

LESSON SIX

THE SIXTH MARK

COMMUNITY

DEFINITION

I am committed to one specific local church and attend gatherings consistently.

LIFESTYLE

I show up faithfully to community gatherings to encounter Jesus personally and through his people.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How is gathering with Jesus' people strengthening me and others?

OVERVIEW OF THIS LESSON

Every lesson has the same three steps: new learning, new practices, and new commitments.

Every lesson takes about four weeks to complete—*if you work at a moderate, consistent pace.*

- Complete *Step One: New Learning* in the first week.
- Complete *Step Two: New Practices* in the second-to-fourth weeks.
- Complete *Step Three: New Commitments* in the third and fourth weeks.

Step One: New Learning

In this step, you'll explore what it means to be part of Jesus' family and why it matters by reading an overview and answering some follow up questions.

When you're done, you'll understand biblical community and be able to explain it.

Write down your start date for this step (complete in the first week): _____

Step Two: New Practices

In this step, you'll integrate new practices to equip and empower you to thrive in God's community. These practices include reading the Bible, prayer, and journaling.

When you're done, you'll know how to gather with God's people and experience Jesus' presence when you do.

Write down your start date for this step (complete in weeks two through four): _____

Step Three: New Commitments

In this step, you'll discover that difference gathering with Jesus' people makes.

When you're done, you'll know how to prioritize your life so you can faithfully gather with Jesus' community on Sabbath and in Life Groups.

Write down your start date for this step (complete in weeks three and four): _____

STEP ONE

NEW LEARNING

STEP ONE: NEW LEARNING

COMMUNITY

As in Heaven, so on Earth

God has always existed. He alone is Creator and King. Sustainer. Shepherd. Husband. Father.

Jesus has always existed with the Father. The King-Healer. Redeemer. Restorer. Judge. Son.

And the Holy Spirit has lived with the Father and Son forever, displaying attributes of the feminine. Wisdom. Power. Intuition. Comforter. Mother.

Though we can't fully grasp who God is and what he's like, we know God's revealed himself as community, a gathering of perfect presence, commitment, and intimacy. Together, the Father, Son, and Spirit showcase what it means to exist in life-giving relationship.

As the Father, Son, and Spirit relate to each other, we were created to relate to others. The community of heaven defines the community of humanity.

But we failed. Every one of us. All the way back to our original parents. In our rebellion, we didn't just lose God's presence. We lost each other and forgot how to live in community. Every generation's violence, greed, racism, idolatry, immorality, selfish ambition, and murder shouts that we've failed to reflect heaven. We're forgotten what it means to be human and family.

But God didn't leave us alone. He sent his Son.

Jesus became human to live with us (Matthew 1:23). He died to destroy our corruption. And rose to restore us to the community of his presence. Now, he reigns in heaven to shepherd us into a new kind of life, the abundant, eternal life where the community of heaven and earth meet.

This doesn't happen automatically, though. We must respond. We must trust and follow.

When Jesus lived on the earth and called us to repent—to trust him enough to follow him—he said God's kingdom was at hand (Mark 1:15). This means it had arrived and was breaking into creation. Responding to Jesus' invitation meant we would leave the destruction and misery of sin to embrace his abundant, eternal life.

Jesus called us out. And invited us in.

Jesus called out of sin and death. Out of confusion and hatred. Out of misery and destruction. Out of aloneness, alienation, and rejection. To trust Jesus is to leave this old, familiar life.

And Jesus invited us into God's communal presence, planted us in new kind of community, adopted us into a new family. He reconciled us to others. Filled with God's love, we're invited to reflect the community of the Father, Son, and Spirit. By God's grace, the beauty of heaven redefines and restores us. On earth, things start to look like heaven.

The book of Acts is the story of God's people encountering his presence and carrying it into the world. When they encountered his presence, power and boldness filled them. Greed no longer had a hold on them. Selfless love exuded from them. And when they went into the dead, dark places of the world, blind eyes were opened. Demons were cast out. The disenfranchised and rejected were adopted into family. The rich and poor loved each other. Women were valued. Slaves were set free. Rulers were confronted with Jesus' reign. God's presence flipped the world upside because it restored a group of people who were willing to follow the king, Jesus.

