



COMMUNITY STARTS WITH YOU

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL SERIES
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyardyouth

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING | COMMUNITY |

WELCOME!

to Vineyard Youth USA Curriculum

Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have massive influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson will include:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to live and reveal the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions with age- and gender-specific items.
- Chances for you as the leader to tune into what God is doing in you and your students' lives.
- Space for students to hear from God for themselves.

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It's important, it's needed, and it's laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!

Why This Topic?

Studies indicate that community and relationships are key facets that connect adolescent students to a youth ministry context, as well as lasting church engagement. The call of the church has been and always will be to create a community and family of God—an expression of God’s love. In this curriculum we want to take the opportunity to discuss some of the realities, difficulties, and hurdles to experiencing community and relationships during this phase of life. The goal of this study is to understand the role of community as well as the barriers that often keep us from “belonging.”

Connecting to Vineyard Values

We intentionally connect our curriculum to Vineyard Values and Distinctives. Community is directly influenced by the Vineyard Core Value of Reconciling Community; you can read more about it here: <http://www.vineyardresources.org/CoreValuesAndBeliefs.pdf>

It also connects with the Vineyard Distinctives “Everyone gets to play” and “Come as you are—but don’t stay as you are.” You can read more about these here: <https://vineyardusa.org/about/vineyard-distinctives>

Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader

In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we’d like to keep in front of you:

Plug in your stories wherever you can. These are bare bones here. You add the meat!

Experiential learning lasts. We’ve tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out—take some risks!

Humor is key. It’s hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor.

Context matters. We don’t know what’s going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray and think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers. How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING

COMMUNITY /// CREATED FOR COMMUNITY



BIG IDEA

You were created for community.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Healthy relationships are crucial for all believers, including leaders. One of the most important things for people in ministry to do is to find opportunities to be “off duty” with other people. Arrange some time to be around other people who allow you to be yourself and not in ministry mode.

(Yes, this even applies to introverts!)

STARTER

(Feel free to use one or all of these.

We try to give variety!)

Ice Breaker:

What was the last thing you saw or heard or place you went (a video, movie, restaurant, song) that you couldn't wait to share? Who was the first person you told? What was their reaction? Have you ever shared something that you were really excited about, and then the other person didn't like it? How did that make you feel? Why?

Video: For a great video go to YouTube and search for “Can We AutoCorrect Humanity?”

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Game: Couch Game

The couch game is slightly complicated but tons of fun. Depending on your group size, it can take up to 20–30 minutes.

Basically you want to form two teams (normally guys versus girls is easiest - if you don't have an even number you'll have to have some boys be girls, or vice versa to make it even). You sit in a circle, making sure you are sitting every other with the two teams. So if you are doing guys/girls, it would be guy, girl, guy, girl, all around the circle. Leave one empty chair randomly in the circle. Also there needs to be a couch as part of the circle with four people sitting on it. Have everyone write their name on a card, then collect the cards, mix them up, and give them back out. Each person should keep their new identity a secret. The game starts by the person to the left of the empty chair calls a name and whoever has that card gets up and moves to the empty chair. Now there is a new empty chair - so whoever is to the left of that chair gets to call a name, and the person with that card moves into that empty chair. And so on. As you do this you begin to learn people's secret identities. It takes a little while, but eventually each team will begin to strategically move people from the other team off the couch, and people from their team onto the couch, to win the game. The object of the game is to get four people from your team (four girls, or four boys) sitting on the couch.

LESSON

Set up and Engage

To the leader: Today we are going to be discussing our need for community. Start off by sharing a story from your life of a time when being a part of the church community was pivotal for you. Then you can back it up with some of the points below.

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DISCUSS

Scientific studies have shown that humans are social beings who need social interaction. People in community have better mental and physical health, have higher self-esteem, and make better decisions.* God decided that man should not be alone!

Genesis 2:18 says, *"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone...'"*

However, even when we know this to be true, we tend to isolate, don't we? Being around people can be hard for some of us. Tell a story of a time you knew you needed to open up to someone but resisted.

How would you define community?

What are some things that make living in community difficult?

MAIN POINT

Read John 17:20–23 aloud.

Jesus prays that we would be one as He and the Father are one. The idea of community is an illustration of God, and meant to be a central role in the building of our Christian faith.

