



cultivate

*Building Biblical Community*

# Welcome

God designed people with a deep need for relationships. We long to be welcomed, known and to belong in a community. Yet, in today's world, many of us are lonely and isolated. Loneliness has become such a modern epidemic that in January of 2018, Great Britain appointed the country's first Minister of Loneliness to tackle the issues of the nine million people who often or always feel lonely.<sup>1</sup>

As believers, we have been welcomed into a lasting community - God's household, the Church. We are actually called family; brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, what does life in God's family look like? What do we do together? How do we act in ways that align with our identity as His people?

Acts 2:41-47 provides us one of the earliest glimpses of the gathered community of faith in the early Church. Read the following passage and answer the related questions ...

## **ACTS 2:41-47**

<sup>41</sup>So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

<sup>42</sup>They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup>Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

<sup>44</sup>And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

1. Where did these early believers actually physically meet? Why might this be significant?
2. What different kinds of people may have been a part of the early Church?
3. What activities were central and consistent to their gathered experience together?
4. What qualities characterized their relationships together?
5. What parts of this passage seem attractive and desirable to you?
6. What parts of this passage seem threatening and uncomfortable to you?

The following lessons outline the **key biblical passages** and the **essential practices** of a group that is building biblical community together.

LESSON 1: *Connect in Community*

LESSON 2: *Grow in Christ*

LESSON 3: *Engage with the World*

Biblical community is built on a foundation of trust and authenticity. As believers, our relationships are not based on passing interests, nationality, ethnicity or gender. Our connection is based on our eternally secure status as brothers and sisters in the family of God. As family members commit to being honest and real, life-giving community is built.

**ACTS 4:31-35**

<sup>31</sup>And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. <sup>32</sup>And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. <sup>33</sup>And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales <sup>35</sup>and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Read Acts 2:41-47 (p. 2) and Acts 4:31-35 (above). Answer the following questions:

1. How does Luke characterize the community experience of the early Church?
2. Specifically, what attitudes were present amongst them?
3. And what actions were key defining markers of their life together?
4. How would you compare and contrast the early Church's experience of community with your previous experience of community?

*Together we will...*

**SHARE HONESTLY**

Read 2 Timothy 3:10 and answer the following questions:

1. What were the kinds of things that Paul shared with Timothy? Similarly, what were the kind of things that the early Church community shared with one another?
2. What does it take for you to feel safe enough to share struggles and triumphs in your life?

3. How can we protect one another's confidentiality as we share?

How will we **pray** for one another consistently as a group?

### INVEST INTENTIONALLY

Read Hebrews 10:23-25 and answer the following questions:

1. In what ways did the faith community in the book of Hebrews truly need each other?

2. What keeps us from being intentional about building deep relationships with other people?

3. What are some ways we can encourage one another well?

How will we **care** for one another and **serve** each other as needs arise?

How will we **play** as a group?

### FORGIVE QUICKLY

Read Colossians 3:12-15 and answer the following questions:

1. What are your typical responses when conflict emerges in your relationships?

2. Since conflict is inevitable in any relationship, what's at stake if we don't learn to reconcile and forgive?

Take a moment and commit to **forgive** one another quickly when inevitable disagreements, misunderstandings and hurts arise.

Healthy organisms grow and develop. When we don't see growth, we know something is wrong. This principle is true in the spiritual realm as well. It is normal and expected for us to develop from "babes in Christ" to mature believers.

For Christians, the ultimate source of truth is God's Word, the Bible. By growing biblically, we can know what God is like, what He values and what His purposes are for us. We can experience life-changing encounters with God Himself through His word and grow to become like Christ.

**ACTS 17:11-12**

<sup>11</sup>Now those Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. <sup>12</sup>There many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

Read Acts 17:11-12 and refer to Acts 2:41-47 as you answer the following questions:

1. What particularly made these Bereans more "noble-minded" than those in Thessalonica?
  
2. Specifically, what attitudes and actions of these Bereans were noteworthy to Luke?
  
3. How can we emulate both the attitude and actions of these early Church believers in our own approach to the Word?

*Together we will...*

**DRINK DEEPLY FROM THE WORD**

Read 1 Peter 2:2 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. Answer the following questions:

1. What analogies does Peter use to describe the Word of God?
  
2. How do these analogies explain the role the Bible should play in our everyday lives?
  
3. What are some approaches to reading and applying the Bible that you have found helpful?

It is only when truth is discovered that it is appropriated. When a man is simply told the truth, it remains external to him and he can quite easily forget it. When he is led to discover the truth himself it becomes an integral part of him and he never forgets."

