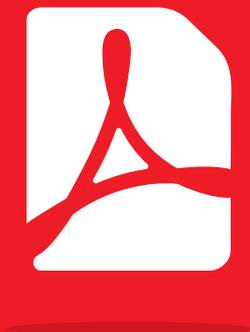


– *Creating* –  
**COMMUNITY**

*We Belong Together*



COMMUNITY  
gr:ups



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INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE, WE  
WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO  
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# WE BELONG TOGETHER

Community looks different for all of us. We have our work friends, family friends, school friends, sport team friends, and so on. Yet, at Real Life Church Ministries when we talk about community we are talking about something more. Community is an ***intentional community gathered together for a common purpose.***

Our Community Groups are created to be intentional as they meet in homes and often share meals with one another. All of our groups study together, pray together, serve together, and have fun together. In addition, this intentional community gathers for a common purpose, which is to FOLLOW Jesus. We all want to become better followers of Jesus as we learn, grow, and live out our faith with one another.

***We belong together, and life truly is better together.***

So over the next several weeks, we are going to unpack the importance of community—how to create it, live it, and sustain it.



# GETTING STARTED

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

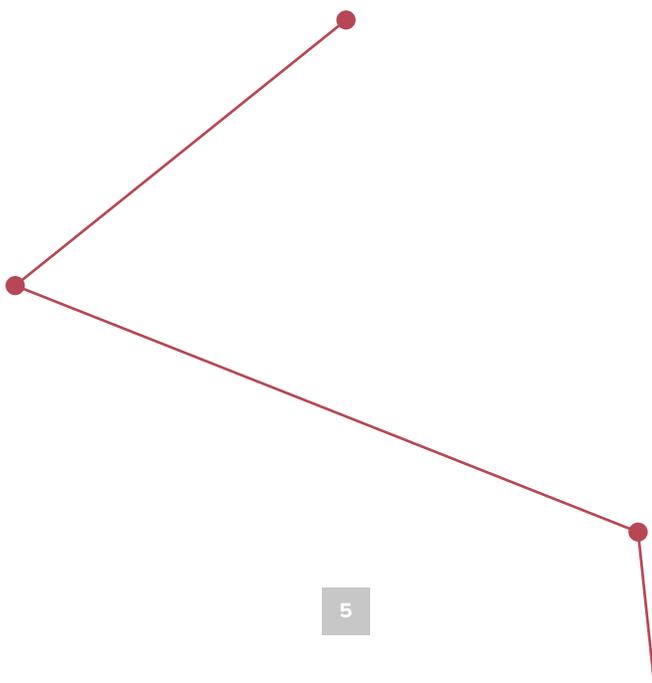
For your group's first meeting, all you have to do is show up. This book has been designed for you to start your homework after your first meeting. This will allow your group the chance to start the curriculum together. We believe this will maximize your group experience.

## YOU WILL NEED

A journal, pen, and a Bible. In addition, there is multimedia content throughout the curriculum, therefore access to WiFi will enhance your experience so you can click and gain immediate access to various content.

# WEEK 1

*Connect*



When we think of Community Groups, we typically think of relationships, community, and “**doing life with one another**”.

Yet, genuine community requires genuine relationships. Often times, this gets overlooked. In Community Group, we can easily get sidetracked and trapped by the rigid structure of things. We can get caught in the pattern of doing the same thing over and over again making Community Group a task and chore to get through every week. When groups become one-dimensional, they become a burden that people simply no longer want to be a part of.

So beginning with WEEK 1, we are going to implement the practice and importance of being MULTI-DIMENSIONAL. This is a fundamental key to a healthy and sustainable group.

### **We Take Our Cues from Jesus**

- Jesus’ Community Group was more than a Bible study.
- Jesus traveled with, talked with, and ate with His Community Group.
- Jesus loved on people, visiting sick and hurting people with His Community Group.
- Jesus prayed with His Community Group.
- Jesus served alongside His Community Group.
- Jesus even went to weddings and parties with His Community Group.

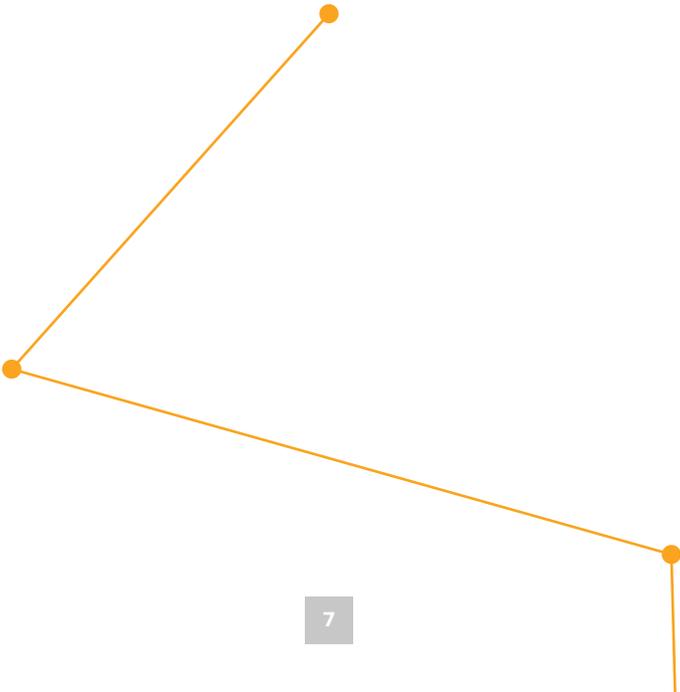
So in Community Groups, you can expect THREE common elements—prayer, service and fun!

