

Harboring the right spirit is everything when it comes to community, or almost everything. We all know the awkwardness of community when it is forced, when the others don't want to participate for any number of reasons but feel obligated, and so we all find ourselves doing what we don't want to do with people we would never choose to do anything with. This kind of community is not life giving but soul crushing, and this is not the kind of community we desire to have at FCCT. Let's spend some time this week praying for the spirit of community, and let's plan to engage in these prayers even when the week is over.

Day 1

Pray for Wisdom

Perhaps the best way to foster a spirit of community is to spend time praying for one another. There are many obstacles to this, one of them being a lack of knowledge on what to pray for. We can make lists of people, have great intentions, but the minute we start to pray we find ourselves without a clue, and quickly develop some type of written prayer like, "God, please help Betty to... Well, just help Betty." Soon, we are going down our list in mere minutes as we ask God to "help" everyone, and then we find we are no closer to developing a spirit of community, because it is not developed from the crucible of efficiency. So, how do we figure out what to pray? Well, the first piece of advice is to pray for what to pray, when you don't know what to pray. This, perhaps, seems a little redundant, but I believe it is very helpful, because God listens to our prayers, and He answers them as well. Most of the time, if we are paying attention and asking questions, and generally taking an interest in people's lives, we will have an idea of what to pray for. But sometimes, we just are lost, and God knows what is going on in the other person's life, and in their heart. He knows the inward struggles, the quiet joys, and the hidden anxieties that people have, so go to Him for knowledge and wisdom in discerning how to pray for those around you. It will do more than you might think.

Verses: James 1:5, James 3:17, Ephesians 5:15-17

Prayer Topics: Humility, Discernment, Judgement

Day 2

Ask

This might seem way out there, but if you don't know how to pray for someone, maybe you should ask them. The reason we often fail to employ this strategy, I believe, is because it will make us feel weird and awkward. We are afraid of coming across as "Super Christian," or we are afraid the question will lead to awkward silence from the other person. Most times, however, I have seen people respond with gratitude, if the question is offered with humility and sincerity. At the very least, it will start some kind of conversation, and most people will begin with stating that they don't know how you should pray for them, because they have never been asked. From the initial question, you could ask them what challenges they have faced lately, what they have been learning, how are their relationships, how is their work, their health, and how is their relationship with God. This probably seems very personal, and it is. We should all use discernment in where, how and to whom we ask these questions. But we usually ask lots of questions in any conversation, and is it weird that our goal is to pray for someone, rather than just collect trivial things about them? Most people I know are flattered that someone cares enough about them to pray for them, and as Christians one of our greatest responsibilities is to lift up others before the throne of grace, so let's get started.

Verses: James 5:16, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, Romans 8:26

Prayer Topics: Curiosity, Care, Generosity

Day 3

Be The Answer

When we ask God or others what to pray, and when we lift those prayers before God, we should think about how we might be the answer to those prayers. As I write this, some might be seeing a huge burden, and this is where we need to ask God to give us the spirit of community. We should not fail to do something about the needs of others that we are in a position to respond to. Most people, in modern society, don't have a lot of physical needs. It is not likely that you will ask someone how you should pray for them, and they respond that you can help them to move their furniture to a new fourth floor apartment. Although it is possible, it happened to me last month. Most of the time, however, people need others to listen to them and to care about them. In those times when you will be helping someone physically, you should not take it lightly. Some time ago I overheard someone trying to figure out who could help them get to a medical appointment. Since I have flexibility in my schedule, I offered to take them, and was very glad I did. They passed away shortly after I had helped them out, and I was glad to get to spend the time with them that I did, doing something that was simple for me, but meaningful and truly helpful for them. When we pray for those who are sick or in the hospital, is it possible you might be part of the answer to that prayer? We often pray for comfort and encouragement for the sick, is it possible that you may be the comfort and encouragement they need? The spirit of community is to hope that we can be the answer, so let's pray that we are.

Verses: Hebrews 13:1-3, Romans 15:1-2, James 2:14-24, James 2:8

Prayer Topics: Volunteer, Capabilities, Generosity

Day 4

Pray the Bible

When you don't know what to pray for someone, but you want to pray because you know it is helpful in building the spirit of community, one thing that is always effective is to pray the prayers of the bible for others that you know. Paul, for example, is great at praying for amazing things for other people. He doesn't just pray for new jobs, better houses, or flights that are on time. Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts might be opened, that we might know the depth and breadth of Christ's love for us. Paul prays that we might be filled with the fullness of God, and that our love might increase in knowledge and depth of insight. These prayers are extraordinary in their scope, and they are penetrating in their wisdom. If you prayed these prayers for all the people that you are in community with, and prayed them regularly, how might the spirit of community in you change? How might they be changed by your prayers? You won't know until you try.

Verses: Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 1:3-11

Prayer Topics: Tools, Gifts, Resources

Day 5

Be Grateful

One way that prayer can help us develop the spirit of community is for us to pray for the right heart towards other people. We spend a lot of time complaining about other people, either to ourselves or to others. This needs to be counteracted by praying prayers of thanksgiving for those around us, especially

the ones we find hard to deal with. Most of the time, when we struggle with our desire for community with others, it never really crosses our mind to pray about it, especially to lift up thanksgiving for it. Before Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned by the Nazi's during World War 2, and ultimately executed, he was leading an underground seminary training pastors in the faith, and he found that in these trying circumstances where community was hard to come by, he was grateful for even the smallest amount of community. What was small and ordinary was shown to be worthy of great gratitude when the circumstances changed, and the people you barely tolerated became life saving company. Learning to be grateful for the community God gives, even when it falls short of the community you want, is one key to developing a spirit of community, and we can start practicing this key at any time. How about now?

Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Colossians 3:17, James 1:17

Prayer Topics: Perspective, Attitude, Appreciation