

Week 1- Community

Lesson Leader Guide: Importance of Community

- The Story of Mary & Elizabeth, Luke 1:26 - 45
- Opening Questions
 - Think of your best friend—why are they your best friend?
- Context to Provide
 - In Jewish law, a woman who had sex outside of wedlock was to be stoned (Leviticus 20). The pregnancy of a “virgin” would have been proof of immorality.
 - Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant and had previously been told that her childbirth in old age was to prepare the way for the Lord (Luke 1:5 - 23). She had never been able to conceive so was also new to being a mother
- Discussion Questions
 - What is the sign the angel gives Mary as proof of what he is saying?
 - If this is confusing, follow up: where does Mary go right after this message from the angel?
 - What is Mary’s response to what the Angel tells her?
 - What is Elizabeth’s reaction to Mary when she arrives?
 - Why do you think the Holy Spirit would have Elizabeth tell this to Mary?
 - How did Elizabeth encourage Mary?
- Application Questions
 - How have you been encouraged by friends in the past when you were going through hard times?
 - How have you encouraged friends who were struggling?
 - Why is it important to have support?
 - What support do you wish you had?
 - How can we be that support for each other?

1. The Trinity

Verse	Devotional Content
John 14:15-20 "If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."	The Trinity is one of the greatest mysteries in our Christian faith. We all know there is a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but we will spend our whole lives learning and trying to understand how God can be three-in-one. It's not something we will ever fully understand. What we know from the Trinity, however, is that God starts with community. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully connected. God values community. He models it for us in the Trinity itself. According to Jesus's words in these verses, we can see a couple of things about the Trinity. 1. Jesus asks his Father and his Father is the one who sends. 2. The Holy Spirit will NEVER leave us and He lives in us. 3. Jesus may have left Earth, but he will return. Each part of God in the Trinity serves a different function in our lives. God the Father sends and does and acts in our lives. Jesus came to die for our sins and rose again so that we may have eternal life. He is coming again to restore his kingdom on earth one day. The Holy Spirit is with us currently and lives in us to guide us and to be our helper. We have a powerful God who through the community of his three-in-one nature meets ALL of our needs. God is sufficient for you and wants you to see the value of community. We need Him and we need each other. Reflect: How do you view the Trinity? How does this affect your daily life? Apply: How can you invest in our church community? Reach out to someone in the group and tell them how you want to grow our community.

2. The Body

Verse	Devotional Content
1 Corinthians 12:12-18	Whenever you get a cold, don't you just long to be able to breathe normally? You

“The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.”	always take for granted your body parts until one of them is not operating the way it should. The Christian body is also something we often take for granted. We do this in two ways, first by not fulfilling our role. This passage says that God has put each part of the body (each of us) where He wants it. Each and every person has a specific purpose in the body. As women, we can often feel that we are not needed. Someone else will do it or we are not the ones preaching so we aren't valuable. That is a LIE from an enemy who is SCARED of what you can do for the kingdom of God. We ALL have a purpose in the body of Christ and when we don't fulfill our purpose, the body does not operate the way it should. Secondly, we don't think we're part of the body at all. If you have been saved and made new, you are a part of the body of Christ. Even if you don't feel like you are or feel like you are qualified. Each and every Christian is <i>essential</i> to God's plan and His work. He gave you specific gifts and talents and they are designed to work together with the gifts of your brothers and sisters in the body. We are each necessary in the body and the body needs ALL of us to function the way that it should. Reflect: When you think about the body of Christ, do you feel like you have a role? Why or why not? Apply: What gifts do you see in yourself that can be used in the body of believers? How can you use those this week? If you don't feel like you have any gifts, reach out to a friend and ask them! Sometimes it's hard to see our good qualities.
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3. The Church

Verse	Devotional Content
Ephesians 2:19-22 “So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's	Think of a time when you did not feel like you did not belong. How did it feel? Did it make you sad? Mad? Did you feel alone? Unfortunately, almost everyone has felt this way before. Maybe it's in the school cafeteria, on the bus, or maybe in your own family. Perhaps it's even been at church. Scripture is clear, even if people have not been in your life— <i>you BELONG to Christ</i>. He has made you a part of His family. You

family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.”	belong in the Church. You are welcome here. You are valued here. You are a member of this family. This passage says that “we are carefully joined together in him.” This means that it is not just by chance or by accident. God is bringing us together and uniting us in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God brought you into his family on purpose and he is bringing us together on purpose. Nothing can change his plan for us or the fact that you belong here. Sometimes God’s people don’t act like God, remember that we are all sinners. It does not mean that you don’t belong. It means that we ALL need Jesus. The church is supposed to be the “dwelling where God lives;” we are His home. WE– all of us. Let’s live in the unity that we have because we are all His. Reflect: Think of a time when you felt rejected by others. What did you think about them and yourself at that moment? Think about a time when you felt accepted by others. What did you think about them and yourself at that moment? Apply: How can we make others feel included in the Church? What action steps can you take this week to do this?
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4. Sisters in Christ

