



The Saint Paul's Baptist Church  
*"A Church for People On the Grow!"*

40 DAYS OF  
**CHALLENGE**



FEB 14 -  
MAR 24

**PRAYER & FASTING**

THE SAINT PAUL'S BAPTIST CHURCH  
[WWW.MYSPBC.ORG](http://WWW.MYSPBC.ORG)

**'Perfection isn't the goal - progress is. Keep going.'**

**WEEK 1 GUIDE**

## What is the *40-Day Challenge*?

Researchers have long claimed that it takes twenty-one days to turn a particular behavior into a habit. Some say it takes longer. A lot depends on the difficulty of the hoped-for habit and how important it is to the person who is hoping for it.

This study was prepared with that in mind. It is intended to develop or strengthen habits that will bear fruit in your life that will last for eternity. Its effectiveness, however, will depend in great measure on your desire and determination to discover and put into practice the real purpose of the church and its life-changing benefits.

This study is at the heart of this *40-Day Challenge*, a total church campaign designed to stir and stretch everyone in our church—those who are new and those who have been engaged for awhile. Together with the weekend worship celebrations and the weekly small group curriculum, this study has the potential to do more than change your habits. It can change your life. Based on the book of Acts, the daily readings and challenges included in this study are designed to help you understand, internalize and externalize the five great callings and purposes of every follower of Jesus, they are to:

- **CONNECT IN COMMUNITY:** *All the believers were together and had everything in common (Acts 2:44).*
- **CELEBRATE IN WORSHIP:** *They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).*
- **CULTIVATE SPIRITUAL GROWTH:** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).*
- **CONTRIBUTE MONEY AND MINUTES:** *No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had (Acts 4:32-34).*
- **CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND THE WORLD:** *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

The following is a sampling of the things you will discover and begin (or continue) to practice on our journey through these daily readings and challenges:

1. Living in community opens the door to growth and joy in a way that nothing else does.
2. With our redemption comes the call to live differently, to be better.
3. In God's eyes, it is "not good" if we are not linked to others in healthy, helpful community.
4. Our worship should be a day-by-day and moment by moment habit.
5. The loving sacrifice of Jesus redeems our fallen souls, restores our fellowship with God, reverses our self-centeredness, and returns us to the purpose for which we were created.

6. Worshiping God is like a symphony that begins with praise.
7. An ungrateful heart cannot truly worship, because a worshipful life is a grateful life.
8. Joy is both the content and the overflow of a worshiping heart.
9. Our tendency as human beings is to turn romance into routine, and rhythm into meaningless repetition.
10. God cannot give more to those whose hands are already full.
11. Prayer will change the person who prays.
12. One small step can result in amazing growth and development in a person's life.
13. We human beings tend to mistake our role, thinking we are owners when God has repeatedly made it clear that we are not.
14. Money is a test. Always.
15. Your spending today has a direct correlation to where your heart will be tomorrow.
16. Everyone you know is a faithful tither.
17. God can take whatever you put in His hands and multiply it.
18. Jesus calls us to seek relationships with people not for what we can *get* but for what we can *give*.
19. The gospel of Jesus 'Christ is a "Come and See" gospel.
20. Real give-and-take relationships with the people around us will open many doors.
21. Jesus did not give up on the people everyone else gave up on-and neither should you.

Finally, this study will have the greatest and longest-lasting impact if you read and use it (see next section, *How to Use the 40-Day Challenge Guide*) at the same time our church and your small-group are participating in the campaign.

***God bless you for taking this extraordinary challenge!***

# Accepting the Challenge

## How to Use this 40-Day Challenge Guide

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. - Acts 2:42-47*

Those first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem had an amazing impact on the world. Though the church started with just a handful of people praying in an upper room, they witnessed many signs and wonders. Not one of them was in need, for they shared generously with each other. They prayed and worshiped and ate together daily. And they quickly experienced exponential growth, adding as many as three thousand new members in one day.

Wow! Wouldn't it be great to be part of a church like that? Of course, they had advantages. Some of them had walked with Jesus. They had preachers like Peter, James, and John, and they were in on the ground floor of this new thing called the Church.

Still, they had jobs. And families. And problems. Even persecution. In fact, if you read much further in the book of Acts in the Bible, you may see that the main difference between their church and yours was not in their circumstances. It was in their practices. They "devoted themselves" to things we are not much devoted to. But that can change and when that changes, we will change. Our churches. Our families. Our lives.