This first session we will start with FUN, and this component must be carried on throughout the life of the group.

**TODAY:** Hang out, share a meal, play a game, and simply have FUN with your group.

# WEEK 2

*Calling in Community*



As a society, we are getting lonelier. Forbes reports that “the number of Americans with no close friends has tripled since 1985.”<sup>1</sup> CBS reports that “roughly 72 percent of Americans experience loneliness. And that this is not a once and a while feeling, but 1/3 of lonely people say they experience loneliness once a week.”<sup>2</sup>

This highlights the importance of community. After all, we were all created and designed for community. This is supported by our experience, the Bible, and even science. From experience we know loneliness can be sad and depressing. It can make us do things we regret. It can stir up negative thoughts. It is not life giving. The Bible reiterates this truth as it is filled with “one another” statements:

- Love one another.
- Encourage one another.
- Forgive one another.
- Bear with one another.
- Accept one another.
- Be hospitable to one another.
- Pray for one another.

And finally, science supports our need for relationships. A Harvard study showed that people who were physically unhealthy but have meaningful relationships typically live longer than fit people with fewer friends. It also went so far as to say a person belonging to no groups could cut their risk of dying in half by joining one.

So there is no doubt we all need community. **WE BELONG TOGETHER!**

“Human beings were made for living in community, and it is in community that we flourish and become most fully human.”<sup>3</sup>

## A Scripture to Memorize

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.  
-Galatians 2:20

## A Thought to Ponder

What is it about living out our faith in community that creates tension and stress? How can we overcome that tension to build authentic community?

## An Action to Take

As you start the first week of curriculum, take a few minutes to pray. Pray asking for God's help to teach you, use you, and shape you for His purposes. Pray for God's strength and guidance as you learn how to live life in the calling of community.



# WEEK2DAY1: *Sacrifice*

## Jumping In

Have you ever been in love? Whether it be a spouse, a sibling, or a child, love impacts and changes your life. Love creates a sense of sacrifice in us all. We begin to sacrifice our wants and desires for the wants and desires of our family. Love invokes sacrifice and a sacrificial life is a life greater than the individual.

The same is true in a life that follows Jesus. When Jesus started His ministry, He chose 12 guys to be His disciples. When looking at their life together, there is much to discover and learn, but for now let's focus specifically on the call of Jesus. Each time Jesus asked these guys to follow Him, they all responded with "yes." In doing so, they dropped everything. They counted the cost and surrendered themselves to the call God had on their lives. With submission and sacrifice comes life-change. Peter's perspective was radically altered. He went from focusing on the Kingdom of Peter to helping build the Kingdom of God. When we say "yes" to Jesus and "no" to ourselves, when we make following Jesus a priority, our lives change. Our perspective is radically altered. Everything we have or do becomes about the Kingdom of God.

*Love invokes sacrifice and a sacrificial life is a life greater than the individual.*

## An Area to Study

**Read Mark 1:16-20.**

*One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you*

*how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him.*

*A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee’s sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.*

## Homework

01. According to Acts 4:13, the men Jesus called were “ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures.” If Jesus chose 12 ordinary guys to start and carry out the mission of His church, then what does that say about how God can and wants to use you?
02. Can you imagine if a man came by your place of work and told you to stop what you were doing and to follow him? What does it say about the credibility of Jesus when these guys immediately dropped their livelihoods to follow Him?
03. Why do you think the call to follow Jesus was so irresistible?
04. What does it say about these guys to leave their stuff and follow Jesus? What impact did this decision have on their lives?

### **Read Luke 9:23-24.**

*Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”*

## Homework

05. What does the call to follow Jesus look like in your

life? What do you need to give up and surrender to fully pursue Jesus?

06. Maybe you have already surrendered your life to Jesus, and that is incredible! However, the passage above reminds us that sacrifice and surrender is not a one-time thing but a continual and daily practice. Therefore, what are you holding onto today that is keeping you from fully pursuing Jesus?

07. **Evaluate** what you consider yours. Make a list with three categories:

**A. Your Stuff** – What do you feel attached to or spend the most of amount of money on (i.e. money, possessions)?

**B. Your Time** – What consumes most of your time (i.e. work, thoughts, relationships, family, hobbies, reading, sports, etc.)?

**C. Your Talent** – What are you good at (i.e. making people laugh, singing, fixing stuff, learning, teaching, crafts, athletics, woodworking, etc.)

<i>YOUR STUFF</i>	<i>YOUR TIME</i>	<i>YOUR TALENT</i>
01.	01.	01.
02.	02.	02.
03.	03.	03.

Once you've made your list, start to evaluate what each of those things look like when surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. Do any of them change or go away? Do they connect with one another? Do they help or hurt others? Do

they bring life or do they bring pain? Are there any that you wouldn't want made public or your family to know about?

## Go Further



Andy Stanley - Jesus

## A Prayer to Pray

Father, I acknowledge you as the creator and giver of life, you are my Lord – the boss/master of my life and your ways are always best, good and right. After evaluating everything in my life, I pray for the courage to surrender all to You. God, it is not easy and I am weak. Please give me your strength, your wisdom, your peace and comfort as I choose to surrender my day to you. Help me God to surrender my thoughts, my time, my money, my words, my actions, and my attitudes to you today. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



# WEEK2DAY2: *Service*

## Jumping In

Have you ever played a game and wanted to get second place? Or what about when you started your career, did you want give up your promotion so everyone around you could rise through the ranks? The answer is probably not! The truth is we live in a competitive world. Specifically, we live in a culture that values being the best.

This is why the story of Jesus is so captivating. Jesus, “though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

The story of God is a total paradox to any other story of power.

