

# Living as a Christ-Follower - The *three* Connections

“Come, follow me.” (Matthew 4:19) When Jesus spoke these words to his first disciples, he called them into a relationship that would transform every area of their lives. Jesus would be their King, and they would become his Kingdom Community. They would set aside many of their former values, priorities, and practices to follow Jesus in the ways of his Kingdom. His teachings would be their guide, his love their motivation, and his life their model. He entrusted them with his mission of helping people find their way back to God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, God used them to turn the world upside down.

So what does it mean to follow King Jesus as his Kingdom Community today? It means embracing three vital and life-changing connections, which we call *The Three Connections*.

## **YOU + God**      **YOU + the Church**      **YOU + the World**

We believe Jesus demonstrated these three connections in his own life when he walked here on earth. As we learn to imitate his ways, we can expect to see ever-maturing expressions of these connections in our own lives. As we mature, God calls us to lead others in the ways of Jesus.

The apostle Paul said, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1). This, in essence, is what it means to be a Christ-follower. Whether you attend a physical location, Community Online, a MicroChurch or Community Freedom, or lead in your own family and neighborhood, you can grow in these connections as you follow the example of Christ. The beliefs and practices outlined in this resource are COMMUNITY’s roadmap on how to be a disciple of Jesus. This doesn’t mean that we are a finished product. We are all “in-process” as Christ-followers. We encourage you to pursue a lifestyle that leaves space to grow these beliefs and practices in your life and family. Commit to developing these YOU+ Connections in yourself so that you can grow in your relationship with God, the church, and the world. We hope this resource can serve as a source of encouragement, challenge, and accountability as we help one another become more like Jesus.

 ***We want to invite you now to read and respond to each YOU + connection.***

## **Connection #1 - YOU + God**

**Commitment to Jesus:** Jesus calls each of us to follow him. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are pledging our allegiance to Jesus as King, turning from our former way of life (repentance), and seeking to follow him in the ways of his Kingdom. Part of our response to Jesus is to be baptized by immersion. This is a public way to say with our whole person that we want to be plunged into the reality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and give up our own ways of living to embrace Jesus’ Kingdom way of life (Mark 1:9-11, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-14)

**Practices that Grow Our Connection to God:** Jesus engaged in practices that strengthened his connection with the Father. These practices included attending Synagogue every week to participate in corporate teaching and worship (Luke 4:16) and withdrawing to quiet places by himself where he could communicate with his Father through prayer and other spiritual disciplines (Mark 1:35, Luke 6:12). As growing Christ-followers, we learn from Jesus’ example by engaging in practices to grow our connection to God. We consistently participate in weekly adult, student, or kids services throughout our four Expressions where we can receive teaching from God’s Word and join with other Christ-followers in worshiping him. We also pursue a closer connection with God through prayer and spiritual disciplines such as journaling, fasting, meditating on God’s Word, silence, etc. We make this time with Jesus a priority in our lives and schedules.



**Commitment to Scripture:** Jesus often quoted from the written Word of God (Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 22:34-40). He was familiar with Scripture and applied its values, principles, and ideals to everyday living. As Christ-followers, we learn from Jesus' example by continually increasing our understanding of God's Word through regular reading and study of the Bible. We can apply what we learn from God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We can let God's principles and commands guide every area of our lives, including our relationships (Matthew 7:12, Philippians 2:3-4, Colossians 3:12-14), sexuality (Genesis 2:21-24, Matthew 19:4-6, Hebrews 13:4), and finances (Matthew 6:19-24, 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

**Kingdom Living that Honors God:** Jesus taught and demonstrated how life in the Kingdom of God is meant to be lived and calls his followers to join him in his Kingdom way of living (Matthew 5-7, John 13:34-35, John 13:15). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit to following Jesus in the ways of the Kingdom. We want our values, ethics, beliefs, and practices to be shaped by the Kingdom, not by the cultural norms or political ideologies of our world. We are mindful of how our words and actions reflect on Christ as we interact with people in person or on social media and seek to honor him in all things (Titus 2:7-8, Colossians 4:5-6).

## Connection #2 - YOU + The Church

**Commitment to the Church:** Jesus established the church as his Kingdom Community. While the decision to become a follower of Jesus involves a personal decision with eternal implications, the Christ-following life isn't solely about my own personal salvation. It's about following Jesus as part of his eternal Kingdom community. The New Testament writer Paul said that when we turn our lives towards Jesus, we become adopted children of God (Romans 8:15b, Galatians 3:26).