-WILLIAM BARCLAY

How will we **discover** truth from the Word each week as individuals and as a group?

### **OBEY WHOLEHEARTEDLY**

Read James 1:22-25 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Answer the following questions:

1. What dangers exist if we merely hear the Word but fail to obey it fully?

Basic questions to utilize anytime you read the Word:

- What stands out most in this passage?
- Since God's Word is true, how should I change as a result?  
What will I do in response to this passage?
- With whom am I going to share this passage and what I am learning from the Bible?

2. What fruit can the Word of God bear in our lives if we hear and obey fully?

How will we **challenge** one another to obey the Word of God wholeheartedly?

How will we follow up with each other for **accountability**?

As we connect in community and grow in Christ, God's Spirit will increasingly prompt us to engage our world with His love. As believers, we are Christ's body – His hands and feet on earth – equipped to bring hope to our broken world by engaging with the people around us in love and humility.

In fact, the apostle Paul's speech to the Athenians in Acts 17 provides us one of the most powerful and insightful examples of how the Church should engage the world with the hope of the gospel of grace.

#### **ACTS 17:16-34**

<sup>16</sup>Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. <sup>17</sup>So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. <sup>18</sup>And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup>And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?" <sup>20</sup>For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." <sup>21</sup>(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

<sup>22</sup>So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. <sup>23</sup>For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup>nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup>and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup>that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup>for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' <sup>29</sup>Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. <sup>30</sup>Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup>because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

<sup>32</sup>Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." <sup>33</sup>So Paul went out of their midst. <sup>34</sup>But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Read Acts 17:16-34 and answer the following questions:

1. How does Luke depict Paul's emotional response towards those in Athens?
2. What familiarity did Paul have with the Athenian culture? Why is this significant?

3. How did Paul connect Athenian culturally accepted ideas and even mysteries to the gospel?

4. What can we learn from the great variety of people's responses to Paul's presentation of the gospel?

*Together we will...*

### LISTEN & LEARN WIDELY

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Hebrews 2:14-18 and answer the following questions:

1. What attitudes and actions characterized Paul's gospel ministry?

2. How does the Incarnation of Christ provide us a model as we engage the world?

How will we sacrificially **enter** the world of our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family?

What questions can we **ask**? How can we **be fascinated** by their stories?

### LOVE COURAGEOUSLY

Read Luke 15:11-24, and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 18-20 and answer the following questions:

How does our experience of the love of Christ compel us to engage with the world?

What does the parable in Luke 15 teach us about God's care and even priority for the lost?

How will we **prioritize** time in our week to know and love the lost together?

### SHARE TRUTH & DO GOOD

Read Matthew 5:14-16 and James 1:27. Answer the following questions:

1. How do "good deeds" impact our presentation of the gospel to the world?

2. Why is it so important that we both proclaim the gospel and do good? In other words, what happens if we only do one of them?

Who will we **pray** for an open door to **share** the gospel with?

Who will we **serve** amongst our unbelieving neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family?



## THEMATIC LIFE MAP EXERCISE

Instructions:

1. Think of your life in three sections. For the younger, it probably works best to think in terms of: a) birth to middle school, b) high school, c) college and after. For the older, it might be better to think in terms of: a) birth to high school, b) college, c) after college. You have the freedom to divide things up the way you want.
2. Fill out the chart below, marking highs (positive experiences and relationships) and marking lows (negative experiences and relationships) – paying attention to how high and how low on the chart.
3. When the above is completed, chose the three highest and three lowest and try to develop/discern themes for each that have continued to shape your life (who you are and what you do) through today.
4. You won't be required to share your chart, but come ready to share your highs and lows, and the associated themes, and how this continue to influence your life in the present. You will be given about FIVE MINUTES to share.

