



EXPERIENCING A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY

ALL IN

WE OFTEN MAKE THE MISTAKE OF ASSUMING THAT A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR. INSTEAD, NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. IN THIS UNIQUE CLASS, YOU'LL BE GROUPED WITH A HANDFUL OF OTHER STUDENTS TO SIMULTANEOUSLY LEARN ABOUT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHILE EXPERIENCING IT YOURSELF. WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE ROLE THAT GOD DESIGNED US TO PLAY WITHIN THE CHURCH, THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP AND MENTORING, ENJOYING BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS, THE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE TO ONE ANOTHER, AND MORE. OUR HOPE IS THAT THIS CLASS CONNECTS YOU MORE INTIMATELY WITH OTHERS AS YOU LEARN TOGETHER ABOUT GOD'S VISION FOR THE CHURCH.



LESSON 1

The class kicks off by diving into God's design for community and how we were made to experience it.

LESSON 2

In this lesson, we will work through several barriers that can get in the way of us experiencing the benefits of an authentic Christian community. In doing so, we'll also learn about what makes the Church so unique.

LESSON 3

We'll examine a few "acts" of Christian community; that is, what we *do* when we're together, starting with study, prayer, praise and lament.

LESSON 4

The class finishes up with a look at a few additional community "acts": service, accountability, encouragement and evangelism.

Lesson 1

CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP

True, but it's not only about a relationship with *God*. It's also about a relationship with God's community.

CLASS STRUCTURE:

- equal parts instruction and discussion

MAIN GOAL:

- to learn about Christian community in theory and in practice

WHAT WE DON'T WANT:

- "In church, we sit together and sing together and greet one another cheerily as we leave at the end of the service. We do all of these things, sometimes for years, without forming any real personal Christian relationships. Our words often seem superficial. The church, therefore, becomes a place where Christians live alone together." (Larry Richards as quoted in "The Friendless American Male")

GET TO KNOW YOUR GROUP

Make notes below as you start to get to know each other. Feel free to continue to add more information as the weeks go on.

NAME:

Job & Hobbies

Other:

Contact Info:



NAME:

Job & Hobbies

Other:

Contact Info:

NAME:

Job & Hobbies

Other:

Contact Info:

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NAME:

Job & Hobbies

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COMMUNITY WAS GOD'S IDEA

"The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it... Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.'" || Genesis 2:15, 18

Even in the company of good work, abundant animal life, and God's care, nothing and no one were suitable companions for Adam.



"At last!" the man exclaimed.

"This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman' because she was taken from 'man.'" || Genesis 2:23)

NOTES:

DISCUSS: Why wasn't God "enough" for Adam?

THE BETTER QUESTION: WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT GOD?

God's nature is Triune; this is, He exists simultaneously in three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Headline: God exists within His own community. He IS community.

Since all humans are made in the image of God, we were meant to image His communal nature. But instead of experiencing community within ourselves, we are meant to experience it with other humans AND with God.

NOTES:



MEET ABRAHAM

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.'" || Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham was called to begin a **NEW** community marked by God's leadership and blessing. It would become great and bless others.

In other words, at the center of God's plan to reveal Himself to us and the rest of the world is a **COMMUNITY**.

God established a covenant with Abraham's descendants:

- God would provide leadership, safety and blessing
- The people would trust God and be obedient to His leadership

God upheld His side of the covenant; the people did not uphold theirs. They couldn't. They needed help. They needed a Savior.

NOTES:

MEET JESUS

Jesus exposed the Jewish people's misunderstanding of their mission:

- They thought: "We're to invite people into *our* community (i.e. to become Jewish).
- Jesus: "No, you're supposed to invite people into **MY** community (i.e. to become mine)."

So Jesus redefined His community:

"...upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." || Matthew 16:18

THE CHURCH

Jesus returned God to the center of community life, inviting everyone who trusts in His leadership to be a part of the Church.

The Church has since taken up its original call to display to the rest of the world how good and loving God truly is, and then to invite others to put their trust in Him.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**Where is the bulk of your most meaningful community currently found?
What draws you together?**

Describe your experience with church and with other Christians.

