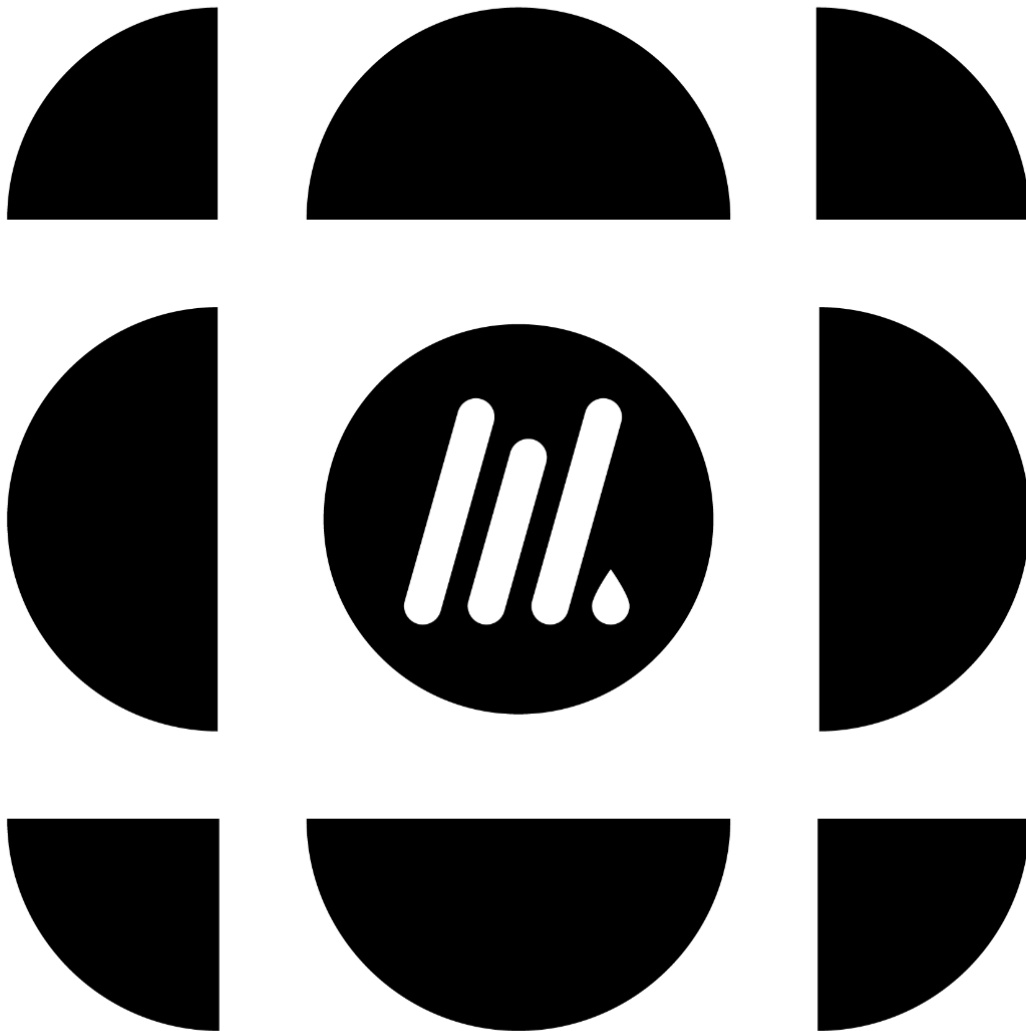


MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY

MOD-01

Name: _____



GOAL To actively grow in our experience and participation in meaningful community where we are known, loved, and challenged.

**KEY
PASSAGE** Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Eph4:15-16)



Week 1

Practice Introduction



So many Christians struggle in their Christian walk unnecessarily. Jesus promises life (John 10:10) and makes a way for meaning and growth, but many do not access it because they fail to meaningfully participate in the community of Jesus. Christians should not feel isolated, disconnected and without help.

When we become a Christian, we get new relationships - first with God and then with God's family, the church (Eph 2:19). We don't get to "have it our way" choosing God and ignoring God's family like a fast-food drive-thru order. Part of accessing life and real change in our Christian journey requires that we prioritize and participate in real and meaningful relationships with others within the local church (Heb 10:24-25), which is the "body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12-31). This invitation to fellowship is part of God's grace to help us grow in Christ (Eph 4:15) and to experience the kind of relationships our hearts long for.

