

Description

You may have mixed feelings about the church and Christians based on past experiences. Now is the time to realize how much you'll need and want consistent interaction with other believers as you mature in Christ. Discover the benefits, challenges, and responsibilities of belonging to Christian community.

Goals

1. Help participants feel accepted, safe, and able to ask questions and grow spiritually.
2. Build an understanding of the benefits of and need for Christian community.
3. Look at an early Christian community for a model of how it could be today.
4. Challenge participants to consider what it means for them to be devoted to the new community God put in their lives.

Outline

Starter: "Great Teamwork Video" (Marching Band)

Story Part 1: Carlo (alternate story: Ryan)

Bible Encounter: Acts 2:38-47

Story Part 2: Carlo (alternate story: Ryan)

Experience: "Like Coals in a Fire" (supplies needed: grill, charcoal), Goal Setting & Commitment

Opening

Give a sincere and warm welcome to each person, letting them know you are glad they chose to come to the session. Share the vision for the group, then feel free to use the following language to open the session:

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." In the same way, your walk with Jesus is strengthened by others. So, today, we're going to learn and talk about why Christian community is invaluable for believers.

We are going to hear a story from a guy who learned about Christian community at his junior college. Then we'll look at the example set by the first Christian community. Finally, we'll walk through the specific ways we can be devoted to our own Christian community, not only for our own benefit but for others' as well.

Starter: “Great Teamwork Video” (Marching Band)

Think about a time when you were part of a team or group that had to achieve a goal together. Could you have accomplished it alone without the rest of the group? What was enjoyable about being part of the group? What was difficult?

Story Part 1: Carlo

If you’re currently involved in a Christian community, what do you like about it? If you’re not yet involved, why not?

Bible Encounter: Acts 2:38-47

Context: Acts was written by Luke, who was not a firsthand witness to Jesus’ life, but was a firsthand witness to some of what happened in Acts. Acts could have been written as early as 30 years after Jesus’ death. In this particular passage, Jesus had asked the disciples (about 120 of them) to wait for the promised Holy Spirit to baptize them in power. As the dramatic arrival of the Spirit came upon this small gathering of believers, a huge crowd gathered around and witnessed the impact of the Spirit’s breakthrough in the disciples’ lives. Keep in mind that this whole scene took place in the very city in which Jesus was crucified. There were probably people in the crowd who had demanded Jesus’ crucifixion. So making a decision to follow Jesus in the very city in which he had been crucified just seven weeks earlier was risky and a stretch.

As the passage begins, Peter had just preached a message that accused the very people who were listening of helping put Jesus—God’s chosen one—to death. The crowd was convicted and asked how they could escape judgment for such a wrong act.

1. What would you see, hear, and feel if you had been in the group Peter addressed?

- It was a large community of about 3,000 people—veteran and new believers—and growing.
- They were devoted to spending time together to learn, eat, and pray. “Together” is used three times.
- Miracles were being done in and around the community.
- There was incredible generosity. They had “everything in common,” i.e. they pooled their resources so everyone’s needs were met.
- Your notes:

2. What aspects of this community are especially interesting to you and why?
 - Your notes:

3. Verses 38-41 told of the conversion of 3,000 people who then “devoted” themselves to their new community. How did Luke describe their devotion?
 - Biblical teaching: They devoted themselves to “the apostles’ teaching.” For people today, this could mean studying the Bible together, or listening to a sermon together, or getting together after a Sunday sermon and discussing it.
 - Fellowship: According to Webster’s dictionary, fellowship means companionship, company; community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience; the state of being a fellow or associate; a company of equals or friends; association.
 - Breaking of bread: This is probably a general reference to sharing meals together. The following are references to the times that Jesus shared meals with people: Matthew 9:11, 14:16, 25:35, 26:26; Mark 2:15. You may want to also ask “How can sharing a meal deepen friendship?”
 - Prayer: At this point, it might be good to ask how members feel about praying out loud around other believers. It may be helpful to share the importance of praying for one another and receiving prayer from others. You may want to reference James 5:13-16.
 - Generosity: “They gave to anyone as he had need” represents radical generosity. In this community, the value of people had become greater than the value of material possessions like money, food, car, clothes, etc. You may want to share 1 Timothy 6:17.
 - Growth in numbers: “The Lord added to their number daily” represents evangelism as a part of Christian community. Even if someone is a new believer, that doesn’t mean God won’t or can’t use them to lead others to faith. As soon as someone becomes a follower of Jesus, they know enough to begin sharing their story and inviting others to know Jesus. You may want to reference Matthew 28:18-20.
 - Your notes:

4. Verse 42 talks about devotion. What does devotion require of people?
 - Persistence or perseverance: You may want to share Hebrews 10:25 to illustrate this perspective of devotion.
 - Consistency: The Acts community demonstrated devotion by consistently meeting, studying God’s Word, and praying together. It became the center of their lives, not just an optional club they attended one night a week.
 - Sacrifice: They were willing to make sacrifices, such as selling all they had, in order to share with others in need.
 - Your notes:

5. Imagine you were one of the new believers joining this community. What would be some of the benefits for you personally (spiritually, practically, emotionally, etc.)? What would be some of the challenges?
 - Your notes:

6. What does it mean to you that choosing to follow Jesus also means choosing to join a Christian community?

- The emphasis here is on the communal nature of our relationship with Jesus. When we enter into a relationship with Jesus, we enter into a relationship with the family of God.
- This passage demonstrates the inter-connectedness between you and God, and you and other Christians. You may want to share John 17:20-21.
- It is important to point out that interacting with a Christian community should not just be an item on a spiritual to-do list. The early Christians in this passage found their motivation for togetherness in *who* and *why* they did they were committed to sharing, eating, praying, and learning together. They knew that, even though Jesus was no longer physically present after his crucifixion and resurrection, he was still working powerfully in and through their community by his Spirit.
- Your notes:

Story Part 2: Carlo

Experience: "Like Coals in a Fire," Goal Setting & Commitment

"Like Coals in a Fire" Watch the clip or, weather permitting, do this session outdoors and use a charcoal grill for a physical demonstration; you can then eat BBQ together in community after the session. Whether or not you use an actual grill, try to give a charcoal briquette to each person in your group as a tangible reminder of the lesson. If you cannot obtain coals beforehand, do your best to simply explain the analogy.

While the video plays or you are lighting the grill, say the following:

Although no community is perfect and there are always other things that feel more important at the time, it is crucial for us to be devoted to Christian community, just as the early disciples were.

In John 13:35, Jesus says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Learning to devote yourself to one another in community strengthens your soul, deepens your faith, and teaches you to love like Jesus.

We are each going to receive a coal. By itself, your coal is cold and dark. But once you place it in the fire, it absorbs the fire into itself, it glows from the heat, and it gives off heat to everything around it.

Your life apart from Christian community is like a cold, dark coal. But once among the community, it takes on new vitality—one that both receives from the others and gives to them.

Goal Setting & Commitment

Where has God given you opportunities to be part of a Christian community?

How has God touched your life in a meaningful way through a Christian community? If not, what would you like to experience in community?

What next step can you take to devote yourself to the Christian community God has placed around you?

- Have dinner with someone from your Christian community.
- Commit to going to an upcoming retreat.
- Ask someone from your community to mentor you.
- Commit to going to fellowship/worship gatherings every week for the rest of the year.
- Find a practical way to serve the community when it gathers: set up chairs, help with snacks, be a “greeter” at the door, or ask a leader for other ways you can serve.
- Every believer understands that life’s priorities and demands vie for our time in Christian community. Sometimes life gets busy, and our commitment to and value of Christian community can dwindle. A next step might be owning up to excuses for not being a more regular presence in the group:
 - o “I’ve got too much studying to do.”
 - o “My intramural team plays that night.”
 - o “I’m so tired at the end of the day, and I just need to be alone.”
 - o “I’m too shy.”
 - o “My favorite show is on TV at that time.”
- Your next step:

Placing your coal in the fire [or in the middle of the table if your group watched the video] represents your choice to take your next step in devotion to Christian community. Take a moment and reflect on what it means for you personally to take your next step. Then, let’s each share again what that step is as we place our coals in one at a time.

After each person has put in their piece of coal, you may want to close with a simple prayer that God would give your group wisdom and courage to pursue Christian community now and always.