After reviewing God's vision for the Church, what about it is most compelling to you?

HOMEWORK

1

FIND A WAY TO CONNECT WITH YOUR GROUP

Set up an email chain, a GroupMe thread, a community on Slack, an in-person get together, etc.

2

SHARE ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE HOBBY

Ex: "I enjoy reading. Specifically, this genre and these authors. Right now, I'm reading this book. I've been a reader since..."

3

SHARE A PRAYER REQUEST

What is something that YOU would appreciate prayer for this week?

4

PERSONALLY REFLECT ON...

What comes to your mind when you imagine healthy, Christian community? Specifically, think about what expectations you have, who would be a part of that community, what you would do or talk about, etc. Also, consider what barriers might prevent someone from experiencing that type of community.

Lesson 2

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN THINKING ABOUT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:

1

MISUNDERSTANDING ITS STRUCTURE

- God is the leader of the Church, and we are called to follow Him.

"Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel." | | Exodus 19:4-6

What makes the church remarkably different from every other community is God's leadership. Unlike humans, He:

- knows everything and can therefore direct us with wisdom and foreknowledge
- does not show favoritism but treats everyone with an equal measure of His love and favor
- has supernatural power at His disposal and can give it to us as well
- is perfect and cannot be tempted or corrupted
-

GOD'S LEADERSHIP CONTINUED

- If we forget that God is our leader, we have nothing to offer this world.

"Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.

He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead." | Colossians 1:18

Practically, having God as our leader means:

- He has the final word about what is true and good.
- the Church isn't limited to the capacities of humankind. Instead, we should be dependent on God's direction and power to carry out His plan.
- we do not need to lose faith if someone in the Church disappoints us or lets us down. Our faith is rooted in God, not other sin-stained men and women.
- we should encourage others to stay connected to and focused on God.

NOT KNOWING WHO GOD TRULY IS

- God has chosen to reveal Himself to the Church so that we can know Him and reflect Him to the rest of the world.

It isn't our job to repackage or reinvent God. Instead, we are to represent Him faithfully, which requires us to truly know Him.

The primary way we get to know God is through the Bible.

Reading and meditating on the Bible has always marked God's people.

"... all the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given for Israel to obey.

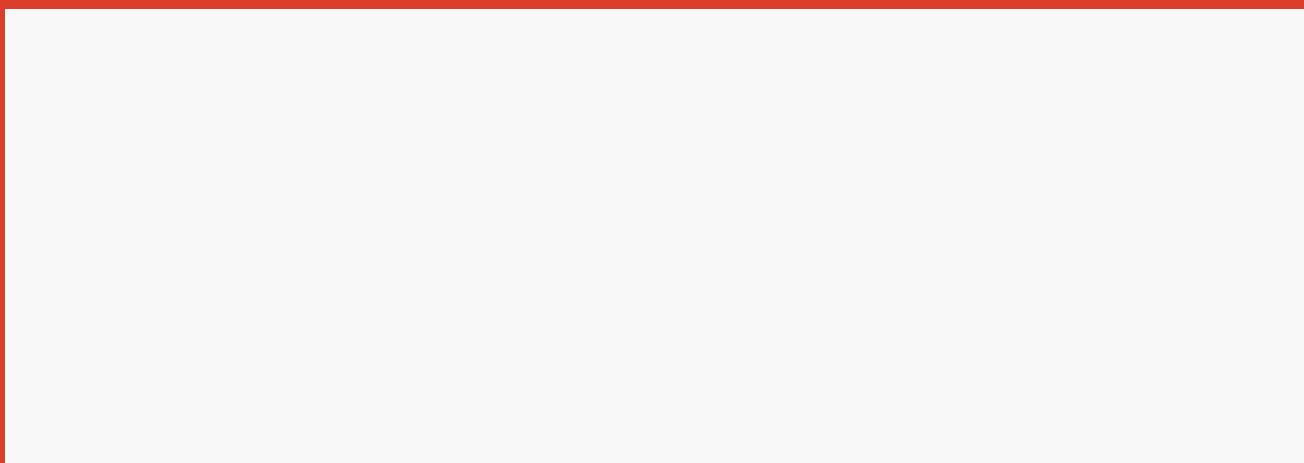
So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law." || Nehemiah 8:2-3

