



TOGETHER

SIX CORE VALUES OF
BIBLICAL COMMUNITY



Introduction & Overview

Connecting people in authentic relationships that lead to spiritual transformation.

Living in community isn't a new idea. It's God's idea! Along with His Word and His Spirit, God often uses authentic biblical community as a primary means of bringing about transformation in our lives.

The goal of this guide is to help your community group grow closer together and pursue spiritual transformation, whether you're a brand-new group or have been meeting together for years.

This discussion guide will help your group have conversations foundational for growing in your relationships with one another and for living in intentional community together. It contains truths from God's Word, practical thoughts on how community works, and discussion questions for you to process together. Whenever there are Bible references noted, make it a point to look up and read each passage.

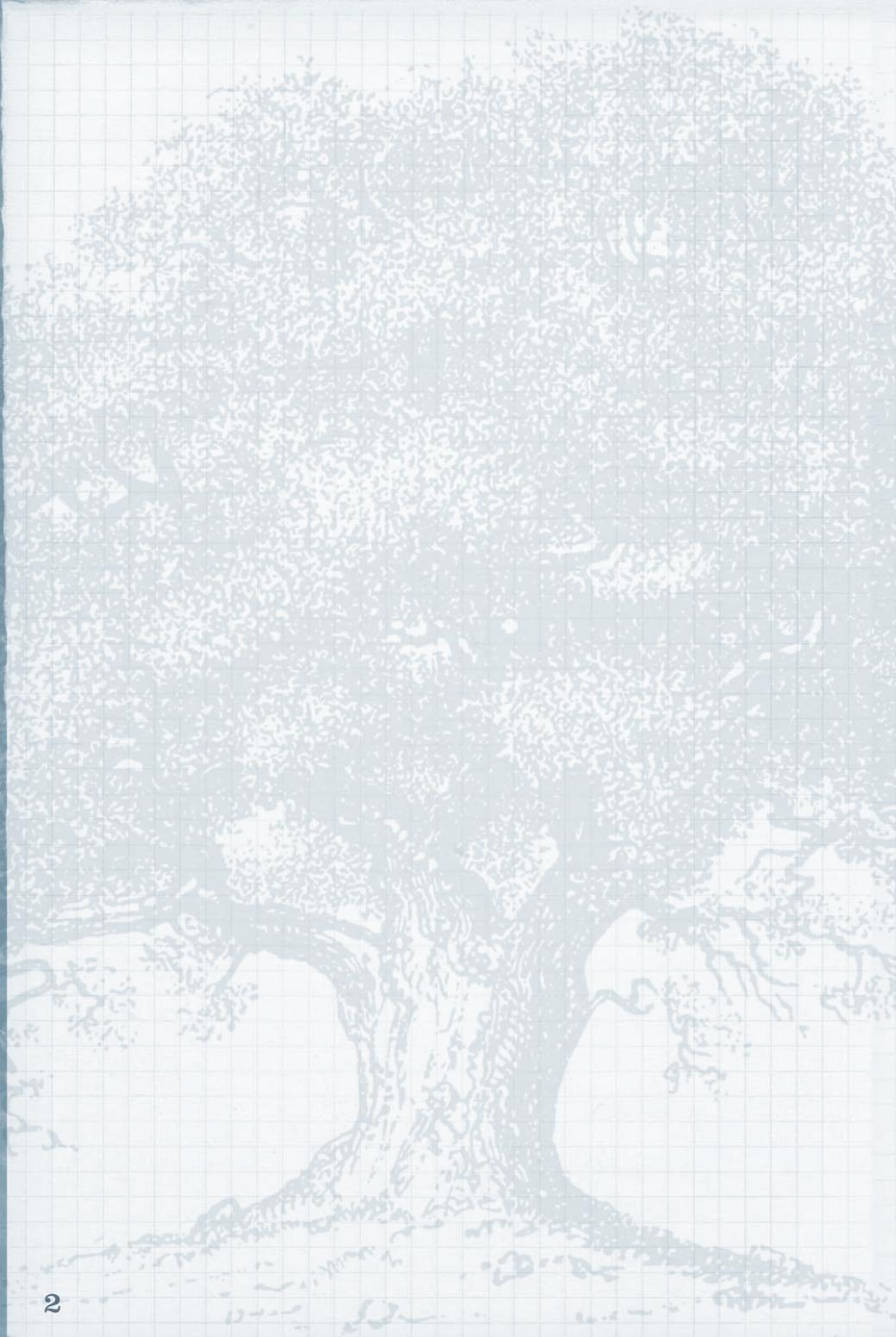
Authentic biblical community doesn't develop overnight, but if you're committed to growing together, your community group will understand and see God's goodness in the many ways that He uses you in each other's lives.

SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

Go through the material together over your next six group meetings. To prepare for each meeting, read that week's chapter from the discussion guide on your own, and answer the personal reflection questions.

When you meet as a group, watch the accompanying video together. Share your answers to the personal reflection questions for that week, and process through the group discussion questions together.

