



Fuel Week 2008
Sunday Morning Lesson

Students Should

Learn:

1. We are called to be a part of a holy community, and we are stronger when we participate with a community.
2. The characteristics of such a community are inclusiveness, safety, and healing; students can seek these traits in their community of faith even now.

Scripture Focus:

- Philippians 1:27—2:4
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 21–27
- Isaiah 11:1–10

What You'll Need for this Lesson:

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- 6-foot high rope strung across the room with a blanket over top, or other such “barrier”
- Bread and juice for the Lord’s Supper (according to your church tradition)

Better Together

Lesson Background:

A friend of mine recently coerced me into signing up for an online community site. You know the ones—along the lines of MySpace, Facebook, and Xanga, this is a social networking site that promises to keep you connected. I will be honest, I never felt the urge to connect with those high school friends who are better left in high school. Or the girl from college who sat on the other side in one of my classes—what was her maiden name? But after a few months, I am learning the value of such websites. Yes, there are the random people I am sure I have never met (yet we share the same high school graduation info), but there are also the friends I would have otherwise lost track of. And even if we are not keeping in touch per se, I like to have some idea of what is going on in their lives, even if it is in the form of catchy tag lines and newly posted pictures.

There is perhaps no greater buzzword these days than *community*. In our super-sonic age of MySpace, texting, and blogs, people seem more connected than ever. But the question is this: with all our attempts at connecting, are we truly creating community? I suggest that before we can answer this question, we need to ask a more fundamental question: Do we even understand what true community *is*? I think, sadly, the answer is often *no*—we do not know what makes a true, biblical community, let alone how to encourage and participate in one.

Central to Christianity is the concept of community: as believers, we form a Body. And as a Body, we work together to accomplish the work of Christ through the unique gifting of the Holy Spirit. But is it possible that apart from the body, we can do nothing? What is the purpose of a finger without the hand, tendons, muscles, and brain to move it? So in our journey to re-imagine holiness, it follows that we must examine the role of community in coming to a deeper life of love and service.

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As we seek to become holy people, we are drawn into relationship with a holy God. We know that we are created in the very image of this God, and as we commune more and more with God, we begin to take on character traits of Jesus—God in flesh. As we take on God’s character, we begin to understand that the godhead *is community*: we serve a God that is three-in-one. So as holy people, we are designed for community. It is woven into our fabric, so to speak.

We will take a look at three passages in an effort to help students understand first, why community is important; and second, what a holy community might look like. In Philippians we will learn the importance of unity and harmony within a group—that a group must support one another from within if they are to have any influence in their larger context. Next, in 1 Corinthians, we will read about the Body of Christ. We are all gifted differently in order to support the whole body. No part is better or less important than any other part. (What a fabulous message for teenagers!) Finally, in Isaiah we will learn what such a community could look like: the wolf lying down with the lamb, the lion living alongside the calf—all led by a child. The characteristics of this community are inclusiveness, safety, and healing.

My prayer is that you and your students will catch a vision of what it means to be holy people seeking to live in community as a means to bring about the ways of the Kingdom. For truly that is what we are called to do as Christ-followers. It is important to take the concept of community out of the realm of MySpace and into more tangible, biblical terms. Though, it will always be fun to see the latest pictures from Random High School Friend’s summer vacation. Enjoy!

The Lesson

Introduction

Electric Fence

In this activity, the goal is to get everyone in the group to cross above a six-foot-high barrier. To define the barrier, you may choose to string up a rope between two posts and hang a blanket over the rope, but feel free to use what is most accessible. However, it is important to note the height of the barrier: no one should be able to jump over on his/her own.

Explain that every person in the group must get from one side of the barrier to the other—*without touching it*. (It is permissible for the group to choose to leave one person behind for the sake of getting the rest across.) If any part of any person touches the blanket/barrier at any time (the *electric fence*), the entire group must start over. Start over as many times as time allows until the task is completed. Designate yourself or another leader to serve as a “line judge.” You will see that this activity encourages teamwork,

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trust, and problem-solving. You will likely notice that students' specific strengths come out: leadership, flexibility, strategy, physical ability, and so forth. After completing the activity, discuss the following:

- **Ultimately, how did you work it out to complete the task?**
- If the task took several tries due to starting over, ask, **How did it feel every time you had to start over?**
- **What positive things can you say about individuals in the group after completing the activity?** Answers could be such as *Tim was good at figuring out our next move; Jackie was good at encouraging others; We couldn't have done it without Mike as the base on the first side; and so on.*
- **After the activity, how do you feel about the group as a whole?**

Explain that this activity was designed to show the importance of working together as a group. We can accomplish more as a community than we can as individuals. Say, **Today we will take a look at how the concept of community plays a role in our call to be holy people, and perhaps stretch our ideas of what such a community might look like.**

Dig In

Read the Word

Say, **In his book *Everyday Saint*, Jim Hampton makes this statement: “We as individuals do not mature; rather the community of which we are a part matures, and we then are drawn into the growth of the community” (pg. 89).** Invite students to divide up into pairs or threes and discuss their thoughts on the above statement. After a few minutes, ask the groups to come back together and share what they discussed. Say in your own words, **Let's take a look at the biblical basis for such a statement.**

Ask students to turn to Philippians 1:27—2:4. Invite one student to read the passage aloud. Explain that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to a specific church in the town of Philippi while he was in prison. The church was experiencing a lot of strife, both from within the community and from outside persecution. Then discuss the following:

- **What was Paul calling the people to do?** He was calling them to stand together in agreement with the message of the gospel in order to face any persecution from the outside. He was also calling them to be in agreement with one another over the purpose of their community—in short, to work together and, therefore, look out for each other's interests before the interests of any individual.
- **How would others know that God was on their side?** If they would stand in agreement with one another as a united front.
- **Why should the people seek to be united with one**

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another? Because they experience encouragement, joy, love, compassion, and other good things from being together.

