



Community

# Community

## Contents

	Page
<b>What is Community?</b>	1
<b>Relationships in Community</b>	4
<b>Resolving relationship breakdown in Community</b>	6
<b>Growing together in Community</b>	8
<b>Inclusive Community</b>	10
<b>Practising Community</b>	12
<b>Appendix A</b>	13

## 1. What is community?

### Connect

1. What do you understand by the word “community”? How many meanings are there?
2. Where do you personally find community?

### Discover

#### Read Genesis 2:15-25 and I John 1:1-7

3. From the Genesis passage what do we learn about loneliness and our most basic need for community?
4. What does “fellowship” mean in I John 1:3, 6 & 7?
5. Who is the source of fellowship and how does this impact on our fellowship with each other?
6. Are fellowship and community the same thing? Why or why not?

#### Read Acts 2:42-47

## Community can be thought of as a place where we can:

- Know and be known
  - Love and be loved
  - Serve and be served
  - Celebrate and be celebrated
  - Admonish and be admonished.
7. How do we see each of these being expressed in the early church? (You can include other passages from the New Testament that come to mind).
8. How are they expressed in your own Community? Are there any that are expressed more readily? Are there any that are being neglected?
9. What risks are there in being part of a Community like this? What might prevent you from moving towards becoming more like this?

## Apply

10. Although we are living in a different time and culture, what lessons from the early church can we learn that are still applicable for our Communities today?

## Pray together

- a) for anything that has arisen from the study
- b) for God to unite you as a Community of His people together
- c) for His direction for your Community for the future.

At the end of this series there is opportunity to put into practice one or more

of the expressions of community that will be covered. We suggest taking a look at Week Six during this week and begin to think about what you might like to do during that week.

For this week think about the 5 aspects of community life above. Pick one and express it in a practical way to someone else in your Community this week.

- Is there someone you would like to get to know better? Arrange to meet with them this week.
- Is there someone you would like to show love to? Send a card, give them a call.
- Is there someone you would like to serve? Cut their grass, babysit, make a meal, give a lift.
- Is there someone to celebrate with? A birthday, anniversary, exam success, new job.
- Is there someone you need to speak the truth in love to? Don't delay.

Or, if you are receiving any of the above, acknowledge it and find a way to express your thankfulness.

## 2. Relationships in Community

### Connect

1. How many different types of relationship do we experience as we go through life? Which do you find in your Community?

### Discover

#### Read | John 3:18-24 and Romans 12:9-21

2. What is the connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with others?
3. What impact does it have on our relationships with others when our relationship with God is strong? What about when it is weak?
4. From these passages what qualities would you expect a Community with deep healthy relationships to have?
5. Sometimes it is easier to function on a superficial level of relationship within a Community. What qualities would you expect a Community with superficial relationships to have?
6. What barriers might there be to prevent us from forming deeper relationships? What would help to break those barriers down?

### Apply

In pairs pick one or two of the following challenges from Romans 12 and discuss how it will help to build strong relationships within your Community.

- Hate what is evil; cling to what is good
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love
- Honour one another above yourselves
- Keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord
- Be joyful in hope
- Be patient in affliction
- Be faithful in prayer
- Practise hospitality
- Feedback together

7. Are there any specific actions you need to take as an individual or as a Community to move your relationship with God or with each other beyond the superficial? What would help to keep you accountable to each other?

**Share needs and pray for each other.**

## 3. Resolving Relationship Breakdown in Community

### Connect

1. How do you think people's attitudes towards commitment in relationships have changed over recent decades both in society generally and within the church? Why do you think this is?
2. Describe a time when you have been involved in or affected by a relationship breakdown either at home, work, church or elsewhere. What effect did it have on you and those around you?

### Discover

**Read Matthew 18:15-35, Luke 17:3-4**

3. What is Jesus' basic teaching on relationship breakdown?
4. What is the process for restoring relationship? What are the roles each person plays? What are the benefits of it being this way? What stops us from taking the initiative?
5. Why is it important to try to restore a relationship? Why not just let it go?
6. When we do not allow ourselves to forgive someone who has wronged us what happens to our relationship with God and with the other person?

7. Do you believe forgiveness is a feeling or a decision leading to action? Why?

**Read 1 Corinthians 13:5, Ephesians 4:15, 25 & 26, 2 Timothy 2:24**

8. What else do we learn from these passages about what our attitude should be towards those who have offended us?

If you feel able, share stories/experiences with each other of either giving or receiving forgiveness.

### Apply

9. If you have ever experienced healing in a relationship that had broken down what were some of the specific steps or actions that brought that about?
10. Are there any outstanding unresolved relational issues that God may be prompting you to deal with? What could be your first step towards the other person?

### Pray together

If this study has raised unresolved issues for you we recommend the book "Total forgiveness" by R.T. Kendall

Don't forget to be thinking and planning what you will do in Week Six.

# 4. Growing together in Community

## Connect

1. Think back to your early days as a Christian believer. How have you changed over time? Be as specific or as general as you like. If as a group have you known each other for a long time you may want to comment on changes that you recognise in each other.

## Discover

**Read 1 Peter 2:2-3, Hebrews 5:11-14, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:14-16**

2. What does it mean to “grow up” as a Christian? How does this happen?
3. What are the consequences of not growing?

**Read 2 Peter 1:3-11**

4. Where does our power to grow come from? Why, then, do we have to “make every effort” to grow?
5. From verses 5-7 list the qualities we can expect to see in each other as we grow.

6. Note the urgency of verse 10. How is this connected to growing as a Christian?
7. What helps you personally to grow spiritually?

## Apply

You may be familiar with the chart below comparing the needs of a young child to grow to those of a Christian.

