



INTRODUCTION TO VILLAGE

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Welcome to Village! On behalf of our Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley, we welcome you to Village. This small group ministry was birthed out of a desire to create intimate groups of people who could delve deeply, each week, into the sermon. Covered in prayer from the beginning, Village is designed to be a safe place where faith is deepened, thinking skills are sharpened, and relationships are strengthened, all as we gather together for dialogue and discussion.

*The Village Mission is to encourage each other in our daily **walk** with the Lord, grow in Christ and with community, and apply sermon principles to our Christian walk each week.* To make this happen, a team of volunteers and the Village staff create a curriculum guide based on each week's sermon. The guide is distributed to each Villager, via email, on Sunday, and the Villages meet at appointed times throughout the week. Each Village is led by a facilitator who has been chosen and equipped for the role, agreed to hold the Village and the villagers in prayer, and promised to lead with integrity and to the best of their ability.

It is important to note that Village is a discussion-based curriculum, so there are no "experts." The facilitators do not serve as teachers or authorities on the sermon. Instead, they are people, just like you, on a journey of exploration and growth. Your facilitator's role is to create a sacred space where you and your fellow Villagers may gather to engage in an authentic, open, and honest exploration of the sermon. Through dialogue and discussion, the goal is for each person's faith "walk" to grow stronger and deeper.

The "word" walk is essential to understand. Found in the Village's mission statement, walk, when used in the Bible, is used as a *technical term*. In the letters of Paul, the Greek word that underlies most uses of "walk" is *peripateō*, which means the way you move. But it also means your pattern of behavior and how you stand before God. As you move from crowd to community, we hope Village enhances your "walk" as a Christian.

As you continue to read a bit more about Village, know that those who labor to bring it to fruition are excited you are here. We hope this guide answers your questions, but if not, you are always welcome to email us at village@alfredstreet.org. Blessings, and thank you for inquiring about Village.

What Village Is

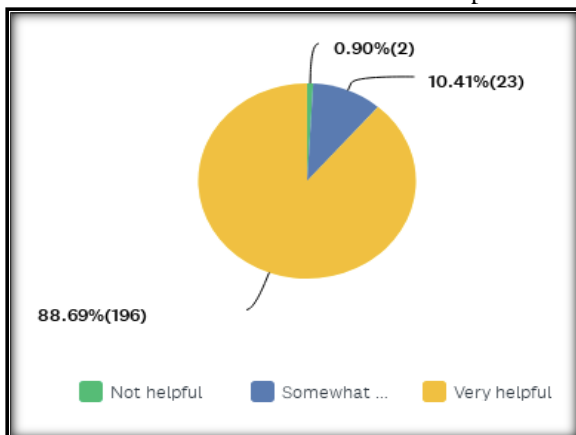
Village is:

- ✠ A place where prayer is offered, people know you by name, your voice matters, and where you will discover new ideas, relationships, and an understanding of our God through the preached and discussed word.
- ✠ A commitment. When you choose to join a Village, you become an integral part of its life, joy, and success. It does take each member of the Village to make the Village whole.
- ✠ A small group discussion format **where the sermon is the curriculum.**
- ✠ Structured to begin and end within a 60 - 90 minute timeframe.
- ✠ Currently being conducted in virtual space, using the Zoom platform.
- ✠ Designed to follow a curriculum guide (see sample attached) that is sent out electronically to all participants by Sunday after the sermon has been preached.
- ✠ A safe space where authentic dialogue and discussion may take place.
- ✠ A place where we will not always agree but where we will always agree to respect the opinions of others and seek not to proselytize.

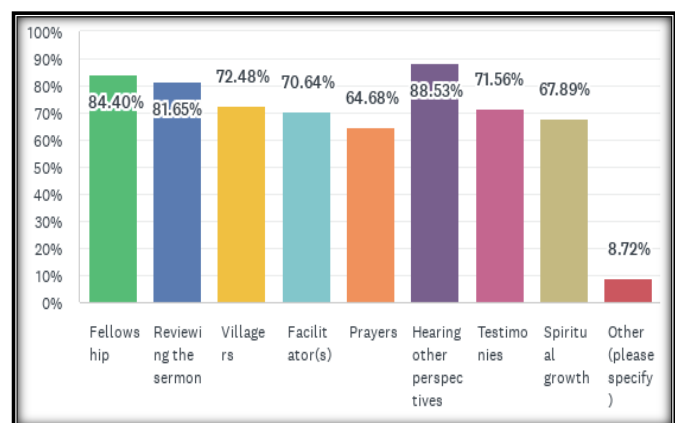
What Others Are Saying About Village

In a recent poll of Villagers, we asked participants to rate the curriculum guide and share which aspect of Village they liked the most. Participants responded as follows:

Was the Curriculum Guide Helpful



What Aspects Did You Like the Most?



