

# CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

2017 Fall  
Sunday School Class  
Sundays @ 9.10am-9.45am

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



@ Bow Tie Cinemas (inside the movie Theater)  
1 SOPAC way South Orange NJ  
[www.Lifechangersfamily.org](http://www.Lifechangersfamily.org)

## Introducing Christian Community

The world is growing—and shrinking. Even as the Global Village adds thousands more each day, technology diminishes the gap between us. Through a video screen, a breaking news event can be shared in real time across the world. Rapid travel offers us unprecedented access to each other. We can communicate with others through a computer modem, a cellular car phone or a specialized support group. But all the while, surveys tell us that people believe loneliness to be their greatest problem.

We all yearn for a sense of community. As our world continues to urbanize, we have more acquaintances and fewer friends. The small-town neighborhood and parish church have given way to the high-rise condominium and megachurch. Our social calendars are filled, and we have greater diversity in choosing how to spend time. But somehow at the end of the day we wonder if anyone really *knows* us. The Bible describes a revolutionary community designed for any society, in any age. It offers the blueprint for a spiritual kingdom where the King's subjects are loved, nurtured and protected. In this kingdom, everyone has distinct gifts, yet differences bring people together. Anyone can be included, yet each person is irreplaceable. When the kingdom citizens are wounded, the community cares for them and restores their health. There is unconditional love, but uncompromising accountability. It's a center of never-ending joy, celebration and worship.

The Bible's most pervasive image for this new community is *family*. Amazingly, the Creator of the universe chooses to approach us as Father and invites us to enter into relationship with him as his children. And as the Father adopts us into his household, he introduces us to a wonderful extended family of brothers and sisters. The members of this family, as little children, make mistakes from time to time. They have quarrels, dishonor the family and disappoint their Father. Yet at other times they perform miracles. Ultimately, they constitute the most wonderful family we can ever claim. This is Christian community.

This guide will inspire, revitalize and empower the Christian relationships in your life so that you might one day have the experience of the early believers in Acts 2: the whole world will want the remarkable thing your community shares. For on our planet, every individual carries a deep desire to be "no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephes. 2:19). May the study of God's Word be your guide down that road.

**1-BUILT TO LAST (Ephesians 2:11-22)**

According to Paul, the Christian community has been built for us with better materials. In this passage he describes the ingredients that make our community a spiritual temple designed to last forever.

1. Have you ever belonged to an organization, which, in your judgment, failed to be what you had envisioned? What elements contributed to its ineffectiveness?
  
2. Read Ephes. 2:11-22. How would you describe Paul's emotions about Christ and the church?
  
3. What specific problem between the Gentiles and the Jews is Paul describing in Ephes. 2:11-13?
  
4. Christ "himself is our peace." How did he accomplish this (Ephes. 2:14-18)?
  
5. Explain what Paul means by the "dividing wall of hostility" (Ephes. 2:14). How does this "wall" keep people from hearing the gospel today?
  
6. In Ephes. 2:19 Paul compares Christians to citizens and family members. In what ways does each of these two comparisons hold true?
  
7. What three building materials make up the construction described in Ephes. 2:20-22?
  
8. The apostles and prophets (Ephes. 2:20) might be seen as representing the New and Old Testaments, respectively. Why are the Scriptures so important as the foundation of our community?
  
9. How do we as members of the body of Christ relate to each other, as do stones or bricks to a building?
  
10. Ephes. 2:22 identifies the true resident of the "building" being constructed. How does that resident care for and maintain the building?
  
11. Paul has contrasted a dysfunctional, divided coalition with a true, harmonious community. How can our church work to more effectively resemble the structure Paul evokes?



## **2-ALL TOGETHER NOW (Acts 2:42-47)**

The great basketball teams play with an almost supernatural precision. As a player dribbles toward the basket, he will suddenly make a perfect pass to a teammate who was completely out of his line of vision. This ability comes from hours of practice together as a team. We call it *chemistry*. The chemistry of the early church captured the world's imagination. People related to each other in a new way. Those who witnessed this new paradigm of community often wanted to be a part of it. Acts, our chronicle of that phenomenon, describes what became the prototype of Christian fellowship.

