

Community in Quarantine

A Practice Guide Series & Reference for Groups

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Welcome

Hello!

In a season of global pandemic, how do we as the Church stay open to God building intimacy in our communities rather than shut down due to a virus physical-distancing us apart?

It can feel like something of a wilderness season where the norms of life, the givens we held onto, are not available to us. Who can help us? Who can sustain us? God can. And He always has – whether walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden, guiding Moses in a cloud through the wild, inspiring Esther's faithfulness in Persia, or empowering the early church's spread across the known world. God sustains and guides every generation.

In this moment for our generation, we're self-quarantining in a Spirit of love to protect our own bodies and our brothers and sisters from COVID-19. Some are healthy, some are sick,



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some are on ventilators, and some have already passed – and we pray for God’s healing and mercy on our ailing world.

Not just “out there” in the world, this is hitting close to home as members of our groups might be experiencing the hardships of health concerns, economic downturn, extra-demanding work, extended loneliness, and so on. Due to these needs, we as the Body of Christ get to be there for one another in prayer and practicality – even serving in sacrificial ways with our time, expertise, network of connections, and money.

Lastly, the importance of meeting digitally is obvious, and tech is really having its moment in churches around the globe! Thank God for Zoom and Google Hangouts in a moment like this. By virtual means, we can continue to connect, study, pray, and support one another in our groups, even while self-quarantining.

The needs are great, but the opportunities for love are greater. May this practice guide series prompt you and your group into greater love for God and one another through a season where we all so acutely need it.

A labor of love for you, our church,
The CG Content Team of Reality SF

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User’s Manual

Weekly Guides, Packaged Seasonally

We know a little consistency goes a long way in a disorienting season like this one. Therefore, we have chosen to provide **four (or more, if repeated) weeks of practice guides at once**. Think of this less as a weekly guide and more as a repeatable, consistent series to anchor your group.

Key Themes & Practices

Along with our usual values for examining Scripture, connecting socially, and praying together – which are integrated throughout – we have discerned that there are five simple themes and practices to keep in front of us during this season:

- [Checking In: A Simple Practice of the Examen and Sharing as Groups](#)



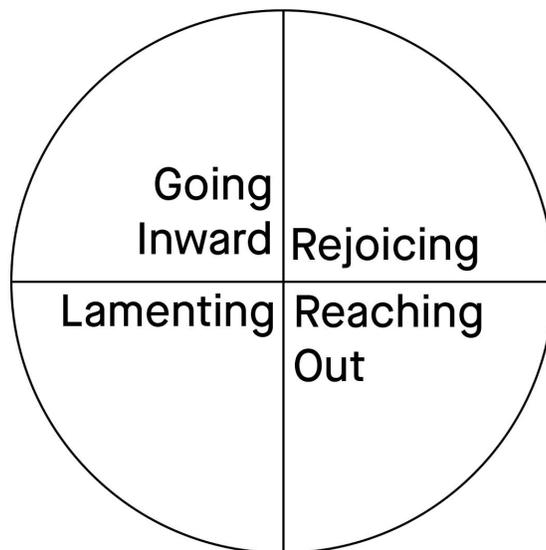
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- [Going Inward: Processing Our Emotional & Spiritual State Together](#)
- [Reaching Out: Serving One Another & Being Rich in Good Deeds](#)
- [Rejoicing: Joyfully Remembering, Giving Thanks, & Playing](#)
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Choose Your (Group's) Own Adventure Each Week

- **Step One: Share a link to the Guide with all group members** to follow along on their own screens.
- **Step Two: Go through the section on [Checking In](#) for 30 minutes at the start of every week.**
- **Step Three: Let that check-in clarify which direction from the other four themes your group should do for the remainder of your time.** We have jokingly referred to this as **“Having a slice of the community pie.”** What’s the flavor of the week? Maybe this week, you choose [Rejoicing](#), and the next could be [Reaching Out](#). If one is not clear to the group by consensus, then the group leader gets to choose!
- **Step Four: Follow the link to your chosen practice guide piece of the pie,** and follow it for the remainder of your time. (Note: Groups might be encouraged to split into 2s or 3s, which can be accomplished by those smaller groups sharing a new video call link in your video call’s chat.)
- **Step Five: Try each flavor of the community pie** (Going Inward, Reaching Out, Rejoicing, Lamenting) over the next month for a well-balanced group experience. Also feel free to repeat these as your group’s needs expand.



