

youthESource Bible Study

Community in Christ: Something Different

By Leah Abel

Series Overview:

Our youth are in lots of different communities ranging from sports teams to families to their fourth period algebra class. Community in Christ can and should look and feel different from their other communities. But does it? This three-part series aims to give a picture of community as Christ intends it and to assist a group or class in developing it.

This is an ideal study to help your group develop a philosophy of how they want to “be together.” This could be a great series to do for back to school or another time of year when it seems the group needs to connect.

These lessons are designed to be used as a large group lesson followed by breakout groups. If you have a smaller group or don't have the luxury of other trusted leaders who let you break up, feel free to keep the group together for the whole lesson.

PART ONE: SOMETHING UNIQUE

LESSON FOCUS: Community in Christ is unique among the many communities of which we are a part.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Spend 10-20 minutes doing something together at the start of each Community lesson. For many students, doing together can be a more effective way of connecting than talking together. Choose one or two of these games.

1. *Scrambled Legs* (15-20 min)— Divide students into teams (groups of 5-10). Each group forms a circle, facing out. Then everyone's knees/ankles are tied to their partners' on either side of them. The object of the game is to shuffle around the room as a ring and collect strips of cloth that are hung from the ceiling, walls, and so on. Each group will have a different color or strip for their team. The first team to collect all strips of its color and deposit them in a centrally located bucket wins.
2. *Pudding Pictionary*—This game works just like traditional Pictionary with one exception. Instead of drawing with a pencil on paper, groups use a tray or cookie sheet with pudding on it to draw their pictures in. One variation is to have two or more teams trying to complete a list of 10 items to be guessed at the same time. The first team to guess all 10 items first wins.

LESSON WARM UP: MY MANY COMMUNITIES

GATHER: Have students gather in groups of 3-5. (If you did teams for the games above you could simply use the same groups.) Provide each team with a piece of paper and a pen for each person.

SAY: Each of us is a part of many different groups or communities. Each person in your group is going to attempt to come up with a list of as many of the communities that they are in as possible. These groups or communities can be your third period art class, the group you always eat lunch with, your soccer team or even this youth group. They must be real teams or groups that you are a part of on a regular basis. The team with the most legitimate groups wins! You have two minutes...ready, set, go!

TIP: If you have a group of 10 or less students, don't divide into smaller groups, just do this as an individual activity and discuss the lists.

SHARE: After two minutes are up, have teams count how many they have and the team that believes they have the longest list should share theirs with the whole room. (Have each person hold on to their list as they will be utilizing it toward the end of the lesson.)

ASK: How is Christian community different from all these other communities?

Gathering connection: If your group attended the LCMS Youth Gathering in summer of 2016, this was the key question of the night as we considered community. Encourage them to share things they remember and learned there.

Tip: Are they stuck? Completely silent? Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and see if that helps get the juices flowing.

Potential answers: Perhaps more diverse (ages, variety of interests and talents, ethnicities, etc.), You didn't choose these people—you were gathered together, designed to rely on one another and serve together, not just exist together. The invisible church has us connected across time zones, even if we've never met.

ASK: If we are honest, Christian community doesn't always look as different from other communities as it should. How should Christian community be different? (If you have a white board or large butcher paper use it to record the group's answers.)

Potential Answers: forgiving, welcoming, accepting, loving, include servicing together, praying together, etc.

Tip: Are they stuck? Completely silent? Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and see if that helps get the juices flowing. Or ask them how this youth group or Sunday school class should be different from their classes and clubs at school or sports teams.

TWO BIG QUESTIONS

SAY: As we dig into community over the next couple of weeks, there are two big questions that we will consider...

1) How should Christian community look and feel different from the other communities of which we are a part?

2) How do we build the kind of community that goes beyond surface level and reflects the love of Jesus?

SMALL GROUP TIME

SAY: Look through the list you created earlier of the various communities that you operate in. Circle the three from this list that are the most important to you.

SHARE: Have each person share their top three and why they are the top three.