1. Looking back, in what group or organization have you enjoyed the most rewarding friendships? Why?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. List a few adjectives you would use to describe the apostles.
3. Acts 2:42 lists four activities of the apostles. What is the contribution of each of these in building Christian community?
4. What condition in Acts 2:43 seems to precede "wonders and miraculous signs"? Why is this so?
5. What natural elements of fellowship are reflected by the apostles' actions in Acts 2:44-45?
6. How does the act of giving enhance fellowship in a group?
7. What do you think were some of the effects of meeting in a busy public place (Acts 2:46)?
8. In many cultures, the sharing of a meal is often a joyful time of fellowship. Why do you think this is true?
9. What effects did the fellowship of the believers have on those around them, and why (Acts 2:47)?
10. Some Christian groups struggle to find a balance between fellowship within and evangelism without. How do you think the first Christians found such a balance?
11. Review the adjectives you listed in question 2. How well do they describe the Christian fellowship you presently experience?
12. Reflecting on the four adjectives in Acts 2:42, how might you enhance your fellowship by concentrating on one of these?



### **3-EVERYONE'S INVITED (Philemon 1-25)**

Ray was a drug dealer and upon introduction to Christ, he became an enthusiastic Christian. Well-dressed and socially adept, Ray found quick acceptance and blended easily. One day Ray brought with him two friends struggling with substance abuse. Their hair was unkempt, they wore "street clothing," and they were wary of unfamiliar church surroundings. As Ray introduced them to an elderly woman during the service, the woman coldly turned away without speaking. Their suspicions confirmed, the pair hasn't returned. Yet Jesus built a ministry based on including everyone. The fellowship of believers is intended to be a place of healing, forgiveness and equality. In a short letter, Paul urges Philemon and his church to restore to their membership a runaway slave, Onesimus.

1. When have you ever felt excluded by a group? Describe your experience and feelings.
2. Read Philemon 1-25. What is Paul's purpose in writing? Describe the tone of his letter.
3. What methods does Paul use to encourage his readers (Philemon 4-7)?
4. Why would Paul rather make a loving appeal than a command (Philemon 8-9)?
5. Onesimus name meant "useful." How does Paul play on this name (Philemon 11)?
6. What changes are implied in Onesimus life (Philemon 10-12)?
7. How does Paul approach the topic of reconciliation in Philemon 12-16?
8. Martin Luther wrote, "Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus Paul also does for Onesimus with Philemon." How does Paul use his own standing with his readers to further the cause of Onesimus? (See especially Philemon 17-18.)
9. What feelings do you think Onesimus had about returning to his former masters?
10. While slavery is obsolete today, to what types of people might we apply this study?
11. It's all too easy to count the Onesimuses out of the fellowship we enjoy. How might an "exclusive" attitude affect Christian community?
12. Think of some individuals who need to feel included in your group or church. What can you do this week to reach out to them?





#### **4-EVERYONE'S INVOLVED (1 Corinthians 12)**

Melba plays the oboe. She's totally dedicated to developing her gift. She found the orchestra too restrictive for her progress in "oboism"; she had to yield to too many other instruments. So she sought out other oboists and created an all-oboe orchestra. They didn't sell many tickets. What we like about orchestras is the harmony of *many voices*. As Christians, each of us is given a gift. But these gifts are always to be developed in the context of community—the harmony of many voices. As Christians, we should celebrate our differences. In this passage Paul describes the exciting way God uses personal gifts to build unity in his body.

1. What unique ability or talent do you most enjoy using?
  
2. Read 1 Cor. 12:1-11. What is Paul's central message? What kind of situation in Corinth do you think motivated Paul's writing this section?
  
3. Given the common source of all gifts, what should be the outcome (1 Cor. 12:4-7)? What factors might cause the outcome to be otherwise?
  
4. How might each of the gifts mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 contribute to the unity of the church?
  
5. Read 1 Cor. 12:12-31. Why do you think Paul uses the human body as a metaphor to discuss gifts?
  
- In what ways are we parts of one body?
  
6. How should each of us be personally encouraged by the truth about gifts in 1 Cor. 12:18?
  
7. How does Paul feel we can avoid divisions in the church (1 Cor. 12:21-25)?
  
8. What "parts of the body" might "we think are less honorable" (1 Cor. 12:23)?
  
9. How can we seek "the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31)?
  
10. What do you feel are your spiritual gifts? How do you see them helping to strengthen the body?
  
11. How can you better use your gifts this week to build a sense of community in your group or church?



### **5-WE GATHER TOGETHER (Psalm 122)**

You've heard the line. A nonbeliever is invited to church, and she declines: "I can worship just as well while working in my garden, or away at the lake. I don't need to be sitting in some expensive church sanctuary." In our time, it's a common notion that worship—and indeed, religion itself—is a personal and private thing. Certainly worship must come from one's own heart, and we can indeed praise God in solitude. But the Bible teaches that God is pleased by worship, which occurs *together*, in community. Any family has a traditional, meaningful place to gather: at the dinner table or around the Christmas tree. God's family is no different. The Psalms have much to say about the people of God coming together to praise him.