What Village Is Not

Village Is Not:

- ❖ A Bible Study. No teacher will impart wisdom about the scripture or the sermon.
- ❖ Didactic. In a didactic setting, someone stands to deliver information to others. Village is meant to be an open discussion, using the curriculum guide to understand how others experienced the sermon and how it may be applied.
- ❖ A requirement to include every question in the guide. The guide is just that, a guide. Through different methods, facilitators and villagers determine the questions on which they will focus each week, leaving others to individual, at-home reflection and study.
- ❖ A gossip circle. Sometimes it is easy to veer from the work before us and move into conversations that need to be more instructive and helpful to the body. The facilitators are encouraged to help guide the discussion and avoid distracted conversations.
- ❖ A place of expertise. We invite everyone to bring their heart, soul, and mind into Village. We ask that we leave out judgment, insisting on our own way as right, or a need to convince others of our path. Village is a space for dialogue. We come to listen and learn from the sermon, the guide, and one another.

What Others Are Saying About Village

Following are just a few quotes taken from a recent survey of Villagers. These may shed further light on what Village is and is not.

- ❖ I liked the safe environment I felt I was in; I am not one to talk or share my thoughts because I've always felt insecure about them. But I didn't feel that way in the group. I felt encouraged."
- ❖ Our Village had a nice blend of generational diversity from various regions. I believe all of us migrated to the DMV from other parts of the country, so we had that in common. The openness of our discussion about the sermons brought beautiful insight into the diversity that ASBC possesses. I love this ministry."
- ❖ "I enjoyed meeting people I likely would not have met. And the discussions we had not only about the sermons but about life. Healing occurred in our sessions."
- ❖ My facilitator was great at keeping the group focused while at the same time encouraging participation.
- ❖ Village helped to bolster my desire to continue living out my faith. I learned to be open to others' experiences in Christ and to learn from the experiences of others. This helps me be honest and not put Christians in a box.
- ❖ The life application suggestions became a conversation starter with friends and family. Village led me to take a deeper dive into the Bible to uncover constructs and concepts that were new and applicable to my daily life.

Covenant and Its Importance

The Covenant is designed to create the space this guide has described. Some Villages also add to the covenant based on their structure and setting. Each Villager is asked to agree to the Covenant, sign it, and maintain a copy in their home files.

VILLAGE COVENANT

Village is your opportunity to move from crowd to community. During this journey, you will find new ways to apply the Sunday sermon to your life. Through the life applications, you will learn to grow step by step into the image of Christ.

The Village Mission is to encourage one another in our daily walk with the Lord, grow in Christ and community, and apply sermon principles to our Christian walk each week.

To accomplish the mission:

1. I will come to gatherings prayed up with the expectation to grow in Christ and community.
2. I will pray for my fellow Villagers throughout the week.
3. I will listen to the sermons each week, re-read the Scriptures at home, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide my interaction with God's word.

As a member of the _____ Village, I agree to the following:

1. Uplift the name of Jesus and each other.
2. Attend gatherings on _____ (day); arriving by _____ (time).
3. Inform my facilitators in advance if I cannot attend.
4. Plan my schedule to be on time and available for the entire gathering.
5. Listen respectfully to my Village family without shaming, criticizing, or judging.
6. Try not to monopolize conversations.
7. Participate fully and regularly in discussions.
8. Build trust with one another by keeping Village discussions confidential.
9. Focus on improving my life, not proving a point.
10. Bring a loving, Christ-like attitude with me every week.
11. Commit to caring for the lives of my fellow Villagers by checking on them in times of their absence(s) and making my presence known in seasons of celebration and sorrow.

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is made complete in us.” - 1 John 4:12 NIV

In full acceptance of the provisions of this covenant, I affix my name to this document in recognition of my commitment to God and the members of this Village. I shall keep a copy of this document as a reminder of this voluntary covenant I have entered on this day.

Sample Curriculum Guide



Date: May 14/15, 2022
Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard John Wesley
Sermon Title: "Can I Get a Witness?"- Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 28:16 - 20 and Acts 1:6 - 8

Matthew 28:16-20: Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Acts 1:6-8: Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

SERMON SUMMARY:

"Why has God left us here on earth?" Pastor Wesley centers this question in the first installment of his new sermon series, "Can I Get a Witness?". The answer to this question is first to bear witness to the saving power of Jesus and then to persuade others through that witness to receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

Research suggests that though 80% of church-going Christians acknowledge the responsibility to share their faith with others, only 68% have ever done so. People do not share their faith primarily because they feel unprepared and unqualified. Pastor teaches us that the ability to share our faith does not require that we provide all the answers to another's questions, defend God, or be a perfect example of holiness. Instead, an effective witness for Jesus Christ:

1. Provides an eyewitness account of how God has been good in their life.
2. It does not feel like their testimony bears the weight of saving someone's soul. Instead, when a person shares their faith, they participate as one voice in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. Is a willing witness. No witness who is forced to testify is trustworthy. Testimony must come because you choose to share what God has done in your life.
4. Must have a story to tell. Witnesses for Christ turn their time of testing into a testimony.