Visit our website: watermark.org/community



1. DEVOTE DAILY

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

Community Core Value #1: Devote ourselves daily to a personal relationship with Jesus.

IT STARTS WITH YOU AND JESUS

If you’ve ever flown on an airplane, you’ve heard the safety message about oxygen masks that will deploy in the event of an emergency. After explaining the function of the masks, the flight attendants add another message: first put the mask on yourself, and then help others. In other words, first make sure that you’re connected to the source of life, and then you’ll be able to help others do the same.

Community works the same way. When you’re first connected to Jesus, the source of life, you will be able to help others connect to Him and receive life from Him as well. But unless you’re walking with Jesus, building intimacy with Him, and drawing your strength from Him, you won’t have anything to offer others.

Apart from Jesus, you can do nothing and will bear no fruit (*John 15:5*). Like a branch disconnected from the life-giving vine, you will wither once your own resources are exhausted. But if you are connected to Jesus, He will breathe continual life, love, and joy into you (*John 15:10-11*), and you’ll be able to pass that on to others.

INVESTING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP DAILY

When you read the word “devote,” that may bring up thoughts of “doing your devotional,” or “having a quiet time,” which may or may not be positive, depending on your experience. The dictionary defines devotion as love, loyalty, or enthusiasm for a person. In being devoted to Christ, what you’re really doing is expressing love, loyalty, and enthusiasm for Him! That’s truly life-giving and anything but stale.

Just like in your relationships with others, your relationship with Christ requires an investment of time and energy on your part. In His case, it should be a priority every day. The greatest commandment that Jesus gave is to love God with everything you have (*Matthew 22:37*). The best thing you can do for yourself and for those in your community group is to be fully invested in your relationship with Jesus, and fully devoted to following Him.

DEVOTING THROUGH DISCIPLINE

One of the ways you can invest in your relationship with Jesus is to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (*1 Timothy 4:7b*). “Discipline” is another one of those words that can bring up pleasant or unpleasant thoughts, depending on your experience. Put simply, discipline means forming and practicing habits that help you grow spiritually. These are God-given means to grow in godliness, and are not a spiritual to-do list that measures your love for God or makes God love you more. The reason we need to practice the disciplines is that it’s not enough for us to TRY to be like Jesus; we must TRAIN to be like Jesus.

You can practice spiritual disciplines together as a community group, but they first have to take root in your own life. Some examples of spiritual disciplines include reading and memorizing the Bible, praying, worshiping, serving, fellowshiping with other believers, and pursuing solitude. These are valuable ways that you can invest in your relationship with Jesus daily.

SHARE WHAT YOU’RE LEARNING

As you grow in godliness, share that growth with others! God can use what He’s teaching you to encourage and challenge your community group as well. Make a point of sharing what God is teaching you and how you are applying those teachings to impact your life. Ask others what they are learning as well. You will encourage each other, challenge each other, and help one another become more fully devoted followers of Christ.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. How have you grown spiritually in the past year? In what areas would you like to keep growing?
2. What spiritual disciplines do you practice? Which are the most life-giving to you? Why do you think that is?
3. What have been your motivations for developing spiritual disciplines in your life? Have they been for legalistic reasons, or for true devotion?
4. Are you a naturally disciplined person, or do you struggle to be disciplined?
5. How do you see community helping you with spiritual discipline?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What impact does your personal devotional life have on your community group?
2. Discuss the difference between practicing spiritual discipline and abiding with Christ. Share how you feel you're doing in these two areas.
3. Describe a time when you were practicing spiritual disciplines but not necessarily experiencing intimacy with Jesus.
4. How can we as a group help each other abide more intimately with Jesus? Be specific.

IDEAS FOR LIVING OUT THE CORE VALUE

- Intentionally set aside time to spend with Jesus on a daily basis. Have a time, place, and plan.
- Keep a journal of what you're reading and what God is teaching you. Share this regularly with your group, and also ask others what God is teaching them.
- Keep a list of things that you are praying for yourself and for others. Share with your group as God answers those prayers!
- Choose passages of Scripture to memorize and meditate on as a group. Help keep each other accountable.

2. PURSUE RELATIONALLY

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.” (Romans 12:10)

Community Core Value #2: Pursue deep relationships with one another, based on love and acceptance.

DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER

Has anyone in your life been devoted to you? They probably showed it by caring for you, putting your needs before their own, learning and doing things that brought you joy, and investing time in getting to know you better. Sounds great, doesn't it? Biblical community gives us all an opportunity to practice devotion to one another and experience the joy and growth that it brings.

The first community core value talks about being devoted to God. Here we also see that Scripture calls us to be devoted to one another. Being devoted to someone else means investing time and energy into the relationship, loving them as a brother or sister, and putting their needs above your own (*Philippians 2:3*). There's also a commitment to be devoted even when it's difficult, because a friend should love at all times (*Proverbs 17:17*).