So let's put this together with the Genesis verse we talked about earlier:

- God created us to be in community—it is not good for us to be alone.
- Then he models community for us in his own relationship with Jesus.

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- Then he prays that we would have that same fellowship with one another, that God the Son and God the Father have with one another.

That is some POWERFUL community!

Throughout the Bible, we find the benefits and purpose of community.

Community is place of safety when people are in trouble—even back to the Old Testament and their cities of refuge where people would flee for protection from their own mistakes!

Community is a place of freedom where people would come to be delivered of their sins.

Community is a place of healing where people would come for prayer and to be physically taken care of.

Community is a place to find mission—together they were called to make disciples of all nations!

Community is a place of power—over and over we read how the power of God flowed in and through THEM—not one guy or girl—but the CHURCH.

The idea of community was one that was meant to be central to the Christian faith. You were never meant to carry the weight of life alone—walking in community eases our burden.

Even though we were designed and created for community, **community takes effort**. It does not always come easy. But it is worth working for.

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So that leads to some questions: What makes a community? If you are in a group, are you automatically in a community? What turns a group into a community?

You can be in a small group, or in a church, or on a sports team, or part of a club, but you won't find community unless you open your heart, unless you share your life, and unless you listen and hear the others' hearts.

Things that lead to community:

Shared experiences: The more we experience life together, the more the ties that bind us together strengthen. Often the greatest way to kick-start a community is to DO SOMETHING TOGETHER!

Shared vulnerability: Community will stay shallow unless we allow people into our lives. It takes courage to share our dreams and fears and weaknesses with each other.

Shared purpose: When a community rallies around a vision, a mission, a cause, or a purpose, it suddenly transforms from a group to a TEAM on a mission.

Shared investment: Lastly, community deepens when people take time to invest in each other's lives. This happens when your concern and care for one another goes beyond Sundays (or whenever you meet) and translates into everyday life.

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DISCUSS

As with all things, we have to be intentional:
There are many things that take our attention and keep us from community. These things prevent us from offering our complete attention and being “present” when we are with other people. Don’t let distractions keep you from community.

Why are we supposed to walk in community?

Why did Jesus spend time praying that we would walk in unity?

APPLY

When you look at your youth group and the four ways we listed to grow community, which one could you work on as a group?

Let’s take some time as a group and brainstorm how we could grow the community of our youth group (no matter what the size is).

On a personal level:
What are some things that keep you from community?

What are some ways that you can be more present with your friends and family?

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RESPONSE

You will probably have great ideas for response because you know your group. Our hope is that we can help you as much as possible, without getting in your way. Below are some response ideas - use what works and throw out the rest! Our main hope is that we will make this as experiential as possible for the teens.

PRAYER

Pray that we would understand the fact that we are supposed to live together in community. Pray that God would help us lay down areas that keep us from community.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- ① What does the word community mean to you?
- ② Why do you think we were “created for community?”
What does that look like?
Do you think that’s true?
- ③ What is one thing that keeps you from complete community? (social media, TV, games, etc.?)
- ④ Do you think social media changes community? Why or why not?
- ⑤ “Community takes work.” What does that mean to you?
- ⑥ What are some ways you can promote community?
- ⑦ What are some ways you can be more present with your friends and family?

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OUTREACH APPLICATION

Over the next couple of sessions we will be looking at community. During these next few weeks, take notice of the people and places you come into contact with and try to identify people who are in need of community. In Matthew 25 Jesus says, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Who can you invite into your community?

**Cacioppo, John T., and Stephanie Cacioppo. "Social Relationships and Health: The Toxic Effects of Perceived Social Isolation." Social and Personality Psychology Compass, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 1 Feb. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4021390/.*

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING

COMMUNITY /// ONE BODY



BIG IDEA

YOUTH LEADER
SOUL CARE

You need people around you.

The way we are created is to be in community. This means that we are aware of our strengths, as well as our weaknesses. Being aware of the areas in which we are weak is not self-deprecating, but a way to ensure that we put people around us that are strong where we are weak. This should keep us from “doing it all.” What areas are you depending on other people to cover your weaknesses? Take a second today to text one of those people and thank them for their role in your life.