What does this look like in real life?

First, we'll explore the two biblical images of *Temple* and *Family* to help us understand what it means to be part of God's community. Second, we'll explore how these biblical images invite us into practical commitments.

Temple

In the Bible, the Temple was where heaven and earth met. Adam and Eve were cast out of God's presence because they sought life somewhere else. Humans lost God's life when they lost his presence. To restore his presence to humanity, God instructed his people to build a Temple. Why? What did the Temple represent? What did it do?

The Temple was a physical structure that symbolized God's restoring, healing presence. It was where sins were forgiven, healing occurred, and friendship with God was restored. It pictured the unveiled presence of God, reminding God's people his presence was the only source of life. Just like Adam and Eve lived in God's unveiled presence before they rebelled, humans experienced God's presence in the Temple.

When Jesus came to earth, he embodied the purpose of God's Temple. He forgave, healed, and invited people into communion with God. Importantly, Jesus carried God's presence. To encounter Jesus was to encounter the Father (John 5). In Jesus, heaven and earth met.

After his resurrection, Jesus filled his followers with his Spirit, the same Spirit that lived in him (John 16?). Like the stones used to build the natural Temple, Jesus said his followers were living stones, assembled to contain and extend God's presence in the world (1 Peter 2:4-10). In Jesus' followers, heaven and earth meet.

So, God's people are a *worshipping community* where God's presence is prioritized. We pray together. Worship together. Listen to God's voice together. Share God's word with each other.

Family

God created Adam and Eve and became their Father. Humans were designed to do the same. God gave us the ability to recreate his image on earth and make families, interlocking generations that experience and extend his love to each other. Every generation was to be a fresh expression of God's image, multiplying his presence throughout the world.

Sin torpedoed family. It separated us, setting us against each other. Jesus' came to restore family relationships by giving his life away. In his sacrificial death, we see what it takes to become family again: we love others enough to give them what they need, not what they deserve.

Those who follow Jesus are adopted into his family, invited out of the broken relationships created by sin and death. Though not perfect, Jesus' family is where disciples learn to be fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Jesus' family is where the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit is available for those willing to receive and give it away. In Jesus, the family of heaven meets the family on earth.

So, God's people are a *family-based community* where the Father, Son, and Spirit's love and commitment is shared. We serve together. Eat together. Celebrate together. In family, we invest in each other. Recognize each other's value. Affirm. Encourage. Exhort.

Gather

We're God's temple, where his presence invades earth.

We're God's family, where his love and life are shared with others.

Both of these images invite us into practical, tangible commitment. And this commitment can be summarized by the word *gather*. Throughout the Bible, God's people are marked by their attachment to each other in concrete gatherings.

There are three types of gatherings woven into the pages of the Bible—and they are based on cycles of time. The first type of gathering emphasizes *family* and takes place throughout the week, emphasizing the daily commitment of family life. The second type of gathering emphasizes *temple* and takes place weekly and yearly.

Family Gathers Daily

God's family is to be marked by consistent, intimate, daily interaction. Notice what's recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes,

they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Together, they were taught by Jesus' first followers, called the apostles. They were devoted to the fellowship, another word for God's gathered people. They ate and prayed together. Those who had more shared with those in need. Day by day, they were with each other in homes. Daily, new followers were added to the family.

Part of living in Jesus' family is being with Jesus' family. There are seven ways we can practice family life together.

- Eat & Celebrate: We share the mundane and miraculous moments of life.
- Serve & Rest: We serve and rest with each other.
- Story: We tell and listen to each other's story.
- Listen: We listen to Jesus in the word to obey what he says and we pray together.
- Change: We share the moments when and where God changes us.
- Accountability: We're accountable for how we give and receive in relationships.
- Share & Show: We share the gospel with our words and show the gospel with our works.
- Include & Invite: We include others in community and invite them to follow Jesus.