LIFE BEYOND THE GROUP MEETING

Typically, groups meet together for a few hours every week for their “official” group time. Those are really important times, but your group's relationships can't stop there. To grow your relationships, you must engage in one another's lives outside of the group meeting. This takes effort and intentionality, since everyone is busy and time is at a premium, but it's incredibly important. Don't just settle for a weekly meeting—build purposeful relationships! We are called to share life together, not just meet for a few hours each month.

One of the best ways that your group can do this is by regularly initiating with one another outside of official group time. Initiators don't wait for the phone to ring; they make the call! Don't compartmentalize community into just the few hours that you meet together; expand it to include other parts of your life, building in as much overlap as possible.

PRACTICAL PURSUIT

Here are some practical ways that your group can pursue deep relationships with one another. The possibilities are limitless, but these four will get you started.

Fellowship. Acts 2:42 describes how believers in the early church did life together. Among other things, they devoted themselves to fellowship with one another. Fellowship can be defined as “a friendly relationship among people.” In other words, be friends! Don’t view the people in your group as only your community group but not your “real” friends. Treat each other like you would treat your good friends. You may not feel like you are good friends with those in your community group. It might even be hard to build those friendships. In fact, the Greek word translated “devote” in this verse implies persistence, perseverance, and endurance despite difficulty. It will take work! But intentional fellowship will grow into true and lasting friendship as you continue pursuing and investing in each other.

Care. The Bible says that God has made the body of Christ in a special way so that the members can care for one another (*1 Corinthians 12:24-26*). Your community group is a smaller expression of the larger local body of Christ, and you are called to care for each other like you would care for yourself. Look for practical ways to meet one another’s needs. Follow up on something that was shared, write an encouraging note, bring a meal, help with an errand, or find a way to assist in times of crisis.

Prayer. Prayer is something that all Christians should devote themselves to (*Colossians 4:2*). You should pray for the members of your group on your own, but you should also pray with each other. Seeking God together is a powerful way to grow your relationships. Be intentional in noting prayer requests that each person has, pray for them right there in group time, and be faithful in following up on those requests.

Fun. Just because community has some serious intentionality doesn’t mean that it can’t be a lot of fun! There is definitely a time to laugh together (*Ecclesiastes 3:4*). Play together often. Find out what each other likes to do, and do those things together. Take a weekend retreat together to a fun place, or find a fun activity in town that everyone can participate in. Creativity is an expression of love, and a great way to intentionally pursue each other is to get creative in how you have fun together.

EMBRACING IMPERFECTION

As you read about ways to build and pursue relationships with your community group, you may be thinking, “That’s all great, but I’m not sure I even like these people.” We all have expectations that we bring into community, and one of those may be to spend time with others who are just like us, who are easy to know and like, who don’t have problems, and who won’t require us to get outside of our comfort zone. That’s pretty idealistic, and usually isn’t how it works in real life.

Jesus said that it’s not healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick (*Matthew 9:12*). It’s not the perfect people who need community, but the broken, the needy, and the imperfect. And that’s all of us! It means that things can get messy at times, and people won’t be exactly who you expect or want them to be. Remember, you may not be exactly what someone else is expecting or looking for either!

When we’re practicing real, biblical community, we get a firsthand look at the struggles, pitfalls, and challenges that all of us experience in our day-to-day lives. Community can be messy, but we experience true life when we are known and cared for by others. God will connect your hearts together as a group. When that happens, you will move past being frustrated by your differences to seeing the beauty in them and fully embracing them by God’s grace. You will be able to accept and pursue one another in the same way that Jesus accepts and pursues you (*Romans 15:7*).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Are your expectations for community more idealist or messy? Why?
2. What’s a relationship where you have experienced real acceptance?
3. When is the best time during the day for you to initiate with others (e.g. during your commute, over mealtime, before bed, etc.)? What makes that the best time?
4. What has been your excuse for not initiating with people in your group throughout the week?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some practical ways that our group can show that we're devoted to one another? What would it look like to stay connected in real time?
2. Who models initiation and pursuit in the group? What things do they do to initiate?
3. Does being your "brother's keeper" motivate you or scare you? Explain.
4. Share where you would most like to grow in the area of pursuing others. Be specific.

IDEAS FOR LIVING OUT THE CORE VALUE

- Make a plan on how you can stay connected throughout the week. Follow up with one another regularly.
- Nominate a "social chair" in the group who helps to coordinate time together outside of the group.
- Build in as much natural life overlap as possible (e.g. going to church together, sharing meals, going to kids' games, etc.).
- Share ownership of pursuing one another, with each person showing initiative.
- Go on a group retreat to spend extended time with one another.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- GroupMe app: <http://www.groupme.com>
- FaithGroup app: <http://www.faithgroupapp.com>

3. COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Community Core Value #3: Offer and receive biblical counsel in all areas of life.