## Getting Started in the 40-Day Challenge

The readings in this *40-Day Challenge* book begin on Monday after Ash Wednesday. Six daily readings are provided for each week—Monday through Saturday. There are no Sunday readings.

To get the most from this experience, set aside a specific time each day to work on the reading and simple step. This should take no more than twenty minutes, depending, of course, on the rate at which you read and the degree to which you apply yourself.

Take your time; don't read ahead or try to complete more than one day's reading at a time. They are designed to build on each other, and will have the maximum effect if they are read once a day, ideally, in the morning. This allows you to process and meditate on the topic throughout the day. Also, you will draw the most benefit if you try not to skip readings, forcing yourself to have to play "catch up."

Each "day" in this *40-Day Challenge* booklet contains the following content:

### **Devotional Lesson**

Each day's content begins with a short reading. Most of these won't take you more than three or four minutes. They are designed to get you thinking about a particular aspect of the week's topic.

### **Scriptures**

Carefully selected Scriptures follow the daily reading. Some are drawn from the reading, while others are intended to add to the content of the reading. You are encouraged to look these up in your Bible and read them in their broader context.

### **Prayer**

After the daily reading and the Scripture selections, a prayer has been included. We encourage you not only to read this prayer but to actually pray it-out loud even. You may want to add to it or personalize it in some way in response to your personal thoughts and emotions.

### **Simple Step**

Another component of each day is the Simple Step, a small but impactful challenge to help you immediately apply the truth or lesson of the day's reading. These action steps are crucial to making the *40-Day Challenge* part of your life throughout the forty days and beyond.

### **Journal Page**

The final section is a journal page with a question or prompt for you to think about and space to write out your thoughts. Take your time with this, as this activity often produces great insight and important breakthroughs for the participant.

### **Partner**

Select a partner and share with them your thoughts and actions about each day's readings.

### **Weekly Challenge Page**

After Saturday's reading there is a one-page recap of the weekly challenge. This weekly challenge section will touch upon some of the main points of the week's message, and the primary step that you are being challenged to make in your life.

### **Small-Group Study and Discussion Questions**

After the Weekly Challenge page there are two pages of small group study and discussion questions that should be used during your small-group time. The small-group study and discussion questions in this booklet are located at the end of each week; however, your small-group may meet earlier in the week.

Therefore, you may want to review the thoughts, questions, and Scriptures found in this section before your small-group starts. And you will want to bring your study with you to that weekly meeting so you can follow along with the progression of thoughts, Scriptures, and questions being discussed. You are on the verge of a greater growth experience than you ever thought possible. As you apply yourself, may God add to your growth, the growth of the church and the glory of God's name.

# ***Week One Purpose: Community***

## **OVERVIEW OF WEEK ONE**

**Main Message Point:** All of us need to be a part of a small group within the church, so that we can experience authentic community through the love, support and encouragement of others.

**THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE:** Commit to joining a small group and participating in its ministry so that you can experience real community.

## **Day 1: The Unity in Authentic Community**

Everyone has a bad day now and then. Even some weeks and months are better than others. But David seemed to be having a bad life, surprising since it had all started out so *good*. Though he was the youngest in his family, the prophet Samuel had singled him out for recognition and anointed him to be the successor to Saul, the first king of Israel. Not long after that, he faced the giant Philistine Goliath in the Valley of Elah and won a startling victory for King Saul and the people of God. Not long after that, he became a musician in Saul's court at the king's personal request. That's when everything started going downhill.

Because David was being hailed as a hero, Saul became intensely jealous. On more than one occasion, the king became so enraged that he attacked the young man. Saul used his own daughter to lay a trap that was intended to end David's life. Things couldn't have gotten worse-but they did! David had at least one thing going for him. He and Jonathan, one of King Saul's sons, had developed a strong and close friendship. Jonathan agreed to be David's secret agent. Once he cleverly and conclusively confirmed that his father intended to kill David, he used a pre-arranged signal to warn David to flee for his life. (See 1 Samuel 20.) The two friends shared an emotional goodbye, and David parted from his friend, left his home, and became a fugitive. The young hero had no protection and no supplies. He sought refuge wherever he could find it-even among Israel's archenemies, the Philistines. Until he came at last to the cave of Adullam, not far from where he had conquered Goliath.