1. Describe a worship service, which you remember as being particularly meaningful to you.
  
2. Read Psalm 122. How would you summarize the emotions and concerns of the psalmist?
  
3. What references to community can you find throughout this psalm?
  
4. How does the psalmist feel about worship in V1? What effect does anticipation have on our worship experience?
  
5. Jerusalem, location of the temple, was synonymous with worship. Is it important to have a special place of worship (Psalm 122:2)? Why or why not? Also in Verse 4, the tribes are commanded "to go up . . . to praise the name of the LORD." Why, in your opinion, would this be a command?
  
7. Should we worship when we don't feel motivated to do so? Explain.
  
8. "Thrones for judgment" (Psalm 122:5) is a reference to God speaking and deciding. How does worship help us clarify issues in our lives?
  
9. The psalmist admonishes his listeners to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" in Psalm 122:6. What effect does such "secular" prayer have on our worship?
  
10. In what ways does worship promote peace (Psalm 122:6-8)?
  
11. The psalmist's worship is completed in Psalm 122:9 with a promise. How is this decision an appropriate response to being in God's presence?
  
12. What aspects of your community worship can you enhance this week?



**6-COMMUNITY COMMISSIONED (Luke 10:1-24)**

The word *evangelism* summons many colorful images for people today. Some think immediately of the street-corner character, preaching and pounding his Bible as folks quickly walk by. Some picture the television preachers who haunt obscure cable TV channels. Others think about a citywide crusade, with the converted pouring down the aisles as the "invitation" music plays. For still others, the word *evangelism* inspires feelings of vague uneasiness or guilt. Few associate evangelism with *community* activity. In the New Testament, however, it is almost always a pair or group of believers who share their faith. Even Paul traveled with partners. Luke's Gospel gives an account of Jesus commissioning his community to spread their faith.

1. List some adjectives that come to mind when you think of the word evangelism.
2. Read Luke 10:1-24. For what kind of mission has Jesus recruited the seventy-two?
3. Why do you think he sends them out in pairs?
4. How do the two comparisons Jesus uses for his workers in Luke 10:2-3 apply to the work of the disciples?
5. How do you account for Jesus' two cautionary requests in Luke 10:4?
6. In what ways does Jesus delineate the seriousness of our work?
7. How should we be encouraged by the responsibility given to us in Luke 10:16? How should we be humbled?
8. How did Jesus and the community of 72 feel about their work (Luke 10:17, 21)?
9. How does Jesus characterize the nature of their mission (Luke 10:18-19)?
10. Jesus cautions against an attitude of spiritual arrogance in Luke 10:20. How might this happen to a Christian? How does he provide a better model in Luke 10:21?
11. What motivation for evangelism do we find in Luke 10:22-24?
12. How can your community of believers better work together this week to perform the work of evangelism?



### **7 SERVANT'S ENTRANCE (Matthew 25:31-46)**

Bill, the class director, hoisted a hefty stack of sign-up sheets. His Sunday-school class laughed. The profusion of class activities, with its chaotic ritual of passing around the sign-ups, was a running joke . . . as well as a source of pride. Frequent covered-dish dinners, rafting trips and softball games were always well attended. The class prized its sense of community. But one lonely sheet often returned void. It was the one recruiting volunteers for an afternoon of service at the homeless shelter. Other than one or two regulars, few ever signed up. The timing was somehow never right for a good class turnout. Ironically, nothing builds community like selfless service together. Many Christian groups have wonderful fellowship-enhancing experiences as they give of their time and sweat in a ministry context. This was the heart of Jesus' life and teaching, and Matthew 25 paints a vivid picture of the importance of service for us.

1. What is the most meaningful act of service that a person or group has ever provided to you or your family?
  
2. Read Matthew 25:31-46. To whom do you think Jesus is speaking? Why?
  
3. In Jesus' story, what is the setting? What is his point in speaking of "sheep and goats" (Matthew 25:31-32)?
  
4. On what basis are the "sheep and goats" divided (Matthew 25:34-36)?
  
5. What do the services described have in common?
  
6. Why do you think those on the king's right are surprised by what he says (Matthew 25:37-39)?
  
7. Does truly righteous action tend to be self-conscious, in your opinion? Why or why not?
  
8. Do you think Jesus' story teaches that we must earn salvation through our actions? (In other words, will our eternal destiny hinge on the number of hours we've completed on mission projects?) Explain.
  