"But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." || 1 Timothy 3:14-17

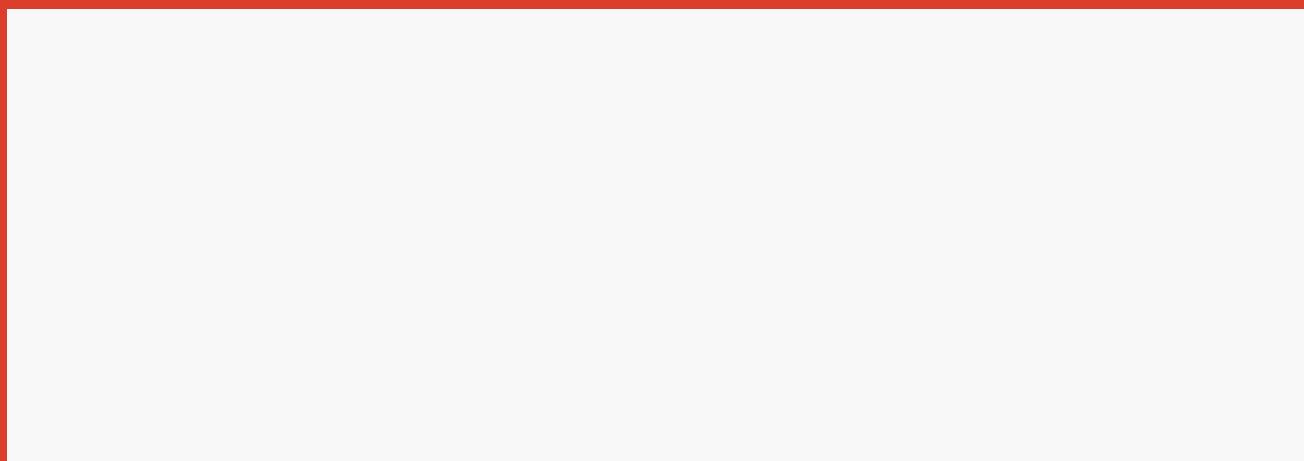
The relativism of the modern age rejects God's truth and leadership. But God is an anchor in the ever-changing current of culture.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Submitting to authority doesn't come naturally to everyone, even to God's authority. In fact, one of the major hesitations that many have about Christianity is the call to submit to God as Leader. How would you describe your relationship with "authority", and how does that impact you letting God be in charge of your life?



The Church must be committed to the Bible, and yet studies show that the majority of Christians do not read it regularly or prioritize its role in their life. What is your experience with the Bible? How might you be able to prioritize it in your life?



MAKING COMMUNITY ALL ABOUT US

- Rather than experiencing Church through a communal lens, we can mistakenly prioritize individual concerns.

In the Church, we aren't at the center. God is. So the focus isn't on how the Church can meet our needs, but on how the Church can meet the world's need for God.

Examples of individualistic thinking:

- "What can this church give me?" instead of "What can I provide the church?"
- "No one reached out to me!" instead of "Whom can I reach out to?"
- taking advantage of all the church has to offer you without feeling compelled or inspired to give financially or volunteer
- "The pastor doesn't shake everyone's hand" instead of "Who seems new here that I can introduce myself to?"
- saying "I go to church", but not being able to name even five people we know well
- blaming it on "the church" that we don't know more people, rather than taking personal initiative
-

CONTINUED

- With an individualistic mentality, we can think that we can image God to the world by ourselves. But we can't. We need others to do that.

