 13:34-35).

They Were Devoted to Fellowshiping in a Family of Friends

There is one more thing the first Christians were devoted to. It is an essential part of Authentic Christianity and the part that really ties it all together. Unfortunately, it is perhaps the most misunderstood and neglected part of Authentic Christianity in American Christianity today. Our spiritual ancestors were **devoted to fellowship** (Acts 2:42).

The Greek word is *koinania* which simply means "to share." But it obviously means more than sharing a cup of coffee in the fellowship hall of the church. To the first Christians, it meant sharing your life. As the text goes on to describe:

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (vs. 44-46).

Authentic Christians are not content to be merely acquaintances with the people in their church. Their life is mixed up with one another. They invite people from their church into their homes. They eat with people in their church. They sacrifice to meet needs of those in their church. They spend a lot of time together. And the text says that they did this **with glad and sincere hearts** (v. 46), not out of a sense of obligation. Christians in the first church ENJOYED spending time together!

This was because they were also devoted to Christ's **new commandment** to **"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another"** (John 13:34-35).

First, notice the kind of **love** we are to have for one another. Jesus commanded, **Love one another as I have loved you**. Jesus said this initially to a group of men whom He had shared His whole life and ministry with. How did Jesus love those 12 disciples? Jesus Himself modeled Authentic Christianity by making it one of His first priorities to gather around Himself a group of 12 close friends and three best friends to do ministry with (cf. John 15:12-15).

How many pastors, missionaries, and Christians in American Christianity serve Christ with their very best friends? Far too few. Yet this is precisely what Jesus modeled for us and why we define Authentic Christianity as *Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends*.

Second, notice to whom this **love** is to be directed. It is **one another**. Accordingly, the greatest commandment is not just to love God, but rather to love God and people (cf. Matt 22:36-40). This is because we are greatly limited in being able to love God apart from loving people. Not even our love for God is as personal and direct as American Christians often think. The primary way we love God is to love a person (cf. 1 John 4:20-21). That's why we have relatively few commands in the New Testament to love God, but a multitude of commands to love people.

But not just any people. The most repeated command in Scripture is not to love your enemies, or unbelievers, or even your spouse and children. All of the over 50 New Testament references to loving **one another** or **each other** specifically refer to loving the Christians in your church! It is those you are in fellowship with that Jesus was referring to when He said, **love one another**.

While there is an encouraging emphasis in the Church today on serving the lost in all kinds of ministries, it is not our love for unbelievers that proves to the world we belong to Jesus. Jesus said, **"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love [not them, but] one another."** Likewise, the greatest kind of love according to Jesus is not loving your enemies. Jesus said, **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends"** (John 15:12-13).

Biblical fellowship is reflected in all of those **one another** and **each other** commands in the New Testament. As you read a sampling below, ask yourself how many of them can practically and consistently be obeyed by just

sitting in a church service with people once a week? What kind of relationships would you need to have with people in your church to even obey and experience these commands? How much of this Authentic Christianity is really occurring in typical American Christianity?

Love one another as I have loved you [i.e. His 12 disciples] (John 13:34)

Lay down your life for your friends (John 15:13)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom 12:10)

Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)

Accept one another (Rom 15:7)

Instruct one another (Rom 15:14)

Serve one another in love (Gal 5:13)

Be patient, bearing with one another (Eph 4:2)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)

Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph 4:32)

Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)

Teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16)

Encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess 5:11)

Have sincere love for your brothers (1 Pet 1:22)

Love one another deeply from the heart (1 Pet 1:22)

Be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3:8)

Offer hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)

Encourage one another daily (Heb 3:13)

Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)

Let us not give up meeting together (Heb 10:25)

Keep on loving each other as brother (Heb 13:1)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (1 John 3:16)

Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18)

There are many more **one another** commands in the New Testament. Can you believe how much God expects your life to be wrapped up in the lives of other Christians? God is trying with all His might to describe what real Christianity is... Authentic Christianity. *Joyfully serving Christ with your best friends*. Not just the typical American Christianity stuff made up of meetings and marketing, buildings, and Bible studies.

