

Before we continue our discussion of Spiritual Community, let's briefly review what we've discussed so far...

- **Discipleship always takes place in the context of relationship**—relationship with God and relationships with others.
- Our relationship with Christ (being **in Christ**) is first and foremost. Outside of Christ, ***Spiritual Community*** cannot happen.
- **Transformation** is the natural and expected result of ***Spiritual Community***. If we are not changed by it we are not experiencing genuine ***Spiritual Community***.
- **Belonging** means we fit in. We are where we belong. We are made for community. It also means we belong to others and others belong to us. We are both “owned by” and “owners of” one another, which means we have responsibility.
- **Accountability** is motivated by love, not fear, and goes hand-in-hand with belonging. It helps us measure our progress in growing into Christ-likeness.
- **Confession** is an act of **Repentance**. The purpose is to recognize we are living out of relational alignment with God and others. The goal is restoration of the relationship... realignment.

This month we will continue by discussing **trust**, a foundation upon which all relationships are built. If trust fails, Spiritual Community falters. A sense of belonging is undeveloped or undermined, accountability is shallow, and confession and repentance are pretty much non-existent.

CRITICAL MISTAKES WHEN IT COMES TO TRUST: *First*, it is a mistake to think that trust simply takes time. I have been in relationships and seen groups who have been together for years not develop real trust. I will ask a leader about the *vulnerability* (another topic for discussion later) of the group only to discover a perceived lack of trust, even though they've been together for years. They get along alright, but they don't really trust each other.

*Second*, it is a mistake to think you must wait to be vulnerable until you think a person or group can be trusted. While I'm not advocating spilling your guts to strangers, I am saying, the fortitude of the relationship(s) need(s) to be tested in order to truly gauge trustworthiness. Think of it as forging—heat and pressure. In fact, trust cannot be forged without pressure, banging, noise, and discomfort. How do you know if you can trust a person or group if that trust is never called upon so sustain anything?

BUILDING TRUST: Yes, time can play a role in developing trust if that time is actually spent building it. One way to build trust is to work together to establish a common understanding, or “rules,” if you will. “Rules” are a practical way of building trust. The rules may be developed intentionally, being set forth in conversation or even writing, but they can also be created experientially. When you think of your relationships with those closest to you, you can probably think of how a person would respond to a particular situation with a high degree of certainty. By your experience—by rule—this is how the person responds. When these rules are broken, trust may also be broken.

God makes promises to us, and keeps them, and this builds trust. It is a rule, if you will, that God is love and God is unchanging. Therefore, I can trust God in every situation in my life. God's motivation towards me is always love. Therefore, while MY orientation to Him might change, I can trust God to remain the same. I am always trying to reorient my life to God—to His rule.

In a group setting, having rules... an order of the way things are done, builds trust through common understanding. We are to have the same motivation towards one another as God has towards us—love. Some simple rules like, “when one person is talking others are listening,” builds trust. I can trust I will be heard. “Always speak the truth,” (not your mind) is another trust building rule. (We’ll deal with honesty later.) More challenging, but equally important, when someone shares about a challenge or sin our responses are always motivated by love. The rule is encouragement, forgiveness and reconciliation. This may seem somewhat subjective, but remember, the idea of reconciliation is to receive back into relationship.

You can tell when a response is motivated by reconciliation or condemnation. The behavior may be condemnable, but the person is not. Obviously, if the person is confessing, they know what they did is wrong. So maybe a good question would be, “If you had it to do over again, how would you handle it?” This will help them think it through, and also provide an opportunity for others in the group to make suggestions if the person says, “I really don’t know.” Another question should eventually be, “How can we help you with this?” If the person is committed to reorienting their life to God by acting in the right way, this is a very necessary question, because we are called to “encourage one another and build each other up.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

So trust is forged. It does not just happen. It takes work and it takes faith. It takes intentionality, like the setting forth and developing of rules—a rule of life together. Fortunately, these rules are given to us by Christ himself. They are called the “one anothers.”