

GO DEEPER: THE POWER OF FAITH COMMUNITY

A Reflection Guide for "Why Church? The Surprising Science Behind Faith Community"

INTRODUCTION

In this compelling episode of Making Sense of Faith, Adam Hamilton invites us to reconsider what we might be missing when we skip church. Drawing on surprising research and his own personal journey, Adam makes a case for faith community that speaks to both the head and the heart. As you reflect on this conversation, use this guide to explore your own relationship with community and consider how connection might transform your spiritual life.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to consider what stood out to you most from this episode:

1. Adam mentions that 36% of Americans regularly participate in religious services, while 70% claim to be Christians. Where do you fall in this spectrum, and what has shaped your level of involvement (or non-involvement) in faith community?
2. The research shows that people actively involved in faith communities live longer, experience better mental health, and volunteer more. Which of these benefits surprises you most, and why do you think faith community creates these outcomes?
3. Adam shares his concern about people who say "I'm a follower of Jesus, not a Christian" because they don't want to be associated with Christians who give the faith a bad name. How do you respond to his challenge that we need to claim the title and be the different kind of Christian the world needs to see?

2 KEY INSIGHTS

1. Community is the antidote to isolation

"Which of us don't need community today? And the reality is community is absolutely essential and it's hard to find it. And in this digital age, you know, our communities sometimes are people who are on our Facebook page or on X or Instagram... But that's just not the same as having deep, intimate friendships or relationships with people."

Question: How would you rate the depth of community in your life right now? What's one barrier keeping you from deeper connection?

Reflection: Adam describes "stretcher bearers"—people who carry us through tough times, like the friends who lowered the paralytic through the roof to reach Jesus. Who are your stretcher bearers? And perhaps more importantly, whose stretcher bearer could you become?

2. Church shaped values in ways we might not realize

"I came from a family of alcoholics and, uh, and so, you know, in, in that area, in that way, I think it, it led me, it, it sort of protected me, uh, from maybe taking steps I might otherwise have taken... It was Jesus who said, your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions. I might not have ever known that word, not for the fact that I went to church."

Question: What values do you hold that have been reinforced or challenged by community (faith-based or otherwise)? What values do you wish were being more intentionally shaped in your life?

Reflection: Adam's story reveals how weekly exposure to Scripture and teaching shaped his relationship with money, alcohol, and purpose. Even if you're skeptical about church, consider: What voices are currently shaping your values? Are they moving you toward the person you want to become?

1 PRACTICE EXERCISE

The Community Audit

Take 15 minutes this week for this reflective exercise:

Step 1: Make a list of the communities you're currently part of (work teams, book clubs, online groups, neighborhoods, gyms, etc.)

Step 2: For each community, ask yourself:

- Does this community know me beyond surface level?
- Would this community show up if I needed them during a crisis?
- Does this community challenge me to grow or simply affirm where I already am?
- Does this community inspire me to contribute to something beyond myself?

Step 3: Identify one gap in your community connections. Is it depth? Is it shared values? Is it the absence of people who would carry your stretcher?

Step 4: Take one small action this week:

- If you're not connected to a faith community, visit one (online or in person) with fresh eyes
- If you attend church but haven't connected deeply, join a small group or introduce yourself to someone new
- If you're actively involved, consider: Who needs you to be their stretcher bearer right now?

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

"Jesus started the church. He pulled together first 12 disciples, then he had 72... He's not just passing on a message. He's actually inviting people into a community and which of us don't need community today?"

"There are lots of Christians out there who get it wrong. We all do sometimes... but the people who are routinely giving Christianity a bad name, if you allow them to claim the title Christian and you're not willing to use it, then the only Christians people will know are Christians like that."

"Multiple studies show that people who are actively involved in faith communities tend to live longer... approximately seven additional years of life. You wanna live longer? We're gonna take vitamins, we're gonna work out, we're gonna exercise. But the thing that has the greatest or could have the greatest impact in your life on longevity is actually being involved in a faith community."

CLOSING REFLECTION

Faith community isn't about perfection—it's about belonging, growth, and being carried when we can't walk alone. Whether you've been hurt by church, never attended, or attend regularly but feel disconnected, consider what it might look like to take one step toward deeper community this week. The research is clear and Adam's story is compelling: we weren't meant to do life alone. Community has the power to shape our values, extend our lives, protect our mental health, and give us a place to both give and receive love.

As you close this reflection time, ask yourself: What would it cost me to try? And what might it cost me not to?

This reflection guide was created to accompany the Making Sense of Faith podcast episode "Why Church? The Surprising Science Behind Faith Community." For more resources like this, visit makingsenseoffaith.com.