



## **Leader Development Topic #3: *Cultivating Healthy Community***

### **Introduction:**

A healthy, Christ-centered community helps us grow our faith and is an integral part of the Christian life. To cultivate healthy relationships, we need to establish who we are as brothers and sisters in Christ and what it means to belong to the family of God. This is especially important as we learn to navigate conflict well while caring deeply for one another in good times and challenging ones.

### **Bridge Group Goal:** *Engage in Community*

Bridge Groups have 3 goals: Experience the Gospel, Engage in Community, and Equip one another as Bridge Builders. Groups are engaging in community as they work to cultivate healthy community, where the church sees lives transformed and operating as the loving family of God.

### **The Character of Christ: Hospitality**

Hospitality is rooted in the Greek words “love” and “stranger” and therefore it means “the love of strangers”. We see Jesus being hospitable to nearly everyone that He meets: the woman at the well; the man who begs Him to heal his daughter; the Syrophenician woman or even the disciples—and these are just a few examples. His ultimate act of hospitality is that He made a way to welcome anyone who believes in Him into His family through His death and resurrection.

As Christ followers, we must live our lives with a posture of loving the stranger. Perhaps looks like making a home-cooked meal or offering assistance to someone who is sick. Even though Jesus didn’t have a home, He always found a way to set aside His own needs and interests for the sake of another’s. He showed that hospitality isn’t a set of actions; instead it is a way of living.

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone*



*should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.  
(Philippians 2:1-4).*

Jesus clearly says in Matthew 22:36-40, that the greatest commands are to love God and to love others as yourself. We must intentionally bring this way of living into our communities, and specifically into our Bridge Groups.

**Questions:**

1. Who is someone in your life who has welcomed you in? What do you remember about how they put aside their own needs to make yours a priority?
2. What other examples in Scripture does Jesus exude hospitality?
3. How can my Bridge Group be a community that loves others as a way of life?

**Leader Development: Cultivating Healthy Community**

*Building a Church Family*

Our families of origin have instilled in us preset biases, perspectives, and often habitual behavior. Maybe our family was religious, hardworking, or enjoyed good fun or delicious food. All of these experiences affect the way we interpret the world around us. Establishing a family identity helps answer the questions “What kind of people are we? How do we act?”

When we meet Jesus and trust Him with our lives, we are adopted into God’s family through His sacrifice on the cross. Our old family identity must be replaced with a new family identity having Kingdom values. We then ask ourselves the questions, “As followers of Jesus, what kind of people are we? How does the family of God act?” There is no better place to look than Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to find our new identity in God’s family.

In Matthew 4-6, we discover that God’s family members are people who:



*Take God's commands seriously.  
Reconcile as quickly as possible.  
Are careful to obey God in our sexuality, even with glances and thoughts.  
Remain faithful to our spouses.  
Keep our word and have no need to make oaths.  
Love our enemies and pray for them.  
Seek to be rewarded by God instead of by people.  
Forgive others because we have been forgiven so much by our Father.<sup>1</sup>*

As we come together in God's family and experience life together, the natural outpouring is a healthy, Christ-like character transformation. Our lives as followers of Jesus, within His family, are to be devoted to the building up of one another to become more and more like Christ each day. God's adoption of us into His family replaces our family identities with His vision of who we are and how to live.

### *Navigating Conflict & Caring for One Another*

As a healthy community, we must be prepared when reality doesn't meet expectation. We should boldly face opportunities to properly address conflict, and provide support to those in need or facing a difficult season of life. Paul encourages the Church to operate in this way: *"That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together,"* (1 Cor. 12:25-27).

Paul puts it another way in the book of Galatians when he writes: *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are in the Spirit should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2).* Paul expects that we were going to transgress and hurt one another and need to help one another when we're burdened, and yet we are still commanded to be united and care for one another in times of joy and suffering. This can be challenging but two things can help.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks, *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2020).



One is to know the difference between loads and burdens. Loads are the normal day-to-day responsibilities that each person carries, but burdens are the responsibilities which are more than our load and often occur because of something beyond our control like illness, job loss or other unexpected tragedies. There are the places where communities can help step in to help carry things for one another for a season.

Another key to navigating conflict and caring well for one another is establishing healthy boundaries. Boundaries between group members help define what people are comfortable with in the groups' relationships and how people would like to be treated by others. Defining some boundaries ahead of time can help prevent conflict and aid in how we care well for others. When there isn't the stress of a conflict or someone in deep need, take the time to talk as a group about some boundaries such as when and how often you will spend time together or even what kind of support people can expect from one another.

**Reflection:**

1. Think back on distinctive qualities of your family growing up. How did those qualities manifest in everyday life?
2. How do the qualities of God's family from the Sermon on the Mount manifest in everyday life?
3. What other examples in Scripture help define a healthy, Christ-Centered community?
4. What insights for navigating conflict and carrying one another's burdens are given in Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 12 & 13, and Galatians 6:1-10?
5. What are some practical boundaries to while we provide care for those in our Bridge Groups and sometimes navigate conflict?