Using the online application Yelp as a metaphor, Pastor reminds us that as we share our testimony, we review the goodness of Jesus in our lives. As we do so, others can receive our testimony as an invitation to learn more about him. Just like Yelp, when we share the blessings of our Lord and Savior, we encourage others to try this same God for themselves. Closing the sermon, Pastor asks us, "...will we offer our review of God to the world? Will we offer our testimony? Will we be a witness?"

KEY POINTS:

1. Jesus calls us to go out into all parts of the world and make disciples.
2. We are called to share our faith as part of making disciples.
3. Research shows that 68% of church-going Christians fail to be willing to share their faith.
4. Nevertheless, we are called to be *martos*, the Greek word for witnesses.
5. An effective witness will first share their personal, eyewitness testimony of what Christ has done in their lives to the glory of God. Then, that personal witness is observed by/(activates the curiosity of) others who may seek to know more about Jesus Christ.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor opens this sermon by suggesting that one's musical tastes can date them. What is your favorite kind of church music, and why? If a particular song moves you, please share just a few of the words from that song.
2. Pastor remarks that the primary reason the Holy Spirit comes is to give us power to become witnesses for Jesus. Based on your understanding of the Holy Spirit, what other blessings does the Spirit bring into your life?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS:

1. In Matthew 28:19, the NIV, and most other versions of the Bible, translate the Greek work **mathēteuō** as “make” disciples. The KJV version of the Bible translates this word as “teach.” **Mathēteuō** is also interpreted as teaching to make disciples. Do you think a Christian's role is to make another person a disciple? What is the role of our witness, our testimony, and what are the boundaries?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. When was the last time you talked about your faith with someone whose religious sensibilities you did not know? Where did you get the courage? What transpired?
2. If you are one of the 68% who has never shared your faith with another, why is that? *Remember, Village is a no-judgment zone.*
3. We are reminded in this sermon that we are not disqualified by what we do not know and are qualified by what we do know. What does this statement mean to you? How does that prepare you to bear witness before others?

“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor teaches that the Greek word **martyrs** (pronounced mar'-toos) means not only witness but a martyr. Over the course of the church's history, there have been many martyrs. What would you do if someone stood before you and said, “deny Jesus or die?”
2. Some would say American Democracy is at stake as we live in an era of big lies, absent ethics, and wavering principles. What witness has the Church at large had in this time of peril in our nation? What witness should the Church have?
3. If we believe that our salvation is eternal, is that to say there is NOTHING we can do that will remove God's hand over our eternal life?

ACTIVITY

1. Think about the many ways people can share their witness/faith. Please list three “Thou Shalls” for sharing your witness/faith and three “Thou Shall Nots”. Share your list with your fellow Villagers. As you listen to the conversation, please jot down a “Thou Shall” that you hear and want to incorporate into your practice of sharing and a “Thou Shall Not” that you want to eliminate from your practice. Over the next week, apply these new practices to help you be a witness.

SPIRIT WORK

1. One may share their faith in many ways. Think about the past week. Did you share your faith with someone this past week?
 - a. Make a list of the ways you shared your faith.

- b. Draw a dark line beneath the final item. Below that dark line, list one or two new ways you could explore to share your faith. Use what is below the dark line as a particular focus of your personal prayer time.

Additional Questions for Married Couples:

1. Share your hopes for additional ways you might share your faith in the world with one another. How can you encourage one another?
2. How do you share your faith with each other? What occurs in your relationship as you share your faith?

Additional Questions for Young Adults:

1. Pastor began the sermon by saying our music marks us as an old or new school. How we share our faith can be old school or new school. What are some of the new school ways to share faith?
2. Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to be digital natives, having grown up communicating more frequently than their parents online. How does the presence of social media in your life impact your ability to share your faith?

Additional Questions for Parents:

1. Pastor notes that inviting (or taking) someone to church is not sharing your faith. While parents are encouraged to take their children to church, what other ways do you share your faith with them?
2. How conscious are you of living out your faith before your children? If you were to ask them, *where do you see Mom or Dad's faith in action*, what would they be able to point to as an example of your faith in God?

Additional Questions for Women:

1. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has long been controversial regarding women's roles **INSIDE** the church for keeping "silent." How do you interpret this text? Does it have any bearing on sharing your witness **OUTSIDE** the church?

Additional Questions for Men:

1. Is there a man in your life who shared his testimony with you? What happened to you as you heard his witness of faith? What can you learn from this man that you can model in your life?

Additional Questions for Returning Citizens:

1. As a returning citizen, do you believe your witness is diminished or strengthened by your life experience?
2. Has the church at large been effective at making disciples of those incarcerated or formerly incarcerated?
 - a. How can the church be more actively involved in providing discipleship for returning citizens released to the community?