



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Firstly, you will notice that at the start of each lesson there are three important bits of information. These will be the basic tools you need to lead the study.

All Scripture will appear in this BLUE colour. All Scripture references are taken from the NIV version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

All discussion questions are in this GREEN colour. These discussion questions are meant to help open up times of sharing in your group.

Occasionally you will see text in RED. Red text are some ideas and thoughts that you may want to use for your group.

The bulk of the text will be in BLACK. This is the script and information for your lesson. However, please do not stick to the script word for word. The information is there just to serve as a guideline. Please feel free to lead or facilitate the discussion in the way which GOD is leading you.

Call to Community
Introduction Steve Murray
5th June 2022

Getting-to-Know-One-Another Questions:

- What is one of your pet peeves (something that annoys you)?
- What is one of your best or worst travel experiences?

Opening Discussion Question:

- What has been your best experience of living in community?

- Have you ever felt the absence of community? What was that time like?

Steve started the message off by quoting a simple yet profound question that social commentator Howard Snyder raised:

“How would you go about destroying community?”

In an essay in the late 70’s Snyder makes the following suggestions to support this statement:

- fragment family life;
- move people away from the neighbourhood where they grew up;
- set people further apart by giving them bigger homes and land;
- separate people’s work from where they live;
- give everyone their own car;
- replace connection with entertainment;
- reduce family size and in your home replace people with objects.

As it turns out, Snyder was a prophet. Forty + years later we live in a world where people are disconnected from their culture, where relationships are shallow and where people live individual lives.

Steve observed that “While it is easier than ever to stay connected through the internet and social media to one another, we are losing the ability to commune with one another. We know how to text, but face-to-face relationships of loyalty and intimacy are becoming more and more the exception to the rule.”

- Do you agree with this observation? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the difference between connecting and communing?

Michael Frost, a modern social commentator, describes what life has become like for many of us – “It’s like we are living permanently in an airport departure lounge; we are surrounded by people who feel like they don’t belong to where they currently find themselves and whose interactions with others are fleeting and trivial because they are tourists in that space and are quickly trying to move on to the next thing.”

- Does Frost’s comparison between our daily existence and an airport departure lounge resonate with you? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt like you are living in an airport departure lounge? If yes, please share your experience.

According to Steve, it’s time to ask ourselves a new question: **“How would you go about creating community?”** This is the question that God is calling us to answer in this season. It’s the question of “How do we live in such a way that God’s true design for community can take root again, begin to grow within us, and begin to, like a piece of yeast placed in the dough, have a growing influence and change within the world around us?” It is the question that will be answered throughout our “Call to Community” message series.

“As the church, we hold in our hearts the answer to the destruction of community around us. Through faith in Jesus and by God’s spirit a new kind of social existence is actually possible. In His life, death and resurrection, Christ has defeated the principalities and powers that keep people apart! In Him, relationships can be healed and transformed! We can all bemoan the fact that we are all more fragmented in society today or we can dare to declare that there is another way. We can dare to declare that a spirit-filled life together is capable of combating the corrosive ideologies of our age. We

can dare to declare that there is hope for the world. We can dare to declare that through the empowerment of God's Spirit we can create the kind of community where people follow Christ together and demonstrate in their daily lives together the radical, transforming love of God."

- From your perspective, what does it mean for us to 'dare to declare that there is another way' of doing life?

[To dig deeper, please go to the end of the study]

We believe that God is laying out before us a prophetic call, a prophetic invitation to draw together in community so not only we can find transformation in us, but also so we can model the kind of transformation that the world so desperately needs.

As Steve noted, "This is not a new call, but has been the call for followers of Jesus throughout history. The world Christ was born into was also splintered and confused, violent and factious, morally corrupt, spiritually bankrupt, full of tensions, and overflowing with rampant ambition and competing interests. Yet into this world, a brand-new social order erupted, one that caught everyone's attention and would go on to eventually transform the entire Roman empire.

The pages of our New Testament contain for us a framework of what this community looked like, and how that community formed, grew, and impacted culture around it. So when we feel the call to community again, it is always a call towards Scripture, a call towards reflection and discussion around the first church, and how their community models for us the ways in which we can create our community today."

Steve shared with us a definition of the type of community that we are being called to be. Read the definition together (consider asking people to bring their printed copy or putting up the definition on a screen):

"Christian community in the New Testament and contemporary church is **Christ-centred**, Spirit-led, prayerful and submitted to scripture. Members of the community pledge their commitment to one another, choose to **live sacrificially** and pursue an ongoing journey of personal transformation. Through **hospitable**, unhurried time together, particularly around food and fun, this unified yet diverse community displays radical love, acceptance and respect for one another. Real, **authentic**, vulnerable relationships create an environment of honest and open communication where the truth is spoken in love, forgiveness is frequent, and encouragement is constant. In this **mission-minded** multigenerational family of faith, outsiders are welcomed in and present needs are met as each member contributes what they have and **uses their gifts** for the glory of God and the common good."