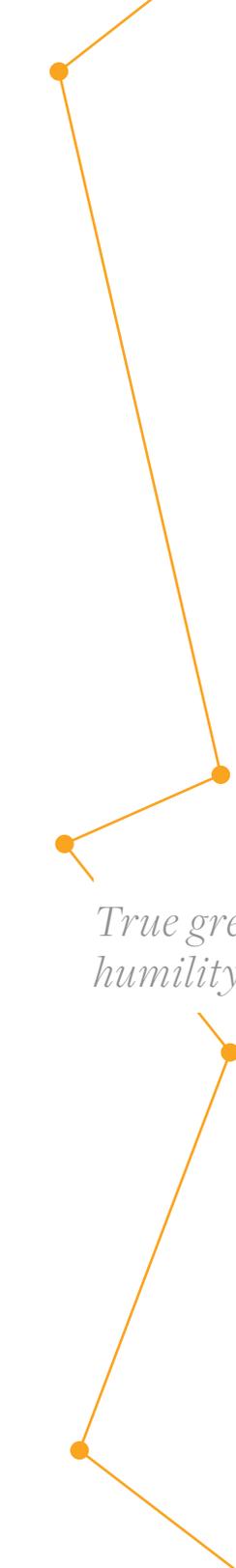
## An Area to Study

### Read John 13:3-5.

*Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.*

## Historical Insight

*In Palestine, the streets were dusty and people wore sandals without socks or stockings. A host was expected to honor their guests by providing a servant to wash their feet.<sup>4</sup> This heightens Jesus’ act of service because he did not appoint a servant to wash the disciples feet but*



lowered himself as a servant to wash their feet.

### **Continue reading John 13:12-17.**

*After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.*

### **Quick Comments**

Washing someone else’s feet is definitely an act of humility and service, but Jesus is going beyond an act of kindness. Through His example, Jesus is setting an example for all of His followers to carry out in their own lives. In fact, Luke’s account found in Luke 22:24-30 reveals that before Jesus washes their feet, the disciples had been arguing with one

another trying to figure out which one of them was the greatest. Jesus is demonstrating to His

*True greatness encompasses humility and service.*

followers what true greatness looks like in His kingdom. To be great in the Kingdom of God is not what the disciples had in mind. Rather, true greatness encompasses humility and service.

This is the paradox. This is the upside down Kingdom of God. If you want to be great, become a servant (Luke 22:26). Love your enemies (Matthew 5:44). Die to yourself (Luke 9:23-24). Consider others better than yourself (Philippians 2:3). The list goes on and on.

## Homework

01. Think of a person/position of power in your life. This could be a world leader or government official, the IRS, or maybe you think of your boss. Now, imagine if this person came to you, called you by name, and said, “How can I serve you today?” This is not simply bringing you a cup of coffee, but a physical, tangible act of service like washing your laundry or cleaning your house. How would this act of service change your perception of that person?
02. Jesus lived a life of radical service. What do you think is the most astounding element of the passage above and why?
03. How would a friend or family member respond if asked about some defining characteristics in your life? Would they characterize you as a humble person? Or a person who lives a life serving others? Why or why not?
04. What do you think makes serving so difficult? Practically speaking, how can you start living a life of service today?

## Go Further



Dave Matthews Band - Everyday

## A Prayer to Pray

- Pray thanking God for humbling Himself for our sake.
- Pray asking God to help you discern how you can live out a life of service.
- Pray asking God to use you for His Kingdom.

## WEEK2DAY3: *Breaking Bread*

### Jumping In

As a Community Group, should your group eat a meal together every week? Is it worth all of the planning, stress, and sometimes conflict? The answer will vary depending who you ask. And yes, community can certainly happen without a meal. Nonetheless, there are certainly important elements found by breaking bread within community. A meal is commonly associated with community, gratitude, generosity, hospitality, unity, empathy, compassion, and

celebration. Simply put, sitting down and sharing a meal helps bring people together. Sharing a meal “softens the soil of the heart” so to speak.

Awkwardness is subsided, conversations begin, questions are asked, and stories are told around the table. All in all, groups tend to grow closer because sharing a meal is a tangible way for us all to do life with one another.

In the Christian community, it is impossible to speak about a meal without referencing the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-30). This was the final meal Jesus had with His disciples before His crucifixion. In fact, we get the opportunity to celebrate this meal every week in community when we take communion. During this time we reflect, remember, and celebrate the amazing depths of God’s love for each one of us. Now, communion is not a practice limited to a church service, but communion can also be a great opportunity inside of a Community Group. A group can turn any meal into a time of communion by remembering and celebrating the love and grace of God displayed on the cross.

Meals are not meant to be burdensome. Rather, when we come together to eat as followers of Jesus it should be

*Sitting down and sharing a meal helps bring people together.*

a time of joy, a time to express our gratitude to God for all He has and continues to do for us. Some groups eat together every week their group meets while other groups eat every other week or once a month. The frequency of the meal is not as important as simply sharing the meal. As a group, find time to share a meal together when you can.

## An Area to Study

### Read John 6:33-35.

*The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

*“Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.”*

*Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

### Read Acts 2:42.

*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.*

## Homework

01. What do you think Jesus means by, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”?
02. The passage from Acts provides us with an account of life in the early church. How should this impact the life and purpose of your group? Do you and your group embody devotion to teaching, fellowship, sharing meals, and prayer? If so, what does this look like? If not, what is missing from your group?
03. Write out in 1-2 sentences describing what communion means for you.

- 
04. Does your group share a meal together often? How has sharing a meal with your group been meaningful for you?
05. If your group does not share a meal together, what is the number one reason keeping your group from eating together?