SHARE: Have each person share one from their list that goes beyond surface level to more authentic relationships. How or why does this group get beyond surface level?

DISCUSS the communities we value:

- What are some of the commonalities in why we chose the groups we did?
- What makes a community valuable to you?
- How important is authenticity or the ability to "be real" in a group or community?

READ: Acts 2:42-47 & Discuss the following questions

1. What words would you use to describe this community?
2. What attitudes do you notice?
3. What actions do you notice this new church community doing?
4. Specifically, what four things did the people devote themselves to?
5. Notice what is happening in verse 47. Why do you think that is happening?
6. In what ways is THIS community (our youth group or Sunday school class) like the Church in Acts 2? In what ways is it different?
7. How was this community formed?

READ: Look back at the start of Acts chapter 2. What happened? Who formed this community? Who made up this community?

Tip: Short on time? Read 2:1-8, skim 2:9-36, read 2:37-41

SAY: What makes this community so very different is that it is formed by the Holy Spirit himself!

ASK: How is our community formed? (Same! The Holy Spirit Himself calls us through the Word and gathers us together!)

If you have time, invite youth to share how they ended up here tonight/today. (Encourage students to share how their families became members of the church or who invited them and brought them or share your own story of how you came to worship and serve as a part of this congregation.)

ASK: None of us is in this room by accident. God gathered together this Church, this youth group, this community. How might knowing that change how we live as a community?

REAL COMMUNITY IS MADE POSSIBLE IN CHRIST

READ: Ephesians 2:13-22.

TIP: Provide some context before reading the passage. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Christians in Ephesus. He was writing about how Jesus came for both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had been God's set apart, chosen people and now God through Christ was bringing together these two very different groups to be His church.

ASK: According to this passage, how is a community that is diverse and even at odds brought together? (In Christ alone!)

ASK: What are some of the ways that those in Christ are described here? Look especially at verses 18-22. (no longer strangers, fellow citizens, members of the household of God, built together into a dwelling place for God)

ASK: What do those descriptors tell us about the way that God intends for the Church to be connected?

SAY: Wow! What an amazing God who sends His Son to earth to put us together—to form us (like one body) into a dwelling place for God!

OPTION: COVENANT WRITING

Leader Note: A series on community is a great time to have a group do some covenant writing and consider what promises they want to make to one another and what guidelines they may like to set for being the kind of community that they aspire to be.

Step One: Values—what's important to us

SAY: Over the next couple of weeks we will spend some time writing a covenant—a document of promise—about how we will make this community look different than the other communities of which we are a part. Tonight is step one. We are going to talk about our values—the things that are most important to us. Don't worry, we aren't setting anything in stone tonight, just beginning the conversation.

SAY: Imagine it is three months from now and someone is asking you about this group. What are some words or phrases that you would most like to be able to use to describe this group? (examples might include honest, authentic, loving, Jesus-focused, etc.)

RECORD & DISCUSS the answers given. Read the list back to the group.

ASK: What are the three most important values to us as a whole group? (Work together to settle on the 3-5 most important to the group.)

Then write them out like this "We are a community in Christ alone. We want this community to be a place that is _____, _____, & _____.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Thank God for forming your unique community of Christians. Ask Him to help you love and serve one another as He has loved and served you.

PART TWO: REFLECTING JESUS' LOVE

LESSON FOCUS: In Christ alone, we strive to develop the kind of community that goes beyond surface level and reflects the love of Christ.

OPENING ACTIVITIES

Spend 10-20 minutes doing something together at the start of each Community Lesson. For many students doing together can be a more effective way of connecting than talking together. Choose one or two of these games.

1. *Fruit Basket Upset*

This game is a classic. Have all students and leaders sit in one big circle. Each person must be seated on a chair. One person stands in the middle and says, "My name is _____ and I like people who _____," filling in the second blank with something that is true about them. This could be anything from "are wearing red" to "have traveled to Australia." Anyone sitting in the circle for whom the statement is true must stand up and move to an empty chair. (Chairs will be left empty by others who get up.) The person in the middle attempts to fill one of the empty chairs as well. Whomever does not get seated in a chair will be left in the middle and becomes the next person to say "My name is _____ and I like people who _____."

