



KICKSTARTER

WEEK 5: Community

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This series is intended to help jump into a relationship with God by engaging in some 'next level' spiritual disciplines. We hope to give a clear roadmap from which you can begin to live into each discipline.

REACHING FORWARD, REACHING BACK

Ecclesiastes 4.9-12 (HCSB) **9** Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. **10** For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. **11** Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm?⁽¹⁾ **12** And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

I spent four years as an area leader, putting together small groups and introducing people to community. The idea, the passion, the drive, came around the recognition that we are not wired to walk this life as a lone wolf; we travel better in packs. Personally, I realize my judgment is skewed, my choices become self-centered, and my perception becomes spiritually blurry when not in community with other believers in Christ. Life, physically and spiritually, happens in stages. There are people around us in each stage to help us along. Plainly and in very simple terms, from a physical perspective, a doctor / mid-wife brings us into this world, our parents raise us, our teachers teach us, colleges attempt to prepare us, friends guide us, and spouses can assist us through the remaining days of the path. Spiritually, it is the same. We accept Christ and become immediately mentored – bottle-fed by believers around us. In the course of the journey we mentored by believers and we will mentor others. A cord of three strands becomes critical to growth. It brings wisdom, accountability, and spiritual intimacy that remind us of God and our reliance on Him. To boil it down in a simple way... garbage in, garbage out. We are what we eat – physically and spiritually, and this applies also to whom we surround ourselves with.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

Think of your physical life. Who has mentored you from a career perspective, education perspective, marriage perspective, or financial perspective? How have these relationships enriched your life? Explain. Have you taken a similar role in your life and been able to mentor people in similar ways? Explain.

Now, transition this to a spiritual lens. Who in your life has helped form that cord of three strands in your life? Has it been in stages? Who has reached back to pull you up? How has this shaped your life and where would you be without that influence. In turn, how have you reached back to pull others up? How has that experience transformed your life? Discuss.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE... PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

Acts 2.41-47 (HCSB) 41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,^(AJ) to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.^(AK) 43 Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.^(AL) 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common.^(AM) 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need.^(p) 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude,^(AN) 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them^[q] those who were being saved.^(AO)

Harvard conducted the longest study on human happiness on record (Waldinger, 2015). For 75 years, Harvard walked with people through their lives to determine what it was that made their life satisfying. While status symbols provided comfort, it was the quality of relationships that brought fulfillment and satisfaction. In fact, relationships promoted a better health, stronger brain activity, and faster healing. We are wired for community. If you read **Acts 2.41-47**, you see the rhythm that the first century church's begins to pound. In fellowship, teaching, worship, and communion begins to take hold an in practice, begins challenge growth. Read **Proverbs 27.17**. We provide accountability. Read **Galatians 5.1-5** and **James 5.16**. Our community wasn't meant to be a weekly catch-up of sports scores, what people are wearing, our kids accomplishments, or current events. Our time together is meant to drive accountability; to support one another to remove the hindrances of what keeps us from a Tent of Meeting experience with God. We are to sharpen one another so that we are spiritual tools of precision, to provide support and prayer, and to not allow one another to be in need – and not in a vacuum of self-absorption.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

Where do you stand in spiritual community now? Are you being sharpened, or simply fed? Or, are you starving yourself? Discuss.

Where do you see a need in your life for something deeper and more transparent? Where do you need to stand vulnerable for help? Explain. What do you need to do to get to this place?

GET UNCOMFORTABLE... GROWING PAINS

Hebrews 10:19-25 (MSG) 19-25 So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into “the Holy Place.” Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The “curtain” into God’s presence is his body. So let’s do it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.

When you observe the world around us, it can sometimes feel like we are living on a flywheel - life just goes faster and faster with no sign of stopping. The momentum of life starts out small – but over time, stuff leads to more stuff and before you know it, you’re just trying to keep up. The contemporaries of Peter, Paul and Luke seemed to also have struggled with this flywheel in one way or another. The authors of Hebrews tells us that we need to be in each other’s lives and encourage one another and that this activity will stoke our faith and draw us closer to God. *The Message* translation of **Hebrews 10:22-25** goes a step further and almost dares its reader to be *inventive* in encouraging our fellow believers...and this dare is perfectly in context and maybe even exciting if you’re already in fellowship or have margin...but what if you don’t have either? What then? This call to action can feel more like a death sentence than a love dare if you aren’t positioned right. We need to engage, and it requires 1) commitment and consistency, 2) trust – the ability to answer tough questions honestly, and 3) flexibility to honor the commitment. I’m reminded of my son waking in the middle of the night with horrible leg pain – growing pains. They are so bad that he says he just “wants to stay a little boy”. Yet, he grows against his will. In contrast, we will spiritually shrink without the growing pains. We need to step forward and engage with others and press ourselves against the sharpening stone of community to breathe in the essence of God’s purpose for our lives.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What questions make you uncomfortable? What discussion do you stray away from because you don’t want to dig too deep? Why are these questions so tenderizing? Explain. What do you need to do lean into these more? What kind of relationships do you need to build to allow this transparency?

What in your life needs to change to make time and priority for community? Is this something you are willing to do right now? Why or why not? What do you think God wants for you right now? Is community one thing keeping you farther from Him? Explain.

ACTIVATION

Step into challenge.

1. In the next few weeks we will begin our **Fixer Upper** series; commit to attending each week of the four-week series.
2. During the **Fixer Upper** series, commit to attending at least one discussion group in the four-week period.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Have some time to read? Take some time and read *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or *The Four Loves*, and the chapter **Friendship**, by C.S. Lewis.

PROVIDE US WITH FEEDBACK

We are excited about the potential these studies have to help each of us process the weekend message at a deeper level, and to see God change our lives in significant ways. In order to make these guides as helpful as possible, we would love to hear which elements are most helpful, which are least helpful, as well as any other

comments, questions or suggestions. Feel free to send your feedback directly to Jon Holmberg at jonholmberg@gmail.com.

Has God been prompting you to lean out over your ski's a bit? Have you had a desire to write, but not sure how to start to scratch that kind of itch? This may be your chance. We are currently looking to expand our team of writers. If you have experience, or no experience, writing studies or devotionals... it's not a big deal – Let God guide your fingers. If you would like to investigate this a bit more please contact me at jonholmberg@gmail.com.

REFERENCES

Waldinger, Robert. **What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness.** December, 2015.
http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness/transcript?language=en