## Go Further

Real Life Church has a ministry called Renewal that provides hot meals to the homeless and those in need every Monday night at in Valencia. Your group could sign up to serve at this event and could help bring a portion of the meal. Then, your group could spend time eating and talking with our guests. Sharing a meal is a tangible way to show the love of God to the world.

If you or your group is interested you can email our Outreach Pastor at [kpisano@reallifechurch.org](mailto:kpisano@reallifechurch.org) for details on signing up.

## A Prayer to Pray

This prayer is from Psalm 34:8.

*“O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”*

*Our Father, we come to Community Group hungry, Lord.*

*We are hungry for comfort, hungry for love, hungry for a new way of living, hungry for your word.*

*Thank you for giving us this place and this time to worship.*

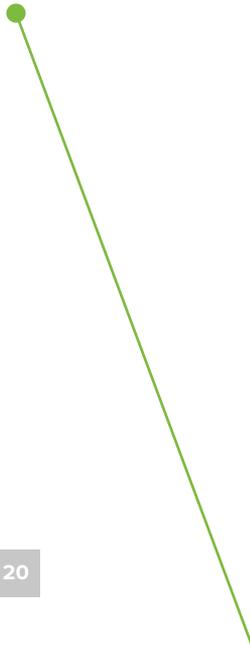
*We are eager to taste your goodness in community with our brothers and sisters.*

*Bless us as we feast on the Bread of Life today.*

*In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# WEEK 3

*Practices in Community*



If you have ever experienced community, you know it does not come easily. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Community is messy and certainly comes with various challenges. However, this does not mean we should throw in the towel and give up on practicing community. After all, we were all created and designed for community (see page 8). “Religious as well as secular researchers have recently rediscovered the human need to “belong” and describe various versions of our longing for community—a place where one is known, or at least a group where everybody knows your name. Our cultural emphasis on personal freedom and self-fulfillment has left many people lonely and emotionally fragile. Many of us are looking for community.”<sup>5</sup> Whether introverted or extroverted, community gives us all life, meaning, and purpose. So instead of giving up on community, this week we are going to explore three life-giving practices that will help our communities thrive.

### **A Scripture to Memorize**

Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. -Philippians 2:2

### **A Thought to Ponder**

What makes community messy? Why are strong, committed, life-giving communities hard to come by?

### **An Action to Take**

Before beginning this week’s homework, write out what you think are the three most important elements needed for a community to thrive.

# WEEK 3 DAY 1: *Gratitude*

## Jumping In

Gratitude is the practice of acknowledging and expressing thanks. Generally speaking, our culture is good at thanking God on occasion. It is common to pray and thank God for our food, our health, our families, and our jobs. However, the missing link in our culture is the frequency and the depth of one's thankfulness. In our culture of busyness, living a daily life of gratitude tends to fade away only to resurface around the holidays.

*Gratitude is the practice of acknowledging and expressing thanks.*

Our study this season begins with the practice of gratitude because we all have something to be thankful for as everything comes as a gift from God. Whether it be a material possession or simply

the intangible air we breathe, we can all express gratitude. As followers of Jesus, our lives have been transformed by amazing grace. Therefore, practicing gratitude is not simply an act or attitude, but it is our identity.<sup>6</sup>

“Our capacity for gratitude is not connected with an abundance of resources but rather with a capacity to notice what it is that we do have.”<sup>7</sup> -Christine Pohl

## An Area to Study

### Read Philippians 4:4-7.

*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Vs. 7) Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

## Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

## Homework

01. We typically find more difficulty giving thanks in negative situations. It can be hard to give thanks when you get a flat tire or when you get laid off from work. Yet, in the Philippians passage above, Paul is writing from a prison cell. How does this affect your reading of the Philippians passage? How does knowing this affect your study of gratitude in today's homework?
02. Having joy, giving thanks, and rejoicing is seen above as a continual action. What keeps us from or distracts us from living a life of continual gratitude?
03. Why do you think a life of gratitude leads to God's peace as seen in verse 7? What do you imagine this peace to be like?
04. What are some ways you can creatively start to implement and practice a life of gratitude, a life of "giving thanks in all circumstances"?

## Go Further



Andy Stanley - I Owe Who

## Why Gratitude Matters

When gratitude is lacking, both the individual and the community are impacted. "Gratitude is vital to sustaining communities...Ingratitude [is] deadly; [it] kill[s] community by chipping away at it until participants long to be just about anywhere else. While gratitude gives life to communities, ingratitude that has become established

sucks out everything good, until life itself shrivels and discouragement and discontent take over.”<sup>8</sup>

## A Prayer to Pray

In your journal, write down three things you are most thankful for.

- Pray thanking God for these various blessings.
- Thank God for His unending love and amazing grace.
- Ask God for His help in finding joy in all circumstances.
- Pray for God to help you live a life characterized by gratitude.



# WEEK3DAY2: *Generosity*

## Jumping In

Generosity is an attitude of the heart: it requires personal sacrifice, and it embodies the willingness to share generously all we have with others for the sake of God's Kingdom. Unfortunately, given our culture of materialism and greed, generosity is a difficult and uncommon practice. In fact, the dominant currencies (what we value most) in the United States are time and money. We strive to make the most amount of money in the least amount of time. Think about it. Most, if not all of us, struggle with this as we are all products of our environment. This creates the tendency to have a closed, tight grip on all of our stuff - especially our finances.

So if we desire to flip the script, the question becomes "how is a culture and a heart of generosity created?"