STARTER

Ice Breaker:

What is your weirdest talent?

Video:

Go to YouTube and search for “Stomp-stomp out loud.”

Game: Human Knot Game

This is best played in groups of about 10, but you can make any size work. Stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Have everyone lift their left hand, and reach across and grab the hand of someone on the other side. Make sure no one holds hands with the person next to them. Then have everyone raise their right hand and do the same thing. Then they try to untangle so they are in a circle!

COMMUNITY /// ONE BODY

LESSON

Set up and Engage

God is creative. From the first time we see God, we see Him creating. Within that creative nature He made each of us unique with different gifts and abilities.

Also, our human nature is to be independent and to do everything ourselves. We want to be self-sufficient, and not depend on anyone else.

Put those together and you can see why humans often have such a hard time working together! Our uniqueness and diversity is from God, but it can also tend to isolate us, or cause division.

DISCUSS

Have you ever noticed anything in society where uniqueness has led to division? (This shouldn't be too hard—consider racism, classism, ageism, etc. But you can drive it toward church too: denominations, more spiritual versus less spiritual, different gifts judging others, etc.).

In what ways do you feel you are unique? Is it difficult to be unique or different? Why or why not?

Are you independent? Do you try to do things yourself? Do you ever struggle asking for help or working in teams?

COMMUNITY /// ONE BODY

MAIN POINT

Read I Corinthians 12:12–27.

Since this is a long passage, divide it up among several students to make it more engaging. Or have the students join up with a partner and read it to each other.

This passage has a lot to pull out of it for our discussion on community. Today we will focus on two major points.

POINT 1

GOD MADE YOU UNIQUELY GIFTED

First it is important to realize that each of you is specially chosen and gifted by God.

Sometimes I know it doesn't feel that way. But this passage teaches us that not only has God gifted you, but you are **INDISPENSABLE** to the mission of God's church on earth.

That means that without you, the body of Christ is incomplete. You are important, and the person next to you is important. You can't do it without other people around you. You need others—just as they need you.

God has empowered you with a specific personality and specific gifts. You make up one piece of a whole. And not just that, but the gifts and talents that God has given you serve the purpose of the whole.

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This passage teaches us that some of you have gifts that are obvious, and some have gifts that are less obvious. But all are equally important! Do you believe this?

Is a “behind the scenes’ person who cleans up after events as important as an “in front of the scenes” person—a preacher or worship leader?

Share a story of a gift that God has given you and how it helps contribute to the whole of the church/youth group.

POINT 2

WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER

You need other people around you. You, in your nature, the way you were made, were made incomplete. You were made imperfect—and that was perfect.

So let’s think about that. What are some of your weaknesses? What are some ways that you need other people?

As the leader share an example of an area where you are NOT gifted and have learned to lean on others who have that gifting.

A great analogy for this is sports. Take baseball for example. The whole team is playing baseball, but they would lose every single game if everyone insisted on being the pitcher. There must be someone to catch the pitches! And then there must be defense. What if everyone refused to play first base? No one would ever get thrown out!

COMMUNITY /// ONE BODY

DISCUSS

This is similar to our understanding of the body of Christ. We are all vital, and we are all different. Welcome the diversity, and learn to lean on each other's giftings where you are not as gifted.

Do you feel like you are needed?

Do you need other people? In what ways? What is an area you are not as gifted in that you can rely on others for?

How does realizing you need other people change the way you interact with them?

APPLY

Read the following passage aloud:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

-Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*

COMMUNITY /// ONE BODY

You have gifts that are necessary for the body of Christ and it is important that you use them. Find a place to serve and to use those gifts.

To apply our lesson today think of one area that you feel you are gifted in and one area that you know you are not as gifted in, and therefore need to rely on the gifts of others.

What ways can you begin to use your gifts right now?

In what area of your life do you know you need other people and their gifts?

What does it mean to be “part of the whole?” What does that look like for your youth group?

RESPONSE

You will probably have great ideas for response because you know your group. Our hope is that we can help you as much as possible, without getting in your way. Below are some response ideas - use what works and throw out the rest! Our main hope is that we will make this as experiential as possible for the teens.