<b>Young child</b>	<b>Christian</b>
Daily food	Feed on the Bible
Fresh air	Prayer is oxygen for the soul
Regular exercise	Practice what you learn
Adequate rest	Healthy rhythm of rest and work
Clean surroundings	Avoid what will weaken you spiritually
Loving care	Be part of a Community
Exposure to new challenges	Willing to step out in faith

Spend some time discussing what part your Community plays in helping you to grow.

8. Young children are often assessed to check their growth and development is within normal range. How often do you assess your spiritual growth? Is this something that would be helpful to do? If so how could you do it?

Pray together

## 5. Inclusive Community

### Connect

1. Define “inclusive” and “exclusive” in relation to Communities. What would be an example of an exclusive Community and why is it important for it to be exclusive? What would be an example of an inclusive Community and why is it important for it to be inclusive?

### Discover

#### Remind yourselves of the parables in Luke 15:1-32

2. Can you summarize the core teaching of these parables into one sentence? You could do this altogether, in pairs or individually.

#### Read Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-31

3. Who invited who for a meal? How is this relevant for us today?

#### Read Luke 10:1-8

4. Why did Jesus send his followers out in twos?
5. What was to be their first response to the large harvest? V2

6. How were they to recognise when a person was likely to be receptive to their message? verses 5 and 6.
7. What were they to do next? Verses 7-10
8. Imagine you are one of the people Jesus has sent out. At each step of your journey how are you feeling? What are your expectations?

### Apply

9. Do you know anyone that could be a “person of peace” in your life? (Someone who serves you or your family in some way, someone who welcomes you in their life or who enjoys your company.)

#### Read Appendix A on page 13

10. Have you ever considered inviting a non-Christian to your group? What would it be like? What would have to change? What could stay the same?
11. Pray that God will show you how he wants you to respond to this study. Is there anything you already know He is saying to you? If so, what will you do about it?

## 6. Practising Community

There is no study this week but an opportunity to put something you have been discussing from the last few weeks into practice.

*Here are some ideas:*

- Have a meal together as a Community
- Spend time with friends who are not Christians
- Club together to provide a Christmas hamper for a CAP client
- As a Community do something that will serve a person or an organisation outside God's family
- Write letters of encouragement to Christians around the world eg through Open Doors or to one of our missionaries
- As a Community do something together that will serve a ministry within the church or another Community
- Have an evening of prayer and pray together for God to increase your love for each other and for the lost. Ask Him to give you direction for your Community and a heart for those He wants you to reach
- Or anything else that you can think of

## Appendix A

Extract from 'The Small Group Leader's Handbook'

### When people are at different places spiritually

You'd think that opening your small group to a non-Christian would be a non-brainer, right? But no. Members of the small group Josh and I were co-leading had their concerns about including Tien.

"Jesus said go and make disciples, not converts. If we let non-Christians into our small groups, where will the "safe spaces" be for Christians to talk about their problems and pray for their non-Christian friends?" This was from Raquel, our resident "theologian-in training". "That'll just be awkward," said Oscar, our talkative rambler who made most meetings somewhat uncomfortable himself. Monica smiled prettily and chirped, "Whatever you guys decide is fine with me, because I've got to go in five minutes anyhow!" as she adjusted her hair for the fourth time that hour.

"Imagine what it could be like", I responded, "if all our small groups were willing to include non-Christians. Evangelism and discipleship would happen side-by-side – and we'd stop seeing these things as mutually exclusive polar opposites".

"We say we're about "bringing the whole gospel to the whole campus to transform the whole world," Josh jumped in to add, "but if we aren't even open to the five of us figuring out how to make space for Tien to join our small group, how are we supposed to live out our mission statement?"

"What couldn't we discuss openly if Tien were here, Raquel?" I jumped back in. "What topics would be off-limits or taboo? How else do we share life together if not by talking about everything openly? And c'mon, how cool would it be if Tien actually became a Christian?! That'd be great!!"

As it turned out, Tien didn't become a Christian that year. But the group did decide to include her, and we had a phenomenal year together. Tien's shy, quiet demeanor affected Oscar, and Oscar asked us how he could curb his cutting tones. His prayer request one day was for God to help him stop making rude remarks that hurt his sister and friends. Raquel's deep angst about complex matters of faith was reined in as she sought to explain the basics of the Christian faith to her new friend Tien. In doing so, she discovered what was at



the core of the gospel and what wasn't. Monica was pressed to ask how deep her commitment to her spiritual growth was when Tien showed up more consistently and faithfully that she did.

Tien came close to conversion, committing herself to Jesus at our college fellowship's retreat midway through the year, but her parents objected and she backed off. Though we still pray for her to choose Jesus' approval over her parents' approval, we also thank God for how he used her so unexpectedly to help us all grow.

In the same passage where Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, he explains who he sees as his flock: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Jesus is not just about gathering up Christians; Jesus actively shepherds non-Christians and calls us to do the same by actively welcoming them into our small groups.

We can understand and accept this. What is sometimes difficult for us to believe is that Jesus might have something for us to gain in the process.

In his goodness, Jesus used our small group to continue drawing Tien to himself. But he also used Tien to challenge and refine the rest of us – no matter where we were in our spiritual walk. Jesus is always setting us up for incredible growth via unexpected means, obstacles and difficult conversations while still accomplishing his purpose in drawing those who don't know him to himself.

To welcome each person into your group means to make space for all of their different personalities, temperaments and levels of spiritual maturity. To do this in entirely Christian groups can be frustrating and difficult at times. Ironically, even though the idea of including non-Christians feels like that would be even more challenging, you might be surprised by how their presence actually puts everything in perspective. That's right, you might start to think, this is what God's kingdom work is actually all about – bringing other sheep into the sheep pen.



**Holland Road Baptist Church**  
**Small Group Studies**  
**Printed October 2012**