First, generosity starts with identity. We have to evaluate who we truly are and what truly belongs to us. A Biblical understanding of generosity helps reveal this to us as the Bible teaches us all stewardship. Stewardship is understanding that we are not owners but in fact managers. In the book of Genesis, we have the account of creation. Genesis 1:26 states, "Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

This understanding acknowledges God as the Creator of the world, and us, mankind, as His creation. Thus, God is inherently the owner of the world who has created and empowered us to "reign" and manage His creation. This

*Stewardship is understanding that we are not owners but managers.*



allows us to see all of our time, talent, and resources as gifts from God, and therefore, it should all be used for God's Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Not only has God shown us all generosity by sustaining our life through the air we breathe (among other things) but also by sending His son Jesus to give His life for us. Once, we acknowledge the amazing generosity of God, we are able to follow His example and give generously.

“We embody our gratitude by following God’s example and generously sharing the resources that we have been given”<sup>10</sup>

## An Area to Study

### Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

*Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” (vs 8) And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say,*

*“They share freely and give generously to the poor.*

*Their good deeds will be remembered forever.”*

*(vs 10) For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.*

*Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully*

*express their thanks to God.*

*As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!*

## Homework

01. Why do you think God calls us to be generous with our time, talents, and resources?
02. Which do you relate more with and why? A cheerful giver or a reluctant giver?
03. Look back through the passage, what impacts were made from the generosity of others?
04. Verse 8 and verse 10 both convey God as the One who provides all of our needs. Do you find yourself having a hard time trusting God to cover your needs? Why or why not?
05. What is your experience with generosity and giving? How do you use what God has given you to bless others and make a difference for God's Kingdom?

“In the normal and healthy Christian life, everything proceeds from God’s generosity, and everything returns to God in thanksgiving. Grace, generosity and gratitude: these are not optional extras of Christian living, but are the very heart of it all.”<sup>11</sup> – N.T. Wright

## Go Further



Rusty George - When You Invest In Him



Ashley Wheelon - How getting gifts taught me...

## Why Generosity Matters

“A lack of generosity refuses to acknowledge that your assets are not really yours, but God’s”<sup>12</sup>

“Generosity, when it flows naturally from the heart of a church community, is contagious. It has an undeniable effect on people who come in contact with it. It expresses in practical and powerful ways the message at the core of our faith: God gave his only Son to us that we might have life.”<sup>13</sup>

When people are generous with their time, talent, and resources the church-community as a whole has what it needs to THRIVE. This ultimately extends throughout the world and helping people find and follow Jesus.

## A Prayer to Pray

- Pray for God to give you a heart of generosity.
- Pray for the strength to not be consumed by material possessions.
- Pray for God to show you specific areas of life where you need to be more generous.
- Pray for God to show you how you can play an active role in impacting the world for Jesus.



# WEEK 3 DAY 3: *Hospitality*

## Jumping In

Hospitality is the practice of “welcome.” Practicing hospitality entails invitation, inclusion, embrace, and a sense of belonging to those all around us. It is a deliverance of grace from the grace in which we have received from God. This practice does not serve an agenda rather it is a gift rooted in love seeking nothing in return. If you have ever welcomed someone, invited someone into your home, greeted a stranger, given someone a ride, offered someone dinner or a place to stay, then you have practiced hospitality.

## Historical Insight

For the first 1,500 years of the church, hospitality was a central practice and focused on giving to those who were unable to repay the act of kindness.<sup>14</sup> However, during the Late Middle Ages the practice of hospitality shifted and became known as a form of entertainment, ultimately a way to accrue honor as the rich and powerful were being hosted. This shifted the focus of hospitality from extending love to other people to being more concerned with selfish gain. This has played a role in how hospitality is practiced in our culture today. Rarely do we participate in hospitality without expecting something in return. Our culture tends to think through reciprocal acts of service. For example, if I buy someone’s lunch, then my lunch will be covered next time. Or if I have someone over for dinner, then they will return the favor next time.

## An Area to Study

**Read Luke 14:12-14.**

*Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or*

*Grace does not serve an agenda; rather, it is a gift rooted in love.*

*dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

## Homework

01. In our culture, we typically associate hospitality with simply hosting a party or having friends or family over for dinner. What do you think Jesus means here when he says, “Do not invite your friends”?
02. Why do you think Jesus emphasizes inviting those who are unable to return the favor and offering hospitality without expecting something in return?
03. Comparing Jesus’ teaching here with today’s culture, how do you think we as a culture are getting the practice of hospitality right? Where do you think we are falling short or missing the mark?
04. How do you think Jesus’ words in this passage should shape our culture’s practice of hospitality?

“Christians spend too much time “deciding” who can’t be included at the dinner party. In contrast, we believe it’s our responsibility and privilege as followers of Jesus to add chairs to the table, not take them away, almost compelling the Host to make more room as we eagerly spread the good news of God’s abundant hospitality among our neighbors. Just as Jesus frequented the meals and parties of his neighbors, we too should make it a priority to eat and relax often with our neighbors.”<sup>15</sup> -Christopher Smith and John Pattison

## Read Matthew 25:34-40.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’” “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