In many ways our understanding of what it means to participate in meaningful relationships is negatively affected by the prevailing mindset of western society. We can refer to one of western society's core beliefs as 'radical individualism' which puts *my* truth, *my* desires, *my* feelings, and *my* comfort at the center. It's a commitment to self above anything or anyone else. Our world has presented self-centeredness in a more presentable - even nobler - light and it's been embraced by the masses. As a result we don't know how to have meaningful relationships because we're not willing to look beyond ourselves.

Practicing the way of Jesus directly opposes radical individualism. Christians experience the radical love of God (Rom 5:5), and in turn are called to love - to love God, and to love others (Matthew 22:37-40). We, like Jesus, lay down our lives to serve and prefer others. To follow Jesus is to drive out the motivation of putting self before all. We fight to uproot radical individualism from our hearts by a radical reorientation to love.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus called random and disconnected people to do life with Him, and with these followers He forged a new community. This was a community of disciples - apprentices of Jesus learning to practice the way of Jesus. True discipleship happens in the context of meaningful community with God's people centered around Jesus. This is not an optional extra, but an essential part of following Jesus.

A radical reorientation to love isn't as easy as we'd like to believe. It takes intentionality, stepping out of our comfort zones, and rearranging our priorities. Imagine radical individualism as the operating system of our lives. The defaults and presets of this operating system cause us to avoid vulnerability, compassion, or anything costly to us. However, God is in the process of re-programming this operating system! To engage with God's work in our lives, we have to let go of these old defaults and presets and have the courage to embrace the community of Jesus.

In order to help people move towards meaningful community centered around Jesus, three crucial goals can be identified - 1) to be known and to know others, 2) to be loved and to love others, and 3) to be challenged and to challenge others. If your desire is to thrive in your Christian walk then you should look for the following.

To Be Known

Being truly known is simultaneously what we long for and what we fear. We long for it because if we are really known we experience belonging and love. We fear it because if we let people see the real us, we risk rejection. For us to participate and experience meaningful community we need to be willing to be known.

Two of the most prominent pictures for the community of believers in scripture are the church as a family and the church as the body of Christ (Eph 2:19; 1 Cor 12:12-31). As disciples of Jesus we are both members of a family and members of the body of Christ. If a member of a family was not known by the other family members, that would be unhealthy. If a part of the body was not recognized by the rest of the body, that would be dysfunctional. The degree to which family members know each other and body parts recognize each other is a sign that the family and body are working properly.

Think about it this way, if the real you isn't known, how can people help you with your struggles, encourage you in your calling, and celebrate your value? If the real you isn't known, how can people partner with you to advance the gospel?

Uncommitted relationships, random connections and occasional hangouts will never result in being known. Being known is to commit to doing life together with other members of the body of Christ over a long period of time. To do this well requires that we step out of our comfort zone and resist self protection defaults. It requires courage to be real, to let the walls down, and to choose vulnerability and honesty.

To Be Loved

Being truly known opens the door to being truly loved. Social media sells us a cheap version of love full of "likes" and "hearts" for a highlight reel of our lives, but this doesn't satisfy our heart's desire to experience real love without pretense. This is what makes the gospel so powerful. God

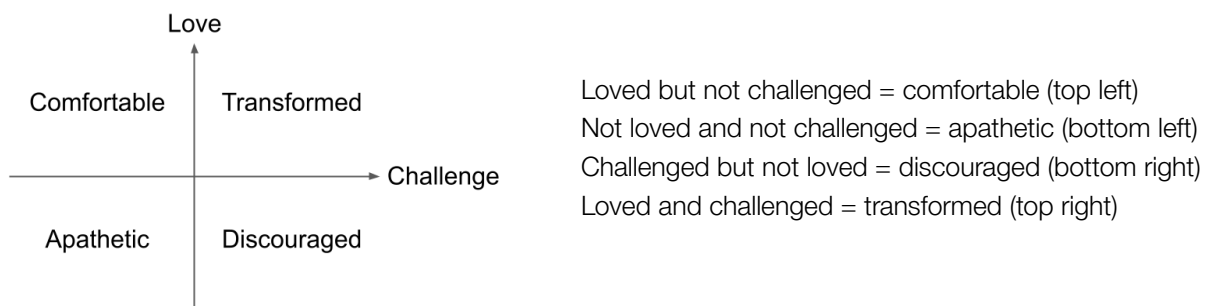
knew us in our sinful state and, by his grace, still saved us and overwhelmed us with His love (Rom 5:8). And if that were not enough, He no longer sees us according to our sin but He sees us as righteous members of his family, as sons and daughters (Rom 5:1; 1 John 3:1-2).