2. *Paranoia* (This game & instructions borrowed from www.ohthefun.com)

Everyone sits in a circle. Each person thinks of a "who" question (Ex. "Who has the coolest shoes?" or "Who is most likely to become a famous food critic?") Pick someone to start. That person whispers their question to the person on their RIGHT. The person they asked has to answer the question out loud with the name of someone in the circle. The question is NOT said out loud, just their answer. A coin is flipped- TAILS means the group gets to hear the question that was asked, HEADS means the question remains a secret f.o.r.e.v.e.r.!!! Hence, paranoia. Questions CANNOT be rude or unkind. (If you use this game, consider connecting to the lesson and referencing the damage that secrets and gossip can have on the relationships in our community.)

LARGE GROUP

REVIEW FROM PREVIOUS WEEK

SAY (something like): Last week we talked about real community. Each of us is a part of many different communities including your second period class, your choir, your basketball team, the four people you always sit with at lunch, and many more.

But, not all communities are created equal. In fact there is one community of which we are each a part that likely includes people that you would never choose to hang out with and with whom you may have very few common interests. It is a community joined together through Jesus Christ.

THAT is the beauty of the Christian church. God calls us through His Word and the power of the Gospel to belong to Him and as we belong to Him we belong to one another.

We talked about two key questions: (Project these questions on a screen or write them ahead of time on a whiteboard or big paper.)

- 1) How should Christian community look and feel different from the other communities of which we are a part?
- 2) How do we build the kind of community that goes beyond surface level and reflects the love of Jesus?

ASK: What are some of the answers to question #1 that we talked about last week?

SAY: Tonight we are going to spend some more time on question #2. How do we build the kind of community that goes beyond surface level and reflects the love of Jesus? Before we do that, let's look back at one more thing from last week: Acts 2.

READ: Acts 2:42-47.

ASK: What are some of the things that made this community unique? What were some of the things that they were doing together consistently that connected them together more and more and made others want to be a part of their community?

ASK: One of the words used in this passage is the word fellowship. Does anybody know what that means?

SAY: For a group to have fellowship it doesn't just mean that they spend time together. Fellowship means that we share something. As Christians we share forgiveness and unlimited grace that is available to us in Jesus Christ. We also share a purpose—to share that message with the world.

SMALL GROUP TIME

ASK: Have you ever heard the phrase "you have to be a friend to have a friend?" What do you think it means? How does that apply to building a strong church or youth group community? (In order to have the kind of community that you want, you need to be a part of making it that community.)

SAY: The question of the night is...HOW do we develop the kind of community that the Church should be? Let's look to the Word of God.

READ: Take some time to read each of the passages below and identify what each passage has to say about Christian community as God intends it.

SAY: As we read each passage, identify the actions we are encouraged to do, the attitudes we are encouraged to have, and the power that makes it possible. (Record the key words and phrases that your group identifies from each passage. You may want to use these in your covenant writing later.)

Romans 12:9-13 (Key concept: What does it look like for love to be genuine?)

1 John 3: 16-18 (Key concept: loving not just in words but in actions and in truth)

Ephesians 4:1-6 (Key concept: What does it mean to bear with someone in love?)

Ephesians 4: 14-16 (Key concept: we are mature in our faith and we assist one another in that endeavor as we speak the truth in love)

Philippians 2:4 (Key concept: consider the interest of others)

Gathering Connection: If your group went to the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering this is an ideal place to connect back to the concept of humility and the connection between humility and community.

Gathering Connection: Sometimes we need to think about the needs of the whole group rather than our individual needs. Have students talk about what it felt like to go to a restaurant that they didn't want to go to because it was the choice of others. Or what it felt like when another

individual's choice to be late impacted the whole group. What happens when everyone attempts to own thing instead of looking to the needs of the whole group? You can make similar points if your group went on a retreat or mission trip recently.