THE BIBLE OVER OPINION AND EXPERIENCE

If God spoke to you, would you listen? A well-known pastor said, “If you want to hear God speak, just read the Bible out loud.” That’s an amazing thought! When you read the Bible, you’re not reading stale truths written down thousands of years ago—you’re hearing the very words of God, spoken to you today.

Scripture being inspired by God means that He is the source of all of it (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As such, it has the authority to speak into our individual lives, but also into how life works in general. Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). Since all authority belongs to Him, and His Word expresses His will for our lives, every part of our lives is subject to the authority of Scripture. Nothing is off limits to God and His Word!

When discussing the things that come up in community, you may be prone to leading with your own opinions and experiences to offer advice or counsel. That can feel easier at times than to dig into what the Bible says about a particular topic. Your opinions and experiences may be valid, but it’s important to remember that God is the authority on ALL topics, and that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). We shouldn’t supplement our opinions with Scripture; we must form our opinions based on Scripture. This is critically important! The effectiveness of your community rises and falls on the biblical literacy of those you commune with.

OFFERING BIBLICAL COUNSEL

The Bible says that as Christians, we should be able to counsel and instruct one another (Romans 15:14). You may be thinking, “How can I offer counsel from God’s Word? I’m not a professional counselor!” The good news is that

you don't have to be; you simply have to be a student of God's Word. If you don't know the answers, you can ask the question: "What does the Bible say about that?" Search for the answers together during group time, or give yourselves a little homework to research and come back with God's perspective from His Word.

You might also be hesitant to share what the Bible says on a given topic because you aren't living perfectly in that area either. If that's the case, you should certainly examine your own life and deal with any areas that don't line up with Scripture before pointing out the same in someone else's life (*Matthew 7:5*). But that doesn't mean you should stay silent! Be honest about where you're struggling, and then point others to the truth of God's Word.

It can be hard, but we've got good news for you: God will give you the ability to do it (*2 Peter 1:3*)! His Word is living, active, and sharp, able to determine and judge our thoughts and intentions (*Hebrews 4:12*). Share God's Word in a situation, then watch Him work.

As you're offering counsel, it's important to be sure that you're using Scripture correctly, and not just grabbing verses out of context. Study God's Word so that you understand its true meaning, then apply it generously to life!

RECEIVING BIBLICAL COUNSEL

The Bible is full of encouragement to listen to counsel. The Proverbs tell us that not having guidance leads to failure, but having an abundance of counselors brings victory (*Proverbs 11:14*). They also tell us to listen to counsel and accept discipline, so that we can be wise (*Proverbs 19:20*). Wisdom is available to us from God's Word, and from God's people sharing His Word with us—we should listen.

Sometimes you might hear counsel from others that isn't what you wanted to hear. If it's from God's Word and lines up with what Scripture teaches, then there may be times that you need to humbly accept the truth (*James 1:21*). Humbly receiving biblical counsel isn't always easy, but it's wise. Humility is the fear of the Lord (*Proverbs 22:4*), and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (*Proverbs 9:10*). If you want to be wise, humble yourself and listen to what God is saying through His Word and His people.

DOERS, NOT JUST HEARERS

It doesn't stop at just listening to God's Word—we must put it into practice in our daily lives. This is a process called application. You're answering the question, "How can I make this truth from God's Word become reality in my life?" Your community group can help you process and answer this.

If we don't apply God's Word to our lives and follow its teachings, we're just fooling ourselves (*James 1:22*). Jesus said that those who hear His words and put them into practice are wise and have a solid foundation, but those who hear and don't respond are foolish people who will collapse when tough times come (*Matthew 7:24-27*).

Be wise! Help one another know what God's Word says, and apply it to your lives.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What's your background with the Bible? How familiar are you with what it says?
2. In what ways do you see the Bible as applicable to your life and authoritative over your life? How does this work itself out in your daily life?
3. Do you feel competent to offer counsel to others using God's Word? How can you continue to grow in this area?
4. How are you at receiving biblical counsel from others? Is it easy or hard for you to humbly accept truth from the Bible?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Knowing that the health of your group depends in large part on the biblical literacy of its members, how does this convict or motivate you?
2. How are we doing as a group in offering biblical counsel to one another? In what areas are we most prone to rely on worldly wisdom?
3. Which topics are the easiest for us to counsel one another from Scripture? Which are the hardest?
4. How can we as a group help one another counsel from Scripture? Be specific.

4. LIVE AUTHENTICALLY

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” (James 5:16)

Community Core Value #4: Live authentically, sharing our struggles.

HOW ARE YOU DOING, REALLY?

Have you ever worn a mask? Maybe you dressed up as a superhero when you were a kid or have gone to a party in costume. Those masks can be fun, but when it comes to community, having a mask on isn't a good thing.

It may not feel like you're wearing a mask right now. We can all be tempted, though, to make ourselves appear to be something that we're not, or to make it seem like we're doing just fine when in reality we're struggling or walking in sin. The result of that kind of mask is isolation, which destroys community and goes against all sound wisdom (*Proverbs 18:1*).