The Christian community does the same as we participate in “gospeling” one another. As we do life together, we become aware of each other’s sins, struggles, and weaknesses. Just as God has welcomed us into His family in the midst of our sin, we welcome each other (Rom 15:7). We no longer view each other according to our sin; instead, we see each other according to our new identity - dearly loved by God and members of His family. We see each other as God sees us. Being known and loved by brothers and sisters in Christ is one of God’s means for us to experience love in the context of His family.

To Be Challenged

To be loved and not challenged is to remain comfortable and stuck in destructive patterns of sin. God’s grace towards us is more than just forgiveness of sins, it is also His power to transform our lives and to live in-line with our new identity in the family of God (Romans 12:1-2). To see each other as God sees us means that we call each other to live in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27), spurring one another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). To this end, we must strive to be a community that is marked by both love and challenge.

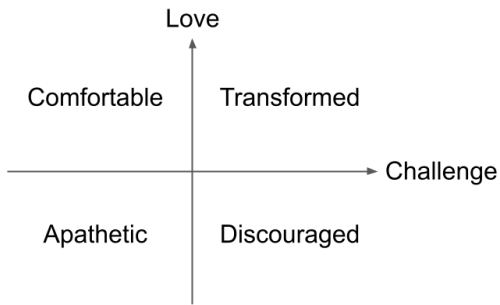
Being marked by love means we strive to welcome all to share meaningful life together centered on Jesus, while challenge means we strive to help each other change our pattern of living into practicing the way of Jesus. We must have both. The diagram shown helps articulate what happens to communities that fail to hold both values.



Challenging one another means we encourage each other to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), and we are willing to speak the truth in love to each other (Eph 4:15). In the context of love, we call-out what is out of place in each other’s lives, we remind each other of our true identity in Christ, and we strive to live-out that identity together by the power of God (Phil 2:12-13).

Self Assessment

Think about your past experience in christian community - where would you place yourself on the loved and challenged diagram below?



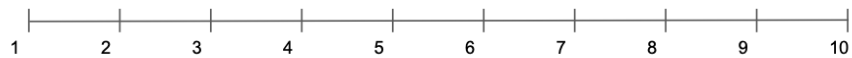
Loved but not challenged = comfortable (top left)
Not loved and not challenged = apathetic (bottom left)
Challenged but not loved = discouraged (bottom right)
Loved and challenged = transformed (top right)

On a scale from 1 to 10, (1 = lowest, 10 = highest) how would you rate your current experience of being known, loved, and challenged at Mercy Commons?

Known:



Loved:



Challenged:



On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your own effort to know others, to love others, and to challenge others at Mercy Commons?

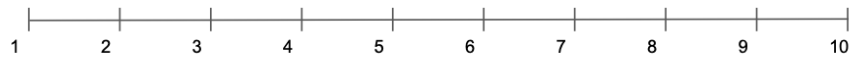
Know others:



Love others:



Challenge others:



Do you desire to take the steps necessary to be known, loved and challenged?

Rate your desire:

My desire to pursue
being known, loved,
and challenged:



Practices for the Week

Exercise

Review the “one another” passages of scripture (see “Supplemental Materials” section). Reflect on how gospel community is God’s gift for us to grow. Spend some time imagining what it would be like if you were the recipient of these “one anothers” in a tangible way. How known would you feel? How loved would you feel? How connected would you feel to God’s family? How would this help you grow as a follower of Jesus?

Pray that He would help you participate in the community that He has in mind and experience God’s family as He intended. Pray for the courage to be truly known. Pray that your love for others would grow, and that by the power of the Holy Spirit you would begin to practice the “one anothers” for the benefit of others.

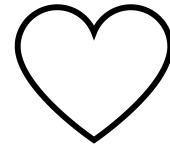
Practices

- Pull out your calendar and schedule the remaining life group meetings for the rest of the year.

- Add people from your life group to your contacts

- Post an encouragement to your life group chat

Week 2



Ways We Avoid Vulnerability

To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear, but to be truly known and fully loved is how God has loved us. It liberates us from pretense, humbles our self righteousness and fortifies us for a difficult life.