Verse	Devotional Content
Hebrews 10:24-25 “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”	Women are especially good at supporting each other. We’re also especially good at tearing one another down. We see this all the time in the world around us. Just think about Mean Girls. The whole movie is about women being cruel to one another. We should look different from the world– in our friend groups and outside of them. It is one thing to support our friends, it’s another to support ALL women in Christ. The only way we can live out these verses from Hebrews is if we put forth <i>effort</i>. The verse says, “let us <i>think</i> of ways.” That is not a casual action. That is something you sit down and think about ahead of time. These are not simple things done at the last minute. It requires a strategy and a plan, and it takes time and actually trying. We have to show up and be in community consistently. We have to

	not neglect one another. This looks like checking in regularly and listening when we ask “how are you” and going out of our way to encourage each other. And this applies to ALL of our sisters in Christ, not just the ones we’re already friends with, but the quiet girls in the back of class too. We need to be there for people, even if they haven’t been there for us. The only way to create change is to be the change. Even if that doesn’t feel fair or easy, it is what Jesus would do and an incredible way he can move through us. Reflect: How have you been encouraged by your sisters in Christ? How have you encouraged your sisters in Christ? Apply: Reach out to a girl in the youth group you have not in the past and encourage her.
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5. Vulnerability

Verse	Devotional Content
James 5:16 “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”	Confession is liberating. Have you ever felt that sense of relief after you admit how you feel or apologize for something you did? Confession is necessary for our souls. We of course need to confess to God, but can I tell you that change normally starts when we voice it out loud to each other? I dealt with the sin of masturbation for years and I confessed hundreds of times to God, but everything changed when I was at a camp and heard a girl confess it out loud to <i>everyone</i>. I was shocked. I was shaken to my very core. That was the first time I realized that other believers could struggle the way I did. I confessed my sin the next day and that was the first time I had felt freedom in YEARS. It didn’t mean that I never struggled with that sin again but it was the beginning of my healing. For the first time, I had hope that I could change. Confession and prayer will change many things– let’s do that for each other. Reflect: What is a sin that you’ve been holding onto and have not been confessing?

	Apply: Choose a safe person and confess to them.
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Week 2- Vulnerability & Authenticity

Lesson Leader Guide: The importance of being vulnerable and authentic

- Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, John 4:1-30
- Context to Provide
 - Samaritans were half Jews and half Gentiles. They were rejected and hated by Jews and would be actively avoided by Jews, so the very fact that Jesus wanted to walk through Samaria was weird.
 - Women gathered water together (for safety) and in the morning (when it was cooler), so the fact that she is there at midday ALONE is suspicious.
- Opening Questions
 - What does vulnerability mean?
 - What does it mean to be authentic?
 - Who is the most authentic person you know? What makes them authentic?
- Discussion Questions
 - What is the woman's reaction to Jesus talking to her?
 - Is Jesus talking literally? Does the woman think that he is?
 - Why does Jesus ask her about her husband? Why do you think he asks her?
 - What is the woman's reaction to Jesus knowing about her life? Why does she ask him that question?
 - What does the woman do when Jesus reveals he is the Messiah? Why is this significant?
- Application Questions
 - What does it mean to you that God knows ALL that you have done? Is that scary or reassuring? Why?
 - Have you ever been vulnerable with a friend? What was the result?
 - What do you need in a friendship in order to feel safe to be vulnerable?
 - How can we create a space for vulnerability and authenticity in our group?

1. God knows ALL things

Verse	Devotional Content
Psalm 139:1-2 “O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.”	When I was younger I doubted that God <i>really knew EVERYTHING</i> I did. Like I knew He was all-knowing and that He had the ability to know everything, but I doubted that He really cared enough to pay attention to me. That was both a comforting and disheartening thought. Comforting because there were some things that I didn’t want God to pay attention to, and disheartening because I struggled to believe that my creator really cared about me. Let me be the first to tell you, God loves you <i>so much</i>. He knows EVERYTHING about you and STILL loves you. He has examined your heart. He knows every thought you’ve ever had and will ever have. He knows ALL that and STILL sent his Son to die for <u>you</u>. God knows everything but His love for will never decrease. You can trust in His knowledge of you AND His love for you. Reflect: How does it make you feel that God knows everything? Is that comforting? Scary? Why? Apply: Regardless of the last time you prayed or talked to God, write Him a letter telling Him how you feel about Him. Be honest and say everything. He knows it all anyway.

2. We are ALL sinners

Verse	Devotional Content
Romans 3:23 “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”	We are all sinners. This is something you know if you have grown up in church, but is it something we really understand? What is sin? According to 1 John 3:4, sin is breaking God’s Law or going against God. Anything we do that is contrary to what God wants for His people is sin. The book of Romans is clear– we have ALL sinned. We are all in need of salvation because we have all gone against God. We have all lied or cheated or been unkind. We have all desired something that was not ours.