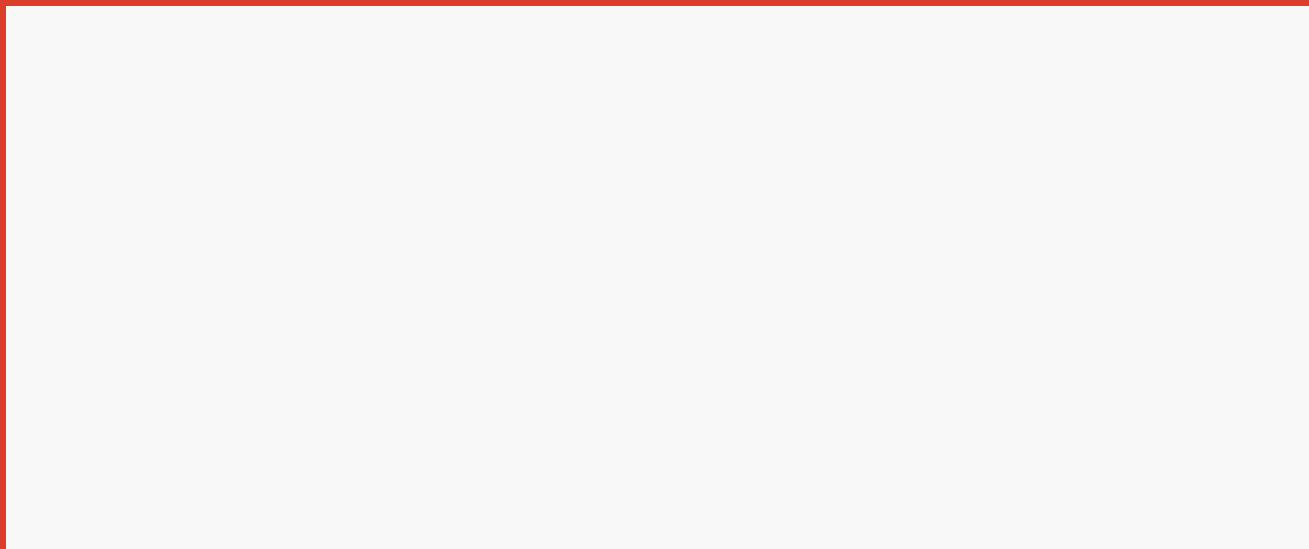
Jesus modeled God by taking on the role of a servant:

- "You know that the rulers of this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." || Matthew 20:25-28

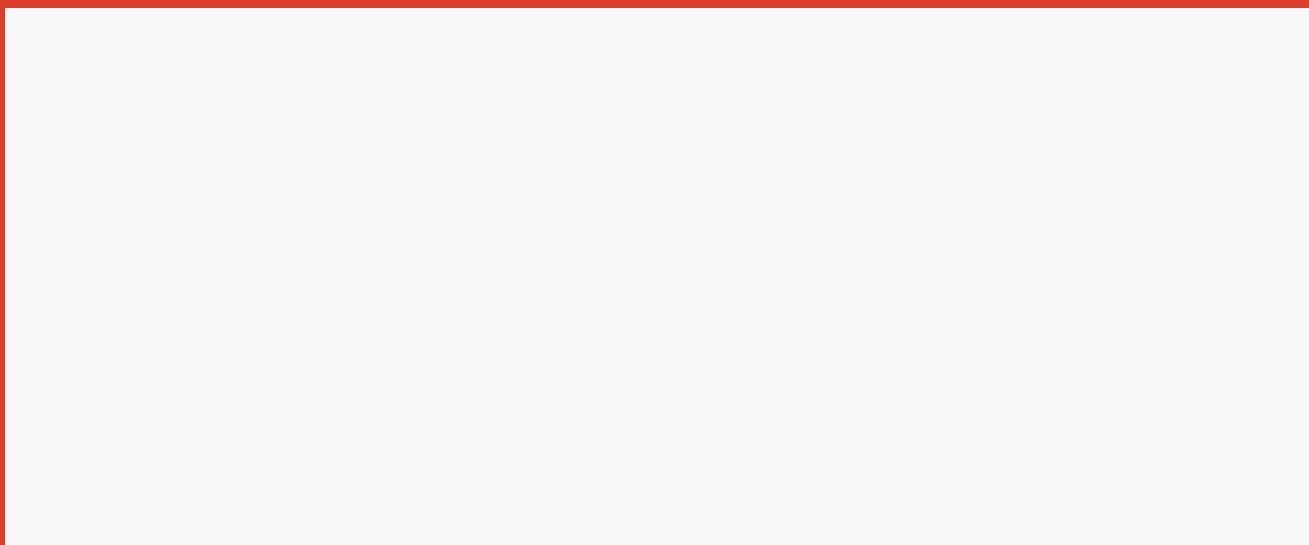
It is pure and utter joy to get to be a part of God's community. He lets us participate in His transforming work of bringing dead people to life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In what ways can you find yourself giving into an individualist, consumer mindset when it comes to church?