The Community Pie



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Permission Granted for Creativity!

As always, the practices guides are a jumping-off point for your groups. **Feel free to get creative and adapt the guides to your group's needs.** Completing the guides is not the point – connection is. If you do something creative that you think others would benefit from hearing about, please let us know at practices@realitysf.com.

Check the Appendix

Additionally in this *Community in Quarantine* guide, you will find an appendix of suggestions for:

- [Technological Solutions for Groups](#), including identifying a “Tech Shepherd”
- [Recommendations for Video Call Etiquette for Groups](#)

Offer Feedback

We love hearing your feedback about this and any other practice guide. You can offer encouragements, edits, and suggestions at practices@realitysf.com.

Practice Guides

Checking In: A Simple Practice of Examen & Sharing as Groups

Open your group time for 30 minutes with the following.

Opening Prayer: Read Scripture aloud (such as Psalm 46, Psalm 91, or other Scriptures that the facilitator is inspired to begin with). After reading the Bible passage, have one person pray for the group time.

Examen: Take 5 minutes of silence, with a focus on breathing and noticing where your body might be holding tension. Prayerfully imagine with each inhale that you are inviting God's presence inward, and with each exhale you are surrendering tension and anxiety to Him. As you are silent, reflect with God:

1. Notice the tension in your body, name the emotion that best describes it
2. Call to mind one moment this week you felt far from God's presence
3. Call to mind one moment you felt close to God's presence
4. Call to mind one thing you feel most grateful for this week
5. Call to mind one thing you feel the need to grieve and lament this week



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Sharing: Ask each person to briefly share their emotion word, along with one response that came to mind in this silent examen. Set a timer for one minute per person to share.

Choose: Based on what came up in the examen, together or at the group leader's discretion choose one of the following practices for the remainder of your time:

1. [Going Inward: Processing Our Emotional & Spiritual State Together](#)
2. [Reaching Out: Being Rich in Good Deeds by Serving One Another](#)
3. [Rejoicing: Joyfully Remembering, Giving Thanks, & Playing](#)
4. [Lamenting: Grieving the World Together](#)

Going Inward: Processing Our Emotional & Spiritual State Together

Bible Study: Examine and interpret these passages on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. *Note: be sure to save time for the reflection questions!*

Read [Matthew 3:13-17](#) and [Matthew 4:1-11](#) aloud.

- What sticks out to you or surprises you about these passages?
- Notice how the tempter arrives when Jesus is **hungry**. Why do you think that is?

Read [Matthew 4:1-4](#) and [Deuteronomy 8:1-9](#).

- What sticks out to you about these passages?
- Notice how the tempter uses the words "If you are the Son of God..." to question Jesus' **identity** as the Beloved as He endures difficult circumstances. Why do you think Satan would tempt Jesus in this way?

Read [Matthew 4:5-6](#) and [Psalm 91](#).

- What sticks out to you about these passages?
- Notice how the tempter uses the words "If you are the Son of God..." to prod Jesus into **doubting and therefore testing** His Father's love and faithfulness with specific signs and actions. In what ways have you experienced doubt in this season? What does that look like? How are you taking that back to God and out of isolation?

Read [Matthew 4: 7-11](#) and [Deuteronomy 6: 4-19](#)

- What sticks out to you about these passages?



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- Notice Jesus' strong response to the tempter's invitation to **power** here. Why do you think He responded so strongly here?

