

Begin with Silence and Prayer (5 Minutes)

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting; around a table, on a couch, a living room floor, etc. Have someone lead a quick prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a moment in silence together. Instruct your group,

“As you sit in silence, invite the Holy Spirit to quiet your heart and mind from distractions. Ask God if there is anything he would like to share with you during this time.”

Why silence? In our overcrowded, busy world, silence (even if for only a few minutes) cuts through the noise and allows space to calm your mind and your heart before God. Close this group time of silence with a moment of gratitude, thanking God for the opportunity to be together.

Review Last Week’s Practice (10 Minutes)

After spending a few minutes catching up on life events over the past week or two, talk through the following debrief questions focusing on the practice that was given last week.

How did it go?

What did you notice about your regular habits and rhythms that you didn’t realize before?

Did you sense God inviting you to swap any particular habit with a spiritual practice?

What do you hope to incorporate into your day-to-day discipleship going forward?

Debrief the Teaching (10 minutes)

If you have a large group, it may be best to divide into small groups of three to four people. Spend a moment catching up on life and then talk through the following questions:

Did you listen to this week’s sermon? What was the biggest take away from the message?

What has been your experience with living in community?

Discuss this Overview (10-15 Minutes)

The role of “life with others” in spiritual formation is to close the gap between who we think we are and who we actually are. Through authenticity and encouragement, life with others breaks down the facades we construct and invites us to live with greater honesty about ourselves. This, ultimately, brings opportunities for transformation. Intentional life with others can be practiced in many ways; a community group (like this one), spiritual friendships, mentoring relationships, prayer partners, WBS or Men’s Frat table, etc. Each of these is a unique expression of community that can be used to shape us spiritually.

Intentionally living with others brings out the best and the worst in all of us, and to truly live life with others is to expose our shortcomings. By living with others authentically, we can no longer hide who we truly are, giving us the opportunity to be known by others and in turn to know them.

But life with others doesn’t only expose ourselves to who we truly are; healthy community encourages us in our deficiencies to believe that change is possible. Community sees you at your worst, loves you regardless, and seeks ways to walk with you into life-giving change.

What is appealing or unappealing to you about living intentionally with others in Christian community?

What has been your experience with spiritual practices in your faith journey?

Open the Bible Together (10-15 Minutes)

Have someone read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 out loud.

What do you notice about the community described in these few verses?

From these verses, what can we learn (positive or negative) about the community to whom this letter was written?

Community and Authenticity

There is a sense of raw honesty within the community described, as they were living life together. There were those idle and disruptive, others were disheartened and weak. Consistent, intentional life with others has a way of opening ourselves up and exposing who we truly are, causing us to live more authentically in the good and the bad of it.

How does true community expose who we truly are? And how is this process a good thing in our spiritual formation?

What are ways to cultivate a more authentic community within this group?

Community and Encouragement

The community in the text has more to it than the mere raw, messy reality, it is also a community that is admonished to encourage one another. In the messy reality of community; they are encouraged to live in peace with each other, encourage, help, and strive to do what is good for each other.

What are ways to cultivate an environment of encouragement within this group that points us toward greater maturity in Christ?

This sort of community does not happen by chance; it takes intentionality and effort. Author Christine Pohl, in her book *Living into Community*, writes, "Good communities and life-giving congregations emerge at the intersection of divine grace and steady human effort."

Why are both of these elements, "divine grace" and "steady human effort," important to the cultivation of community life that provokes spiritual formation?

Something to Practice Individually this Week - The "One Anothers" (5-10 Minutes)

Below is a practice that everyone in your group can try out this coming week. Spend a few minutes reading this out loud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise.

This week's practice will provide the opportunity for you to express community in various ways throughout your week.

Step #1 - Carve out time each day to prayerfully review the attached "One Anothers" worksheet. "The One Anothers"

As you prayerfully review it, what is the one "one another" you feel God leading you to practice for that day?

This could be as simple as spending time in prayer rather than reading the news on your lunch break, or interrupt long blocks of work by pausing for a minute or two and inviting God to be with you in the middle of your office. Be open to what God may highlight for you to change.

Step #2 - Spend a few moments reading and meditating on the scriptures that are listed under your particular "one another" that God led you to for the day.

Step #3 - Ask God to highlight someone in your life that you can express this "one another" to. This could be a spouse, sibling, co-worker, community group member, friend, or anyone that you regularly intersect with in your life.

Step #4 - As God leads you to a particular "one another," search out opportunities within your day to express this form of community. This could mean you need to make a phone call or send a text. Maybe it is inviting someone over for a meal or coffee. Maybe it is seeking forgiveness or expressing your love and care for someone.

Make this a creative and fun way of learning to express encouragement with others. Write down any stories that arise throughout the week from this practice and share with your community group next week.

Close in Prayer (5 Minutes)

Have someone close out your time in prayer. Thank God for the time together, and pray for each other's upcoming week.