

Living in community in a healthy way begins in our homes with our families. Most of the time, the struggles we face in practicing community as adults stem from problems with community we experienced as children in our homes. In order to help the next generation to experience joyful community, and so that we can learn how to practice community as adults, we should see our homes as opportunities to practice and perfect who we will be with others in community in the world.

Day 1

Create Family Goals

It is difficult to live in community where no goals exist. The reason is simple. When no corporate goals are to be found, we will each have our own individual goals, and those will become what we always pursue. In most families in America, dad is trying to find some peace and quiet, mom is trying to have the perfect, Martha Stewart holiday that would look great on social media, the daughter is trying to become more popular and gain the right friends, and the son is trying to beat his previous progress or top score on his video games. Obviously, this does not apply to all people, but these stereotypes exist for a reason. The tendency is for each one to see the family as an obstacle to the personal goals they are trying to pursue, and because there are no family goals, there is nothing to bring the family into community. Outside of shared genetics and the same address, there is no unity to be the foundation for community. In contrast to this, the patriarchs of the Old Testament had a unifying purpose that brought their family together and gave continuity to the generations. In older times, the family business sometimes provided a unifying force to the family. Now, however, it is rare that a family has shared goals. Think about the kind of goals you might develop as a family, goals that could bring you together and glorify God in the process. Who has God made you to be as a family, and what can pursuing those goals together do for you as a family?

Verses: Ephesians 3:14-19, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Genesis 1:28

Prayer Topics: Submission, Unity, Love

Day 2

Be Courteous

In order for our families to experience the unity, love, support, and growth that comes from family community, we must be courteous with each other. In the past, manners and courtesy were very important traits to build into one's character. Being polite was important to being welcomed into many parts of society. Sometimes this could reach ridiculous complexity, but overall, being courteous was seen as a way to thoughtfully reinforce the value of the other person. I remember times when I was young, my mother would be reminding my sister and I how to behave on the way over to someone's house, and what the expectations were for interacting with the person we were visiting in a thoughtful and polite way. Within our families there is no need to be as formal as we are with the outside world, but we should still strive to be polite. The cost of being polite and courteous is the price we pay to value one another, and if our community values others, many will desire to be a part of it. Does your family interact with each other in courteous and polite ways? When it doesn't, is it because of the effort it takes? Why would other people outside of our families be worth effort that our families are not worth? Why do we not shy away from the effort to be polite to those outside the family while seeing the same effort spent on those inside the family as a waste? In what ways can we honor and be polite to each other on a more regular basis?

Verses: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, 1 Peter 3:7-12, Matthew 7:12

Prayer Topics: Kindness, Compassion, Generosity

Day 3

Require Gentle Leadership and Joyful Submission

In the family, everyone should be given the opportunity to practice gentle leadership and joyful submission, for without this, children cannot hope to grow up appreciating community. The family is a place with structure and each person plays a role on a regular basis. The children are not in charge of the adults, and the dog shouldn't be leading anyone. Even though there are regular roles for the family, there are also many opportunities for each family member to practice different roles, thereby learning what it's like for others in the family to practice their roles. As an example, the youngest child can be put in charge of mealtime for a night, deciding what the family should eat, which person in the family should do which task, and making sure the tasks are carried out to their standards. In doing this, the child learns the burden of leadership, that there are difficulties in leading just as there are in following, and learns to be a leader in a gentle and helpful way. Each person should be taught to accept that person's leadership respectfully, submitting to that leadership joyfully, even if the person leading is inexperienced or doesn't know the task as well as the person following. The goal of these exercises is to make sure that leadership in the family is always practiced in a gentle way, and following is always done without complaint. When the family carries out its normal roles then, the expectation is the same, and good leadership and happy following become the normal routine in the family, building happy community.

Verses: Matthew 20:25-28, Exodus 18:21, 1 Timothy 4:12

Prayer Topics: Encouragement, Training, Responsibility

Day 4

Serve Together

One way to create greater community in the family is to find places to serve together. This can be done in many places, from school events to community fund raisers. I have talked to a few families in our church who have put this into practice locally, in organizations like Feed My Starving Children and Project Cure, as well as internationally building houses in Mexico as well as other missions. There are places to serve together in the church, helping to set up or clean up after events, or in our worship ministry, where you can often find related people in the sound booth or onstage. What kind of things could you do together as a family? How could this help you build community together? My family has many memories of serving together in our worship services and ministries, and it is a great way for the family to experience unity. Give it a try!

Verses: Galatians 5:13, Hebrews 6:10, Mark 10:45

Prayer Topics: Cooperation, Harmony, Joy

Day 5

Make Gifts Count

Christmas, anniversaries, and birthdays are all occasions where we might expect to receive gifts. These times are opportunities to express the importance of the recipient to the family, and should not be missed. Gift giving can become largely meaningless, as we look to find something to give to one another because the day of gift giving has rolled around again. Gifts don't have to be expensive to be meaningful, and can be made or even bought second hand if money is tight. What is important in the

gift giving is the honoring of the person receiving the gift. The gift should communicate that we love, respect, and value the person who receives it. We should pay enough attention to the person receiving the gift throughout the year that we know exactly what they would want, or what would help them to achieve their goals or accomplish their tasks. If we don't know what to give a family member who lives with us, we should endeavor to pay close attention to what they want to achieve in life, what they are struggling with, or what they value and would enjoy having. The gift is not the point, but reflects the love and attention of the giver, which makes the bonds of community grow.

Verses: 1 Peter 4:10, James 1:17, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Prayer Topics: Thoughtfulness, Offering, Genuineness