1 John 4:7-12 (Key concept: We are only able to love our fellow Christians because of the perfect love that has been given to us.)

Ephesians 5:25-27 (Key concept: conflict within the community, don't give Satan a foothold)

REAL FRIENDSHIP LOVES and CHALLENGES

ASK: Who are your real friends? How do you know they are your real friends?

ASK: Do you have friends that seem to only be your friend as long as you never disagree with them or challenge them? How do those relationships feel for you? What is missing from them?

SAY: Jesus is Love and Truth. In His relationships on earth He did not shy away from speaking both truth and love. He was challenging and welcoming at the same time.

READ: John 4:1-26, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well.

ASK: How do you see Jesus being loving and warm and also not shying away from speaking truth and challenge?

ASK: How does the woman respond? (Look at 4:39-42 for more insight on this.)

ASK: How important is it for us to be both truthful and loving in this group? Is it important for us to be able to challenge one another as well as love one another in this group? Why?

ASK: How is an ample supply of both love and truth a reflection of the love of Jesus?

OPTION: Covenant Writing

Leader Note: A series on community is a great time to have a group do some covenant writing and consider what promises they want to make to one another and what guidelines they may like to set for a community in Christ together.

Step Two: Actions—living out our values

SAY: Last week we began writing a covenant—a document of promise—about how we want this community to look different than the other communities of which we are a part. Last week we worked on values and said "We want this community to be a place that is _____." (Read your statement from the previous week.)

Tonight is step two. We are going to talk about the actions we want in this group that will help us make this "a place that is _____." Before we do that, is there anything that you would like to revise from our statement last week?

ASK: How will we build the kind of community that goes beyond surface level and that is centered in Christ, not how much we feel like we have in common? (Allow time for any answers that students want to offer and record them on a white board or butcher paper.)

REVIEW: Look back at the list of key words and phrases that we recorded during our Bible readings. What are some do's or don'ts that you want to include in our covenant?

RECORD & DISCUSS the answers given. Read the list back to the group. ASK: What are the three most important to us as a whole group? (Work together to settle on the 3-5 most important to the group. Then write them out like this: "We will build authentic relationships with one another by _____."

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you be a community that reflects the love of Jesus and loves one another deeply—beyond surface level. If you did work on a covenant, ask God to help you live it out by the power of His Holy Spirit within each member.

PART THREE: THE FORGIVENESS FACTOR

LESSON FOCUS: Community in Christ is a place to receive and practice forgiveness.

OPENING ACTIVITIES

Spend 10-20 minutes doing something together at the start of each Community Lesson. For many students doing together can be a more effective way of connecting than talking together. Choose one or two of these games.

1. Unique and Shared

Part One: Have youth form groups of 4-6 people. Pass out sheets of paper and pens. Have the group choose a note taker to create a list of as many things as possible that all members of the group have in common. (Avoid writing things that apply to everyone in the room like "everyone has feet" or "everyone has parents.") Allow five minutes and then have a spokesperson from each group read their list.

Part Two: Have participants stay in the same groups. This time have them come up with things that are unique to each person in the group. (Encourage them to avoid obvious things like "wearing black sandals" and focus on strengths, skills, and qualities.) Have the group help each person come up with their 2 or 3 unique traits. Allow 5 minutes and then have a spokesperson share one unique thing about each person in their group.

2. Honey if you love me

This is a classic game and it requires no props. It just needs a few students who are willing to ham it up. The group starts in a circle with one person in the middle. This person tries to get others to laugh by saying, "Honey if you love me you'll smile." The person on the outside must respond without smiling or laughing saying, "Honey, I love you but I just can't smile." The person in the middle can do various things, without touching anyone, to get another person to smile. If the person does smile then they will become the center person.

LARGE GROUP

REVIEW

SAY: Over the last two weeks we've talked about what sets a community in Christ apart. We've looked at God's Word and seen what it has to say about loving and serving one another in a way that reflects Christ.

ASK: What are some of the characteristics that a community in Christ should strive for according to scripture? (Truth & love, honesty, Genuine love, Actions and truth, consider others' needs before our own, etc.)