Reflection: With the reality of COVID-19 changing so much of our lives so quickly, we have all been, in some way or another, abruptly ushered into a season of unknowns, fasting, and new temptations – like a wilderness. Take 3-5 minutes of prayerful silence to respond to any of the following prompts that most resonate with you.

1. What is the wilderness that you are currently experiencing? What fears, anxieties, and restlessness are coming up for you during this season?
2. What temptation away from God is strongest for you right now?
3. Notice that Jesus' time in the desert is right before He embarks upon His ministry. Ask the Spirit what God might be hoping to free you from, and therefore preparing you for.

Share: Briefly share your responses to the reflection with each other. (Consider setting a timer for 1-2 minutes per person or splitting into smaller groups of 2s or 3s in Zoom breakout rooms or by sharing new video links in your video call's group chat.)

Closing Intercession: Close your time by blessing each other, praying over the work God is doing in each person's heart, and interceding for our city, nation, and world.

Reaching Out: Serving One Another & Being Rich in Good Deeds

Remembrance: Read [1John 4:7-9](#) aloud. Reflect on what came up in the **examen** from earlier.

1. Recall the moment where you felt closest to the Lord this last week.
2. What aspects of God's character are revealed in this moment of closeness?
3. In one minute, ask each person to share what their experience of closeness was, as well as one character trait of God that this experience revealed. ("God is ____(adjective)___.")

Reflection & Practice: Have two volunteers read [Acts 4:32-5:11](#) and [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#) aloud. Invite one another to share for 1-2 minutes each and respond to any of the following questions:

- In Acts 4-5, what strikes you most about this passage? What does it make you feel?
- Why do we give? Why should we give? (Why shouldn't we give?)
- What happens when we give?



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- What does it mean to you to be rich in good deeds?

Needs Inventory: Take 3 minutes of silence to reflect on these questions.

- How are you personally experiencing need spiritually/emotionally?
- How are you experiencing needs financially?
- How are you experiencing needs for social connection?
- How are you experiencing needs in your health?
- How do you see these needs in friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors around you?

Designate a notetaker. Spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming and writing down places you witness or experience need in your direct or extended community. Have the notetaker read back the compiled list of needs to the group when finished.

Serving One Another: Brainstorm as a community proactive ways that you as a group can provide for the needs you assessed.

- How can you give away your time? Your energy? Your talents?
- Your money?
- Your encouragement? Your emotional support?
- Your supplies? (For example, P95 masks from the wildfires)
- Your prayers?

Note to Leaders: If any members of your group have needs that go beyond the group's ability to provide, then please share that need with your CG Coach.

Closing Intercession. Make commitments to each other and close your time in prayer together, that we may have eyes to see how God has loved us so thoroughly, and hearts open to hear the invitation to love our neighbor in light of the generosity He has shown us.

Rejoicing: Joyfully Remembering, Giving Thanks, & Playing

Remembrance & Thanksgiving: Have one person read [Psalm 107](#) aloud, and spend 3 minutes in silence to reflect upon the passage.

Scripture Reflection: As a group, take 15-20 minutes to discuss:

- What stood out to you about this psalm? What surprised you?
- Of the four groups of people that cry out to the Lord (v.4-9, v.10-16, v.17-22, v.23-32), which do you feel like you currently resonate the most with? Why?



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- What do you think is the relationship between hardship and thanksgiving in this psalm?

Thanksgiving: In a group prayer of gratitude, thank God for one or two things you have found joy in this week. They can be simple, small things or big, wondrous works.

As a group discuss the following questions:

- What could be some creative ways that you and your CG can practice thanksgiving and praise together?
- What might it look like for your group to authentically rejoice, celebrate, and play together during this time? This could look like Zoom game nights (we recommend charades, karaoke, [online board games](#), or [Jackbox](#)), hosting FaceTime birthday parties, graduations, or celebrations – or any number of creative options!

Closing Intercession: Read the Anglican Litany of Thanksgiving prayer aloud together. Have one person from the group serve as leader and read the italicized portion, and the rest of the group will respond together with the text in bold.

