

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

LESSON 7: COMMUNITY

THE TARGET: Men's Ministries believes that as a Christian man, you have a vertical covenant with God and a horizontal covenant with other men. In this lesson, you will discover the need to practice the spiritual discipline of community.



SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

The Early Church in the Book of Acts invested in **growth** through **community** with other believers (Acts 2:46) as they shared their newfound faith in Christ with others. As the first-century church started growing, the power of community was essential. **Community created an atmosphere of common principles and values taught and lived out by Christ.** The result of this community would be a commitment to fellowship, discipleship, service, worship, and evangelism through attitudes, interests, and goals. The first-century church community focused on the reliability of having all things in common, the gift of sharing and providing for those who struggled. Unfortunately, today's society teaches Americans that individualism should be the norm. Randy Frazee sums it up well when he states:

We live in a society in which we experience what some sociologists call, "crowded loneliness." We're surrounded by



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

people but do not feel a sense of belonging. In fact, a survey conducted by the Gallup organization revealed that 7 in 10 people do not know their neighbors and that one-third of Americans admit to frequent periods of loneliness.¹

American society has fed this notion of thinking of self above others. In this culture, the individual's rights are always considered over community responsibilities. However, when you begin to develop the spiritual discipline of community, you begin to think of others as more important than you. Perhaps the sequoia tree will give you a picture of what can happen when Christian men refuse to allow culture to keep them from this spiritual discipline.

Sequoia redwood trees have a unique root system that is a marvel, compared to their mammoth size. . . . Their roots actually only go down 6-12 feet, and yet, these trees rarely fall over. They withstand strong winds, earthquakes, fires, storms, and prolonged flooding. How can something up to 500 tons, reaching over 350 feet in height, and live [sic] for many centuries remain standing with roots only going down about 10 feet? . . . Their root system is intertwined with the other redwood trees. . . . Only redwoods have the strength and ability to support other redwoods. . . . Beneath the surface of these huge redwood trees are roots like an army of men who have their arms interlocked, standing and supporting each other. They are preventing the adversaries of life from knocking each other down. They are also making sure there is plenty of nutrients for growth to continue.²

Most men cannot withstand the storms of life by themselves. But everything changes when you **grow in community** with other followers of Christ. Your roots are fused together so that you can stand in the storm, and your growth goes deeper and becomes stronger.

1 Frazee, Randy. *The Connecting Church*. Zondervan, 2001, Page 23.

2 Susan Williamson. *What Kind of Root System Do You Have?* The John Maxwell Team. December 7, 2013. <https://johnmaxwellteam.com/what-kind-of-root-system-do-you-have/> (Accessed December 15, 2020).





CROSSHAIR: Focus on Your Target

Why should you, as a man, be connected in a Christian community with other men? Here are a few reasons to practice the spiritual discipline of community.

First, if you have as a goal to pattern your life after Christ, you should realize Jesus was not a loner. He lived in community with others. A reading of the Gospels makes it clear that Jesus and His disciples traveled, ate, slept, and worked together in community.

Second, Jesus places a high value on community with other believers (Matthew 5:23–24). In fact, God values healthy connection among believers to the extent that He would rather you put your offering on hold to go make things right with someone first, rather than give your offering and remain in conflict with them.

Third, Christianity simply does not work in isolation and independence (1 Corinthians 12:25–27).

Fourth, you should practice the discipline of community because it has the potential to destroy the power of shame, sin, and offense. The enemy wants to keep you isolated in order to keep you from freedom. Whenever you find yourself hiding from others, trying to push them away, an alarm should go off inside you to remind you not to neglect this discipline.

Finally, when you practice the discipline of community, you will grow in your relationship with God and with other men. God will use community to be His hands, His feet, and His guidance. When you practice this discipline, **you will be tuned in to what God wants to say and do through your life.**

The results of walking in spiritual community with others are incredible. There is physical and spiritual health. Henry Cloud in his book *Boundaries* says it this way: “Research illustrates that when we are in a loving biblical relationship, we are growing. When we are isolated, we are slowly dying.”³

When you walk in spiritual community you grow and mature spiritually (Romans 14:1). If you live in isolation, unconnected to deep relationships, it is hard to have a meaningful and joy-filled life.

³ Cloud, Henry. *Boundaries Updated and Expanded Edition: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life*. Zondervan, 2017, Page 290.



Spiritual endurance happens when you practice the discipline of community (Ecclesiastes 4:12; Hebrews 3:13). Furthermore, spiritual change and growth can only happen through relationships (Romans 12:15). Knowledge is good, but only relationships make an eternal impact. Thom Rainer said:

Church members who became involved in some type of group in the churches were five times more likely to be active in the church five years later compared to those who only attended worship services. . . More than 83 percent of those who joined and were involved in a small group were still active in the churches five years later. But only 16 percent of those who attended worship services only remained in the churches five years later.⁴

4 Rainer, Thom S. *I will: Nine Traits of the Outwardly Focused Christian*. B & H Books, 2015, Pages 36–37.





BULLSEYE: Hit Your Target

Fill in the following chart. What can you glean?

Read	God Speaks Through
Galatians 5:13	_____ one another.
Galatians 6:2	_____ one another's burdens.
Romans 12:10	_____ one another.
Romans 15:7	_____ one another.
Romans 15:14	_____ one another.
Romans 16:16	_____ one another.
Colossians 3:13	_____ one another.
Ephesians 5:21	_____ one another.
1 Thessalonians 5:11	_____ one another.

- Read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Highlight every time Jesus did life with other people. What can you learn from Jesus' community life with others?

- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, how well do you live in community with other believers? Write out a plan to improve.

How has this study affected the way you look at community? How does this study affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers below or in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about what you just studied. How did this study help deepen your love for God?

- Write down a thought from this study that you experienced this week.

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate what you experienced to your family and to others around you?



Next Step:

- Courage:** Commit to meeting with a group of men quarterly for one year. I will begin _____.
- Strength:** Commit to meeting with a group of men monthly for one year. I will begin _____.
- Endurance:** Commit to meeting with a group of men weekly for twelve weeks. I will begin _____.

FireBible:

- Read the *FireBible* note on Acts 2:42–47.
 - » What role did other people play in the development of the Early Church?

 - » How can this knowledge help you grow in your relationship with other believers?

- Read the *FireBible* note on 1 Corinthians 12:25.
 - » What can you glean about living in community with other believers?



- Read the *FireBible* note on Ephesians 4:3,13-14.
 - » How can you ensure you maintain unity of the Spirit with other believers?
 - » What are three ways you can ensure you maintain unity of the faith?

- Read the *FireBible* note on Hebrews 10:25.
 - » What does being in community provide to you?

- Read the *FireBible* article, on “The Church.”
 - » From the 12 descriptors of the church, what can you glean?
 - » Why is living in community with other believers important?



- Read the *FireBible* article, “Spiritual Separation for Believers.”
 - » Why is this important as you develop and strengthen your community with other believers?

 - » What does separation *not* mean?