The way we make this happen is through Life Groups. Even though there is one official Life Group gathering each week, Life Groups are designed to train followers of Jesus how to be family to each other seven days a week.

Family Gathers Weekly

From the beginning of time, Jesus set aside one day a week to rest. After he created the earth in six days, he installed a day just for rest. It's called Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3). God blessed this day, meaning, it has the inherent ability to perpetuate and multiply life. Further, God sanctified the Sabbath, meaning, he made it different from the other six days of the week.

The Sabbath is the last day of the week—what we call Saturday. It starts at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday (in the Bible days start at sunset, not sunrise).

There are multiple biblical themes found in the Sabbath. Here are the most important ones.

- Rest: God calls us to rest on Sabbath, from sunset to sunset (Genesis 2:1-3).
- Creation: Sabbath reminds us God created us and, when we rest on this day, we remember his authority and reign over our lives (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11).
- Provision: Sabbath reminds us God is our provider. To show us his gracious provision, he instructs us to work six days a week and rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 16; 20:8-11).
- Freedom: God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. To commemorate his miraculous freedom, God instructed his people to rest on Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).
- Memorial Sign: The Sabbath is the sign that we're God's people, the marker that he is our God and we're his people. It's like a wedding ring for the bride and groom (Exodus 31:12-18).

- Grace: Sabbath is a reminder that we can't save or restore ourselves. Only God can do this and he does it by his grace. This is why he said he alone sanctifies us (Exodus 31:12-18).
- Gather: Sabbath is the first of God's special appointments with his people, special times when he's agreed to meet with his people to reveal his presence (Leviticus 23:1-3).
- Delight: Sabbath calls us into the delight of God's presence, inviting us to reconsider our source of life and joy (Isaiah 58:13-14).
- Healing: Jesus healed on Sabbath, showing us that the Sabbath is where God's presence invades earth to restore humanity (Matthew 12:1-9).
- Eternal Life: Sabbath points ahead to our final rest in God's presence, where everything has been restored and God's presence is revealed to us in full measure (Hebrews 4:1-11).

There are three practical ways God invites us to celebrate and gather on Sabbath.

- Rest: God invites us to rest from the work of provision. This means we refrain from employment and lay down the obligation to provide for ourselves. He promises to provide for us and our part is to work Sunday through Friday and rest on Sabbath. When we actively rest from work, our body, soul, and spirit tastes the restoring power of heaven.
- Gather: God told his people the Sabbath was a holy convocation (Leviticus 23:3). The word *holy* means something that's set apart for a special purpose. The word *convocation* means a gathering. God called his people to gather on the Sabbath for a special purpose. And the special purpose was to meet with him and one another. When Jesus was on the earth, he met with God's people on the Sabbath (Mark 9:21; Luke 4:16). His disciples did too (Acts 13:14-16; 17:2). Every time we show up on Sabbath, we're reminded we have a special relationship with God and his people.
- Family: Sabbath is about foster the intimacy and commitment of relationship. On this day, take time to experience holy leisure with others who embrace Sabbath as a way of life.

Family Gathers Yearly

To reveal the depth and breadth of God's restoration in the world, he created a series of celebrations or holidays that start in the spring and end in the fall. These celebrations are interconnected and each shows us how God will restore the world through Jesus.

- Passover: This celebration recalls the time when God's people were freed from Egypt. It points to Jesus death on the cross, the event that freed us from sin and death.
- Unleavened Bread: This seven-day celebration recalls the Israelites' quick departure from Egypt. It points to God's invitation to live in trust, to leave behind our bondages and enter into the freedom of obedience.
- First Fruits: This is a one-day celebration that reminds us of God's gracious provision through harvest. It points to Jesus' resurrection and the promise he will raise us from the dead.
- Pentecost: This is a one-day celebration that commemorates the event when God invited Israel to become his people and, in doing so, gave them a new way to live. It points to Jesus' invitation to the nations to become part of his family and live in his presence.
- Trumpets: This is a one-day celebration and, on it, God's people were instructed to blow a *shofar*, a ram's horn. It points to the future day when Jesus will return and be installed as king of all the nations on the earth.

