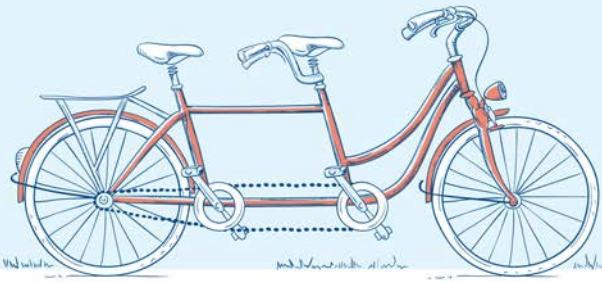


BETTER
Together



Week 1 Leader Guide

THE WIN

Group members will discuss the blessings of community and identify barriers to experiencing the rich community we were created for in Christ.

5-10
minutes

SERMON RECAP: WHAT DID THE TEXT MEAN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

In the sermon this week, we learned that we were created for community!

- God dwells in community Genesis 1:26
- We are created in God's image. Genesis 1:27
- God blesses community John 17:20-24

From what you learned in the sermon, answer the following:

- Why is community so foundational to who God created us to be?
- What are some of the blessings of community?

3-5
minutes

WARM UP

- Who is one of the best friends that you've had in your life?
- What was it that made them such a great friend?

30-35
minutes

THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

As we read in Genesis 1, God created us for perfect, rich community with each other so that we could reflect his image with clarity. However, something has gone deeply wrong in our pursuit of community. If we think about the nature of our relationships, we notice a deadly tendency: we use people to meet our own needs first. This is a result of our rebellious fall from community with God as described in Genesis 3.

We pursue our own interests and protect ourselves from people and relationships that will demand too much of us.

- Can you think of a time you've intentionally avoided someone who bothers you?
- Have you stopped pursuing certain friends because they were no longer meeting your needs?

-
- Have you clung to unhealthy relationships to escape the feeling of being alone?

Our self-centeredness shows itself in multiple ways that keep us from “imaging” God to bring him glory. Here are five indicators of individualism from “The Gospel-Centered Community” by Bob Thune and Will Walker. Read through this list together as a group and then have each person choose 2-3 bullet-point statements that best apply to them.

SELF-RELIANCE

- You are proud of your ability to deal with your own problems and challenges without help from others.
- You enjoy being asked for help but you rarely ask others for help.
- It’s difficult for you to be vulnerable about what’s really going on in your soul because “those are my issues to deal with.”
- You don’t honestly think you need people to grow spiritually; personal spiritual disciplines are sufficient (Bible study, prayer, theological reading).
- It’s hard for you to receive gifts or help from people without wanting to pay them back somehow.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

- You may be thought of as a “good Christian” by others, but few people know you as you really are.
- You may be outgoing and extroverted, but your relationships stay on the surface.
- Very few people have full access to your life. You may disclose things to people, but only what you want them to know. You do not want them to dig deeper.
- When relationships get hard, you tend to withdraw rather than deal with the issues.
- You tend to measure spiritual growth by how much you know.

SELF-PROTECTION

- You tend to keep others at arm’s length to guard against being hurt or rejected.
- You measure spiritual growth or maturity by what others say or think.
- You fear at times that if people knew “the real you,” they would keep their distance.
- You avoid conflict. If people offend you or hurt your feelings, you prefer to say nothing rather than risk anger or rejection.
- You might be addicted to approval. Your sense of value rises and falls on what other people say (or do not say) about you.

SELF-IMPORTANCE

- You tend to be addicted to busyness; it’s the way you fill the void of deep relationships in your life.
- You have a higher concern for respect from others (attention) than you have a sense of responsibility for others (sacrifice).
- You are more concerned about what others think of your accomplishments (importance) than what they think of your relational influence in their lives (significance).
- You tend to measure spiritual growth by what you have accomplished.

SELF-WILL

- You regularly choose work and hobbies over people.
- Your schedule and priorities always take precedence; you don’t reshuffle your agenda to help or serve others.
- You like having people around, but you don’t tend to take their advice or welcome their correction.

-
- When it comes to church, you tend to ask consumer-oriented questions like, “What do I like/not like? How does this make me feel? What do I get out of this?” Your wants and goals are functionally prioritized over the needs of the community and the mission of the church.

Notice that the headings over each of these bullet points have to do with “self.”

- Which statements most clearly describe you?
- If your self-centeredness was transformed into a joyful God-centeredness, what would the results be for yourself and for your group?

3-5
minutes

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Ephesians 2 as a group.

- What key verses or phrases from this passage speak to living in community?
- In the first half of the chapter, how did Jesus save us from selfishness?
- Ultimately, what is God making out of us? (v.21, 22)

Close and pray together as a group, celebrating the gift of community in Christ!