Yes, even Bible studies. Please remember that none of our first century brothers and sisters even had New Testaments, let alone a copy of the Old Testament. Yet they will always be our very best example of Authentic Christianity. Why? Not because of the amount of their Bible knowledge, but because of the closeness of their relationships. God warns that **knowledge puffs up**, but **love builds up** (1 Cor 8:1). If your Bible studies are focused on knowledge instead of love and relationships, they are probably not what God wants.

Don't you get the feeling when you read the passage above from Acts that the first Christians were *Joyfully serving Christ with their best friends*? Friendship is the best one word definition of what biblical fellowship is all about. And yet there is an alarming lack of friendships in the typical American church. Authentic Christianity is living in community, sharing our life with those in our church.

This is precisely what the first Christians experienced, and it is tragic to see how much independence and isolation there often is in American Christianity. Many people attend church services every week, but do not feel they have a good friend in the church to share their struggles with and to serve God with. This is what the multitude of **one another** commands in the New Testament are all about. Unfortunately, the independent nature of our society has impacted the Church, and many Christians live their lives in such isolation that it is virtually impossible to experience real biblical fellowship.

There are 20 commands in Scripture to love your church family for every one command to love anybody else. The reason for that is because God views your church family as your family. Listen carefully, here, because God wants to expand how you view who your family is. The kind of care and concern anybody would expect you to have for your own blood family, is the kind of care and concern God is expecting you to have for your spiritual church family. In God's sight, we are all brothers and sisters in His family.

Jesus changed the definition of a Christian's family when we read:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. Someone told Him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You." He replied, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" Pointing to His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Matt 12:46-50)

Loving and caring for the needs of your immediate family is not enough for Authentic Christianity. While this can be an incredible challenge in itself, God our Father calls us to more. We work and earn wages to provide not only for our own family, but to be able to be generous to other families in our church family. We are not to spend every Saturday only serving the needs of our own family or fixing our own house, but to be giving some time to serving the needs of others as well.

Maybe you grew up with little to no family. Look around you at the next church service you attend. This is your family now. Maybe they don't feel like your family, but our Father in Heaven wants us to do whatever is necessary to make them our family because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Lasting Gift for Your Children

Have you ever known someone who had Christian parents but never really saw their dad and mom living it? Maybe it was your parents. Oh, they went to church, but when you think about it, they resembled American Christians more than Authentic Christians. You never saw dad pray except maybe at the dinner table. Did you ever see him worship God in song outside of the church building? Was the very heart and soul of your family connected to other families in a bond that remains unbroken to this day? Or did you just kind of do your own thing?

The most valuable thing you can impart to your children is Authentic Christianity. Do you want them to really be ready to excel in this life when you let them go? Give them Authentic Christianity. Do you want to give them the best vaccine possible to immunize them from the diseases of the soul which are devouring American (and Christian) youth? Start them now in Authentic Christianity. It's American Christianity that leaves a bad taste in their mouth, just like it did for us.

Kids and teens yearn for Authentic Christianity. Let them see their parents living it now. Let them join you singing to God in somebody's living room. Let

them hear you tell your friends what God taught you in your Bible reading this week. Let them see you listening to the prayer requests of a friend, bowing your head, and talking to your Father who is in Heaven. Have them join you in *Joyfully serving Christ with your best friends* in your church. You will not give your children a more valuable gift than Authentic Christianity.

They Were Devoted to Small Groups

Do we want to honor our Father in Heaven by loving His children and our brothers and sisters? Are we willing to do anything to honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by obeying His foremost command to love one another as He has loved us? Do we want to experience the fellowship, friendship, and family the New Testament describes?

Then let's make one thing crystal clear. Merely attending church on Sunday will not make it happen. You simply cannot experience the biblical ideas of fellowship, friendship, and family when you just see those in your church one hour on Sundays.

How are we going to have the relationships necessary to do Authentic Christianity? How about just the command to **encourage one another and build each other up** (1 Thess 5:11)? Just that simple command would require you to know a need in a person's life, and then to have a friendship such that they trust and welcome your knowledge of their struggle and value your encouragement and counsel.

This is one more reason that our small group ministries are such a vital part of New Life. There is no better way to obey and experience those **one another** commands of God and to cultivate the kinds of friendships that Christ desires His people to have in a local church. This is why the first Christians regularly met, **in their homes** (Acts 2:46).