- **Why are selfish ambition and vain conceit things to be concerned about?** These are not outward-focused qualities, they are self-focused. True community cannot exist in the presence of selfishness.
- **From this passage, why is it important to be a part of God's community?** The community provides protection from harm, as well as strength in the knowledge that no one is left alone in the walk with Christ. Also, being a part of the community means that no one is overlooked—everyone is valued and loved.
- **Why is it important for there to be harmony within the community?** Paul knew that no community can withstand persecution if there is division within the group itself. When there is good in the community, there is good for its individual members.

Now invite your students to turn to 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 21–27 and read the verses aloud. Then discuss the following:

- **Sum up the passages in your own words.** Each one of us works differently and has different strengths, but it is the same God and Holy Spirit working in each one of us. We need one another so that we can function as an entire body of believers. No person is better than any other. Combined we can do more than we can apart.
- **What does this say about the weaker and stronger parts?** There is no such thing as weaker or stronger: all parts need one another equally.
- **What does this say about division within the group?** There is no division because God brings all the parts together. God is the author of community.
- **Now, given these passages, why is it that maturity comes through community?** We are better together. A community should draw everyone in so that the successes, hopes, and fears of the individual cannot happen apart from the successes, hopes, and fears of the community. God created us to need one another in order to be complete.

To sum it up, read the following from *Everyday Saint* (pg. 91):

“I think that the process of sanctification [being made holy] is much like this. The equipment for maturity is only available within the community. The graces for spiritual maturing are distributed throughout the community in the form of complimentary gifts. Each member has an essential gift which it is their privilege to exercise within that community. In order for us to mature into the people Christ has called us to be, it is essential that we learn to function as a community.”

(Note: if you are with a group that meets on a regular basis,

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consider using this lesson as a starting place for further study on spiritual gifts and their role in one's life and community.)

Say in your own words, **Now let's see what this kind of holy community might look like.** Ask your students to turn to Isaiah 11:1–10; invite a student to read the passage aloud. Then discuss the following:

- **What are some characteristics of this community?** In *Everyday Saint* we read about three characteristics of this kind of community: it is inclusive, safe, and a place of healing.
- **From this passage, how can we tell that a holy community is inclusive?** The leader does not judge on the basis of what he or she sees or hears; rather, he or she judges fairly for all. The wolf and lamb are together; a child is the leader. All images are of opposites that come together in the safety of community.
- **How might our community be more inclusive?** Encourage your students to be creative in their answers. A community can be inclusive in terms of how people treat social standing, school attended, religious beliefs, gender, interest, and so forth.
- **A holy community is also safe. Where do we see examples of safety in this passage?** The wolf and the lion do not harm other animals; the cobra does not harm the infant, and the child does not get bitten by the viper. Verse 9 says that “they will neither harm nor destroy.”
- **How might our community be safer?** Remind your students that safety is more than just a physical thing. It also means a lack of harmful conflict. Additionally, it is just as important to feel safe *emotionally*. An emotionally-safe community is one that is encouraging and loving toward all, with no fear of rumors or thought of reputation.
- **A holy community is also a place of healing. How do we see this in the passage?** Because there is no harm or destruction, there is an opportunity for those who are hurting to heal from their wounds without fear of further harm. Further, the community fosters a sense of change in those who typically cause harm toward others. In a sense, this is a form of emotional healing.
- **How might our community be one of healing?** By being inclusive and accepting people without question, a community can sow the seeds of healing. Love is the greatest salve for a hurting soul.

Wrap Up

Pass out paper and pens or pencils. Then share the following excerpt from *Everyday Saint* (pg. 94):

“In our churches, both individually and collectively, we need to submit ourselves to the Spirit's work, allowing Him to change our intentions, realign our priorities, and adjust

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our attitudes so that we begin to see others the way Jesus sees them. Only then will we respond in the same way He did—with love, compassion, and justice.”

Invite your students to write the following two sets of words on the paper, leaving space to write after each: *intentions*, *priorities*, *attitudes*; and *love*, *compassion*, *justice*. In the first set, ask the students to answer the following questions for each word.

Encourage them to think about the faith community of which they are a part (youth group, church, or other group), and jot down any notes or thoughts on the paper.

- **What is my community’s focus in this area?** For example, what would you say are the youth group’s main intentions? Is it to spread the love of Christ, or to come together and hang out?
- **What might my community change in this area in order to more closely resemble a *holy* community?** For example, with intention, you might choose to post a mission statement so all members of the community can learn it and agree together in purpose.

In the second set, ask your students to think about the following question, again writing down any thoughts or notes on the paper:

How can my community seek growth in this area?

Finally, ask your students to discuss the following quote from *Everyday Saint*: “The true obstacle to unity, and consequently to holiness, is not the presence of legitimate differences of opinion but self-centeredness” (pg. 92). Invite students to be honest with themselves about their own self-centeredness. You may choose to allow time for individual prayer.

Closing

Explain that one of the greatest tools we have for participating together in a holy community is to share the Lord’s Supper. As preparation, take time to listen to one another’s prayer requests, and spend time in prayer together. As you share the elements according to your church tradition, do so with an awareness that you are participating in Christ’s greatest act of justice and compassion on behalf of others.