

The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive by Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop (Crossway, 2015 (20 quotes selected by Matt Smethurst.)

1. God Created Community.

“Scripture teaches that the community that matters is community built by God. We may cultivate it, feed it, protect it, and use it. But we dare not pretend to create it.” [page 14]

2. The Gospel and Demographics.

“What [often] occurs is a demographic phenomenon and not necessarily a gospel phenomenon. Single moms gravitate to each other regardless of whether or not the gospel is true. This community is wonderful and helpful—but its existence says nothing about the power of the gospel.” [pages 20–21]

3. Community United around the Gospel.

“When Christians unite around something other than the gospel, they create community that would likely exist even if God didn’t. As a modern-day tower of Babel, that community glorifies their strength instead of God’s.” [page 23]

4. The Church Closer than Family.

“Our world’s history is a long story of tribal conflict where no one is closer than those who are family. That is, with one critical exception of course: the local church. When two people share Christ—even if everything else is different—they are closer than even blood ties could ever bring them. They are the family of God.” [page 26]

5. Supernatural Community and the Gospel.

“Nothing safeguards the gospel quite like the supernatural community of faith that gospel preaching produces. Lose what is supernatural about that community and, I fear in a generation or so, you lose the gospel.” [page 41]

6. Loving Other Christians.

“To follow Christ is to love other Christians. . . . Love between believers isn’t a sign of maturity; it’s a sign of saving faith.” [page 52]

7. Community Bound to Church Membership.

“It turns out something everyone is talking about—authentic community—is bound up in something people rarely ever talk about: church membership.” [page 54]

8. Leaders and Attenders Responsibilities.

“Pity the poor church leaders—in churches both large and small—who will someday give account for flocks that are so amorphous that no one really knows who’s inside the church. Pity the poor church attenders who never commit to obey a particular set of church leaders and instead attempt responsibility as their own shepherds—a responsibility they were never intended to fulfill.” [pages 59–60]

9. Ministers’ Job Is to Equip Others.

“Christ gave the church ministers of the Word not to effect change, but to equip others to effect change. The Sunday morning sermon isn’t the finish line for Word ministry, it’s the starting line.” [page 90–91]

10. Give Your People Good Books.

“Good books are little time-release capsules of culture-transforming teaching that you can spread around your church. Give them away often (extracting in exchange a promise to read them), and bit by bit you will change how your people think about church.” [page 123]

11. Worship Music for Any Emotional Condition.

“I tell new members at our church that I want music that helps them worship God if they got engaged the previous evening, and I want music that helps them worship God if they broke up the previous evening. When you select music with a variety of emotional starting points, you teach your congregation that God’s promises hold true no matter our emotional condition.” [page 143]

12. Church as a Family and Not an Event.

“How you run your schedule on Sundays says much about what you expect of your people. What if they’re ushered from the parking lot to the nursery and right into your theater-like seating area—then gently rushed out afterward to make space for the next service? It says that church is primarily about the experience of what happens during the service rather than the relationships that form around the service. . . . Consumers rush in and out of the service, viewing church as a spiritual ‘drive-thru.’ But providers show up early and, as able, stay around afterward. They see church more as family and less as an event.” [page 144, 145]

13. Why God Values Unity.

“The reasons we value unity often diverge from the reason God values unity. When you teach about church unity, denominate it in terms of its value to God. Yes, unity is pleasant. Yes, it makes for a happy church. Yes, it keeps meetings shorter. But ultimately unity is valuable because it reflects God’s character and being. . . . God cares about our unity because it shows off his power and wisdom.” [page 164]

14. No church Is the Best Place for Everyone.

“I am quite certain that your church is not the best place for everyone. Some may find it too big; some too small. Some may find your leadership too autocratic; some too passive. Some may find your spiritual environment exhausting; some may find it bland. Use every departure as an opportunity to reexamine your ministry, but never assume that every departure is a mark of failure. Your church’s job is to shepherd every member to the greenest pastures, even when it means shepherding them into another faithful church.” [page 167]

15. Conversations about Sin.

“With few exceptions, conversation about another’s sin should either be confession (e.g., confessing my poor response when I was wronged) or collaboration (e.g., talking together about how we can encourage that person toward godliness). . . . With our own sin, we should be open and transparent; with the sin of others, we should be discrete.” [pages 174–175]

16. Restoring a Brother.

“Self-promotion and self-righteousness want the circle of those who know of someone’s sin to be as wide as possible. But when my goal is the exaltation of Christ through the restoration of a brother, I will keep the circle as small as possible for as long as possible.” [page 175]

17. Embracing Others into the Community.

“If your church culture lauds those who singlehandedly ‘win’ non-Christians to faith, set a better example. Pray that when God brings a friend of yours to Christ, your church community will have so embraced him that he wouldn’t actually know who ‘won’ him to faith.” [page 192]

18. Church Can’t Compete with the World.

“Absent supernatural community, the church can’t compete with the world to attract non-Christians. For people bent on pleasure and ambition, the world will always be a more attractive place than your church to spend a Sunday morning. You can’t out-world the world.” [page 193]

19. Best Strategy for Reaching the World.

“Our greatest confirmation of the gospel is the community of the local church. Therefore, our best strategy for reaching the world is to fan that community into a raging inferno of supernatural witness that will be far more attractive than any adjustment to our music, small groups, or sermons could ever be.” [page 194]

20. Imagining Our Brothers and Sisters in Heaven.

“Sometimes when my church is celebrating the Lord’s Supper, I let my gaze drift from person to person, imagining what they will be like in heaven. There’s Margaret over there who sends me all those discouraging e-mails—yet who loves her Lord and our church. Squinting into the future, I can almost see her now, shining with the wise love and compassion of her Lord. Joe, who’s sitting a few rows back, reliably tells it as he sees it. That may at times be off-putting today, but the beauty of the honesty underneath will one day result in heartfelt praise to our King. Then there’s Marie, who’s talked with me a dozen times about struggles with unbelief. I can picture her

gazing with unending joy and confidence on her faithful Redeemer.” [page 212]

Matt Smethurst is managing editor of *The Gospel Coalition* and author of *1–2 Thessalonians: A 12-Week Study* (Crossway, 2017). He and his wife, Maghan, have three children and live in Louisville, Kentucky. They belong to Third Avenue Baptist Church, where Matt serves as an elder.