*"When his brothers and his father's household heard about it," the Bible says, "they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader" (1 Samuel 22:1-2).*

We don't know for sure, but it may have been in the midst of those circumstances-or others like them-that David wrote, *"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore" (Psalm 133:1-3).*

True fellowship with good friends is precious and satisfying like the plentiful overflow of the anointing oil running down from the head of the high priest during his anointing (the other priests were merely sprinkled, but the high priest was drenched). True fellowship is refreshing, like the mountain dew that feeds the springs, and in return supplies the rivers and lakes with water. Is that psalm a depiction of your life? It isn't likely that you are facing what David was facing. There probably isn't anyone threatening to kill you. Nonetheless, you need authentic community. You and I need relationships. You need to "live together in unity" with other members of the family of God.

Authentic community can carry you through the toughest of times. It can illuminate your darkness and lighten your burdens. It can deepen and transform you, and it can strengthen and sharpen you as iron sharpens iron. (See Proverbs 27:17.) Wherever David was when he wrote Psalm 133, he had clearly learned the immeasurable value of unity in community. He had discovered the importance of being surrounded and supported by people who loved God, loved him, and loved each other.

*"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).*



## Scriptures

*Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as he loved himself. - 1 Samuel 18:1*

*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. - Psalm 133:1-3*

*Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, and fear God. - 1 Peter 2:17*

*As we have opportunity; let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. - Galatians 6:10*

## Prayer

Eternal God, thank You for placing me in a community, a family of faith, a church that seeks to honor you by leading me into a closer and stronger relationship with you. Enlarge my love for the family of believers. Deepen my relationships. Broaden them. And walk with me in this forty-day adventure, using it for my growth and using me for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Simple Step: A Phone Call

Think through your relationships (maybe seven to ten of your closest friends and family). Is there someone with whom you're not in unity? Is there someone you haven't talked to for a while? Or someone you need to "sharpen" like iron? Call and set up a time to meet with that friend or family member in person. Record the date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## Journal Prompt

Church isn't a building you go to; it is a family you belong to. Take a few minutes to jot down the ways your church is-or can become-a family to you (for example, "We don't always agree, but we love each other anyway," "We eat together a lot," etc.).

## Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

## Day 2: Together Time

Some people are extroverts. They feel comfortable in groups. They tend to be friendly, talkative, and assertive, and they enjoy making new friends. A few hours in the company of others tends to restore and energize them, while solitude can be a draining experience.

Then there are introverts. These individuals are not necessarily shy, nor are they antisocial. They simply feel more comfortable when they are alone than when they are in a group. Typically thoughtful and reserved, they often have many friends. But they are restored and energized by quiet, solitary moments.

Most people fall somewhere between introvert and extrovert. They may lean more in one direction than another, but they are reasonably comfortable both in social situations and periods of solitude. God understands these tendencies. He should, because He created us—all of us—to need alone time *and* together time.

These days, however, it is easy to miss out on both. We may work or drive or eat by ourselves, but these hardly qualify as solitude. And, we may be surrounded by people, though we may not really be "together" with them. The second chapter of Acts, which describes the birth, growth, and dynamic life of the early church, makes frequent references to the followers of Jesus sharing time together:

*They spent their time learning the apostles' teaching, sharing, breaking bread, and praying together. The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and everyone felt great respect for God. All the believers were together and shared everything. They would sell their land and the things they owned and then divide the money and give it to anyone who needed it. The believers met together in the Temple every day. They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts. -Acts 2:42-46 (NCV)*

Those first followers of Jesus didn't just go to church on Sunday and greet the folks they knew. Their lives were intertwined. They met together in a large group (in the temple courts) and in small groups (in their homes). They didn't just share their time; they shared their lives as well.

No matter how long you have been a follower of Jesus, and regardless of whether you are an introvert, extrovert, or something in between, you were created for both solitude and community. In Acts, chapter two, God, who knows you better than you know yourself, provides a snapshot of what your life can look like. He has given you your church family to worship with in a large group setting and share life with in a small-group setting.

That's why the first week of this *40-Day Challenge* focuses on community. Just like those first followers of Jesus, we all need to be part of a small-group within the church, so we can experience authentic community through the love, support, and encouragement of others. Such community opens the door to growth and joy in a way that nothing else does.