PRAYER

Spend some time praying for each other's gifts and talents. Pray that God would help you use your gifts for His kingdom. Pray that God would help each person feel like they are part of the body of Christ.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- ① What are some of your gifts and talents?
- ② What are your weaknesses?
- ③ Is it harder to admit your talents or weaknesses? (*You may be surprised by this answer.*)
- ④ Why does Paul use the illustration of a body? What significance does that have?
- ⑤ Why do you think God created us to need other people?
- ⑥ Is it hard or easy for you to ask other people for help, or to admit that you need other people?
- ⑦ Think of an area of your life where you have had to depend on someone else. How did that make you feel?

OUTREACH APPLICATION

Find someone in your school or community who may not receive much encouragement. Encourage that person in a talent or gift that you see in their lives. When we learn to call out or notice other people's talents, it can have a profound impact on those around us.

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING

COMMUNITY /// ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER



BIG IDEA

Isolation is the enemy of community.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Sometimes the most isolated position is that of ministry leadership. Surveys have shown that pastors and ministry leaders often feel the most isolated.¹ It is crucial that as a leader you take time to find community and find people that you can talk to and be real with. Remember that in the middle of all of it you are not alone.

STARTER

Ice Breaker:

What is your greatest fear? Go around the circle and have each person share their greatest fear in life.

Video:

Search YouTube for "Don't fall asleep at the office."

Game | Marco Polo On Land:

Designate an area to play in, and make sure it will be safe. One person is the "IT" person and wears a blindfold, and the other people spread out. Once they pick a spot they are not allowed to move except to rotate on a "pivot" foot like in basketball. If the IT says "Marco," the others say "Polo." Then they can take one large step in any direction and reset their pivot foot. If they get tagged, they are out; the last one in wins.

COMMUNITY /// ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER

LESSON

Set up and Engage

Loneliness versus Isolation—What's the Difference?

Being alone is simply the absence of people. It is not necessarily good or bad—it can be either at different times.

Loneliness is one of those feelings or emotions that can come and go, or it can be one that sticks with you for a while.

“Note that isolation is the objective measure of how large your social network is, whereas loneliness is a subjective perception of how one feels. In other words, you can have many friends and be lonely, or no friends and not be lonely.”²

Isolation is withdrawing from people, and it can be physical or emotional. Isolation occurs when we build walls and keep people at a distance.

With the increase in technology usage, more students are feeling isolated today than ever before.

“Loneliness is a feeling of separation, isolation, or distance in human relations. Loneliness implies emotional pain, an empty feeling, and a yearning to feel understood and accepted by someone.”³

DISCUSS

Talk about a time you have felt alone.

Lonely? Isolated?

Do you think loneliness and isolation are different?

Why?

What are some things that cause you or your friends to isolate?

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MAIN POINT

Read I Kings 19 aloud.

(This is a pretty long passage, so you may want to split it up or do a “popcorn” reading.)

Some lessons we can learn from Elijah’s story:

1. Often loneliness is a deception.

Elijah has a huge victory in battle, and then he goes and hides in a cave because of his fear over Jezebel’s threat. While he’s there, he complains to God that he is alone. God asks him twice, “What are you doing here?”

Elijah thinks he is all alone, and this makes him despair. But is he really alone?

God reminds Elijah that there are seven thousand people waiting for him. Sometimes our isolation is our inability to see the people who are with us.

2. Even when we are alone, God is always with us.

God told Elijah that He was going to pass by. It was a personal act of relationship—a whisper—rather than a show of power that God used to reveal Himself to Elijah. This shows us that community is not just about the people around us, but also about our personal relationship with God.

God makes a point out of showing Elijah that he is with him, not only in power, but in love and relationship

When we feel alone, often it is easy to turn our back on God, rather than turning *to God who is the very one* we need.

3. Getting out of loneliness often begins with a few steps of courage.

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You have to take the first step to come down the mountain, much like Elijah had to take that first step and face his fear and find community.

This can be one of the hardest things to do because of the fear of being rejected.

It is easy to tell ourselves that we should never reach out for friendship again, because we've been hurt too many times.

The truth is, you WILL be hurt again. But the risk of relationship is still worth it.

And if we wait for others to reach out to us, we may never find the connection we are looking for.

So ask God for strength and courage and start taking simple steps "down the mountain of isolation" and toward relationship with others.