- Day of Atonement: This is a one-day celebration that recalls the event in Israel's history when God's people could access his presence and the entire nation could be forgiven of their sin. It points to Jesus' future ministry to cleanse creation of sin and death.
- Tabernacles: This is an eight-day celebration that anticipates eternal life in God's presence.

QUESTIONS FROM THE READING

1. In your own words, summarize the big ideas about following Jesus.
2. What are some of your key take-aways from reading?
3. Acts 2:42-47 describes what happened to Jesus' disciples after they were filled with God's Spirit and carried God's power into the world. What did they do? How did they live? How did they think about and interact with each other?
4. I Peter 2:1-10 tells us about disciples who faced persecution and hardship. Though they were rejected by the world, they were special to God. How does God describe his people in this passage? How does this change your view of God's people?
5. In Isaiah 58:13-14, God helps his people, Israel, grasp his heart and vision for the Sabbath (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday). How does this help you understand his heart and vision? What might this vision do to help you shift your lifestyle to rest, worship, and gathering?
6. Based on what you've discovered, how does Jesus want you to obey this week?

Supplemental Videos

The following videos may be helpful for you to watch as you think about this lesson and respond to the questions. You can find these videos on YouTube by searching for a YouTube channel called *The Bible Project*.

- Temple
- Sabbath

STEP TWO

NEW PRACTICES

STEP TWO: NEW PRACTICES

BIBLE—PRAYER—JOURNALING

Introduction

In this step, you'll integrate three new practices: listen to Jesus in the Bible, talk to Jesus through prayer, and journal. It's best to spend most of your time in the Bible and in prayer (about 80%) and then follow up with journaling. If you spend the bulk of your time in the Bible and prayer, you'll experience the biggest impact toward growth.

To incorporate these new practices, you'll need to make some decisions: when, where, how much, and how long. In other words, when you know **WHEN** you'll do these practices, **WHERE** you'll do them, and **HOW** long you'll do them, you have a much better chance of integrating these practices into your lifestyle.

Here are two questions to help you decide.

Where will I fit these practices into my weekly schedule/routine? Consider working your way up to four times each week.

How long will I spend each day doing all three practices? Any amount of time is good to start with but consider working up to thirty minutes at a time.

Although not necessary, it will help you to spend time in the Bible, prayer, and journaling at the same time every day, in the same place, for the same length of time. Of course, if you can't do that, then do what you can.

The important part is this: *make a commitment and keep it.* When we make and keep our commitments, we increase our ability to hear and obey Jesus.

Use this chart to record your decisions.

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
What Day?							
When?							
How Long?							
Where?							

On the next page, you'll find a helpful worksheet to direct your time in the Bible, prayer, and journaling each day.

NEW PRACTICES WORKSHEET

Listening to Jesus in the Bible

Each week, you'll learn to listen to Jesus through the Bible. To do this, you'll read, think about, and answer questions about a passage. For this lesson, you'll spend multiple days in EACH of the following texts.

- Acts 2:42-47
- I Peter 2:1-10
- Isaiah 58:13,14

As you spend multiple days in each passage, journal the following questions.

1. Who is God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?
2. What is God doing?
3. Who are God's people—and as a result, who am I?
4. What is God inviting me to do today?

This Week's Bible Text: _____

Talking to Jesus through Prayer

Each week, you'll learn to talk to Jesus in prayer. To do this, you'll learn to pray using the forms of prayer Jesus gave to his followers in Matthew 6:9-13.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

We call this *The Disciple's Prayer*. Each week, we explore one aspect of *The Disciple's Prayer*.

In this lesson, you'll explore the sixth form of prayer called *The Prayer of Warfare*. Use *Prayer of Warfare* in *The Disciple's Prayer Guide* to pray this week.

