

COMMUNITY: THE SECRETS OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS (CELL AND SERMON SERIES)

based on John Ortberg, Everybody's Normal til you get to know them (Zondervan)

DATE OF SERMON	THEME	BIBLE PASSAGES	BOOK REF	OTHER RESOURCES
8th Feb	Getting to know you:(Time)	Eph 4.1-6 Mark 2.1-12	Ch 1-3	Growing in Jesus by Carl Simmonds Session 8 We're in this together
15th Feb (1 before Lent)	Being Real (Authenticity)	Genesis 3 2 Corinthians 3/ James 5	Ch 4	Film : Marvellous (esp clip "He has no side")
22 Feb (Lent 1)	Accepting and Forgiveness	John 8.1-12 Matthew 18.21-35	Chs 5 & 8	Miracle Maker (Woman caught in adultery)
1 March (Lent 2)	Facing Facts (Confrontation and Conflict)	Proverbs 14. 9 & 29 & 15.1 Matthew 18.12-17	Chs 7 & 9	
8th March (Lent 3)	Breaking down barriers (inclusion)	Ephesians 2 Matthew 18.1-10	Ch 10	
15th March (Mothering Sunday)	The Secret of a Loving Heart: Gratitude	Luke 7.36-50	Ch 11	



WEEK 1: Getting to know you

WELCOME

Share some drinks, food and chat.

- Think about your best friend or a best friend you had while growing up. Why is (or was) that person your best friend?
- What are some of the things you currently do to develop stronger relationships with others?

WORD

Read Mark 2.1-12. This is one of the great stories in the New Testament about community, involving a paralysed man and the friends who brought him to Jesus.

1. What do you imagine it would have been like to be a paralysed man in the ancient world. What do you imagine the man and his friends would have had to do to develop their friendship with each other?
2. What difference does that friendship bring to their lives in this story?
3. *In his book, "Everybody's Normal till you get to know them", John Ortberg talks of how everybody in a community has some vulnerabilities. For the paralysed man in this story, it is the fact he is paralysed, the fact that his whole life has to be lived lying on a mat. He has to accept his dependence on his friends and his friends also accept his vulnerabilities. Ortberg says, "Here is the truth about us. Everybody has a mat. Let the mat stand as a picture of human brokenness and imperfection.... But it is only when we allow others to see our mat, when we give and receive help with each other, that healing becomes possible.*
If you feel able, tell the group about something which is or has been your "mat" in the sense in which Ortberg talks about it.
4. *"If you want a deep friendship you cant always be the strong one. You will sometimes have to let somebody else carry your mat."* Are you more likely to carry someone else's "mat" for them or to let them help to carry yours? Why?
5. *Psychologist Alan McGinnis notes that the number one for entering into deep friendships (community) is to assign top priority to our relationships. In Ortberg's words "You cant carry someone's mat in a hurry and everyone comes with a mat."* How difficult or easy do you find it to prioritise giving unhurried time for friendships/ community?

WORSHIP

v 12 *"The man got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of all the people. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this"*
Think of some times past or present when God's love or healing has amazed or delighted you. Spend some time recalling these occasions in prayer and praise.

WITNESS

Who in your circle of friends would you like to bring to Jesus for help. Pray for them and ask God to help you to recognise the opportunities when you might be able to be of service. **OR** What do you like doing outside of church/cell? Write it down on a sheet of paper. On the other side list names of people you'd like to know better. Consider reaching out to them by inviting him or her to join you in one of the activities you listed. Build in some time to get to know them

WEEK 2: Being Real: We're in this together

WELCOME

Share some drinks, food and chat.

Q: What is it about just hanging out that helps people to loosen up and be comfortable with one another? What else do we do to help lower our guards with each other?

WORD

Read Acts 1. v6-11

One minute Jesus is there with his apostles - the people he's entrusted to share his life and mission with the rest of the world - and the next, he's gone. And on top of that, two men in white clothing - presumably angels - show up and ask, in essence "What are you doing, just standing there?"... Discuss

1. How do you think the apostles felt at that moment?
2. In what ways do you feel (or have you felt) as though you're "just standing there" in your Christian walk, waiting for Jesus to tell you what to do?

Read Acts 1. v12-17 & 21-26

3. How did Jesus' followers respond once they got over their initial shock?
4. How does knowing other Christians you can trust and share your struggles with - no matter what kind of struggles they are - help you to stop standing still and move forward?

In groups of 3 or 4 *Read John 17:20-23 & Ephesians 4:1-6.* In your smaller groups, discuss...

- According to these passages, in what ways do we already have unity as Christians?
- Describe a time when you tried to go it alone, without a church/ cell group, either before or after you knew Jesus. What was that like?
- How describe a time when you've experienced God bringing a church or cell group together for a purpose. What was that like? What is the difference between these two experiences?
- Who do you know right now who is not only your friend but who helps you to come closer to Jesus?

WORSHIP

Give everyone an ice cube and stand in a circle.

Hold hands with the people on each side of you with the ice between your hands. Hold hands tightly until the ice completely melts. Don't let go. It's going to get cold but remember - we're all in this together.

As you wait for the ice to melt sing songs of worship and praise God for the encouragement you can be to each other especially when things get tough.

WITNESS

In twos, look at the options overleaf. Pray together about the choice you make.

WITNESS OPTIONS (COMMUNITY WEEK 2)

- a)** What do you like doing outside of church/cell? Write it down on a sheet of paper. On the other side list names of people you'd like to know better. Consider reaching out to them by inviting him or her to join you in one of the activities you listed. Build in some time to get to know them
- b)** Encourage other people this week. Share something very specific that will be a real encouragement to them. If you're married, watch for an opportunity to tell your spouse how much you appreciate him or her. If you have children, let them know when they're doing something right - or just what wonderful people you think they are. Let your workmates or neighbours know you're there for them - and stand by your words.
- c)** Invite someone to the Alpha taster eve on April 13th 2015
- d)** Telephone Dawn or Sally and offer to help with cooking or babysitting for Alpha.