What most excites you about being a part of a church community?



HOMEWORK

1

CONNECT WITH YOUR GROUP AND DISCUSS YOUR S.H.A.P.E.

S: Spiritual Gifts

- If you are a Christian, what are your spiritual gifts? Not sure? Click [HERE](#) to take Meck's spiritual gifts assessment.

H: Heart

- What most excites you? Breaks your heart? What are you passionate about?

A: Abilities

- What are some things you're just naturally good at? Writing? Baking? Fixing things? Art? Connecting with people?

P: Personality

- How would you describe your personality to others? Introvert/extrovert? Doer/thinking? Enneagram number?

E: Experiences

- What experiences in your life have most impacted who you are?

2

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 (NEXT PAGE)

Record your observations as you read. What sticks out to you? What do you have questions about?

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 (NLT)

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.



OBSERVATIONS:

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO KNOW? (ABOUT HIM, YOURSELF, ETC.)

WHO DOES GOD WANT YOU TO BE? (WHAT CHARACTER TRAITS ARE IN VIEW, WHAT CONVICTIONS DO YOU FEEL?)

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO WITH WHAT YOU'VE READ?

Lesson 3

THE CHURCH IS NOT A GROUP OF BEST FRIENDS; IT'S A FAMILY.

In a traditional family, it's your blood that ties you together. In the Church, it's Jesus' blood that ties you together.

STUDYING THE BIBLE

Reading the Bible is both an individual and communal activity.

"If you crack open the door of an Orthodox Jewish yeshiva (seminary) study hall, you might expect to be greeted by utter silence. After all, the students need to learn massive amounts of information. ... Instead what will greet you is a din of multiple conversations. Pairs of students will be standing at podiums facing each other, animatedly discussing the fine points of each text. Bespectacled students will have one hand poised over an open volume while the other hand gestures wildly, the debate waxing and waning. If one student doesn't understand the passage, the other tries to explain it. Together they think of possible interpretations of the text.... At first glance, this seems like a strange study technique. But through the ages Jewish thinkers have considered it vital to study the Scriptures in the presence of other people." || Ann Spangler, "Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus"

Rabbinical saying: "When two sit together and exchange words of Torah, then the Divine Presence dwells among them."

- Jesus: "Where two or three gather in my name there am I with them." || Matthew 18:20

HAVERIM: (HEBREW) "FRIENDS WHO STUDY TOGETHER"

Advantages:

- There are neither students nor teachers; only co-learners. Each person accepts personal responsibility for learning and helping others to learn.
- Participating in a *haverim* rejects the notion that spirituality is a private affair. Trust, openness and vulnerability are required.
- Studying with others invites alternative perspectives that would otherwise be foreign to you.

Consider studying the Bible with a partner or group on a regular basis.

SAMPLE STRUCTURE OF A GROUP BIBLE STUDY:

- 10 minutes: Share one praise/answered prayer from the previous week/month (however long it's been since meeting)
- 2 minutes: Pray over your time together
- 30 minutes: Discuss the passage(s) the group agreed to spend time on individually (could be the "Know, Be Do" questions, or others - "How did God challenge you in our reading?," "How did God encourage you in our reading?," "What surprised you in your reading?," "What confused you or raised questions for you in our reading?")
- 10 minutes: Share prayer requests for the upcoming week/month
- 5 minutes: Pray together

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (COLOSSIANS 3:1-17)

OBSERVE: What does the text say?

