

AFTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Session 2: Choosing Community

How do we find friends and fellowship after community college?

Based on chapters 5-6 of After College: Navigating Transitions, Relationships and Faith. In preparation for this session, students should read these chapters in advance.



Objectives:

- After this session, students will be able to articulate healthy perspective and expectations when it comes to finding friends and fellowship after community college.
- After this session, students will be able to create a plan for finding healthy community and a church after community college.
- After this session, students will be able to summarize what to look for and what to watch out for as they seek out community after community college.

Lesson Outline

(Total Length: 90 minutes)

TIMING	CONTENT	MATERIALS NEEDED
5 minutes	Walk in Questions	Snacks/Food, Nametags, PPT, Projector/Screen
10 minutes	Community Mapping	PPT, Colored Pencils, Community Mapping Handout
15 minutes	Finding Friends	PPT, My Identity in Christ Handout, Finding Friends and Church Handout
10 minutes	Leaving Home	PPT
15 minutes	Biblical Perspective: Why Church	PPT, Post-its, pens, Finding Friends and Church Handout
10 minutes	Identifying Your Preferences	PPT
10 minutes	Practical Tips For Getting Connected	PPT, Finding Friends and Church Handout
5 minutes	Alumni Testimony	PPT, Alumni Interview
7 minutes	Individual Reflection	PPT, Ambient Music, Notebooks
3 minutes	Closing Comments & Announcements	

Context For Facilitators:

For most community college students, the struggle to find community is *the* biggest challenge they'll face in their transition. If students found meaningful friendship and rich faith community within InterVarsity at community college, it can be a shock to the system to realize that for the first time they may have to go hunting for friends, church, and fellowship again. Most students are not prepared for the "patience and intentionality" it takes to make friends post-college (as one alumnus puts it). We can help students expect that it will likely be hard to choose community; they will probably not find a community just like their current InterVarsity chapter, and that's okay!

As we prepare students for the reality that finding community after community college will come with challenges, we must also point them to healthy perspective and practices. We can normalize the fact that it may take time (and energy!) to make friends and find a church. Choosing community after community college often requires alumni to push themselves out of the rhythms (or rut) of a typical week to pursue it.

We can help set realistic expectations as well highlight possible pitfalls. When former students are in transition, they may be tempted to settle for the lowest common denominator for belonging: the happy hour scene, unhealthy dating relationships, or social media outlets. While happy hour, dating, and social media can all have positive aspects, former students who approach these as the sole place of connection will set themselves up for struggles.

Not only do our students need to be aware of possible obstacles, but they also need to be aware of the incredible opportunity to find rich community in their new beginning (whatever that is). Our lives are full of change, and

more often than not, community is a place where God anchors us. Though we may have moments (or days or months) of missing old friends or feeling lonely and isolated, God has new, good things in store. We are invited into His kingdom—through community—in every season of our lives. As students work to establish a new community in their next step, we can remind them that the “in between” time of transition provides a beautiful chance to deepen the most intimate relationship we have: our friendship with Jesus.

Note: students who plan to stay in the area will have different challenges than those who move to a new city/campus for the first time. No matter the circumstances, we can help students realize that the relational realm of our lives is always in flux, regardless of where we live. Every student, no matter where they're headed, will have to navigate choosing community after community college.

Section 1: Finding Friends

Walk in Questions (5 Minutes)

As students walk in, invite them to enjoy the food spread and engage each other with the prompts below. Place questions on a large screen or as “table prompts.”

1. What has community looked like for you in community college?
2. How do you think it will change after community college?

Community Mapping (10 Minutes)

Pass out handout. Let’s take some time to think through your community network. Think about the places you frequently go – your dorm floor, a particular class building, an extracurricular club – and the relationships you have there. Put your name in the middle of the handout we’ve provided. Then add the places you often go on campus. In each place write the names of people you are connected to there.

Allow a couple minutes for activity.

Invite discussion in small groups or as a large group:

- What do you notice about your maps?
- Any observations about where you find community right now?
- How can you envision this shifting during your next step?
- What opportunities and challenges do you anticipate?

You might be noticing that much of your current community is based on proximity. Within a small radius, campus and its surrounding geographical area offers incredible opportunity for people to find community, especially with people who are the same age or in the same life stage. As you transition this will change. Wherever you end up, there will be less similarity and proximity with peers and neighbors. This can feel challenging, but it is also an incredible opportunity for rich relationship.

Note: For students staying in the area, especially if that is also their hometown, you may invite them to consider different questions or a different activity that helps them realize that even if they are staying home, they have likely changed and so has the place where they are going/staying (If they’re staying in the area but they no longer have a student ID card and access to activities, how does that change things?)