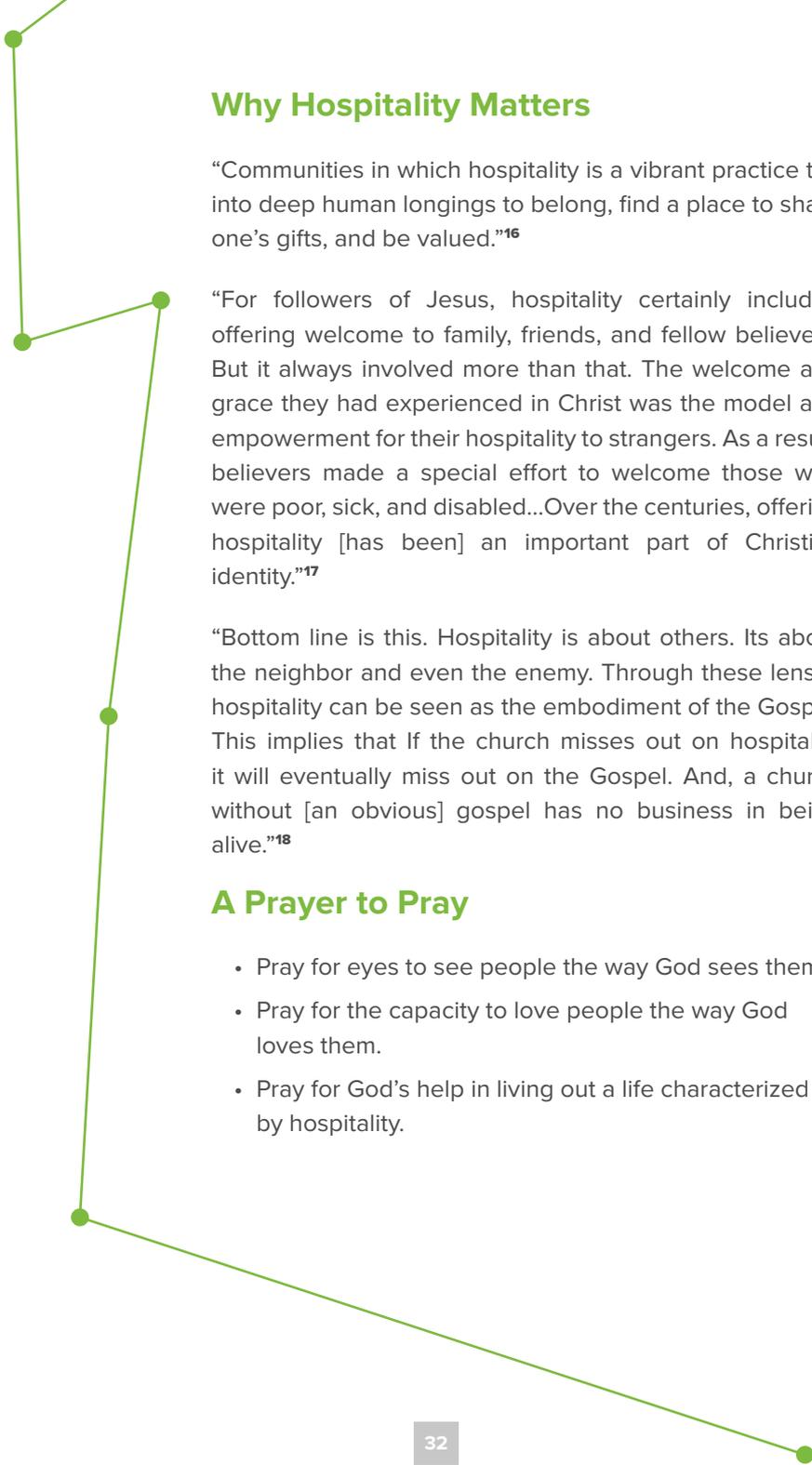
## Homework

05. What elements does this passage tell us are included in the practice of hospitality?
06. Do you regularly practice hospitality? If so, what elements in this passage do you see in yourself on a daily or weekly basis? If not, what do you think is keeping you from living a life of hospitality as described by Jesus in this passage?
07. Jesus equates what we do for one of the least of these as if we were doing it directly for Jesus himself. How does that impact your responsibility to live a life of hospitality? A life welcoming and caring for all?

## Go Further



Jeff White - Public Faith and the Practice of...



## Why Hospitality Matters

“Communities in which hospitality is a vibrant practice tap into deep human longings to belong, find a place to share one’s gifts, and be valued.”<sup>16</sup>

“For followers of Jesus, hospitality certainly included offering welcome to family, friends, and fellow believers. But it always involved more than that. The welcome and grace they had experienced in Christ was the model and empowerment for their hospitality to strangers. As a result, believers made a special effort to welcome those who were poor, sick, and disabled...Over the centuries, offering hospitality [has been] an important part of Christian identity.”<sup>17</sup>

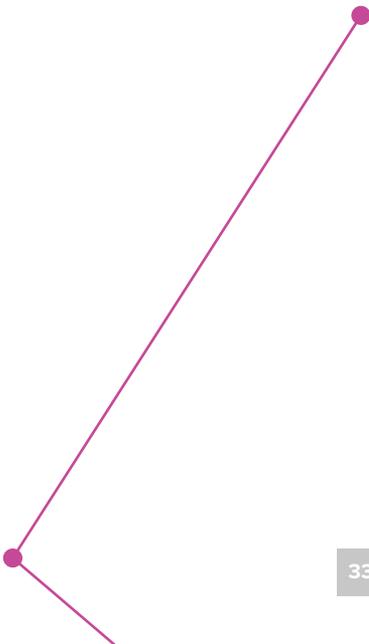
“Bottom line is this. Hospitality is about others. Its about the neighbor and even the enemy. Through these lenses hospitality can be seen as the embodiment of the Gospel. This implies that If the church misses out on hospitality it will eventually miss out on the Gospel. And, a church without [an obvious] gospel has no business in being alive.”<sup>18</sup>

## A Prayer to Pray

- Pray for eyes to see people the way God sees them.
- Pray for the capacity to love people the way God loves them.
- Pray for God’s help in living out a life characterized by hospitality.