Within this definition there are six characteristics of the type of community Christ calling us to as a model (you can find them bold and italic in the text):

- Are there any of the six characteristics of the type of community we are being called to that you don't understand? Share your question with the group and have them help you understand it.
- Which of these characteristics do you think your group already does well?
- Which one of these characteristics do you think your group could grow in?

Steve states that "Christian community and our growth and development as people are inherently interlinked."

- Why do you think Christian community and our growth as people are interlinked?
- Why do you think Christian community is essential for fulfilling Lifezone's Mission of helping people live for Jesus and share His Love, we do this by creating communities where people can come as they are, grow deep and live large?

"Love is the very nature of God, and therefore relationships – community - is the natural outworking of the very nature of God. Community is what enables us to move forward in our destiny as humans to be in a relationship with God and each other. This is key because so often I think we conceive of community as like the safety net under a tightrope walker: it's a good thing to have in case something bad happens. But the kind of community God is calling us into and that the Bible speaks of is not the safety net under our lives, it is the tightrope itself. You literally can't move forward without it. It is the thing you must put your weight on and focus on if you want to progress in your faith. It is the very thing that will align you most to the character of God. To His love. Our community together is nothing less than the joy of being invited into the very nature of God."

- Do you tend to view community as a safety net that is good to have in case something bad happens? Or do you see it as the tightrope, the very thing you must put your weight on and focus on if you want to progress in your faith and move forward in your destiny?

Steve vulnerably shared with us that he found himself both inspired and challenged by his reflection on the type of community we are being called to. He said: "With the biblical definition in hand I could see how my current choice of lifestyle habits, relationships and community put me at times more in line with Snyder's vision than God's. I sat there and began to consider the opposite of the definition, to see how it would read if I inverted it." Here is the anti-definition. Read the anti-definition together (consider putting the definition on a screen):

"Community in the church and in my life is often me-centred, goal-driven, spiritually empty and shallow. Members of this community show up when nothing else is happening, live selfishly, and pursue an ongoing journey of personal satisfaction. Through surface and rushed time together, particularly between other meetings and work-related demands, this disjointed and individualistic community lacks love, acceptance, and respect for one another. Fake, distant, invulnerable relationships create an environment of vague and brief communication where real truth is seldom spoken, hurts are buried, and gossip prevails. In this bland, exclusive clique-driven community, outsiders are kept at a distance and real needs within the group are rarely known because each member keeps to themselves both their needs and their resources, depriving God of glory and their neighbour of their love and help."

As Steve reflected on the anti-definition, he realised that there was much that unfortunately resonated with his life. Perhaps yours too. He challenged us: "May today be the day we draw a line in the sand, where we soberly take a look at our lives and our tendency towards rampant individualism and open the ears of our hearts to hear the call of God that is upon us. It is not just our own growth that is at stake, but the growth of the communities, neighbourhoods and societies around us."

Prayer:

- Break into groups of two or three people and share with each other what in the Definition of Christian Community and Anti-definition challenges you or inspires you. Spend some time in repentance, confession and praying for each other.
- Pray for courage to be that contrast community that powerfully provides a foretaste of God's Kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Digging Deeper:

Christ through his life, death and resurrection has brought this new community, the people of God into being. The apostle Paul writes about this in Ephesians 2:14-22: "

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

The ancient city of Ephesus included a variety of indigenous people from Anatolia, Romans from Italy, Egyptians, Persians, settlers from Greece, and many others. It was a multi-culturally and socio-economically diverse environment similar to many urban places around the world today. Paul was describing how through Jesus' saving work, the wall of hostility is now broken down between groups of people and people are brought into relationship as brothers and sisters. Whatever has divided us has been removed by the power of the cross.

- What excites you about this new community that Jesus has brought into being?
- What do you see as challenges to living out what Christ has already accomplished?
- How does Ephesians 2:11-22 describe the new kind of community we are called to? [Hint: (1) reconciled to each other (2) reconciled to God (3) part of God's family (4) holy (5) built together and indwelled by the Holy Spirit]
- In what ways do you think the power of God is demonstrated when we live in loving and caring community with each other? [Hint: The power of Jesus' saving and healing works are made visible through community. In our life together we image who God is. His character is reflected through us.]

Lifeline thanks The Vine Church HK for making this resource available for the wider Church.