

Week 1: Life Together

Acts 2:42-47

To be studied in response to January 13, 2019.

life together

A people apprenticed to
the Life of Jesus

Begin with Prayer

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Consider including a few minutes of silence.

Introduction:

As always, *our common goal as apprentices of Jesus is to learn to be loved by Jesus, to be led by Jesus, to become like Jesus, to lead others to Jesus.* Over the next few years, we will be focusing on the many practices that help us cooperate with Jesus' plan for transformation in our lives. This week, we begin a new six-week series, "Life Together," focused on the practice of **Christ-centred community**.

For us to open up to God and one another, the environment needs to be safe, and we each need to be safe for each other. Let's remember the following guidelines:

- Practice *good listening skills*
- Honour "*sharing boundaries*" and *confidentiality*
- *Don't try to fix, problem-solve or rescue.* Our aim is "*gospel fluency*" (*applying the truth of our identity in Christ and the completed work of his life, death, resurrection and reign to the circumstances of our lives.*)
- Practice *healthy conflict resolution*
- Seek to be *co-learners* and make this a safe space to ask *any and all questions.*

Re-connecting and Debriefing (10 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3-4 people each (ideally same-gender).

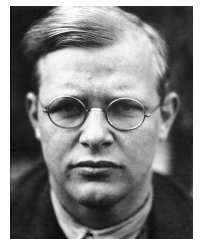
Spend a few minutes catching up on life (e.g. highs and lows of past week).

Then talk together through the following debrief questions:

1. *Were you able to hear Sunday's teaching on Acts 2:42-47? What's one way God spoke to you?*
2. *How might we benefit from looking closely at this description of early Christian community?*
3. *How does the idea of a deeper experience of Christian community make you feel? Excited? Scared? Skeptical?*

Listening to God's Word: (20-25 minutes)

Read the following together: In 1938 pastor **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wrote a small book entitled Life Together as a guidebook for the Confessing Church as it sought to live a counter-cultural gospel in 1930s Nazi-led Germany. He wrote, "*Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it*" (Life Together, translated 1954, Harper and Row, p 30). Bonhoeffer's timeless writings reflect on our hopes and disappointments in community, and how the Scriptures address those experiences with the Truth.



It's worth paying attention to the assumptions and thoughts that influence the expectations we have of ourselves and others in the practice of community. It helps us to see more clearly how the Word addresses us uniquely. By allowing God's word to examine us, we will be able to join in Bonhoeffer's encouragement: "*Let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.*" (p 20).

Setting the Scene for Acts 2:42-47: The foundational text for our series is found at the end of Acts 2. Jesus commanded his apprentices to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit was sent. The Spirit would give them the heavenly power for the mission Jesus entrusted to them (see Acts 1:8). And soon, that's what happened! The Holy Spirit fell on the gathered believers. To explain what had happened to fascinated observers, Peter stood up and gave a compelling witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Many of those who listened were convicted of their sin and trusted in Jesus. The result was a new community (3000 people)! Today's story gives us a model for the things that should mark our own community, as a church and as a Life Group committed to apprenticeship to Jesus.

As always, as you hear this story, consider: **Who or what do you relate to most in this story, and why?**

Tell the Story: The leader will tell **Acts 2:35-47** from memory. (A few extra verses are included for context.)

Rebuild the Story: Let's open up our Bibles to **Acts 2:42-47**.

- *Walk through, chronologically, verse by verse, asking "Who, What, Where, When, How, and sometimes Why" questions. Where did the leader add or omit details?*

Read the Story: Have someone read the story from his or her Bible.

Debrief the Story: Let's respond to the following questions:

- *Who or what do you relate to in this story, and why?*
- *What are the characteristics that marked this first community of believers in Jesus?*
- *Why do you think these first believers gravitated to this way of being together? What can we learn from them?*

Listening to Our Hearts (10-15 minutes)

Our first practice together will be to reflect on our previous experiences with Christian community. Take out paper or a journal and a pen. We are going to spend 10-15 minutes journaling on the following questions.

- ❖ *When you think about "Christian community" what thoughts or emotions are stirred up for you?*
- ❖ *Where have you had the richest experience of Christian community? When has it been most difficult for you?*
- ❖ *Of the characteristics we see in Acts 2, in our present cultural context...*
 - *...which ones do you think are easiest/most natural to practice together? Why?*
 - *...which ones do you think are most difficult to cultivate? Why?*
- ❖ *What is one aspect of "Acts 2" Christian community - "life together" - of which you long to experience more?*

Listening to One Another (10 minutes)

After you have finished journaling your thoughts, discuss the following questions together:

- ❖ *How was it for you to reflect on your past experiences of Christian community?*
- ❖ *What's one hope/desire for community that you would like to share with this group?*
- ❖ *What specific action do you sense God asking you/us to do this week/month based on what we have practiced together today?*

Listening and Praying for One Another

Using the Lord's Prayer as a guide, based on what you've shared together, spend time listening to God and praying for one another.

WORSHIP (Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name) **PETITION** (Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread) **CONFESSION** (Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us) **ENGAGEMENT** (Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one)
WORSHIP (Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever) **AMEN.**

Leader Notes

This new six-week series, "Life Together," will dive deep into the five aspects of Christ-centred community found in this foundational text: being together (the fellowship), learning together (the apostles' teaching), eating together (the breaking of bread), giving together (no one having need), and praying together (the prayers). Our goal is to demonstrate how each of these characteristics help to nurture our identity as the church – the new family of Jesus, apprentices of Jesus embodying the reality of the kingdom that Jesus announced.

An important part of learning is the opportunity to put what you've learned on an intellectual level into practice in a "real life" situation. The key word is "practice." Over the next six weeks, the Life Group materials will include some new elements. In addition to the chance to study the upcoming sermon passage, you will be given a "practice" that you can try together within the context of your Life Group meeting. Sometimes we will also include a suggested "practice" that each group member can try in the course of the next week. These practices will relate specifically to the Sunday teachings, and aim to take people beyond their "comfort zone" and into growth.

As you study this passage together...

- Remember the centrality of Christ and his work, and the role of the Holy Spirit in birthing this community. The events of Acts 2:42-47 occur after the events of Jesus' ministry and redemptive work described in the gospels. This community is only meaningful and possible because of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the gift of the Spirit:
 - *"Not what a [person] is in him[her]self as a Christian, his[her] spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that [person] is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for eternity."* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 1954, p 26).
- Use your 'holy imaginations' to envision what this means for your "life together" as a group, going beyond "Sunday school answers" to practically envision a way of being a community.
- Reflect on their own experiences; what efforts (successes or failures) influence their own willingness or hesitancy to try and live out the vision found in these verses?
- Make the connection between this call to Christian community and Jesus' call to apprenticeship. Why is this description of community the best way to make and be apprentices to Jesus?
- Reflect on your personal responsibility in living into this vision for community.