DISCUSS

What stuck out to you in the story of Elijah?

Why do you think God sent all the different disasters?

Why was it important that God whispered to Elijah?

In what ways do you think you miss the community around you?

COMMUNITY /// ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER

APPLY

Two common causes of isolation are previous hurts and the fear of getting hurt. The enemy uses those lies to keep us from community.

You are not alone. Even the most mature Christians can feel like they are isolated.

To apply this to our lives, let's take a moment of reflection. (Maybe turn some music on and give the students a blank card.)

Take some time to think through any past hurts that may have led to feeling unwelcome or unwanted or alone.

This could get deep for some kids, so have some time set aside and a couple adults ready to help them process.

Then have them write on one side of the card about a time when they were hurt, and to think about how it could have led them to isolate from others.

On the other side have them write down one simple step they can take to re-engage in relationship and community. (*Could be go to youth group, go to small group, ask forgiveness, confront that friend, ask a friend to hang out, etc.*)

DISCUSS

What does isolation look like in your life (video games, books, busyness)?

Why do previous hurts impact our current relationships?

Why do you think belonging is not an emotion or feeling?

What steps can you take to "come down the mountain"?

COMMUNITY /// ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER

RESPONSE

You will probably have great ideas for response because you know your group. Our hope is that we can help you as much as possible, without getting in your way. Below are some response ideas - use what works and throw out the rest! Our main hope is that we will make this as experiential as possible for the teens.

PRAYER

This is a great opportunity to have students pray for each other. I have found that asking this as honestly as possible is powerful: "Who feels like they are isolated?" Then have the students gather around those who stand up. You may have to have students who stand up gather up with other students who stand up.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- ① Why do you think Elijah ran after his victory?
- ② What makes isolation so dangerous?
- ③ What causes you to draw into isolation? (stress, fear, tiredness)
- ④ How do you feel when you draw into isolation?
- ⑤ Do you think isolation is different from being introverted?
- ⑥ What are some ways that you can help people who struggle with isolation?

OUTREACH APPLICATION

Can you think of anyone who seems to have isolated themselves recently? Who haven't you seen in a while? Who haven't you contacted in a while? Reach out to those people. Sometimes just reminding someone they are not alone is the most important thing you can do for them.

¹Dance, Mark. "The Isolation Trap." *LifeWay Pastors*, LifeWay, 21 May 2015, www.lifeway.com/pastors/2015/05/21/the-isolation-trap/.

¹Hall, Todd W. "The Personal Functioning of Pastors: A Review of Empirical Research with Implications for the Care of Pastors." *Sage Journals*, 1 June 1997, journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/009164719702500208.

²Yeh, Charlotte S. "The Power and Prevalence of Loneliness." *Harvard Health Blog*, 13 Jan. 2017, www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-power-and-prevalence-of-loneliness-2017011310977.

³Carter, Les. *Mind over Emotions: How to Mentally Control Your Feelings*. Baker Book House, 1985.

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING

COMMUNITY /// THE POWER OF OFFENSE



BIG IDEA

Offense hinders community.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

As leaders we can often take on offenses as well. Some of the most dangerous and damaging offenses are secondary offenses—offenses that we take on, on someone else's behalf. Another easy pitfall of offense is when people criticize the work that we do. It is important to guard ourselves and be sure that we are quick to offer forgiveness. Spend some time in preparing for this lesson in silence with the Lord, asking Him to bring anything to mind that may be an offense you are holding onto. Then ask Him how to proceed with it.

STARTER

Ice Breaker:

What's the weirdest fight/disagreement you've ever had?

Video:

Search YouTube for "Immaculée Ilibagiza on Surviving the Rwandan Genocide."

COMMUNITY /// THE POWER OF OFFENSE

LESSON

Game: Crown the King.

Instructions—Go to your local Burger King and ask for crowns—enough for everyone! Get some pool noodles. The game is easy: everyone tries to knock each other's crowns off. Last one with a crown wins!

Set up and Engage

Living in community means there are going to be plenty of times when we hurt or offend each other. It is often easier to write someone off or cut them out than it is to forgive.

Forgiveness does not come naturally to most of us.

Tell a story of a time when you struggled with forgiving someone, or a time when someone really hurt your feelings (if you can tell this in an appropriate way).