Community helps us take off the mask of appearing to having it all together, and helps us be fully known and fully loved. A big way you can do that is to commit to being completely honest with one another. This means giving others permission to know the real you by sharing authentically. This lets your community encourage and lovingly challenge you to move toward Christ (*Hebrews 10:24-25*), and to not be hardened by the presence of sin in your life (*Hebrews 3:13*). Sharing your true condition with others isn't about shame, punishment, or condemnation; it's about love, joy, and freedom (*Romans 8:1, John 8:32*)!

KNOWING THEIR CONDITION

In addition to sharing how you're really doing, part of living in community is to know how the other members of your group are doing. Just as you should strive to be fully known, you should strive to fully know others (*Proverbs 27:23*), so that you can understand how to best love, care for, and support them. In this, you are your “brother's keeper” (*Genesis 4:9*), and can help bear one another's burdens (*Galatians 6:2*).

TIME AND TRUST

If the idea of sharing how you're really doing with your group gives you the cold sweats, you're not alone. It can feel scary and vulnerable to present a view of yourself to others that isn't perfect and might be really broken. That kind of sharing takes a level of trust with each other, which usually takes time to build. And that's okay! If you have the foundation of love and acceptance (*see core value "Pursue Relationally"*), you can take steps towards being really honest with each other. As you share, and your group responds in a loving way, you'll find that it builds trust, and that it becomes easier and more natural to be completely transparent.

BRING IT INTO THE LIGHT

With that in mind, what does it mean to actually share the sin and struggles that we like to keep in the dark? It means bringing those things to the light (*Ephesians 5:11*). That isn't easy to do, since it goes against our sin nature to expose those things (*John 3:20*). But as Christians, the Bible calls us to live as children of God who walk in the light as we follow Him (*Ephesians 5:8, John 3:21*).

This means that we need to confess our sins to each other (*James 5:16*). Each of us has the responsibility to quickly and fully confess our sins to others. Confession may feel like punishment, but it's actually a gift from God! Confession brings mercy, forgiveness, fellowship, healing, purification, and restoration.

You should be honest about what you're struggling with and why. Don't just focus on the behavior, but also on what's going on in your heart, which is where sinful behavior comes from (*Matthew 15:19*). Since the way you live comes from your heart (*Proverbs 4:23; 27:19*), if you only confess your actions, the root of the problem will remain unaddressed and in the dark.

I CONFESSED – NOW WHAT?

In response to any sin that is confessed, the Bible tells us that we should pray for healing (*James 5:16*). This is a powerful way to support one another as a community group. When someone confesses sin, pray for them right away. Ask God to heal their heart. Share verses from Scripture that speak to what they shared (*see core value "Counsel Biblically"*). Celebrate the fact that God is

working in their heart! Remember to accept each other, just as Christ has accepted you (*Romans 15:7*). Be kind to each other, be compassionate, and forgive each other in the same way that God has forgiven you (*Ephesians 4:32*).

After you confess, you'll probably feel like a weight has been lifted from your shoulders. You experience forgiveness, and fellowship is restored (*1 John 1:7,9*). The next step is repentance, which is actively turning away from the sin that you confessed (*Acts 3:19*). Your group should help each other process through what repentance looks like, and how you can continue to turn towards God and away from your sin.

The last step is to move forward. The Bible says that when a righteous person falls, they get back up and keep going (*Proverbs 24:16*). By God's grace, we can move past what we've done, and press on towards Christ (*Philippians 3:13-14*), being confident that nothing we do could ever make God stop loving us (*Romans 8:38-39*).

Don't isolate yourself in the dark with your sin. Come out of hiding, confess to your community, and enjoy the life and healing that follow.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. When have you felt comfortable sharing a real struggle with someone? What was it about them that made them feel safe?
2. Has someone in your past broken trust with you after you shared something personal? How did you respond to that broken trust?
3. What excites or scares you about giving someone permission to see the real you?
4. Are you ready to live authentically and be accountable to and for others?
5. How convinced are you that you are to confess your sin and struggles with others in your community group? If you're not completely comfortable with that idea, what steps can you take to prepare your heart?
6. Is there anything you're currently struggling with that God is prompting you to share or confess?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Celebrate someone in your group who has modeled authenticity when it comes to their sin and struggles.
2. On a scale from 1-10, share your individual anxiety/fear level concerning this topic (10 being scared to death). Rate the feeling of the group as a whole.
3. What are the excuses that we might use for not taking the next step of obedience in confessing our sin to one another?
4. How can we help each other live authentically? Be specific.

IDEAS FOR LIVING OUT THE CORE VALUE

- Share your detailed stories and testimonies to gain an appreciation for each other's unique background, wiring, and struggles.
- Be willing to proactively self-disclose what's going on in your heart; don't wait for people to ask the perfect question. Be willing to go first.
- Set aside intentional time for accountability in between regular all-group meetings.
- Share struggles and celebrate victories as they happen in real time. Don't wait for the next meeting.
- Pray for healing and victory in the moment sins are confessed. These prayers are powerful!

