

## *Summer of Personal Worship*

### **WEEK 6 - Community**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was executed by The Gestapo in 1945, wrote in his book *Life Together* that “The first service one owes to others in a community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. God’s love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives God’s Word, but also lends us God’s ear.”

We do God’s work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them” (*Life Together*)

This week we will focus on community, which we can find in our church, the neighbourhood we live in, and our workplace. Basically it is the place where we encounter people whom we have something in common. We have the ability to influence those in our community by our words and actions and if we desire any type of relationship with them we need to intentionally acknowledge their existence. As Bonhoeffer suggests, the greatest thing we can do for those in our community is to listen them into existence. If we put aside our phones for a while, turn off our TV, and go listen we will be pleased with whom God has placed in community with us.

Being in community is God’s desire for humanity. He wants us to live in harmony where we express AGAPE type love and unselfishly seek to positively interact with others. Humanity has been infected by generations and generations of self-pleasing habits and so loving others as God desires is not our first response. We need God’s grace and fruit of the Holy Spirit in order to love as God calls us to love.

We should desire community and not run from it. We are uniquely made to worship God and be a blessing to others and function best when we are in harmonious relationship with others. Spend time over the next week to talk with God about how you can be an ear or hands to someone in your community.

#### **Day 1**

Community is where we can grow, see God’s hands and work, and experience love that we have never imagined. It is the place where we use our blessings to honour God and help His creation move closer to Him. Like Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are to be in harmonious relationship with others, not seeking our own will or desires but seeking to offer unconditional love.

Review the material below (scripture, reflection video, praise song and prayer) so as to prepare yourself for the upcoming week. Take some time to reflect on each piece and consider revisiting them from time to time during the week. Let them speak to your heart about the need to share Jesus with the lost.

#### **SCRIPTURE - I John 4:11 (New International Version)**

*“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*

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### **REFLECTION VIDEO – *Do community***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPlxwOMzR3w>

### **PRAISE SONG – *If we are the body***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4kTivO3uqI>

**PRAYER** - Read and reflect on this prayer (from Street Psalms) while asking God to turn your heart to those outside your door:

*“Wonderful God, with all our hearts and with all our minds, we pray to you. We pray for your peace from above, for your loving-kindness, and for the salvation of our souls. We pray for our community, and for those who live in it. We pray for the aged and infirm, for the widowed and orphans, and for the sick and the suffering. We pray for the poor and the oppressed, for the unemployed and the destitute, and for prisoners and captives and for all who remember and care for them. We pray that we and others may end our lives in faith and hope. Defend us, deliver us, and in your compassion protect us, O Lord, by your grace. AMEN”*

### **Day 2 - Who is my neighbour?**

By definition a neighbour is someone who lives close by you, but "close" is a relative term. For the city dweller, the neighbour is probably someone in the next apartment, but for the urban family, the neighbor is a bit further away. And for those who live out in rural areas, the neighbour may live a mile or two away. We have ideas as to what constitutes a good neighbour based on whether they are friendly, considerate and whether they respect our space and privacy. We may consider someone a good neighbor if they wave at us, stop to pet our dog and chat, and buy lemonade from our children. They take time to talk and smile and hopefully reach out to connect to you. Those who fall under this understanding of neighbour are individuals each of us can positively influence by showing Gods love to them. It doesn't require us to do much more than be willing to talk and listen and be willing to see them as individuals in need of God grace and hope.

The Gospel of Luke contains a story about the Good Samaritan which starts off with an expert in the law asking Jesus “and who is my neighbour?” Jesus offers a scenario about the neighbour being someone not meeting the definition in the first paragraph above. They are individuals we could encounter during our day-to-day activities. They are the person sitting in the bus near us who we see each morning on our ride to work but never make eye contact with. They are the ones who hold empty cups on street corners hoping a passer-by will drop some spare change into it. They go to our food banks, use our shelters, are incarcerated, sick in hospital, or locked away in a room in a senior centre waiting for the family visit that will never happen. Jesus shares that our neighbours are those around us who could use an ear to listen to them, a shoulder to cry on or arms to hug them.

Read and mediate on today's scripture. Speak with God about how you can be a good neighbour not only to those who live near you but to those you may encounter during your day. Then watch

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for those He places in your path and offer them a simple act of kindness that lets them know that their neighbour cares for them.

*“No one should seek their own good, but the good of others” 1 Corinthians 10:24*

### **Day 3 - Blessings others**

Blessings, simply put, are acts or words that are conducive to the happiness or welfare of someone else. Scripture makes it clear that God blesses us not so we can live with greed, but so we can bless others.

You know what acts of kindness can bring a smile to the faces of others, but are you willing to do them? Read and meditate on today’s scripture and then reflect ways you can bless others. Ask God to give you the courage and desire to step up your game and do something to bless your neighbour.

*“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever”.*

*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God” 2 Corinthians 9:8-11.*

### **Day 4 - Stewardship**

Have you read the opening verses to the 24<sup>th</sup> Psalm and reflected on what those words mean? The psalmist writes: *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”*. Basically we own nothing. God owns everything from the oxygen we breathe to live, to the water we shower with. He owns our money, our homes, our goods, our family, and even our pets. So what are we doing with these things? Are we using them to honour God or misusing them to satisfy a personal need?