	We have all said something about someone else (gossip). Because we are all sinners, no one's sin is worse than another. We are ALL in need of Jesus to make us right with God. I have often fallen into the trap of comparison. At some points in my life, I have felt that my sin was not “as bad” as someone else’s so I did not need God as much or to confess as much as somebody else. At other points in my life, I have felt that my sin was much worse than anyone else’s and that there was no way that God could forgive me. Both of these are lies from an enemy who wants you to feel like you don’t need God OR that He can’t help you. The only answer to ALL sin is to run to our Father who can cleanse us and heal us through His Son’s death and resurrection. Trust me when I say that admitting that A. You’re a sinner B. You need God C. God wants you will change your life. We have to remember that this is true of ALL people. EVERYONE has sinned. We have to point others and ourselves to this truth. Reflect: Are you more likely to believe that your sin isn’t <i>that bad</i> or that God can’t/won’t forgive your sins? Apply: Write a prayer to God and ask forgiveness for your sins, whatever they are—regardless of if you think they are not that bad OR too bad.
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3. What is shame?

Verse	Devotional Content
Genesis 3:6-7 “The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she	Did you know that we were never meant to feel shame? Shame did not exist in the Garden before Eve and Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We were never made to feel shame. We were never meant to bear that load. So what is shame? As one of my favorite Christian authors, Christine Caine says, “Shame is the fear of being unworthy, and it adversely affects our relationship with God, others, and ourselves.” You may have felt guilt before; shame is different.

gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. <i>At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.</i> So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.”	Guilt says “I did something bad,” but shame says, “I am bad.” Shame lies to us and tells us that no one, not even God can truly love us and accept us. Shame in the garden drove Adam and Eve to hide from God, and it does the same thing in our lives today. We hide away our dirty secrets from God and others. We feel isolated and way too broken for anyone to care, accept us, and especially not fix us. Shame whispers, “it’s too late now” and “you will never change” and “if anyone knew, they would reject you.” Shame is one of the enemy's biggest tools because it isolates us from community and it isolates us from God. Know that shame, regardless of its source, is a lie. Sometimes we feel shame over something that happened to us, brokenness, and sin that was committed against us. Sometimes we feel shame because of something that we did. I promise that in either instance, God is way bigger than your shame. He wants you to bring it to Him. He wants to heal you and help you and replace the lies of shame with the truth of Grace. Reflect: Are you holding onto any shame? Do you believe that you are bad/unforgivable/uniquely broken and that no one can fix it? Apply: Write a prayer asking God to speak truth into any lies that shame is breeding in your heart and mind. Ask him to help you examine your heart and reveal any brokenness, hurt, or sin that is causing any feelings of shame.
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4. Exposure

Verse	Devotional Content
Ephesians 5:13-14 “But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, ‘Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’”	In looking at shame yesterday, you may have wondered, but how do I overcome these feelings of shame? The only treatment for shame is exposure. The only way to overcome those lies of unworthiness is to hold them up to the light. Scripture says that Jesus is the light of God. He will expose what is untrue in your life. He will expose the lies of shame. Confessing and naming it to God is 100% the first step in the battle against shame. However, I also encourage you to tell a safe person. Sometimes we can confess to God but we keep it “between us,” and it

	remains hidden even if we tell Him. As scary as it is, telling another believer is one of the best things you can do in fighting your struggles, especially with shame. Speaking your shame out loud allows the lie that you will be rejected or that it's too much for someone else to be proven false. We know that God will always love and accept us (at least we know that it is in our heads, whether we truly believe it or not is another matter), but it is harder to believe a human will. Speaking your shame to another believer allows them to love you as God does in a way that is easy to see and feel. The light makes everything visible and helps us to see we are not alone. God loves us and has put people in our lives to show us His unconditional love. Reflect: Have you had someone tell you something and it made you feel better because you felt the same way? Have you ever heard a speaker/preacher talk about something and it made you feel less alone because you had felt those same things? Apply: As scary as it is, share something that you are <i>actively</i> struggling with a safe person. Text them, call them, talk to them in person, but write the name of that person and commit to talking to them today.
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5. Being Safe People

Verse	Devotional Content
Proverbs 16:28 "A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends."	Have you ever shared something with a friend and they blabbed about it to others? How did it make you feel? When we share something personal and sensitive, even if it doesn't feel like a big deal to someone else, and they tell someone else, it completely destroys the view and trust we have in that person. It feels like a betrayal and we cannot trust them ever again. Have you ever been told something and then shared it with someone else? Did the person who told you become upset with you? What was the impact on your relationship with that person?

	We all need safe people. Safe people are those friends in our life who we could call for anything and tell anything, and they would keep it safe and give us good Godly advice. A true friend will keep your struggles and heartaches safe. They won't gossip about you. We need those safe people who we can confess to and talk about God with. Not only will safe people keep what we tell them to themselves, but they will also, more importantly, point us to God in response to our pain and struggles. The best safe person you can have is trustworthy and pursuing the Lord. In order to find safe people, it is important to first be a safe person for others as well. I used to struggle with feeling like I had no friends who were really safe, but I had to take a step back and ask if I was a safe friend. In some instances I was not. God calls us to be kind, supportive, and safe for our fellow sisters in Christ. That's what we should all try to do, with no exceptions. Reflect: Do you have a safe person in your life? Are you a safe person for anyone? Apply: Brainstorm at least one way we can be safe people for everyone in this group. Brainstorm at least one way you can be a safe person for the people in your life.
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Weeks 3-6 in Progress!