INTERPRET: What does the text mean?

APPLY: What are you to do in response?

PRAYER

Like Bible study, prayer is meant to be done individually and with others.

But why? What is the benefit of praying with others? Here's an example from the New Testament:

"When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,

"Why were the nations so angry?
Why did they waste their time with futile plans?
The kings of the earth prepared for battle;
the rulers gathered together
against the Lord
and against his Messiah."

'In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness." || Acts 4:24-31, NLT



Praying together with others emboldens us. It strengthens the Church by uniting us before God and allowing us to draw strength from Him together.

NOTES:

GROUP PRAYER

Quickly record prayer requests below, and then take turns praying for one another (whomever is comfortable doing so).

WORSHIP BY PRAISE & LAMENT

worship: "to ascribe worth to someone or something"

Worship isn't entertainment; it's engagement. It turns our attention to God and allows us to declare and celebrate His worth

"It is the voice of the church that is heard in singing together. It is not I who sing but the church. However, as a member of the church, I may share in its song. Thus all true singing together must serve to widen our spiritual horizon. It must enable us to recognize our small community as a member of the great Christian church on earth and must help us willingly and joyfully take our place in the song of the church with our singing, be it feeble or good." || Eietrich Bonehoeffer, "Life Together"

NOTES:

Worship includes both praise **AND** lament.

Lament: the individual and communal practice of bringing our grief before God (anxiety, broken relationships, infertility, death, addiction, etc.)

Nearly half of the psalms in the Bible are psalms of lament, and many are meant to be sung together with others.

NOTES:

HOMEWORK

1

PARTICIPATE IN A CHURCH SERVICE WITH YOUR GROUP

Try to coordinate your schedules so that you can participate in a church service together, whether it's in person or online. Build in time to connect with each other either during or after the service to talk about what you learned.

2

EXTRA CREDIT: WRITE A LAMENT

Try writing a simple psalm of lament. Use your own words and structure, and don't overthink it. Simply bring a grief to God and then draw strength/wisdom from Him. For examples, see Psalms 12, 22, 44 or 86. We challenge you to then share it with your group and allow them to speak words of encouragement to you.

Lesson 4

ENCOURAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

"I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge.... He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns....

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, 'I am a follower of Paul.' Others are saying, 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Peter,' or 'I follow only Christ.'

Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!" || 1 Corinthians 1:4-5, 8, 10-12, NLT

To encourage is to point others to God for strength or courage.

Encouragement is not flattery. Flattery focuses on the flatterer (self-focused). Encouragement focuses on the one encouraged.

NOTES:



Encouragement and accountability are both needed to point and redirect each other to God.

Accountability is only appropriate and helpful in certain circumstances:

- when a ministry leader or Christian person of influence is teaching in a way that contradicts Scripture, is participating in illegal or flagrantly immoral practices, or is creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation
- when another Christian you are already in a close, loving relationship with displays ongoing patterns of sin
- if you are in a spiritual mentoring or pastoral position and your correction has been solicited

Accountability isn't only about pointing out errors. It's also about redirecting erroneous methods or mindsets back to God.

NOTES:

GROUP DISCUSSION

Share about one thing that God has been teaching you about lately. Why do you think that lesson is important during your current season of life, and through what outlets has God been teaching you about that? Share also about what you plan to do about what He's teaching you.

Share about a time when you were on the receiving end of helpful accountability. What was it that made that helpful? What result did it have on your attitude or behavior?

SERVICE

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do us a favor.'

'What is your request?' he asked.

They replied, 'When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.' || Mark 10:35-37

"When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. **But among you it will be different.** Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." || Mark 10:41-45, emphasis added

The Church's service incarnates the gospel by reaching out to people where they are with hope and love.