Stewardship suggests that God made us responsible for the planet we live on, for His creation which includes the animals and the environment. It also means that we are responsible for the resources given us and must use them to bring glory and honour to God. It includes our monies, our talents, our spiritual gifts, and our time.

Are you being a good steward of all God has entrusted to you? Are you wasteful or mindful and do you use that for which you have been given to help others?

Read the following verses and reflect on them. Take some time to be alone with God and listen to what He has to say to you.

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**Genesis 2:15** *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it”*

**1 Peter 4:10-11** *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

**Acts 20:35** *“In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

### **Day 5 - Breaking down barriers**

What prevents us from reaching out to someone who is not like us; someone from a different culture, country or even race? When we encounter someone different from us do we inadvertently default to the stereotype we generally associate with that group possibly preventing us from making a connection with that individual? Are our cultural biases preventing us from truly seeing and knowing our neighbours?

Today, will you set aside twenty minutes and watch the following video by Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie? She offers thoughts about how we can miss out of knowing someone because we view them from a viewpoint that only reveal a part of who that individual is. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>

Today’s scripture comes from a letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He remarks how people were misjudging his intentions based on false understanding. Ask God to speak with you about breaking down barriers that prevent you from seeing people as He sees them; individuals like us in need of Jesus.

*“You are judging by appearances.-If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do”*

**2 Corinthians 10:7**

### **Day 6 - Heart for the rejected**

Without much thought, I believe we can all bring someone to mind we know is dealing with rejection; some of us reading these devotions may be undergoing rejection. It is a terrible feeling to be discounted for whatever reason and it is worse if someone we have loved puts us aside. Our youth are often harshly and cruelly exposed to rejection on social media venues. So called friends write awful statements about their relationship and try to discount their posting with explanations such as “I didn’t really mean what I typed”.

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Can we do anything to help? Firstly, we can start by being mindful about assigning value to people based on their appearance, wealth, or intelligence. Self-esteem and self-worth is not enhanced by promoting beauty aids and self-help books. There is nothing wrong with self-improvement however we are more than the shell we occupy. We should be concerned about the heart, soul and mind of those feeling worthless. Spending time with someone as opposed to offering fancy Christian speech and bubbly self-talk statements goes a long way.

We were made to be in community with others. Even the most introverted of us, need human companionship because, that is how God designed us. All of us are capable of reaching out to someone who you can uplift. Even if we can only offer a one-off encounter, it could bring hope to someone feeling hopeless. Speak with God about opening your eyes and heart to those around you and ask if he could put someone in your path whom you can make part of your community.

Read, meditate, pray and reflect on this verse:

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

### **Day 7 - Outreach**

What do the following verses from Matthew 25:34-35 mean to you? *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”*

These are people in your community that someone has reached out to help. Was it you who helped; if not, why not? There is so much need in our world that we almost do not know where to begin, but begin we must. As this week of community devotional winds down, it is hoped that God has spoken to you to at least look to see your neighbours. He does not want to guilt you into action but wants to bring you to see those He also loves and need Him. He chooses us to be His hands and feet on this earth and to go to those who could use some Jesus in their life.

Prayer puts our faith into action. Read James’ statement about helping and talk with God. Let Him guide you to do what He has prepared you to do for your community.

*“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” James 2:14-17*

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### **Prayers for your community (city, town, neighbourhood)**

It is important that you remember where you live and who is around you. Talk with God about the community He has placed you for this season of your life. Consider keeping these prayer ideas close to you. Place them in your bible so you can access and pray the scripture suggested for each topic.

#### **1. Pray for spiritual awakening in the churches of your community.**

Pray the Scriptural prayers found in: Ephesians 1:15-21, 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Philippians 4-6; and Hebrews 13:20-21

When you pray these Scriptures, insert the name of your church asking God to bring the fullness of Jesus' life into it. Remember the example of Epaphras, a servant of Christ who "wrestled in prayer" for the Christians that lived in three cities – Colosse, Laodicia, and Hierapolis (Col 4:12)

#### **2. Pray against the spiritual strongholds of darkness over your community.**

Ephesians 6:12 teaches of the constant spiritual battle in the heavenlies - actual strongholds that the enemy has over geographic areas.

Command the "rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil" in the north, south, east, and west of your city to "give up" those people held in spiritual bondage. Praise the Lord that people will come to Jesus from the four sections of your city.

**3. Pray for the leadership and authorities in your community:** such as the Mayor, the City Council, Police Chief, School Board, and so on. – 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

#### **4. Ask God to bless your community.**

"Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted" – Proverbs 11:11

The greatest blessing God can send is Jesus Christ, who will turn people from their wickedness, and bring them salvation. – Acts 3:26.

#### **5. Pray for the welfare of your community.**

"...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." – Jeremiah 29:7

#### **6. Pray for the people of your community to turn to God.**

Remember the Nineveh (read Jn 3:1-10) and Samaria did (John 4:39-42).

**7. Pray for peace within your community.** – Psalm 122:6,

#### **8. Pray for your community to support righteousness and goodness.**

"When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy." – Proverbs 11:10