## Scriptures

*Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.... [Then Peter] went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.*

– Acts 12:5-7, 12

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

– Hebrews 10:24-25

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

– Acts 2:42-47

## Prayer

Lord God, You set the lonely in families (See Psalm 68:6.); and you've given me a church family to enjoy. You provide ways for introverts, extroverts and those in between to experience authentic community through the love, support and encouragement of others. Help me to connect and stay connected with my brothers and sisters in Christ, as we grow closer to each other and closer to you. Help me overcome any fear or reluctance and find a group where I can know and be known, love and be loved, celebrate and be celebrated, serve and be served. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Simple Step: Search the Church's Website

This church offers fellowship opportunities through small-groups designed for men, women, singles, and couples in every stage of life. Look on the church's website, call the church office or ask someone for information on how you can join a group. If possible, sign up or start a group that is going through this *40-Day Challenge* study. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## **Journal Prompt**

Look back over Acts 2:42-47 and jot below the parts of their (or that church's) way of life that most appeal to you. Also include some practical ways you might be able to make those ways a part of your life.

## **Partner**

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions

## Day 3: The Great Dance

Gregory of Nazianzus was born sometime around AD 330, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine, who converted to Christianity and decreed that being a Christian was no longer a crime in the Roman Empire. Gregory went to school in Athens, Greece, with a friend named Basil, who would later become the Bishop of Caesarea as well as an important theologian known as "Basil the Great." Gregory himself became Bishop of Sasima and, later, Bishop of Constantinople (named for the Emperor Constantine).

Gregory, Basil, and another friend named Gregory of Nissa, became known as the Cappadocian Fathers, three tremendously influential church thinkers and writers from the same region in what is now central Turkey. Gregory of Nazianzus is famous for being the first person to use the word *perichoresis* to describe the Trinity. Sounds complicated, doesn't it? But it really isn't.

*Perichoresis* is a Greek word that literally means "circle dance." If you've ever been to a Greek or Italian wedding (among others), you may have witnessed *perichoresis*. Participants celebrate by linking arms or in some cases, holding handkerchiefs between them as they dance joyfully around and around to the sounds of laughter and loud, happy music. It is also the word Gregory and others used to describe the relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—a happy dance, a unity and community.

This is evident in Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John 17:

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

-John 17:20-23

We were created to reflect God's image (See Genesis 1:26-27), and the very nature of God is one of unity in community. Thus, it is the prayer and will of Jesus that His followers join in the dance. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-person life is to be played out in each one of us. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made."

Our tendency as fallen human beings is to run from God, like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden (See Genesis 3:8.), and from community with Him and others. But with our redemption comes the call—and the indwelling enablement—to live differently, to be better. God wants us to unite with others in community settings, draw closer to Him and others in small-groups, and reflect the circle dance of God in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And, as tends to happen in celebrations that include a circle dance, the dance gets better as it goes along and the circle widens to include those who never before suspected that they could dance.

*God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

- Genesis 1:26-27

*The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

- Genesis 3:8

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one-I in them and you in me-so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." - John 17:20-26*

## Prayer

Righteous God, though the world does not know You, I know you by your grace and through Your Son. Thank You for the immeasurable price you paid to redeem me and make it possible for me to join in the fellowship of Your Church. Help me to reflect the unity in community that mirrors your nature, while I endeavor to model that nature to the world around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Simple Step: Prayer

Ask God to show you the people connections He wants you to make and guide your steps as you connect with a small-group. If you already have a group you connect with regularly, thank God for them, pray for them and ask yourself how you can better show them love and support. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## Journal Prompt

Do you tend to run from communion with God and community with others? Or do you embrace those things? Ponder the question, and then journal a few lines about why you respond the way you do, and what, if anything, you would like to see change.

## **Partner**

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

## Day 4: The Good and the Not Good

You may have heard that ants can carry fifty times their body weight. If you had that ability, you could lift a Winnebago RV over your head! But did you know that the combined biomass of ants on earth roughly equals the total biomass of all the people on earth?

Ants thrive, at least in part, because they form complex communities. Some ants live in massive "super colonies" that can stretch for thousands of miles. They gather and store food. They communicate and cooperate with each other. And they have much to teach us.

King Solomon, the wisest man in the world during his lifetime said, "*Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!*" (Proverbs 6:6). It is a commendation of the ant's work ethic. But that's not the only reason to respect ant ways.