Being committed to a small group of Christians is the one of the most practical differences between American Christianity and Authentic Christianity. You simply cannot consistently and practically obey all of the **one another** commands in the New Testament without being in a small group fellowship. You can go to Sunday morning service every week, show up for all the church picnics, and even serve in some ministry. But you will never find Authentic Christianity in any of these by themselves.

At New Life Community Church, Authentic Christianity is found in our small groups. We have not been able to consistently produce it any other way. The **one another** commands in the New Testament clearly describe Authentic Christianity and it will only be consistently realized in small bands of believers committing themselves to **one another** to give and share their lives and families.

The most valuable thing about such small groups is that they give you the opportunity to obey all the **one another** commands your Father has given you. If you are not in a small group, it is unlikely you even have an opportunity to obey the over 50 **love one another** commands in the New Testament.

We Are Devoted to L.I.F.E. Groups

An essential kind of small group at New Life is our L.I.F.E. Groups. The acronym L.I.F.E. reminds us of the purposes of our small groups which are:

Loving others

Interceding for others

Friendship with one another

Evangelizing the lost

Sounds remarkably similar to what the first Christians were devoted to doesn't it?

We guarantee it. Being a committed and sacrificially loving member of a L.I.F.E. Group at New Life will bring tremendous benefits to you and your family. The kind of blessings you can't buy with money, or maybe even find anywhere else.

But let's be honest. Even if L.I.F.E. Groups at New Life are great, just the thought of being committed to a small group of people may produce some mixed feelings. We know what you're thinking. Many of us at New Life have asked the same questions you might be asking:

- "When do we have time? Johnny has Cub Scouts three nights a week, little Suzy has dance lessons two nights a week, and I'll die without Monday Night Football!"
- "What if I don't 'click' with any of these people? Will I really fit in?"
- "What do I need more friends for? Between my family and work mates, I've got all the relationships I need. More than I want sometimes!"

- "I'm not going to have to do some of that 'male bonding' stuff or anything am I?"
- "What if I have to be open? I mean if I keep a 'respectable' distance then I'll stay 'respectable.' If people really get to know me, they might not like what they find out."

All of these concerns would be legitimate questions if ... if you were not a Christian! As a child in God's family, the Father has certain expectations of your life. Our Father has been very clear in communicating His most important expectations of how you are to live in His Family with your Christian brothers and sisters. The relationships we have with our spiritual siblings are a critical issue for the Father.

In fact He's even kind of blunt about it: **Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother** (1 John 4:20-21).

Loving our Christian brothers and sisters certainly requires having a friendship with them. Families were never intended to be an island, but to be intimately connected with the rest of the Christian family through sharing their life with other Christian families. This, and nothing short of it, is Authentic Christianity. This is the way it was meant to be. And only through small extended families of Christians like L.I.F.E. Groups will we ever have the opportunity to be *Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends*.

Now That's a Scary Thought

You might be thinking: "People have problems. And if my life is hooked up with their life, that means their problems will become my problems." Yeah, but here's an even scarier thought: Your problems might become their problems! That's right. Sharing your life with others may mean that they share the ups and downs of your life with you.

Now you're starting to get the picture! Now you're beginning to understand what Christ meant when He said, **Love one another as I have loved you** (John 14:34). Indeed, Christ gave up everything in His life for us, but He also shared His difficulties, distresses, and disappointments with those around Him. When it comes to Authentic Christianity, sharing our life is just as important (and maybe harder) than giving our life.

We Americans love to give, but we hate to share. Here's what I mean. When someone is truly in need, most of us have little problem giving our time and money to help. This is a virtue that we should never lose. But sharing our life is an equally essential virtue that we know little about.

How often do we share our personal concerns with others and ask them to pray for us? It seems at times that we practically need to be on our death bed before we are willing to share our life with others. How often have you shared a decision (big or little) with another Christian in order to get their counsel? Have you ever confessed a sin to a brother or sister in Christ so they could help you?

Perfection Not Allowed

That's not to say that Authentic Christianity is easy. If it was, more would be experiencing it. But many of us at New Life can tell you that it is worth the effort. I have always been committed to one or more small groups of Christian friends for 40 years, starting in the military when I was saved, through college, and all through my adult life. I am talking from experience when I tell you that *Joyfully serving Christ with your best friends* in a small group is the best way to live!