Through the work of the Spirit, we enter into an eternally binding relationship with God as his sons and daughters and into an eternally binding relationship with one another as brothers and sisters. We are family, called to love one another. As growing Christ-followers, we are committed to this family. We do our best to make sure every person in the family can thrive. We care for the needs of one another. When conflicts arise, we follow the process Jesus outlined for addressing conflict directly through face-to-face conversations (Matthew 18:15-17, Matthew 5:23-24).

**Practices that Grow Our Connection to the Church:** Jesus engaged in practices that strengthened his connection with his followers. Jesus chose a small group of twelve to be in his inner circle of relationships. (Luke 6:12-16) He spent most of his time with these disciples, shared important conversations and events with them, and lived daily life with them. Jesus also served his followers by washing their feet. He performed this lowly act to set an example for them that they were to serve one another. (John 13:1-7).

As Christ-followers, we are committed to the type of genuine biblical community the first Christians practiced as described in Acts 2:41-47. Therefore, we make connecting in a Small Group and with one another a priority. We also believe God gives every Christ-follower spiritual gifts and talents that are to be used in service to others in order to build up his body, the church (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4). That's why we give our time to serve others in the church. We encourage everyone in our sphere of influence to join a Small Group and use their gifts and talents to serve on a Ministry Team within an expression of COMMUNITY.

**Care for Family:** As Jesus was dying on the cross, he asked one of his disciples to care for his mother as if she was his own. This touching act of love demonstrated Jesus' sense of responsibility for his own family (John 19:25-27). As Christ-followers, caring for our families is a priority in our lives. We take seriously the responsibility for the spiritual formation of our children and their children. We can model a God-honoring commitment to our families (Ephesians 5:21-6:4, 1 Timothy 3:1-5) as we lead by example in each of our connection. We strive to practice them authentically where we live, work and play. In turn, if we are parents, we will teach our own children to practice the these connections as well (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).



**Discipling other Christ-followers:** Within Jesus' relational circle, he chose to invest more deeply in three men: Peter, James, and John. He included these three in some of the most personal parts of his life and ministry (Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 5:35-43, Mark 14:32-34). He prepared them to be leaders in the church (Matthew 16:17-19). He released them to do ministry in this world (John 17:18). Early church leaders like Paul adopted this model of discipleship (2 Timothy 2:2).

As growing Christ-followers, we can disciple others as well. We are committed to coming alongside other growing Christ-followers and discipling them through the three Connections. When we invest in the lives of other people, we are discipling Christ-followers and future leaders that can be released into their individual calling and help others find their way back to God.

## Connection #3 - YOU + The World

**Commitment to the World:** Jesus sends his followers out to carry on the mission of helping people find their way back to God (John 20:21, Matthew 28:18-20). The people of God have always been blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). Therefore, as Christ-followers, we are committed to building friendships with people in the world who do not yet have a relationship with God.

**Practices that Grow Our Connection to the World:** Jesus engaged in simple practices that enabled him to build relationships with people and help them find their way back to God. As Christ-followers, we follow the example of Jesus who "blessed" the people and places he encountered every day. We believe you will find the following practices to be helpful in following Jesus' example.

**B: Begin with Prayer** - The mission always begins with prayer. In this practice, we ask God to show us who to bless and then commit to regularly praying for those people.

**L: Listen** - In this practice, we intentionally listen to the people around us to learn their stories and understand their needs so that we can look for opportunities to love and serve them well.

**E: Eat** - Share a meal with people! Just like Jesus shared a meal with Matthew and his friends, we can eat with those we want to bless. There is something about food that opens doors to relationships.

**S: Serve** - As you listen to people and the places that matter to you, you will find ways to sacrificially serve them. You can find ways to serve our community through serving opportunities in our Community Cares Ministry.

**S: Story** - Finally, share your story and your presence with people. Be ready to tell people about the work Jesus has done in your life—even if it's still messy!

**Engaging in the Work of Mercy and Justice:** Jesus declared that he came to bring good news to the poor, the imprisoned, and the oppressed (Luke 4:16-21). As Christ-followers, we share in Jesus' heart for those on the margins and engage in the work of caring for the vulnerable in our world, understanding it is an expression of love toward God himself (Matthew 25:34-35). We seek to join God in working against injustice so that everyone experiences freedom (Isaiah 58:6-10). We follow God's command to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with him (Micah 6:8).

**Giving Generously:** Generosity fuels the mission, helping more and more people find their way back to God. Jesus endorsed the Old Testament practice of tithing—giving God the first 10% of everything you have (Matthew 23:23). But he went much further, challenging us to live financially generous lives. He cautioned against storing up wealth (Luke 12:13-21). He challenged us to be wise stewards of what we've been given (Matthew 25:14-28). He commended radical generosity (Luke 21:1-4). As Christ-followers we seek to align ourselves with these Biblical practices by living financially generous lives starting with a tithe and moving toward a life of radical generosity.