5. ADMONISH FAITHFULLY

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16)

Community Core Value #5: Encourage and admonish one another faithfully towards maturity.

GO! FIGHT! WIN!

If you've ever been to a sporting event, you know how important it is to have encouragement. Whether it comes from cheerleaders, fans, a teammate, or a coach, being encouraged helps athletes perform to their best potential, drawing strength from those who are supporting them.

The same thing is true in community. Life can be hard, and we need reminders and encouragement from those around us, such as:

- Be bold, be strong (*Ephesians 6:10, 19*).
- Keep your eyes on the prize (*Philippians 3:14*).
- Don't lose heart (*1 Thessalonians 5:14*).
- Keep doing good (*Galatians 6:9*).
- Finish well (*1 Corinthians 9:24*).

We need other believers to encourage us to be all that God has created us to be, and to remind us that true life can only be experienced in Christ and through obedience to Him.

REMINDING OF GOD'S BEST

The word “admonish” from Colossians 3:16 means reminding one another about life in Christ. It means telling others God's truth, and exerting loving, positive influence to help them walk in that truth.

It doesn't mean controlling their behavior, or beating them up for their sin. Any admonishment should be delivered with patience, grace, and compassion. If someone doesn't respond initially, it could become a warning, or even a loving rebuke or strong correction (*1 Thessalonians 5:14a, 2 Timothy 4:2*). But the motivation should always be someone's growth, not their shame. God is

patient, slow to anger, and abounding in love (*Psalm 103:8*), and it's His kindness that leads us to repentance (*Romans 2:4b*). As you admonish one another and seek to restore one another from sin, it must be done in a spirit of gentleness (*Galatians 6:1*).

It can take courage to do this well and fully. It might be easy to speak into the 98% of someone's life that is relatively straightforward to address. There might be the "last 2%," though, that you're hesitant to speak into because you don't know what their reaction will be, or what deeper issue that might be uncovered, or you're afraid of hurting their feelings. You should always deliver the message with love and grace, but the most loving thing you can do for someone in those moments is to share with them the "last 2%" of what you see. Base your admonishment on Scripture, be rooted in love (*Ephesians 4:15*), and remember that wounds from a friend can be trusted (*Proverbs 27:6*).

Before admonishing someone, you should ask yourself a few questions: Does this person really need to be admonished? Am I the right person to do it? When would be the best time to admonish them? Does this person know that I love them?

KEEP / STOP / START

A practical way to think about encouragement and admonishment is to answer three questions for yourself, and to help others answer for themselves. Something like this: "In order to fully obey God's Word and pursue His best for me, what do I need to:

- Keep doing? (*Encourage one another to keep up the good work.*)
- Stop doing? (*Point out sin or unproductive behaviors to turn away from.*)
- Start doing? (*Suggest new opportunities to pursue Christ more fully.*)

Processing these questions in a thorough and loving way will help your group point one another toward Christ.

RESPONDING TO REMINDERS

The same principles discussed earlier about receiving biblical counsel apply here (*see core value "Counsel Biblically"*). We should respond humbly, not with anger or by trying to deflect attention to someone else's issues.

Chances are good that someone in your group will admonish you in a way that isn't perfect and might even be really frustrating to you. You may be tempted to respond with one of these four destructive communication patterns:

- Withdrawal (*simply ending the discussion or leaving the situation*)
- Escalation (*adding fuel to the fire, responding with anger and intensity*)
- Negative Interpretation (*assuming they meant to hurt you*)
- Invalidation (*denying the significance of what they're sharing*)

Instead of responding in one of those ways, we need to honor these reminders of God's perfect truth delivered by imperfect people, by responding in a way that's humble, gentle, patient, and loving (*Ephesians 4:2*).

CONFLICT, GOD'S WAY

If a negative response to something escalates into a conflict, that isn't the end of the road for your group! Handling conflict biblically is an excellent way for your group to love one another and grow closer together. Don't stop when things get tough.

During conflict, healthy community groups commit to responding according to the following principles:

- Keep short accounts; don't let your anger stew (*Ephesians 4:26*).
- Look at your own heart; get the log out of your own eye (*Matthew 7:3-5*).
- Go and show your brother his fault (*Matthew 18:15*).
- Go and be reconciled (*Matthew 5:23-24*).

There might be some sparks as you sharpen each other (*Proverbs 27:17*), but your group can grow and sharpen each other by how you remind one another of God's truth, and respond to any conflict in a way that honors Him.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Who's an encourager in your life? How can someone encourage you best?
2. Who was the last person who "sharpened" you through a loving, hard conversation?
3. How have you handled conflict/miscommunications in the past? How was conflict handled in your family? What's your typical response now?