Ants live in community and thrive in community. If there is such a thing as a "solitary ant," it is a rare exception. God created ants to live in colonies. That's where they belong. And yet, the single ant is right at home in the workings of an ant colony. Effective. Healthy. And vibrant. And the same is true of you.

Let's look for a moment at the creation narrative in the Bible book of Genesis. In the beginning of all beginnings, God created light. "*God saw that the light was good,*" the Bible says in Genesis 1:3. Then He created the oceans and the continents, and He said they were good, too. (See Genesis 1:6-10.) Then came vegetation, which was good. (See verse 13.) And the sun, moon, and stars: still good. (See verses 14-18.) He then added sea creatures, flying creatures, land animals of every shape and size, and it was all good. (See verses 21-25.) Then, at last, came the first human being, and "It was very good." (See verse 31.)

It would seem that everything is "good"-until we get to chapter two, that is. "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). That's right, now we're talking "not good." God had placed one lucky soul in the Garden of Eden, a perfect world. No death, no disease. No conflict, no crime, no crying, no hunger, no hatred, no pollution, politicians, poverty, or pain. It was paradise. That first human being had it all, including intimate, unbroken fellowship with his Creator. And yet, God says it is "not good for the man to be alone." Humanity's first dilemma was not sinfulness; it was aloneness.



You know the rest of the story, of course. God created a woman, a perfect partner for that first man in that pristine place. He recognized that Adam, the first human being, needed companionship with someone else. You were created like every other human being on the planet to need others. Whether you are married or single, young or old, introvert or extrovert, God created you with a desire to live in community. That's where you belong and where you will grow best and thrive most. Your circumstances and surroundings may be perfect, and yet it is "not good" for you to be alone.

You need to be linked to others in healthy, helpful community. Especially with the fast, frenetic lifestyles common in this day and age, connecting with your Christian brothers and sisters in a small-group setting is a great way to help and be helped. A small-group is an ideal place to spur others on toward love and good deeds. It's a place where you can be encouraged and sharpened as you do the same for others. It's a place where "not good" can become "all good."

## Scriptures

*The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

- Genesis 2:18

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- Hebrews 10:24-25

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.*

- Proverbs 17:17

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*

- Proverbs 27:17

## Prayer

Loving God, I know it is not good for me-or others-to be alone. Thank You for showing me-along with the members of my small-group-how to spur others on toward love and good deeds, encouraging and sharpening one another as iron sharpens iron. Teach me to embrace unity in community in both good times and times of adversity. Help me to freely give and receive what Your good, perfect and pleasing will intends for me and my family of faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Simple Step: Decide on a Possible Group

If you are not already committed to attending a small-group, visit a small-group within the next week. You can visit [www.myspbc.org](http://www.myspbc.org) and click on the "Groups" button on the Main Page to review a listing of groups available now. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## Journal Prompt

The Bible says, "*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another*" (Proverbs 27:17). Have some areas of your life become rusty and dull? If so, identify them and write down some ways that others can sharpen you in those areas.

## Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

## Day 5: “One Anotherness” and You

It's test day in school. The students squirm and the teacher distributes the test forms and issues one final injunction: "Be sure to read and follow the instructions."

How many students ignored that advice? How many skipped the instructions in an effort to finish more quickly and earned a lower grade as a result? How many of us do the same when it comes to the commands of Scripture?

The New Testament emphasizes "one anotherness." In numerous places, we are instructed to treat "one another" in specific ways. For example:

1. Love one another (John 13:34).
2. Accept one another (Romans 15:7).
3. Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10).
4. Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16).
5. Instruct one another (Romans 15:14).
6. Greet one another warmly (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20).
7. Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
8. Be patient with one another (Ephesians 4:2).
9. Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).
10. Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16).
11. Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13).
12. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).
13. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16).
14. Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

We are commanded also to be kind to one another and forgive one another (See Ephesians 4:32), and to bear one another's burdens (See Galatians 6:2). And more. Much more. Some of the "one another's" in the New Testament are phrased negatively-that is, what we should not do to one another. For example, Romans 14:13 tells us, "*Stop passing judgment on one another,*" and James 4:11 says, "*Do not slander one another.*" It all sounds good, doesn't it? That's how Christians are supposed to act, right? But every single "one another" command assumes a social context. It is impossible to obey those commands unless we are living in community with each other. And that might have been easier-or at least more natural-in the first century, when the early church comprised a network of people meeting in homes, eating together and sharing each others' lives.