# WEEK 4

## *Your Role in Community*



In the United States, we live in an extremely individualistic and consumeristic society. Put simply, our individualism causes us to see life through a personal lens making decisions based on how it affects “me,” the individual. The consumerism aspect creates a never-ending hunger and appetite for us to consume EVERYTHING without ever helping produce ANYTHING. Individualism and consumerism feed off of one another strengthening our personal desires at the expense of another.

Unfortunately, these societal norms can leak into our life of community, wreaking havoc and destruction. A community is made up of several individuals. However, a healthy community does not place their individual preference or desire above the needs and desires of the group. In community, there is no room for sole consumers. Community requires everyone to be a producer. Everyone has a role whether you know it or not; everyone has something they are able to contribute to the group because God has gifted us all uniquely.

We are ALL called to participate, so this week we are going to look at three roles in the life of community.

### **A Scripture to Memorize**

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. -1 Corinthians 12:4-6

### **A Thought to Ponder**

How are you uniquely wired? What are you passionate about? How can your gifts serve God, the church, and those around you?

### **An Action to Take**

Ask someone in your group what unique gifts they see in you. Then, go and find an area to serve where you can use your giftedness for God’s glory.

## WEEK 4 DAY 1: *Your Role is to Commit*

### Jumping In

Our culture is not the best at exemplifying commitment. Our individualistic and consumeristic culture has created the mentality that if something is not just the way I like it, then I will leave and find something that is. Did you know “Americans now change residences an average of fourteen times in their lives”?<sup>19</sup> This is also why the phrase “Church Shopping” exists. If church is not exactly how I prefer it to be, then I will pack up and find a new church that matches perfectly with my preferences. There is a toxic shallowness to this way of thinking. It minimizes the seriousness of commitment, making it more difficult to trust someone’s word or promise.

*We want the joy of being connected without the burden of commitment.*

On page 8, we looked at how we all need relationships and community. However, turning this need into a reality is often prohibited by our hesitation to

make commitments. We want the joy of being connected without the burden of commitment. The tension between the two creates an obvious problem. “While we might want community, it is often community on our terms, with easy entrances and exits, lots of choices and support, and minimal responsibilities.”<sup>20</sup> Like the wise old saying “You can’t have your cake and eat it too” suggests, you cannot have it both ways. It is literally impossible to eat your cake and still hold on to it. The same is true for community. Some times we want community to be tailored perfectly to our own individual standards, yet an individual and a community are polar opposites of one another. We can not have an individualistic community without taking away the very essence of community. So what do we do?

We have to reorient ourselves with the truth and importance of commitment.

## An Area to Study

Read the Parable of the Sower found in  
Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23.

*Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:*

*“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”*

**Continue reading verses 18-23.**

*“Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is*

*produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"*

## Homework

01. Above, Jesus tells the story of a farmer and his seeds. The farmer explains the fate of 4 kinds of seed.

- Seed 1 — Snatched Away
- Seed 2 — Didn't last long
- Seed 3 — Quickly crowded and choked out
- Seed 4 — Stayed planted

Do you see a common trend? What do all four seeds have in common?

### Common Factor

All of the seed's life spans are categorized by the time spent in the soil.

The first three seeds did not last long enough in the soil to produce any fruit. However, seed four was never uprooted. It survived, it was committed, and a massive harvest was produced.

02. Which seed do you relate to most? We all long to be like seed 4 but if you take an honest look, which seed describes you most?

- Are you a seed that does not understand?
- Are you a seed that quits and gives up when problems arise?
- Are you a seed that jumps all in but gets distracted

and worried by other things?

- Or are you a seed that stays rooted and committed despite hardships for the sake of being transformed and producing fruit?

03. What factors in life keep you from staying in the soil? What makes commitment difficult for you?

## Go Further



Carey Nieuwhof - Why The Search...

## Why Commitment Matters

“God is transforming creation. If we slow down and stay put long enough, we too will be changed into the likeness of Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

We live in a microwave culture. We want what we want, and we want it now. There is a reason why 5-Star restaurants do not cook their food using a microwave. They understand that quality products do not appear instantly. There is a reason why get-rich quick schemes are in fact “schemes.” The same is true in our pursuit of life-giving community. We want to reap the beautiful benefits of authentic community yet we are not always willing to put in the time, hard work, and commitment it takes to cultivate such a quality product. The hard truth is, if we cannot settle down and be committed long enough to see the fruit of our labor, then we will tirelessly search for the deep longing in our soul - that is community.

The myth our culture continues to buy into is the idea of the grass being greener on the other side. Yet, this is and will always be a myth as EVERY community this side of Heaven is finite and fallen.

Jean Vanier tells us to “stop wasting time running after the perfect community. Live your life fully in your community today.”<sup>22</sup>

“The power of stability, though, is the chance to get below the surface, to recognize patterns, to become more sensitive to the work God is doing all around us.”<sup>23</sup>

## A Prayer to Pray

- Pray for God to give you clarity and understanding on the call God has on your life.
- Pray for strength to stay committed even when times get tough.
- Pray for God’s help to stay focused and not get distracted from the worries of this world.
- Pray for God to transform you, allowing your life to be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.