ASK: How is community in Christ different from other communities?

A COMMUNITY WHERE WE RECEIVE GRACE

SAY: The very heart of what makes us different as a community is the cross. Each one of us is a broken, imperfect, mistake-making sinner. Each of us receives grace and forgiveness and a clean slate at the foot of the cross. Community in Christ should look different because we are gathered by God himself. Community in Christ should look different because we are gathered among people who are imperfect and fully forgiven.

ASK: What are some things we do in worship on Sunday mornings that highlight this gathering of imperfect, fully forgiven people? (confession & absolution, Communion)

SHOW: a picture of people gathered at a Communion rail and a picture of a pastor announcing absolution to a congregation

SAY: When we are gathered at the Communion rail shoulder to shoulder, each receiving grace and forgiveness in the Sacrament we can be reminded of what makes us a community—grace and forgiveness in Christ. Also during confession and absolution as we all confess our sins together and receive forgiveness we receive God's grace as individuals and as a community.

SAY: What a beautiful picture of the Church! But...it often doesn't look so pretty. The New Testament has a lot to say about conflict. Here are just a few of the passages addressed to Christians...

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger"

Galatians 5:13-15 "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."

James 4:1 "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?"

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you."

1 Corinthians 3:3 "...there is jealousy and strife among you..."

Luke 17:3 "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him"

ASK: Why does the Bible have so much to say about conflict resolution? (Because there was a lot of conflict, even back then!)

SAY: Being a Christian doesn't mean no more conflict or disagreements. It means being forgiven and showing forgiveness. That's how community in Christ is different.

SMALL GROUP

ASK: Almost every one of the Epistles addresses some kind of disagreement among Christians. Does it surprise you that there is so much conflict addressed in the New Testament?

ASK: What kind of stuff do you think early Christians disagreed about?

ASK: What happens in a relationship where conflict or hurts aren't talked about or dealt with? (Consider Ephesians 4:26-27. Why are we encouraged not to let the sun go down when we are angry?)

READ: Matthew 18:15-17.

ASK: What are the steps that Jesus says we should take when we have a conflict with a fellow Christian? (go to them first, then involve others)

ASK: Is that how most teenagers (or for that matter adults) deal with conflicts or hurts? Why not?

ASK: What do we usually do?

ASK: How could relationships among Christians be different if we really practiced Matthew 18?

ASK: When you are the person being confronted, how do you usually feel? How do you respond when someone confronts you? Ideally how should we respond when a fellow Christian confronts us? (Use this as an

opportunity to highlight the importance to listening and not being defensive. We get defensive by nature. How can we be open?)

Consider one of the two options (Act it Out or Youtube It) below to change things up.

ACT IT OUT OPTION: Who Stole My Donut

This is a silly role play activity, but it may help your group to better understand what practicing or not practicing Matthew 18 looks like. Its cheesiness may also ease the tension if there are unspoken conflicts that already exist in the group.

Choose two volunteers who are not afraid to "ham it up" in front of the group. If you have students who do drama or like improv games, this is for them. Take them aside and quickly explain to them that they have a conflict. Suggest that one of them thinks the other stole their donut. Give them a minute to talk about their conflict, who will be the injured party, and how they will act it out. Encourage them to start with one conflict such as Volunteer #2 stole Volunteer #3's donut and then start piling all kinds of other things on top like "he always takes people's stuff" or "one time he borrowed my pen and never returned it" or "he never called me on my birthday!" Tell them to ham it up, but that eventually they will hug and make up to end the role play.

Go back to the rest of the group and ask for a third volunteer. Tell this volunteer and the rest of the group that Volunteer #2 and #3 have a conflict. Volunteer #3's job is to encourage the arguing parties to practice Matthew 18.

The injured party (Volunteer #1) should approach Volunteer #3 and begin accusing and complaining that volunteer #2 stole their donut. Volunteer #3's job is to listen and be loving, but encourage Volunteer #1 to talk directly to Volunteer #2. (Volunteer #1 should have a long list of excuses about why he isn't going to do that. The more they ham it up the better.) Eventually Volunteer #1 should approach Volunteer #3 to lay out his hurt over the stolen donut. This should end in conflict resolution and a hug.

