



practicing the way

# community

## Jesus' Call to Community

### Overview

We begin our practice of Community with a teaching on the fallout of individualism in the Western world – loneliness, and its dark twin: tribalism. Is there a practice from the way of Jesus that would set us up to live in a rich web of relationships where we grow and mature into Christlikeness? Yes, it's community.

As we practice the way of Jesus, we need partners for the journey, a community to help us along the way. Jesus invites all who follow him to be a part of a new family. This family of God is not a social club or a group of friends who look, think, and talk similarly, but a community of apprentices following Jesus' way of life. And despite the work it takes, the fights we will endure, and the learning we will do along the way, together we're figuring out how to be with Jesus, become like him, and do what he did.

If Jesus' vision for his community of disciples was for them to become a tight-knit, diverse, and loyal family, the question arises: what rhythms and habits exist in the family of God? Or, put more practically, what rhythms should my community adopt in our shared life together?

While there is no perfect answer to these questions, throughout church history we see the Community of Jesus adopting seven rhythms: Celebration, Bearing Burdens, Confession of Sin, Hospitality, Eating Together (Communion), Prayer and Worship, and Generosity.

Over the next few weeks we will be laying a foundation for Community, but as we do let's explore practical outward rhythms and practices for growing together as a Community seeking after Jesus. This week's Practice provides ideas for how to adopt the seven rhythms included above into the life of your Community.

### Scripture

Take a few minutes to read the following passages of scripture out loud: Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 13:1-2,16; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22; Galatians 6:2; and James 5:16.

### Discussion Questions

1. In the passages we just read, did any particular phrases or ideas stand out to you? If so, why?
2. Of these seven rhythms, which do you think our Community does well? (Celebration, Bearing Burdens, Confession of Sin, Hospitality, Eating Together (Communion), Prayer and Worship, and Generosity)
3. Of these seven rhythms, which would you be most excited for our community to explore further?

## Practice

The goal of this week's practice is to begin working some of all of the seven rhythms into your Community. Below we have included the seven rhythms and some basic instructions for how to give each rhythm a try. Have someone read the description of each rhythm. After all the rhythms have been read, decide as a Community a rhythm you would like to try together tonight and a rhythm you'd like to come back to in the weeks ahead. Some of these require more preparation than others, so don't feel pressure to try them all at once. Within the instructions, we have included a note about how much preparation is required for a given rhythm. Feel free to take a few weeks over your next month together to try out rhythms you may not get to tonight.

## Celebration

There is always something to celebrate. Consider spending a night in celebration by having everyone share one thing that is good in their life right now, sharing a nice meal, celebrating a birthday with affirmations and cake, or going out for a night of fun together!

## Bearing Burdens

Spend a night allowing people to share what is difficult in their lives right now. You can do this as a large group or in groups of 3–4. Consider having each person answer the question, "What is one thing that is challenging or heavy in your life right now?" As people share, take time to stop and pray for them as needed. After someone shares, ask them the follow up question, "How can our Community support you?" As able, take steps to support them and meet needs.

## Confession of Sin

Take a night to create space for confession of sin in your Community. While this does not take much preparation on a logistics level, there is a significant amount of preparation a Community must go through to handle confession well. Some guidelines for confession include:

- Have a conversation about the nature of confession before diving into the act of confession. Ask questions such as: What's your experience with confession? What do you think the purpose of confession is? What's scary about confession and what could be good about it? How could we make our Community a safe place for confession to happen?
- Confession must be invited, not coerced. Make it clear that no one has to share anything they are uncomfortable sharing.
- Confession ought to take place in smaller settings of 2–4 people.
- Establish a rule of confidentiality

## Hospitality

Consider practicing hospitality as a Community in one of the following two ways: 1) Take a night off of meeting together and instead encourage each person in your Community to invite a friend or neighbor who does not follow Jesus over for dinner. 2) As a Community, throw a party, bbq, or game night and invite friends and neighbors who do not follow Jesus to join you.

## Eating Together (Communion)

If your Community currently does not share a weekly meal together, plan a night to share a meal. Include within that meal bread and wine (or grape juice!) and a time to pray and reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus together. If your Community does currently share a meal together, consider finding a way to practice Communion with greater intentionality. You can plan a more elaborate meal, adopt a regular liturgy to open your meal together, or rotate who leads Communion, allowing different people to open your time with prayer, reflection, or scripture of their choice each week. If you're in a rut or communion tends to look one way for you, consider exploring different aspects of communion.

## Prayer and Worship

Consider taking part of a night (or all of a night!) to pray and/or worship together. At the simplest, you can split into groups of 3–4 and ask one another, “What is one thing you need prayer for?” and then pray for one another. You can spend a night revisiting a particular form of prayer (listening prayer, imaginative prayer, etc.). Or you can spend time in worship by having someone lead your Community in song, or simply have each person share something they are grateful for in life right now.

## Generosity

There are lots of ways for your Community to practice generosity. A few of these ideas include:

- 1) Open up the floor to your community by asking, “Does anybody have a financial or practical need that our Community could help meet?” If someone shares, create space for people to offer contributions to meet that need.
- 2) Plan a night in which people bring extra money they are able to donate to needs in or outside of your Community. When you come together, decide on a need inside or outside of the Community to give that money to.
- 3) Adopt a monthly “Rice & Beans Night”. By choosing a simpler, less expensive meal, members of your community can choose to bring the money they would have spent on a more elaborate meal and instead donate that money to a local nonprofit or to someone in need in your Community.

## Questions

1. Ask Yourself: Where in my life am I able to practice contentment, regardless of circumstance, situation, or what I have?
2. Ask Yourself: In which areas do I consistently feel discontented, regardless of circumstance, situation, or stuff? Or is there an area of two that you find especially difficult to limit or simplify? (Consider the areas of simplicity we’ve explored: stuff, apparel, speech, and pleasure.)
3. Ask the Spirit: Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to show you “the secret” that Paul references — that he can do all things, or feel contented in all situations, because the Lord has strengthened him.

Based on what you’ve discovered, make up a list of 5 or so core values you want to be living into. Some may be currently supported by your lifestyle, and some may be “in progress.” That’s okay! Our goal is to get some clarity around what our “center” is, so we can keep coming back to it. As you review your list, spend some time in prayer before God, asking what He might add or subtract.

## Closing Questions

1. What did you like about the rhythm we tried tonight?
2. Which of these rhythms comes most naturally to you? Which comes least naturally?
3. What preparation is required for the next rhythm we are going to try together?