## WEEK4DAY2: *Your Role is to Be Authentic*

### Jumping In

In the age of social media and the rise of credit card payments, we have the freedom to appear as anyone or anything. Through our screens we have control on how others perceive us by only uploading pictures that catch our good side or by only writing posts describing the highlights in our life. We also take out loans and get buried in debt in order to have the nicest car. The truth about our lives becomes about what others perceive to be true based on what we post on Facebook or how we choose to spend our money. Unfortunately, our culture is plagued with the desire to impress because deep down we care about what others think. Whether or not we truly have a happy life, we want others to think we do. Some of us secretly want others to want our life. Yet, how far do we allow all of this to go before we call it dishonest? At what point do we acknowledge that the life we appear to have does not actually line up with our reality? The truth is, believe it or not, authenticity matters. Authenticity calls us all to be transparent, which requires us to live lives characterized by trust and honesty — even in the small things. Without it, genuine community cannot exist.

After looking at commitment in the previous day's homework, you might see a correlation between commitment and authenticity. Commitments are made to keep the community's values and intentions in line with one another. A commitment is a promise made. A promise requires trust and honesty, so authenticity and commitment do in fact go hand in hand. Commitment and authenticity are not meant to be legalistic rules to control your group. Rather, they are created to help your community THRIVE.

*Whether or not we truly have a happy life, we want others to think we do.*

## An Area to Study

### Read Ephesians 4:25.

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

### Homework

01. Have you ever intentionally told a lie? Or tried to appear to be someone you were not? What do you think was the motivating desire for this lack of authenticity?
02. Now on the other hand, can you think of a time you were intentionally lied to, cheated, or deceived? What happened, and how did this make you feel?
03. How does being “all members of one body” impact the importance of putting away falsehood and speaking only truth to one another?
04. How do you think a lack of authenticity affects our community and relationships?

## Go Further



Being Authentic Is More Than Just Being...

### Why Authenticity Matters

Promises provide the internal framework for every relationship and every community – they function like the “hidden supports in a well-built house.” We don’t generally notice or call attention to them when they are providing structure to our relationships, though we certainly notice when they collapse...Commitments and promises that have been tested and proven are at the root of our ability to trust one another, and without some measure of trust, it is difficult to do much of anything.”<sup>24</sup>

“In speaking as well as in living truthfully, our words and actions are an expression of our faithfulness to individuals, the community, and God.”<sup>25</sup>

### A Prayer to Pray

God, I pray for my life to be characterized by authenticity. Help me be true to who you have created me to be. Through Jesus you have made me new, so right now I pray for strength in putting away the old me and for courage in living out my new life in you. Allow my life to be an encouragement to others, building others up, as we are all a part of one body, one family, the community of God. Amen.

## WEEK4DAY3: *Your Role is to Pray*

### Jumping In

Throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, prayer is seen as a prominent practice. The Apostle Paul even wrote to one of his churches instructing them to “never stop praying” (1 **Thessalonians 5:17**). The importance of prayer is especially evident when looking at the life of Jesus. “Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray...He prayed often and regularly...When he faced his greatest crisis, he did so with prayer. We hear him praying for his disciples and the church on the night before he died (**John 17:1-26**) and finally, he died praying.”<sup>26</sup>

Prayer was a clearly fundamental practice in Jesus’ life.

*It is important to know that prayer goes beyond simply praying for ourselves.*

In our culture, self-focused prayer is the dominant practice. This is where we pray for ourselves, our job, our health, and our own well-being. This is not a negative thing, but it is important to know that prayer goes

beyond simply praying for ourselves. In addition to personal prayer, we may pray for others and even ask others to pray for us. This kind of prayer is called intercessory prayer. To intercede means to speak on someone else’s behalf. We do this as we pray for family members, friends, co-workers, politicians, and even strangers around the world who may be suffering from oppression or the effects of a natural disaster. We even invite others to participate in intercessory prayer when we ask others to pray for us.

“Offering intercessory prayer means nothing other than Christians bringing one another into the presence of God...Offering intercessory prayer means granting other Christians the same right we have received, namely, the right to stand before Christ and to share in Christ’s mercy.”<sup>27</sup> - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## An Area to Study

### Read 1 Timothy 2:1.

*I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.*

### Now, read Paul's prayer found in Ephesians 3:14-21.

*When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.*

## Homework

01. Paul clearly calls us to a life of prayer. Here he is specifically talking about a life of praying for other people. Do you find it difficult to pray for other people? Why or why not?
02. When you ask someone to pray for you, what are you hoping will happen? Would it hurt your feelings knowing someone told you they would pray for you but never got around to it? Why?

- 
03. In the 1 Timothy passage, Paul gives us three easy steps on praying for others. Does this help negate any fear associated with praying for others?
04. In the Ephesians passage, Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus. Look back through his prayer, and identify and reflect on the specifics of his prayer on the behalf of the people in Ephesus. What are some points of his prayer that stick out to you?

## Go Further

Write out a prayer outline from 1 Timothy 2:1, and use it to pray for others.

Step 1: Ask God to help them.

Step 2: Intercede on their behalf.

Step 3: Give thanks for them.

After writing it out, put it somewhere that you will see often such as the dash of your car or your bathroom mirror. Then, every time you see their names, you will be reminded to stop and pray for those people.

## Why Intercessory Prayer Matters

When I practice intercessory prayer “I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner. That is a blessed discovery for the Christian who is beginning to offer intercessory prayer for others...There is no dislike, no personal tension, no disunity or strife, that cannot be overcome by intercessory prayer...Intercessory prayer is a gift of God’s grace for every Christian community and for every Christian...The very time we give to intercession will turn out to be a daily source of new joy in God and in the

Christian congregation.”<sup>28</sup>

“All the members of a community who live out the practice of intercessory prayer can depend and trust the fact that other Christians are living out this practice. Thus, as we pray on the behalf of others, others pray on our behalf.”<sup>29</sup>

## A Prayer to Pray

Using the prayer outline you created above, pray for 3 people in your life.

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