Of course, Authentic Christianity is not free of problems, stresses, and inconveniences. As disappointing as it may be, you won't find a perfect L.I.F.E. Group at New Life. The singing might be dreadfully off key, it might be your turn to care for everyone's kids, and the treat afterwards might be one of those yucky tasting "health" foods.

But no matter. Authentic Christianity has nothing to do with perfection or convenience. Real Christianity is being real with a real God and real people. In fact, the imperfections you will encounter in a L.I.F.E. Group will actually make it even more authentic!

Christianity is a Team Sport

It's a given. Sharing your life with others has its risks. But please ponder for just a moment the risks of not participating in Authentic Christianity. Why is the divorce rate for Christians not much different than anyone else? Why are Christian families experiencing just as much discontentment, disillusionment, and discouragement as the rest of Americans? Why do we have so much difficulty passing on our Christian values to our children? Why isn't the Christian life fun anymore? It's because there is so little Authentic Christianity!

In fact, God the Father desires Authentic Christianity so much, that He made sure you will fail miserably as a Christian without it. God made Authentic Christianity a team sport. Americans play it like solitaire. You can be an American Christian and remain solo, but understand this: You will never be an Authentic Christian until you join a team.

You can join a church, you can join a Bible study, you can even join a prayer group, but if you never devote yourself to a small group of Christians as if they were your very own family, you will not have Authentic Christianity. You will not be *Joyfully serving Christ with your best friends*.

Try playing football by yourself sometime. It's not possible, is it? Neither is Authentic Christianity. If you're not going to let others into your huddle don't even get on the field. **God is opposed to the proud** and you're sure to lose (Prov 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5). **But He gives grace to the humble.** Nothing or nobody can beat you when you have God's grace. But only the humble get it. Only the humble will make their Christian life a team sport. And only the humble will experience Authentic Christianity.

Authentic Christianity is . . .

- When your family is wondering what to do on one of those rare "free" nights and the first thing that comes to mind is taking a half gallon of Rocky Road ice cream over to someone in your L.I.F.E. Group and sharing it with them. And nobody cares one little bit about what their house looks like!
- When you share that home improvement project with the rest of the guys in your L.I.F.E. Group, and then the next weekend you're helping someone else with theirs.
- When you get a job offer to go to another city, but decide to stay for fear that you will never find another family of God's people like the one you've found here.
- When everyone else's kids in your L.I.F.E. Group think of you as their uncle or aunt.
- When that lost friend your small group has been praying for finally experiences something in their life that only God could do and realizes they need Jesus.
- When your group serves a practical need in a lost person's life who has never had anyone love them like that.

- When your lost friends and neighbors marvel at the kind of friendships you have in the church and ask, "Why is that?"

Authentic Christianity is when tragedy strikes (and it does more often than we'd like to think) and you know there will be some people who hurt as much as you do.

Do you need a place to stay? You've got it. Do you need some money? You've got it. Do you need someone who will care for your kids as if they were their very own? You've got it. Do you need an arm around your shoulder or a squeezed hand and a smile? You've got it. Whatever you need, God will use these people to provide it. That's the way He wants it.

In fact, God loves Authentic Christianity so much, He will allow hardship, difficulties, and the persecution of His people just so the world can witness what Authentic Christianity looks like. But we don't have to wait for a tragedy. Authentic Christianity can happen right now.

We are not implying that all of us at New Life are living this way, but there is nothing we desire more. We haven't attained this lifestyle — we're still in pursuit of recapturing 1st century Authentic Christianity in 21st century America. But God is helping us realize it more and more every day.

Will you join us in that pursuit? What are you willing to change about your life so that God can help you make the transition from casual Christianity to committed Christianity? Are you still content with American Christianity? Or are you convinced, as we are, that God has a much fuller life planned for us called Authentic Christianity?

Thank you for taking the time to get to know New Life's "heart," at least "on paper." We believe God has given us a great deal of grace to live out what you have read and will continue to give us grace to grow in Authentic Christianity all the more. If the above reflects your own convictions about what a local church of Jesus Christ should look like, we would love to have you join us in *Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends*.