DISCUSS

Do you find it difficult to forgive?

Was there a time that you had to forgive someone?

Was there a time you had to ask for forgiveness and someone didn't forgive you? How did you feel?

MAIN POINT

Read Matthew 18:21–35 aloud.

We have been forgiven much.

The great debtor was forgiven a large amount of money (the equivalent of millions of dollars). In fact, when the disciples heard Jesus talking about this much money,

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they may have even laughed at the ridiculousness of someone lending such a large sum. We have been forgiven an immense debt—worth more than millions of dollars.

One of the points of the story is that our forgiveness of others flows from a place of knowing how much God has forgiven us.

Jesus does not minimize our pain, but He does invite us into a place of being grateful for what He has done for us, and sharing that forgiveness with others.

Forgiveness is not excusing a wrong.

When you forgive someone, you are not saying that what happened was okay. What happened to you is wrong, and it shouldn't have happened. By offering forgiveness you are not justifying the actions of the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling.

You have to choose to forgive, just as continuing to not forgive is also a choice. Sometimes you may have to choose to forgive multiple times.

Sometimes it may take a long time to ever “feel” like you've forgiven someone.

Forgiveness versus trust

Forgiveness is not forgetting, and there is a difference between forgiveness and trust. Trust is earned, but forgiveness is given. The ruler in the story found in Matthew 18 didn't offer to give an additional loan to the debtor, even though the debtor seemed to be out of money.

Letting God take control

Forgiveness is about giving God control. When we withhold forgiveness, we are trying to hold onto control of the situation. And in turn we are saying that God's forgiveness is not enough.

COMMUNITY /// THE POWER OF OFFENSE

DISCUSS

Why do you think the ruler forgave the debt? Why couldn't the debtor forgive the debt?

Why is it important to understand that forgiving is not saying what happened is okay?

Do you think that forgiveness is really a choice? Why or why not?

Is there a difference between forgiving and forgetting? Why or why not?

How does forgiveness give God control? Why is this important?

APPLY

Let's try to apply this teaching to some real-life situations:

Let's say your friend talks behind your back about you—maybe says something that is hurtful. According to this teaching, what should your response be? What if they don't ask forgiveness? Is your response any different?

Let's say your boyfriend/girlfriend cheats on you with another person. What is your response based on this teaching?

Side note to teacher: What I'm going for here is to help students understand the difference between forgiveness and becoming a victim. Of course they need to forgive, but what does that look like? Should they break up? I would say yes. Forgiveness does not always mean things get to stay the same relationally.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Let's say your friend's parents are getting a divorce. They are hurt and angered by this, and feel betrayed by their parents, or by one parent in particular. How would you counsel them to forgive in this situation?

Forgiveness is a choice, but God helps.

Forgiveness of others starts with the fact that Jesus has forgiven you. Forgiveness can feel hard, even impossible sometimes. We can start by simply asking God to help us want to forgive. God honors honesty. And he will start working with us at whatever place we can start. Sometimes forgiving others is a process, and this is okay. Don't beat yourself up if it takes a while, and multiple times of forgiving them in your heart, before you feel released.

Forgiveness brings healing.

Forgiveness opens the door to allow God to heal the hurt in our lives. Often forgiveness is more about what God can do in US than about the people being forgiven. By forgiving you are letting God have control, and therefore asking God to come into your heart and heal where you've been hurt by that person. Remember, God has already forgiven the person who wronged you. It is not your place to hold people to a higher standard than God does.

DISCUSS

Is it hard to relate to "having been forgiven a great debt"? What debt have you been forgiven?

Is it harder to forgive or to be forgiven? Why?

How does forgiveness allow God to "heal the hurt"?

COMMUNITY /// THE POWER OF OFFENSE

RESPONSE

You will probably have great ideas for response because you know your group. Our hope is that we can help you as much as possible, without getting in your way. Below are some response ideas - use what works and throw out the rest! Our main hope is that we will make this as experiential as possible for the teens.

On their own:

Have students use an index card for these questions/responses:

Is there someone you need to forgive?

Have you hurt someone and not yet asked for forgiveness?

Write down the name(s) on a card and make a plan to talk to them this week!