Let us give thanks to God our Father for all his gifts so freely bestowed upon us:

For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea,

We thank you, Lord.

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends,

We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,

We thank you, Lord.

For health and strength to work, and time to rest and worship,

We thank you, Lord.

For all who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity,

We thank you, Lord.

For all who earnestly seek after truth, and all who labor for justice,

We thank you, Lord.

For all that is good and gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing the image of Christ,

We thank you, Lord.

For the communion and community of our church, in all times and places,

We thank you, Lord.

Above all, we give you thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord;

To him be praise and glory, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.



Lamenting: Grieving the World Together

Prayer: Read aloud [Psalm 88](#). In your heart, invite the Holy Spirit into your space, calling to mind the anxiety, uncertainty, loss, loneliness, fear, and confusion of this season. Then read the following prayer together:

“Humble Maker, there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Therefore, take away our pride and false securities so that we may humbly trust in your guidance and care. Shape us into who you would have us be. Amen.”

(Moravian Daily Texts: A Devotional Guide for Every Day, 2020).

Each person has 1-2 minutes to share one way in which God has taken away areas of “pride and false security” in this season.

Practice - Lament: Today we will each write our own psalm of lament in our journals or on our device. Read these two prayers of lament aloud: [Psalm 6](#) and [Psalm 102](#). Set a timer for 10-15 minutes for each person to silently and honestly call out before God in lament.

Although no formal structure is required, laments can follow the general structure of Protest, Petition, and Trust below.

Protest: Tell God what is wrong.

- *E.g., Lord, I am worried about coronavirus and my dad. He is older and I feel like he is so vulnerable. You seem so far off. Are you doing anything to protect your people, especially the elderly and the lonely?*
- *E.g., God, ___ lost their job last week. Why do you seem so distant and like you are just watching from the sidelines? Do you not care about us? Where are you during these times of confusion and fear? My heart is rattled with uncertainties.*

Petition: Tell God what you want Him to do about it.

- *E.g., Please protect him, if you are willing. I know you are able to. Please, God!*
- *E.g., Please provide a way out of for ___’s family. They are struggling to trust you in this season. They have two small children. Please, like the sparrows, give to them all that they need.*

Trust: Recall truths about God’s character and His actions in the past.

- *E.g., I know you are good, God. And I know that your love is better than life, even this life! Thank you for bringing my father to faith many years ago.*
- *E.g., Lord, you are faithful, I know this is true! You have provided for me and broken through times when I felt hopeless. May your will come quickly, O God.*

Share: After completing your personal lament psalm, split into 2s and 3s to share your lament and pray for one another. (For creating smaller groups, you can use Zoom breakout



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rooms or share new video links in your video call's group chat. Be sure to set a time to return to the larger group by.)

Discuss: Come back as a large group and share about the experience.

- What was your experience of writing the lament?
- What was difficult? What was easier?
- Why do you think God calls us to lament?

Closing Intercession: Close the time in prayer, asking God to continue opening our eyes and ears to hear and pray over the laments of our own hearts and others. Find accountability this week in groups of 2-3 people to continue praying over each other and checking in with each about these laments.

Appendix

Appendix A: Technological Solutions for Groups

Almost every group has at least one person who is very tech savvy and would be excited to help. Therefore, the first recommendation is to delegate the tech side of group gatherings to an excited and capable helper – a beloved “Tech Shepherd.”

Responsibilities for Your Group's Tech Shepherd:

- Assessing and determining the best technology for fitting your group's needs, such as choosing a video call platform (e.g., Zoom, Google Hangouts) and communication platform (e.g., Slack, Whatsapp).
- Helping establish group norms for digital meeting etiquette. See our recommendations below as a starting point.
- Connecting with the group facilitators prior to the group time to have an idea of when the group might need further tech shepherding during the meeting. Reference the prompts provided in the group Practice Guides for ideas.