9. In what sense is Jesus the hungry person, the thirsty person, the stranger and so on (Matthew 25:40, 45)?
  
10. What, for you, would be the effect of seeing Jesus himself in the faces of helpless people?
  
11. What does this passage say to you about the priority of service in your own Christian community? What changes should be made?





**8-AND THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS (John 13)**

Everyone who drives recognizes the universal symbol for *love*. Our society is obsessed with the concept of love.

The Bible's definition of love liberates us from the shifting platitudes of our day. As Jesus prepared his disciples for their era of ministry, he taught a challenging lesson.

1. Think of a few recent movies you've seen or songs you've heard about love. What message did those carry about the subject?
  
2. Read John 13:1-17. What do you think were Jesus' thoughts about his disciples as he faced the close of his earthly days?
  
3. What visual lesson did Jesus teach (John 13:4-5)? Why do you think he chose this lesson?
  
4. Why does Peter object (John 13:8)? What does he need to learn?
  
5. What point does Jesus make about his relationship with his disciples (John 13:12-14)?
  
6. Read John 13:18-38. What part does Judas play in Jesus' teachings of that evening?
  
7. How does Jesus say the disciples should cope with his imminent departure?
  
8. What should be a Christian's standard for loving (John 13:34)?
  
9. How will love affect the disciples' standing in the world (John 13:35)? What does this say about the world's own version of love?
  
10. How would you summarize Jesus' definition of love among Christians?
  
11. Pray that God will build your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ to the point that "men will know you are [his] disciples."



**9-TRUE CONFESSIONS (Nehemiah 9:1-5; James 5:13-20)**

The classic movie *Twelve Angry Men* deals with the jury in a murder trial. In the beginning, the twelve know nothing about each other. They are simply Juror Number One, Juror Number Two and so on. They discuss the case with detachment. But as the hours wear on and the tension builds, the reserve of each begins to melt away. The jurors begin to share facts about themselves—facts which often reveal their biases. The seclusion of the jury room brings down barriers, encourages honesty and builds a community. The Christian community also involves transparency. These two passages, describe the process of community confession: to God and to each other.

1. With what group of people during the last few years have you been the most open and transparent? Why?
  
2. Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls—and its community—after a generation of captivity. Read Neh. 9:1-5. How do the Israelites prepare for confession?
  
3. How do the Israelites use their time at the confessional gathering (Neh. 9:2-3)?
  
4. Why is the reading of God's Word important in confession (Neh. 9:3)?
  
5. What two acts follow the reading of the Law (Neh. 9:3)? Why does this make sense, in your opinion?
  
6. Levites (Neh. 9:4-5) were the priestly tribe. How can church leaders be involved in helping the Christian community in confession?
  
7. Is it easier for you to confess sins to God, or to a friend? Why?
  
8. James's epistle focuses on the act of confessing our sins to each other. Read James 5:13-20. What point is made about trouble, happiness and illness in James 5:13-14?
  
9. Why is it important to ask others to pray for us, as opposed to simply praying privately (James 5:14-16)?
  
10. How might the acts of confession and prayer together enhance each other (James 5:16)? James specifies praying with a "righteous" person. What qualities should you look for in seeking such a prayer partner?
  
11. How is the urgency of our accountability to each other described in James 5:19-20?
  
12. How can your church or group make use of these passages to become a more effective community of confession?



**10-CONFRONTATION AND RESTORATION (Matthew 18:15-35)**

There's the tale of the father who had fallen out with his son. After a time, he posted this sign in the town square: *Son—all is forgiven. Meet me here at sunset.* At the appointed time, seventy-five young men showed up.<sup>1</sup> How many broken relationships among our friends and families are never repaired? Why are schisms so common among churches and Christian groups? Perhaps many of us are unsure how to lovingly handle conflict, reconciliation and forgiveness. In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches the biblical principle of confrontation and then adds a cautionary parable.