PRAYER

Have the students pray with each other. Ask students who are having a hard time forgiving other people to stand or raise their hand. Have the other students pray for them.

Lead the students who are struggling in this simple prayer:

God, help me want to forgive _____.

God, I choose to forgive _____.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- ① Who are some of the hardest people for you to forgive?
- ② Why do you think we are sometimes slow to forgive?
- ③ What are some ways you can remind yourself of the forgiveness you have been given?
- ④ Who do you need to forgive? (Depending on your group, this may or may not work. They may prefer not to share, but they might be willing to write down a name on an index card and keep it with them.)

OUTREACH APPLICATION

This week, if there is someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to ask forgiveness from, make a plan to do it!

NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL LIVING

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT



BIG IDEA

YOUTH LEADER
SOUL CARE

STARTER

COMMUNITY STARTS WITH YOU

How do you recharge? Take some time this week to recharge your batteries. I have had some conversations recently with leaders who no longer know what recharges them. Even when they are “off,” their thoughts are still on all the things that need to get done. Make some “recharge goals” for this month.

Ice Breaker:

If you could have dinner with anyone not named Jesus, who would it be (living or dead)?

Video:

Michael Jr—Be The Punchline (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2MORc0ZCo8>)

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

LESSON

Game: Balloon Defense

Divide the room into two sides with two teams. Each team gets 25–50 balloons (use two different colors). You can play this free-for-all style where there are really no rules and they just try to pop each other's balloons and defend their own balloons any way they can. Or you can play it capture-the-flag style. This way if someone crosses the center line and gets tagged, they go to jail. You make a small square for the balloons on each side and if you can cross into the enemy territory and make it safely into that square, you get to take a balloon and pop it. Play for as long as you want—have fun!

Set up and Engage

Have you ever felt like you were on the outside looking in? Have you ever wanted to be in the cool kid club? Or simply just wanted to be asked to tag along?

The truth is that we all want community to be someone else's responsibility. We say it is "their" job to include me. We all want to feel desired, wanted, and pursued. We want to be invited into something, to belong to something.

Many times we want it to be about us, but we are called to be those who give not those who consume. It is not about you!

Have you ever been on the outside looking in? How did it feel?

What keeps you from community?

DISCUSS

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

MAIN POINT

Read Luke 19:1–10 aloud.

(If you want to watch a funny video to illustrate the story, go to skitguys.com and look up Little Billy: Zacchaeus.)

Community Starts with You

Jesus was rejected by a lot of people. There were many who thought that He didn't look the way that He should look, or act the way that He should act. Jesus didn't let that define Him though. Instead, He reached out and helped others be in community—people like Zacchaeus.

We often talk about how Zacchaeus (we'll call him Zach for short) climbed the tree because of his size, but I have to wonder if it was also because no one liked him and they probably didn't think he deserved to meet Jesus. They all knew what he did for a living, but Jesus set the example that community starts with us.

In this story Jesus modeled for us how we can and should be reaching out to people. It is also echoed in Matthew 28:18–20, which teaches us to GO – Baptize – Teach. Go means that you are the one to take the first step. Baptism in the early church meant that you were a part of the family. Being baptized meant that no matter what you belonged. Teaching requires spending time with someone. This was the model God set for us.

1. Go to them

Jesus didn't wait for Zacchaeus to come down from the tree. He didn't stand by and wonder, "Maybe Zach doesn't want to talk? Maybe he wants to be alone." No—Jesus initiated relationship. He reached out.

Even more importantly, he reached out at the potential expense of his own reputation! Can you imagine that? Everyone there knew that this guy was a tax collector. By going to Zach, Jesus was aligning himself with this guy, and therefore opening himself up to recrimination.

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

In your world, this would be like reaching out to someone in school, and possibly opening yourself up to being made fun of. Do you know anyone like Zach in your school? How do people treat him/her?

2. Help them belong

Studies have shown that relationship and community is one of the things that causes most students to attend churches or youth groups.* People are longing to BELONG. They are longing for community. They are longing to “fit it” and be accepted just as they are.

But this starts with you. What does it look like to not only reach out to someone, but also to welcome them into your life or community? Jesus didn't just give lip service to loving people, he actually gave them a place. Now this is harder to apply to our lives. It's not like everyone you meet can “belong” in your friendship circle. But in youth group EVERYONE can belong, right? Can we learn to help others belong and find a place in our group?