Today, regardless of which campus you attend, the context for fulfilling the "one another's" of Scripture is likely to be a small-group. In such a setting, you can rub shoulders with all kinds of people-those who are like you and those who are not. That's a great place to learn how to obey God's commands to love one another, accept one another, bear patiently with one another and forgive one another.

Trying to fulfill the "one another's" of Scripture without a small group community can be much like taking a test without first reading the instructions. You may avoid a little effort at the beginning and

even get some things right, but you probably won't grasp and reflect the full purpose of the process. You will miss out. And you will be far less prepared for the next test when it comes.

## **Scriptures**

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

- Galatians 6:2

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

- Ephesians 4:32

*Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

- Hebrews 3:13

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- Hebrews 10:24-25

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

- James 5:16

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

- 1 Peter 4:8-9

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank You for the wisdom of Your Word which guides me to your will and instructs me in your ways. Help me to invest myself, my time and my effort into the community provided by a small group. Help me also to learn to fulfill the "one anotherness" that you desire for your people. Let my life be a reflection of the verses above not only in theory but also in practice. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **Simple Step: An Act of Kindness**

Perform one act of service by writing an encouraging note or making a call to a friend you know is going through a difficult time. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## **Journal Prompt**

In the lines below, journal your answers to these questions: Of the "one another's" listed in today's reading, which is the most difficult for you? Which is the easiest? Which do you feel you need most from someone else?

## **Partner**

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

## Day 6: What a Friend

Jesus was not the only rabbi of His day. In fact, before Jesus came along, the most famous rabbis in Judea and Galilee were Rabbi Hillel, who died when Jesus was a teenager, and Rabbi Shammai, who died about ten years later.

In those days, it was the custom for a young man who wanted to study the Torah (the Hebrew Scriptures) to apply to become one of the rabbi's *talmidim* (followers). If the rabbi agreed, the young man would then shadow the rabbi constantly and absorb his master's teachings, ways of studying and thinking, and lifestyle. Eventually, the best *talmidim* would become rabbis themselves, leaving their teachers in order to teach others.

There are some striking differences between Jesus' relationship with His disciples and the rabbis' relationship with their *talmidim*. For example: Jesus' disciples did not apply to Him. He chose each of them personally. He said, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you"* (John 15:16).

Jesus' *talmidim* did not leave Him in order to become rabbis. He left them so that they would become evangelists: *"After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it"* (Mark 16:19-20).

Perhaps most importantly, before leaving His followers to spread His gospel, Jesus told them: *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you"* (John 15:15).

Jesus' relationship with His followers was more than that of rabbi to student; it included a close friendship. Jesus lived His life in relationship with others. He was not only the cousin of John the Baptist but also a close friend. He befriended the lonely and despised Zacchaeus. He was almost certainly friends with "the twelve" before they became His closest disciples. He was criticized for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

In His darkest hour, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He pointedly asked His closest friends to stay nearby. Jesus' friendships included the brother-and-sisters trio of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary of Bethany. He visited them frequently in their home, probably lodging there while attending the various feasts at the Temple in Jerusalem.

On one occasion at their home, He was asked to referee a dispute between the two sisters. (Luke 10:38-42) Another time, as He reclined at the table for a meal, Mary anointed His feet with precious oil and dried them with her hair. (See John 12:3) And, of course, on another visit, He raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. (See John 11:38-44).

Jesus served as a valuable model for true friendship. A careful reading of the Gospels reveal the nature of a true friend living in community. He fed thousands but He also lingered over meals with friends. He healed all who came to Him but, He also raised Peter's mother-in-law from her sickbed. He was Lord of all, and yet He served His friends and washed their feet. He was often heartbroken

and ultimately abandoned by many of His friends, but He never let them down. He showed them how to love, forgive and live in community. And now through the pages of the Bible, He has shown us how to do these things as well.