NOTES:

EVANGELISM

Every mark and action of Christian community must have in mind those who are far from God.

Examples:

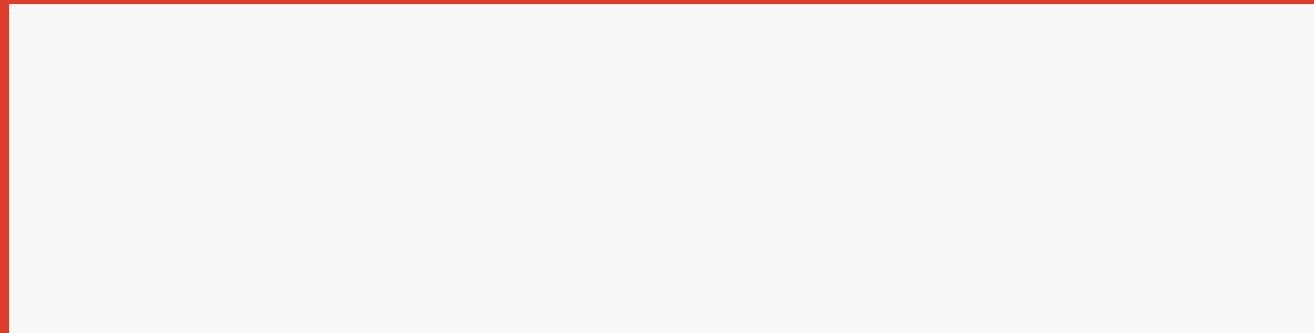
- Our Bible study should help us know how to articulate our faith to others.
- Our prayer should include those who are far from God.
- Our praise should remind us how truly great God is and inspire us to want to share Him with others.
- Our lament should help us empathize with the longings and hurts of those who need God.
- Our encouragement and accountability of fellow believers should aim to uphold our witness to the world so that Christians are known for God's love and grace, not for judgment and condemnation.
- Our service should bring us into relationships with those who need God.

"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." || John 13:35

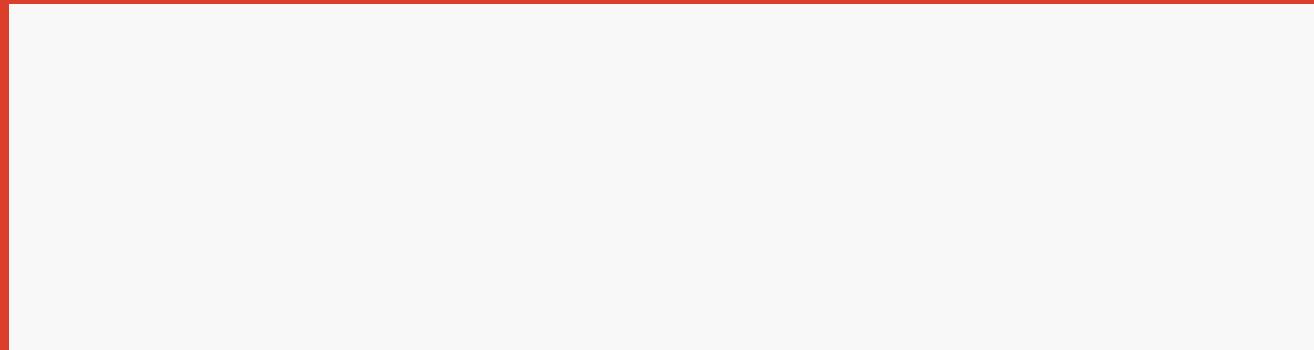
NOTES:

GROUP DISCUSSION

In what ways are you currently or might you start to incorporate service into your mentality and actions? Think back on your SHAPE. What about it might inform how you could uniquely serve others?



The greatest evidence that the Church is authentic is the love that it displays - among believers and toward those far from God. But that type of transforming love isn't self-manufactured. It comes from first knowing God and experiencing His love. What next step can you take to deepen your love for God?



You've had the opportunity to get to know each other better these last four weeks. What comes next for you all?