Leader—Tell a story of a time you saw the power of helping someone belong, who didn't think they would, and how that touched their life.

3. Spend time together

Community requires time. There are no shortcuts to community and friendship. Have you ever noticed that when you go to an event like a weekend retreat, you come home having cultivated a new friendship with someone? That is because time is needed to make community.

We are so busy that often it is hard to create space in our lives to be together. This is another way that community starts with us. When we arrange our lives to make sure we attend youth group, set time aside to go to retreats, and create time to hang out with our friends, we are fostering community!

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

DISCUSS

Have you noticed how easy it is to just stay home and relax, or kill time on your device? It is always easier to walk AWAY from community. But we find life when we walk TOWARD it.

Can you relate to Zacchaeus? Did you see Zacchaeus differently through this telling? How?

Why is community so important for your generation?

In what ways do you feel like you belong or not?

How do you feel about the call to “GO”?

What stands in our way?

I have found there are several things that can stand in the way of initiating community with others:

Fear of being rejected when I reach out. What if they don't really want to talk to me?

Fear of what others will think of me, especially if the person I am reaching out to is maybe looked down upon by others.

Fear of opening up to a new person. Sometimes it is easier to just have the friends you have, and not try to meet new people. It can be scary to be vulnerable with a new person.

Self-centeredness. Most of the time the reason I don't let community start with me is that I'm too involved in my life—my own issues or my own busyness—to really care or even notice others in need.

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

APPLY

Are any of these true for you? What can you do to combat those?

One important thing to remember from the verses in Matthew 28 about Go-Baptize-Teach is that Jesus ends that section by promising He will be with you: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Remember, you aren't doing it alone.

Community starts with you. In your school or in your group, who is in the role of Zaccheaus? Who are the people that feel like they are on the outside looking in? You have the power and the call to help them feel like they belong.

What are some practical ways that you can help others feel like they belong?

Why is reaching out to new people so difficult?

What things stand in your way?

RESPONSE

You will probably have great ideas for response because you know your group. Our hope is that we can help you as much as possible, without getting in your way. Below are some response ideas - use what works and throw out the rest! Our main hope is that we will make this as experiential as possible for the teens.

COMMUNITY /// OWNING IT

PRAYER

Have the students pray for each other. Pray for the ones who feel like they don't fit in community, but also take the time to pray as a group. I like to have the students come together in a huddle and pray as one group. Let some students lead out, asking that God would help them be an open community where others feel they can join and belong.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- ① Do you feel like you have a community?
- ② Where do you feel like you have the strongest community?
- ③ How can you help build community within our group?
- ④ Why do you think community is so important within the church?
- ⑤ Why does community start with you?

OUTREACH APPLICATION

Who are the people around you who don't have a community? What keeps you from reaching out to them? Find ways for your group to reach out to those people in your area.

*Powell, Kara Eckmann, and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 93.; Clark, Chap. Hurt 2.0: *Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH USA CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We’re pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we’re confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson includes:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to reveal and experience the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions with age and gender specific items.
- A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.
- Planned activities to help students hear God for themselves.

Community Starts With You

Studies indicate that community and relationships are key facets that connect adolescent students to a youth ministry context, as well as lasting church engagement. The call of the church has been and always will be to create a community and family of God – and expression of God’s love. In this curriculum we want to take the opportunity to discuss some of the realities, difficulties, and hurdles to experiencing community and relationship during this phase of life. The goal of this study is to understand the role of community as well as the barriers that often keep us from “belonging.”

About the Author

Nick Sybouts

Nick serves as Vineyard’s Middle School Pastor. He and his wife, Annah, have been married for 9 years and have a 4 year old son, Kairon, and will be soon welcoming their sweet little girl! Nick graduated from Family of Faith Christian University with a Bachelor of Arts in Church Ministry and from Fuller Theological Seminary with a Masters of Theology. Having spent over 15 years in various roles of youth ministry, Nick has a passion for students and seeing them reach their God-given destiny. During his free time, Nick is a die-hard sports fan, an avid reader, Netflix binge-watcher, and a “hack” golfer.