## Scriptures

*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.*

- Mark 3:13-14

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.*

- Luke 10:38

*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ... When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"*

- John 11:5, 32-36

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

- John 13:12-15, 17

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your friendship. Thank you for your patience with me. Thank you for never leaving me, nor forsaking me. Save me now from being too shy, self-centered, or busy to establish relationships. Use my relationships, especially those in my small-group, to teach me how to build Christ-like relationships with others. Help me to love with your love, forgive with your mercy and grace, and live in community with Your Spirit of kindness and generosity. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Simple Step: Connect with a Friend

Do something with a friend today, even if it's only for five minutes: Make a call. Send a text. Share a cup of coffee. Send flowers. Take a walk together. Or, even better, enlist a friend to connect with another friend! Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

## Journal Prompt

The Gospels reveal different sides of Jesus' relationships, from "tax collectors and sinners" to more intimate friendships with people like Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Peter, James and John. Think about the different kinds of relationships in your life and how they are being (or could be) used by God for His glory.

## **Partner**

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

## The Weekly Challenge for Community

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One of the things you discover when you get **involved**—the church becomes NOT a building you go to, but a family to which you belong. And for every person, the center of family life is usually a small- group that meets regularly so that people can study spiritual truth together. This is a place where each person can know and be known, love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated.

Community comes with a cost, however. Each person must be willing to invest both time and effort. Each person must choose to be involved in community by listening to others, praying for others and being a fully invested part of a group that does life together deeply.

Your first weekly challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to join, attend and contribute to a small-group. You are likely to get the **most** out of this *40-Day Challenge* by doing *three* things:

1. Attend the weekend worship celebration so that you're acquainted with the challenge for that week.
2. Read the daily material in *this 40-Day Challenge Study Guide*.
3. Be part of a small-group where you can do life and learn truth together.

Some of you may be ready to tackle a bigger challenge: If you are a veteran of small-groups, but have never led one, meet with your small-group leader and ask that person to teach you for the next five weeks so you will be prepared to serve as a leader the next time around. Your challenge is to say to your small-group leader, "Would you apprentice me?"

If you are currently leading a small-group, your challenge during these next six weeks is to apprentice at least one member from your group to lead a small-group of their own.

If you've never been in a group, your challenge is to show up, contribute by doing your reading and take a genuine interest in others.

## ***Small-Group Study and Discussion Questions***

For use by small-groups after the Week 1 readings on the topic of **Community**. Below is a complete list of small-group study and discussion questions that will cover some of the important themes for this week.

In order to stay within the time limits of your small-group meeting, your small-group leader will choose what questions he or she wants your group to focus on. You will need to bring your guide with you to your small-group meeting. Please use this agenda to guide your meeting:

### **40 Day Challenge Small Group Meeting Agenda** (Small Groups should meet for a minimum of 90 min.)

***Time: 90 min***

#### ***Agenda Item Time***

- 1. **Welcome & Opening Prayer** 3 min.
- 2. **Identify Timekeeper and Share Ground Rules** 5 min.
- 3. **Icebreaker** 20 min.
- 4. **Bible Study-Small Group Study & Discussion Questions** 40 min.
- 5. **Announcements** 5 min.
- 6. **Celebrations** (Answered Prayers, New Job, Birthdays, 10 min.  
Anniversaries, Promotions, New Homes, New Babies, etc)
- 7. **Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer** 5 min.

1. **Icebreaker:** Go around the room asking everyone to briefly answer this question: What is the

closest family you've ever seen or known?

2. **Bible Study:** Read Acts 2:42-47.

3. Ask the question: Do you think the picture of the church in those verses indicates a community that was more intertwined with each other's lives than most churches today, less so, or about the same? Why?

4. Ask the question: Do you think those verses reveal the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17, that His followers would be united in a community like the unity the Father and the Son enjoyed? Why or why not?

5. Ask the question: What do you think would be the effect on the lives of people if their church reflected that kind of community? What would be the effects on the community surrounding the church? How might it affect how your seeking friends, neighbors, and family members view the gospel?
6. Listen to these words from the Day 4 reading: "You were created like every other human being on the planet to need others. Whether you are married or single, young or old, introvert or extrovert, God made you to live in community with others. That is where you belong and where you will best be able to grow and thrive." Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?"
7. Do you think being in close relationship to others makes it easier or harder to follow Jesus? Why?
8. *"Church isn't a building you go to—it's a family you belong to."* Why is that true? Have you seen that in your relationship with the church?
9. Are there any issues holding you back from seeking stronger connections with others in the church? If so, what are they, and what changes would you like to see?
10. What are some ways this group can be a closer and stronger family to you? Name one practical thing this group can do for you, or one specific way we can pray for you in the week ahead.