4. How are you doing at reminding others of God's truth in a loving way? In what ways can you grow?
5. Does anything come to mind that you need to keep doing, stop doing, or start doing?
6. What's your typical response when someone tells you something that is true, but you might not want to hear?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Discuss this statement: If the motivation is love, it's a greater sin to say nothing than to say it wrong.
2. How much ground could we take as a group in sharing the "last 2%" with one another?
3. How are we doing at inviting feedback into our lives? How are we doing at receiving constructive feedback?
4. What are some excuses we hide behind instead of lovingly admonishing one another?
5. What can we do to help each other admonish one another in love?

IDEAS FOR LIVING OUT THE CORE VALUE

- Take and talk through a community group assessment (contact your director).
- Find out each other's plans and goals, and be active in helping one another reach them.
- Celebrate large and small victories frequently in all areas of life.
- Write someone a note telling them how you have seen them grow.
- Don't just admonish and then leave; be willing to walk through the situation deeply with one another.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Conflict Field Guide (go to www.watermark.org and search "Conflict Field Guide")

6. ENGAGE MISSIONALLY

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19–20)

Community Core Value #6: Engage intentionally with our communities and the world to make disciples.

GET OUTSIDE THE LIVING ROOM

Picture this: a group of athletes want to perform at a high level in their sport. They’ve committed themselves to their training. They’ve received instruction from their coach and encouragement from friends. They’ve been honest about their weaknesses and have disciplined themselves to strengthen them. They’ve been reminded of their potential, and everyone is supporting them.

And then, when the big moment comes, they are unwilling to leave the huddle.

That would be tragic. All the work that they put in would be negated by the fact that they didn’t get in the game when it actually mattered.

In community, it would be equally tragic if all the investments we make in each other’s growth didn’t “leave the living room,” so to speak. If your group is only inwardly focused, looking to your own needs instead of those around you, you’re missing a big part of what God wants for you. We are all God’s workmanship, created to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do (*Ephesians 2:10*). If your community group doesn’t impact the way you believe, think, and act outside of group, then it isn’t working fully as it should.

Getting outside your living room could mean something as nearby as having a conversation with your neighbor, or it could mean something as far as taking a trip to the other side of the world. Wherever “there” is, you should engage intentionally for the cause of Christ. It’s no accident that you’re alive when you are, and living where you are—it’s God-ordained (*Acts 17:26*).

THE GREAT COMMISSION

In the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*), Jesus tells His followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching people to obey everything He had taught. This commission applies to every believer; therefore it applies to your group.

You are called to multiply yourselves and create other fully devoted followers of Jesus. This means sharing the gospel, loving others, and teaching them God's truth. This may feel daunting, but you aren't doing it alone! Jesus will go with you (*Matthew 28:20*), and your group can support you as well.

KNOW YOUR GIFTS, USE YOUR GIFTS

Fulfilling the Great Commission might look different for everyone. Each one of you has special gifts and should use them to serve others as a good steward of God's grace (*1 Peter 4:10*). You are uniquely wired to serve God in the way that He wants you to. You may not feel particularly gifted, but God can use you in significant ways.

As you get to know each other, your community group can help identify and build upon your spiritual gifts, which God has given to each of you for the common good (*Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11*). You can encourage each other to serve individually, and you can also leverage your collective gifts to serve together.

With your group, talk through how you can love and serve:

- The local body of Christ (*Galatians 6:10*)
- Other believers (*1 Peter 4:10*)
- Non-believers (*Luke 19:10*)
- The poor and needy (*James 1:27, Proverbs 14:31*)
- People in other nations (*Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:19*)

Pray for one another that you would be effective in ministry and service, and pray with one another that God would use you to build His kingdom!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. How comfortable are you with sharing the gospel with others? What, if anything, makes you uncomfortable to share (e.g. fear, lack of knowledge, etc.)? What are some steps you could take to grow in this area?

2. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If not, how can you begin learning what they are?
3. Is it easy or hard to believe that God wants to use you uniquely to love others and serve Him? Why?
4. What are some ways that you could love and serve others in the areas noted above? Who do you need to share the gospel with?