Reflect through Journaling

As you read and pray, it's helpful to journal your thoughts, feelings, and insights. Consider journaling to one or two of the following prompts.

- What I learned today was...
- What I discovered about Jesus was...
- What I discovered about myself was...
- What I sense I need to do is...
- What doesn't make sense is...

STEP THREE

NEW COMMITMENTS

STEP THREE: NEW COMMITMENT

GATHER

Introduction

Gathering with God's people matters. It's where God's presence dwells on earth. When we gather, he gathers with us. Together, we're the "living stones" of the Temple he's building on the earth. Together, we show what it's like to live in the rising sun of God's eternal presence.

But we must DO it. We can't talk about it and not do it. "Gather" is a verb, an action word, something that happens only when we do what it describes.

Over the next three-to-four weeks, you'll gather with God's people twice: on Sabbath and during the week for Life Group faithfully. Unless there's an emergency, just show up no matter what. As you do, respond to the journaling exercises on the following worksheet. This will help you think about gathering with God's people through new eyes.

Over the next three-to-four weeks, you'll also learn to rest on Sabbath. Each week, you'll NOT do something you normally do and, instead, you'll do something you DON'T normally do. This will help you can experience the biblical vision of rest and communion.

Steps to Success

1. Look at your personal and family calendar for the next four weeks.
2. Talk with your spouse/family/roommates about your commitment to attend Life Group and Sabbath every week for four weeks—no matter what.
3. Make adjustments to your calendar and commitments as necessary.
4. Identify roadblocks/challenges you know you'll face as you seek to keep your commitment. Come up with contingency plans BEFORE the roadblocks/challenges are in front of you.
5. Then, show up.

Sabbath Bookends

One way we can celebrate Sabbath is to welcome and close Sabbath with special rhythms or rituals that remind us of who God is, who we are, and how he's called us to live. The Jewish people have started and ended the Sabbath in just this way for centuries, so we can learn much from their practices.

On Friday night, welcome the Sabbath with a special meal, prayers, and rituals to help you experience Jesus and his rest. Here is a helpful resources: <https://www.268church.org/sabbath/>. Engage this practice ONCE during the four weeks of your commitment.

On Saturday night, you can close Sabbath with a special prayer and rituals to help you leave Sabbath with joy and peace. Here is a helpful resource: <https://www.268church.org/sabbath/>. Engage this practice ONCE during the four weeks of your commitment.

WEEKLY GATHER WORKSHEET

Week Of: _____

Roadblocks

Do this journaling exercise on Sunday or Monday.

- What roadblocks might I face this week as I keep my commitment to show up at Life Group and the Sabbath gathering? What do I need to do about them right now?

Life Group Gathering

In your journal, reply to the following prompts on the same night as your Life Group gathering.

- What I feel, think, and experience BEFORE I attend Life Group this week.
- What I experienced at Life Group this week.
- How did my experience at Life Group help me see the power of gathering with God's people?

Sabbath Gathering

In your journal, reply to the following prompts on Sabbath.

- What I feel, think, and experience BEFORE I attend the Sabbath gathering this week.
- What I experienced at church this Sabbath.
- How did my experience at church help me see the power of gathering with God's people?

Sabbath Rest

In your journal, reply to the following prompts before Sabbath.

- How can I rest from activity that's outside God's heart and vision for Sabbath? Consider technology, entertainment, spending money, maintenance, education.
- How can I fill my day with activities consistent with God's heart and vision for Sabbath? Consider time to have meaningful conversation with your family, leisurely dining and conversation, physical rest and sleep, Bible study and prayer, fellowship with friends.
- What did I experience as I rested on Sabbath? What do I want to try next week?

Sabbath Bookends

I will welcome the Sabbath on Friday night and use the resource on the following date: _____

The people I would like to do this with: _____

I will close the Sabbath on Saturday night and use the resource on the following date: _____

The people I would like to do this with: _____