1. How do you feel after an argument with a friend? How do you tend to handle reconciliation?
2. Read Matthew 18:15-35. What specific situation does Jesus discuss (Matthew 18:15)?
3. What wisdom can you find in confronting alone, as Jesus teaches?
4. What might be added by involving one or two others (Matthew 18:16)?
5. To what additional levels of confrontation should we proceed (Matthew 18:17)? Why?
6. Jesus was often criticized for the attention he paid to pagans and tax collectors. What perspective does this add to Matthew 18:17?
7. As the community of believers, what special credentials do we possess (Matthew 18:18-20)?
8. How does Peter's question (Matthew 18:21) motivate Jesus to tell this particular story, after his teaching on approaching sinners?
9. Ten thousand talents would be an unreachable sum—easily millions of dollars, a sum no one could have paid. Why does Jesus use such a staggering total in his story?
10. How do you think it would be possible for the forgiven man to so quickly handle the servant without mercy?
11. How can your church or fellowship group apply the wisdom of this passage to the conflicts you face?
12. Think about people you may need to forgive, and ask God to help you remember to show the mercy you have been given.



**11-A HAVEN FOR HEALING (Ezekiel 34:1-16)**

In a Sunday school just like the one we are in this morning at LifeChangers Gospel Church, where members really love each other, when one of them suffered a stroke and paralysis, she became homebound. She grieved for the fellowship of the class, and they missed her as well. So the members pooled their funds and purchased a video camera to stream the class to her each week making special comments and greetings to their absent friend. For her, it's almost as good as being there. In the King's community, the citizens are protected, loved and healed. Ezekiel, in this passage, offers a prophetic warning against our forsaking that task.

1. The last time you were ill for an extended period, how were you cared for and by whom? What feelings did you experience in depending on others?
  
2. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16. Describe the spiritual status of Israel, according to Ezekiel.
  
3. Ezekiel uses shepherds and sheep as metaphors. In what ways do these apply to God's people?
  
4. Using Ezekiel's metaphor, what actual crisis is occurring in the "shepherding" of Israel?
  
5. The shepherds have abandoned five responsibilities, according to Ezekiel 34:4-5. Describe the implications of these five failures.
  
6. In what ways do you think the leaders of Ezekiel's Israel have used instead of served the people?
  
7. How does the Lord feel about the shepherds' behavior (Ezekiel 34:7-10)? What actions does he promise to take?
  
8. What do we learn about the Lord's character from his words in Ezekiel 34:11-16?
  
9. What do you think are some of the ways God takes care of his "scattered sheep"?
  
10. What adjectives would you use to describe God's character as represented in this passage?
  
11. How can we encourage our Christian leaders to take more seriously the implications of their responsibilities to the weak, as suggested by this passage?
  
12. Ask God now to show you the weak, wounded and lost you've been called to heal, and to move you to positive action.





**12-POWER TO THE PEOPLE (Acts 2:1-41)**

Not long ago, someone travelled to the site of extensive hurricane damage. He related how it felt to see the evidence of awesome natural forces: houses leveled, huge trees uprooted and carried away. He also discovered the power of such an event to draw people together in a new way. Distress brought out the best in fellow victims, and they found themselves caring for neighbors to whom, days before, they wouldn't have spoken. First-century history offers the evidence of awesome supernatural forces. An incredible power moved through the ancient world, and, again, people were drawn together in a new way. This mighty force was described, again, as a powerful wind. Yet this time, the result was not uprooting and destruction; instead, broken lives were rebuilt. The Creator of mighty winds calls and empowers a new community to change the world.

1. Read Acts 2:1-41. Jesus has left the earth. His followers face a difficult world. Describe the challenges which lay before them.
2. Why do you think God chose tongues of fire (Acts 2:2) to represent his presence and power?
3. Why do you think the Holy Spirit's first action would be to inspire believers to speak in foreign tongues (Acts 2:4)?
4. The onlookers respond in various ways (Acts 2:5-13). What factors determine the response of outsiders to our own Christian experience?
5. The first Christians certainly captured the world's attention. How can the church command the world's interest in a positive way today?
6. What is Peter's first concern as he opens his sermon (Acts 2:14-15)?
7. How is Peter's choice of Scripture appropriate (Acts 2:16-21)?
8. With what logic does Peter build his argument (Acts 2:22-36)?
9. How does Peter "close the deal" (Acts 2:38-40)? What is the result?
10. Looking back over Acts 2, how would you summarize the priorities and actions of the Holy Spirit upon his arrival at Pentecost?
11. How can you experience the power of the Spirit in your life this week to help a friend better understand who Jesus is?