GROUP DISCUSSION

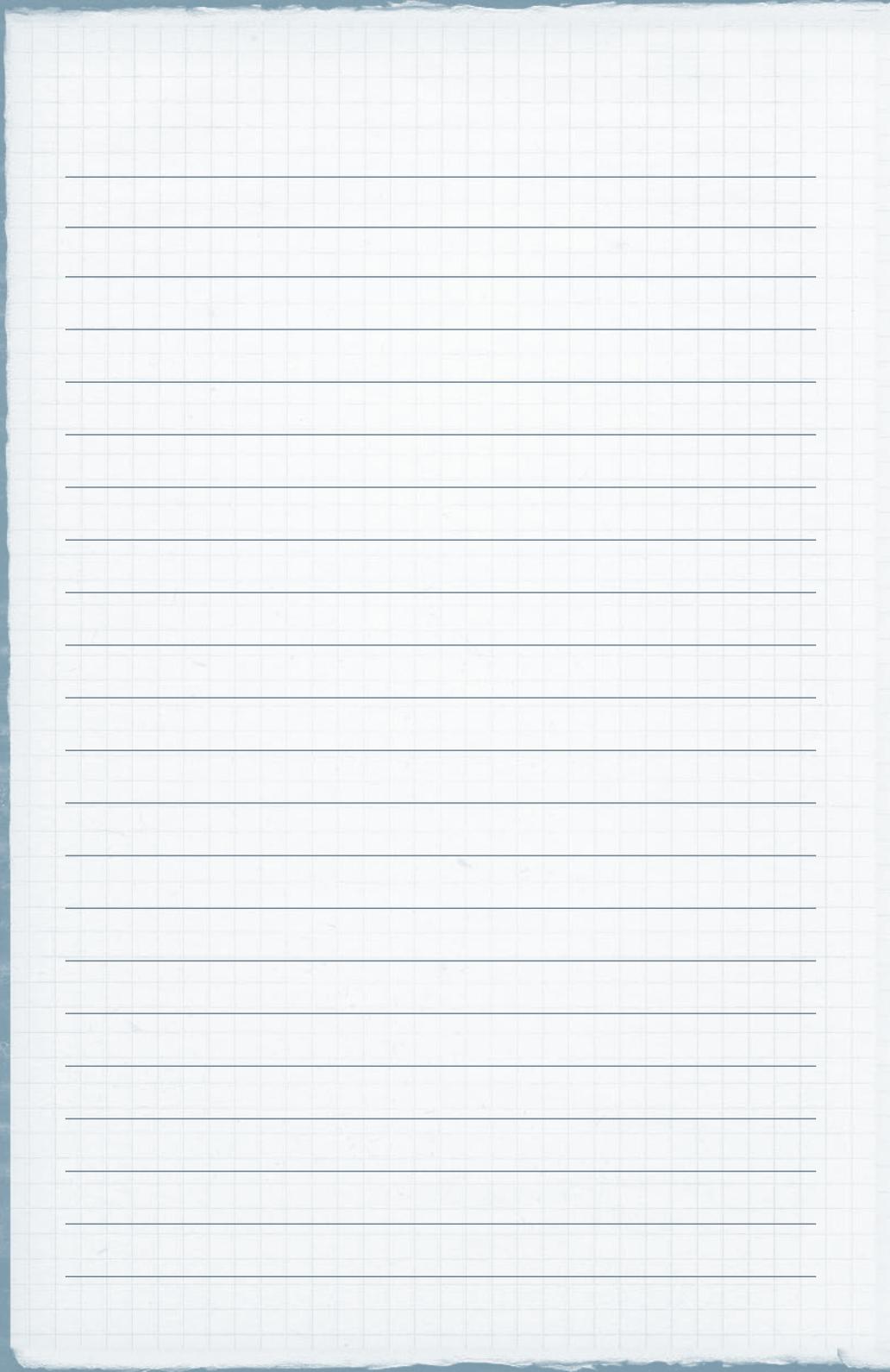
1. If you could choose three people to come to know Jesus as Savior today, who would they be (e.g. neighbor, co-worker, family member, etc.)? Why did you pick them?
2. What are you doing, or what is your plan, to engage those people in a spiritual conversation?
3. What gifts and talents has our group been blessed with? How will we best deploy them in engaging those who are far from Christ? Brainstorm some ideas together.
4. How will we encourage and hold one another accountable to share our faith regularly? Be specific.

IDEAS FOR LIVING OUT THE CORE VALUE

- Identify the “top 10” people that you would like to intentionally engage with about Jesus, and pray for those interactions.
- Practice sharing your testimonies with each other to get comfortable in sharing with others.
- Spend time intentionally sharing the gospel with others as a group or as partners.
- Build relationships with people who don’t know Jesus, and invite them to group activities.
- Share stories of where God provided opportunities to serve others and share the gospel.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Watermark message series on sharing your faith (<http://www.watermark.org/media/series/27/>)



"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel." - Proverbs 12:15 · "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." - Galatians 6:2 · "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." - Ephesians 4:2-3 · "And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone." - 1 Thessalonians 5:14 · "Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction." - 2 Timothy 4:2 · "But 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 · "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." - Hebrews 10:24-25 · "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." - James 5:16 · "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?" - Proverbs 24:11-12 · "He who separates himself seeks his own desire. He quarrels against all sound wisdom." - Proverbs 18:1 · "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 · "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." - Colossians 3:13 · "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." - Proverbs 27:5-6 · "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." - Proverbs 27:17 · "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you." - Ephesians 4:32 · "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." - 1 John 4:11 · "Where there is no guidance the people fail, but in abundance of counselors there is victory." - Proverbs 11:14 · "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out." - Proverbs 18:15 · "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days." - Proverbs 13:20 · "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered." - Proverbs 28:26 · "Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue." - Proverbs 28:23 · "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." - Proverbs 14:12 · "Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers." - Psalm 141:5 · "But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." - 1 Corinthians 12:20-25 · "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart." - 1 Peter 1:22

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