ASK: What things did you observe in the role play? What things felt the most like trying to talk about conflict in real life?

ASK: The donut thing was silly, but what are some more real conflicts (big or small) that we might see in this group?

ASK: How could THIS group be different if we committed to practicing Matthew 18? (Be sure to highlight the need for those not directly involved in the conflict to practice Matthew 18 as well. Instead of taking sides, all group members should encourage grievances to go directly to the person who hurt them. "Just venting" can quickly transition into gossip and lead to destruction in a group.)

YOUTUBE IT VIDEO OPTION: Unmerciful Servant

This option digs deeper into the rest of Matthew 18, looking at the parable of the unmerciful servant. WATCH: a version of the Unmerciful servant from Youtube. There are several. Consider this version where little kids retell the story from memory and adults act it out. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEGTLbW_L00 It's funny, which will re-engage some wandering minds, and it's interesting to see how small children understand this parable.

DISCUSS the video briefly and then READ Matthew 18:21-35.

ASK: Have you heard this parable before? What was the main point that Jesus was trying to make?

ASK: Why do you think Peter asked the question in the first place?

ASK: Why does the servant's unwillingness to forgive seem so ridiculous?

ASK: What does this parable tell us about why we should forgive others?

READ: Colossians 3:12-15. Here we see yet another community of Christians, this time from the city of Colossae, being encouraged to resolve conflict.

ASK: What are the attitudes and actions that the Colossians are encouraged to have in community? What makes this difficult to do at times?

ASK: Who is it most difficult for you to forgive?

ASK: How are we supposed to forgive? (As we have been forgiven)

Gathering Connection: In the book of Philippians Paul says, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. I ask you also, true companion, to help these women..." These ladies were in some kind of disagreement that made Paul say, "Somebody step in and help them work it out!"

ASK: Matthew 18 says that it is sometimes necessary to bring another person in. Why is it sometimes necessary to involve someone else in a conflict? How should that best be handled?

SAY: God asks us to forgive as the Lord forgives, not as that person deserves. Forgiveness is not easy. The key is to realize that you are an imperfect, sinful, selfish person who doesn't deserve forgiveness and yet has been forgiven of ALL our ugliness by God through Jesus Christ. We can forgive because we are forgiven. This isn't always easy, but it is key for a community that continues serves and loves one another.

OPTION: COVENANT WRITING

Leader Note: A series on community is a great time to have a group do some covenant writing and consider what promises they want to make to one another and what guidelines they may like to set for a community in Christ together.

Step Three: Dealing with Disagreements

Read through the covenant as it exists from the previous two weeks.

SAY: Two weeks ago we began writing a covenant—a document of promise—about how we want this community to look different than the other communities of which we are a part. First we worked and said "We want this community to be a place that is _____." (Read your statement from the week one.)

Last week we talked about some of the actions we want in this group. We said "We will build authentic relationships with one another by _____."

SAY: Tonight we'll talk about how we want to deal with disagreements and conflict in this group.

ASK: How will we practice forgiveness in this group? How will we keep this group healthy, not falling into gossiping or cliques? (record their answers)

ASK: What will we do when someone in the group breaks this covenant? Are there any instances of breaking this covenant that should involve consequences? What should they be? (Leaders: While it is important for buy-in that this be their covenant, not your list of rules, be sure that any concerns or consequences that are important to you are a part of this covenant. You want this to be a document that helps you deal with issues within the group or poor behavior in the future. Be honest with that about students.)

Tip: Following this week's covenant work have one of the students make a colorful poster with the covenant (or type and blow it up) so that the covenant can be easily viewable and referenced in the group.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Ask God to help your group grow in love for one another. Pray for courage for students to talk about some of the stuff they might be struggling with in a relationship with another student. Pray for God to give open ears and open hearts to listen if they are the one who has hurt another.