-Tim Keller

The doorway to experiencing meaningful community in our lives is to first be truly known. It is impossible for your brother or sister in Christ to come alongside you if they don't know what you're facing or what you're thinking. In order to be truly known, we must be *vulnerable* with one another. We often feel that being vulnerable means being weak, but it actually means being *courageous*. Being vulnerable means directly facing our deep fear of being rejected - a fear that goes all the way back to the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve hid from God when they sinned. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has accepted and welcomed us in the midst of our sin and brokenness. He invites us into His family while we are still "not okay", but then leads us to *not stay that way*. That's what we do for each other when we're vulnerable - we express the love and acceptance of Jesus for one another, and then challenge each other to walk out of darkness into the light.

Here are some ways that we can tend to avoid vulnerability. Spend a few moments considering which one you may tend to use when you find yourself avoiding vulnerability.

Pretending

When we pretend, we put on a mask that shields our hearts from opening up with others. We make people perceive us in a certain way that is not in-line with what is actually happening in our hearts.

Minimizing

When we minimize, we make something that is actually weighing heavy on our hearts appear as if it is "no big deal". We don't let people into the reality of how we feel about the situation we're facing.

Ignoring

When we ignore, we avoid allowing ourselves to be aware of what is happening in our own hearts. We don't process our emotions or allow others to help us process our emotions.

Re-directing

When we re-direct, we take charge of the conversation to steer it away from where we feel vulnerable.

Practices for the Week

Exercises:

Read through the list of “one anothers” again:

1. Identify a few of the “one anothers” that you would not fully experience if you are not truly known. (i.e. you cannot experience someone carrying your burdens if they don’t know what your burdens are)

2. Identify a few of the “one anothers” that if received as intended, will potentially make you feel uncomfortable.

3. Write down in your own words the necessity and benefit of being known, loved, and challenged

Practices:

- Prayerfully consider 1-2 people who you want to invite to truly know you and who you are willing to give permission to challenge you.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

- Schedule a coffee or meal with at least one of these people listed with the intent to invite them into your life in a meaningful way.

Week 3



Practices for the Week:

Exercise:

- Prayerfully consider a few of the people that God has put on your heart.
- Take the names that you have come up with, read through the list of “one another” passages and identify which “one another” God is wanting you to express to them?
- Next, think through how you will express that “one another” to them.

Name	“One Another”	How
<i>Jane</i>	<i>Serve one another</i>	<i>Offer to babysit so that she can go out or have a date with her husband.</i>

Notes:

Week 4

Hearing Stories & Celebrations

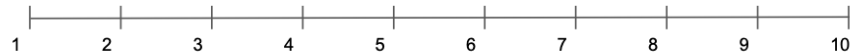
Self Re-Assessment



The point of a reassessment is to see whether there has been growth or progress. Be honest.

On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your current experience of being known, loved, and challenged at Mercy Commons?

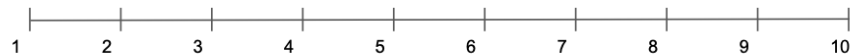
Known:



Loved:

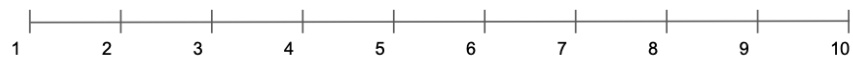


Challenged:

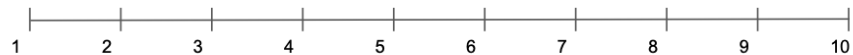


On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your own effort to know others, to love others, and to challenge others in this church?

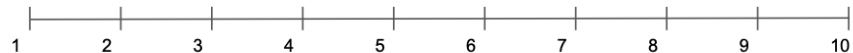
Know others:



Love others:



Challenge others:



Do you desire to take the steps necessary to be known, loved and challenged?

Rate your desire:

My desire to pursue being known, loved, and challenged:



Notes:

Practices for the Week:

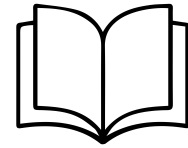
Exercise:

The world around us is suffocating from lack of meaningful community. People are often won to community before they are won to Jesus. One of our most powerful evangelistic tools is inviting people to experience the community of Jesus.

- Prayerfully think about people in your life who desperately need gospel community, and desperately need Jesus. Write their names down below, and identify next steps God may be calling you to take to invite them into your church community.
- Share that person's name with someone in your life group so that they can support your efforts.