Recommended Tech Solutions for Video Calls:

- [Zoom](#) - A video call software that can be used for free. For free accounts, the meeting has a 40-minute limit before timing out. Check if anyone in your group has a paid account for unlimited time and can send the meeting link. If none have a paid account, then you can also rejoin a meeting link – though this is possibly a bit clunky



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for group conversation. Zoom also allows for [breakout rooms](#), which enables groups to split into pairs to pray, for example, and it has a [virtual background feature](#) which is pretty fun!

- [Google Hangouts](#) - Another free video call software, and a Google account is not required for use. This service has no time limit but does have a 25-person cap, which will only affect the largest of small groups.

Recommended Tech Solutions for Communication:

- [Slack](#) - A free, multi-channel option for group communication. A free account enables one-on-one video and phone calls. The only problem with a free account is only the last 10,000 messages remain stored in your group. This might actually be a reachable limit for our most chatty and meme-sharing groups. Challenge accepted! (Note: Since Slack is intended for work, by default it mutes notifications outside of workday hours, but [you can change that here](#).)
- [Whatsapp](#) - This free service allows users to message one another in a way that feels like a familiar group text. Users can also make free voice and video calls to one another.

Appendix B: Recommendations for Video Call Etiquette for Groups

These are some recommendations to ensure that video calls feel as close to an in-person gathering of the Body of Christ as possible.

Mute when you're not the one talking, praying, etc.

If there is anything you take away from these recommendations, this should be the one. Mute yourself and regularly check if you're accidentally un-muted. Muting yourself if you're not talking keeps your barking neighbor's dog from drowning out your groupmate's prayer!

Use mutual invitation.

The video delay can sometimes lead to a strange dance where two people start speaking at the same time, then both say "No you go," then wait a bit, and then both speak again at the same time. Awkward! We've found mutual invitation – inviting the next person to speak by name – to be helpful in avoiding this, as well as making it clear when you are finished speaking. Use this discussion direction tool when possible!

Split into smaller groups or pairs.

Also to solve for talking over one another, feel free to split your group into smaller subgroups to pray or discuss. Do this by sharing a link to a new call in your video call's chat. Set a rally time for when people need to return to the larger group call.



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Turn video on, if possible.

Seeing people's faces makes an enormous difference when trying to maintain or make personal connections. But... not everyone has a working camera on their computer or phone, so please have empathy for those who cannot.

Put distractions away.

In a moment where we can feel like we're scattered digitally, honor your group through offering them your undivided attention. Similar to if you're talking to someone face-to-face, looking at your phone or browsing on your computer indicates you're not engaging with the people you're with. And you may not think you're being obvious, but you actually have a tell when you're distracted! Don't make your group find out what it is!

Join on time.

Being punctual is important for its own sake, but some video calling software will loudly "ding" to announce new entrants to the call. If you join 10 minutes into the call and everyone is in prayer, then it might drown out a still small voice. ;) Grace, of course, but avoid it!

Think about what's behind you.

Obvious, but often overlooked. A half-clothed roommate, a passerby on the street, or an unexpectedly hyper child will appear behind people in a video call putting on all manner of distracting and hilarious antics. It's kind of magnificent – but also not!

Try to find a place where your back is to a wall – or an otherwise uninteresting background – to ensure minimal disruptions for you and the others on the call. Likewise, avoid moving your camera while on a video call because the moving background behind you might make your group dizzy!

"Leave" meetings, don't "end" them.

For some video calling systems, you'll have the option to leave a meeting or to end it. Leaving is highly recommended because ending will kick everyone else off the video call. Love your group's extroverts, and allow for extra fellowship time!

Who's responsible?

If you're the call host (or a group "Tech Shepherd"), ensure these recommendations are followed. Similar to a CG Leader, you're responsible to ensure the safety and functionality of the group during a video call.

If someone isn't muted, has their video turned off, or appears to be distracted, gently ask them to change course so that everyone else on the call feels respected and valued.