Name	Next Step
<i>Sam</i>	<i>Invite him to coffee or an event with a few friends from our life group.</i>

Supplemental Materials



“One Another” Passages in Scripture

The New Testament is full of instructions for God’s people in the church to love and care for each other in a way that is radically different from the individualism of western society. These instructions are often given using the phrase “one another”, which teaches us that each member of the family of God has a responsibility to maintain the community of Jesus around them. Not only should we open our lives up to be known, loved, and challenged by others, but we also have a responsibility to know, love and challenge others ourselves. Here is a collection of some of the “one another” passages separated into categories of being known, loved, and challenged:

Known	Loved	Challenged
<p>Accept one another (Rom 15:7, Rom 12:10)</p>	<p>Love one another (John 13:34-35)</p>	<p>Instruct one another (Rom 15:14, Col 3:16)</p>
<p>Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:6, 1 Thes 5:13, 1 Pet 3:8)</p>	<p>Have equal concern for one another (1 Cor 12:25)</p>	<p>Spur one another on towards love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)</p>
<p>Honor one another (Rom 12:10)</p>	<p>Wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33)</p>	<p>Do not give up meeting together (Heb 10:25)</p>
<p>Agree with one another (1 Cor 1:10)</p>	<p>Serve one another (Gal 5:13)</p>	<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)</p>
<p>Offer hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)</p>	<p>Carry one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2)</p>	<p>Encourage one another (1 Thes 4:18, Heb 3:13)</p>
	<p>Bear with one another (Eph 4:2, Col 3:13)</p>	<p>Do not slander one another (James: 4:11)</p>
	<p>Forgive one another (Eph 4:32, Col 3:13)</p>	
	<p>Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom 14:13)</p>	

As you engage in the “practices for the week” - reflect on these “one another” passages of scripture, which are copied below for easy reference:

Know One Another	
Accept one another	
<p><i>“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 15:7</p>	<p><i>“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 12:10a</p>
Live in harmony with one another	
<p><i>“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 12:6</p>	<p><i>“All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 3:8</p>
Honor one another	Confess your sins to one another
<p><i>“...Outdo one another in showing honor.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 12:10b</p>	<p><i>“Therefore, confess your sins to one another”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>James 5:16</i></p>
Agree with one another	Offer hospitality to one another
<p><i>“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Cor 1:10</p>	<p><i>“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 4:9</p>

Love One Another	
<p><i>"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 13:34-35</p>	<p><i>"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 15:12-13</p>
<p><i>"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 13:8</p>	<p><i>"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 4:8</p>
<p><i>"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 John 4:7</p>	<p><i>"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart"</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 1:22</p>
Have equal concern for one another	Wait for one another
<p><i>"that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Corinthians 12:25</p>	<p><i>"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another"</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Corinthians 11:33</p>
Serve one another	Carry one another's burdens
<p><i>"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Galatians 5:13</p>	<p><i>"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Galatians 6:2</p>
Do not lie to one another	Do not provoke or envy one another
<p><i>"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices"</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Colossians 3:9</p>	<p><i>"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Galatians 5:26</p>
Bear with one another	

<p><i>“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ephesians 4:2</i></p>	<p><i>“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Colossians 3:13</i></p>
Be compassionate to one another	Forgive one another
<p><i>“Be kind and compassionate to one another”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ephesians 4:32</i></p>	<p><i>“forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ephesians 4:32</i></p>
Build one another up	Clothe yourself with humility towards one another
<p><i>“build one another up, just as you are doing.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>1 Thessalonians 5:11</i></p>	<p><i>“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>1 Peter 5:5</i></p>
Don’t grumble against one another	Pray for one another
<p><i>“Do not grumble against one another”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>James 5:9</i></p>	<p><i>“pray for one another, that you may be healed.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>James 5:16</i></p>

Challenge One Another	
Instruct one another	
<p><i>“You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Romans 15:14</i></p>	<p><i>“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Colossians 3:16</i></p>
Stop passing judgment on one another	Spur one another on towards love and good deeds
<p><i>“Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a</i></p>	<p><i>“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Hebrews 10:24</i></p>

<p><i>stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Romans 14:13</i></p>	
<p>Do not give up meeting together</p>	<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs</p>
<p><i>“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Hebrews 10:25</i></p>	<p><i>“addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ephesians 5:19</i></p>
<p>Encourage one another</p>	
<p><i>“Therefore encourage one another”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>1 Thessalonians 4:18</i></p>	<p><i>“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>1 Thessalonians 5:11</i></p>
<p><i>“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Hebrews 3:13</i></p>	<p><i>“encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Hebrews 10:25</i></p>
<p>Do not slander one another</p>	
<p><i>“Brothers, do not slander one another.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>James 4:11</i></p>	