Finding Friends (15 Minutes)

Who are you?

As we consider finding friends and community in your next step, it is wise to start with ourselves. If we don’t know ourselves, it will be difficult for us to build healthy relationship with others. While self-discovery is a life-long process, one key identity question is worth considering now: “Who are you?”

Many of us know how to *describe* ourselves better than we know what *defines* us. Our identity – who we are – is defined by God alone. Not by our shifting friendships, job performance or relationship status. During transition it’s normal to doubt ourselves or question our place in the world, but ultimately we can choose to let Jesus, and our relationship with him define us. *Pass out My Identity in Christ Handout.* If we are Christ-followers, this is what God sees when he looks at our lives. Even if we feel like we don’t look or act like these things right now, this is how God sees us through Christ! When we remember who we are it can make relating to others feel less risky, and hopefully easier.

4 P’s: Passions, Proximity, Purpose, & Personality

One way to frame our relationships with others is considering how our passions, proximity, purpose, and personality enable us to build connections to new people.

- **Passions:** What we care about helps us connect to others. One way to accelerate the process of finding friends is to find ways to do what you love with other people. This could mean serving an organization that aligns with something you care about or joining an organization. (Serving a youth group at church, playing in a sports league, InterVarsity on another campus, etc.)
- **Proximity:** As you consider the places where you will live, work, or study, think about how that will foster or limit connection. Living by yourself might seem more comfortable, but it can also be isolating. Once you arrive it could be a good practice to redo the community mapping exercise we did earlier but using your new patterns of place.
- **Purpose:** In InterVarsity we often talk about being a part of God's mission to heal the world with his community and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Joining a local church and finding a way participate in mission can be a great way to find friends and community. This could even be connecting with InterVarsity on your new campus!
- **Personality:** Our personality shapes how we connect with others in our passions, proximity, and purpose. One quick example of how this plays out might be introversion compared to extroversion. Introverts and extroverts will have different opportunities and challenges when building relationships. Some extroverts may be tempted to find community in the low-hanging happy hour scene, while some introverts may be tempted to never leave their apartment because they're so exhausted by the relational output of their daily job. One thing to remember is that when we willingly put ourselves in uncomfortable situations, we grow and learn more about who we are, especially when we reflect on those uncomfortable experiences. Don't allow your personality to define you. If you are an extrovert, it might be important to stay in on a weekend sometimes. Introverts, it will be important for you to get out of your apartment and connect with others. That being said, it can be important to consider how your personality might shape your connections to others.

Practical Tips for Finding Friends

While we are all made in God's image, every one of us is unique in our passions, interests, and gifts, etc. Because everyone is different, there is no easy 5-step plan for finding friends that works for everyone as they transition out of college. That said, we all need friends. While modern technology allows us to stay connected to former friends, eventually we need to transition and build new relationships. Even if we stay in touch with former friends, we must keep in mind that all relationships are dynamic; they are always in a state of change. Moving forward is inevitable. So what do we do? Here's a couple of tips:

- **Intentional** – Be intentional with your approach to relationships. In the midst of transition, it can be easy to slip into isolation. Develop a plan for finding community. Consider the four P's when you are building your plan. You will probably need to adapt your plan, but having a plan helps you start moving and keep moving.
- **Initiate** – In the college context we are used to being pursued by others (staff, friends, classmates, etc.). After college, this likely won't be the case. In fact, more often than not you will need to initiate and pursue new friendships. You may even need to initiate more than you think, think about the how you initiate during follow up with new students, it's kind of like that. Don't limit the people that you're willing to initiate with. There is great value in multi-generational friendships, and this might be your first opportunity to experience that in depth.

- Incarnate – There are limits to virtual connections, these limits often cause us to separate mind from body from soul. As God incarnate, Jesus entered into the world and all its brokenness. As his followers we are also invited to enter into the physical world around us. Don't settle for virtual connection. God has sends us to particular places to be an incarnate example of the Kingdom.

Leaving Home (10 Minutes)

You might already be experiencing the tension of shifting relationship with your parents. In the midst of that tension, you may be tempted to pull away from family and neglect to honor your parents (sometimes without even realizing it). Some of you may rely more on parental relationships and approval and over-invest in your parents' opinions and "plan" for your lives. Let's look at scripture to explore the incredible blessing and importance of family as well as the potential idol of family.

Exodus 20:12 says, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." It's the first of the commandments with a promise attached to it. God cares about how we interact with our parents! Matthew 10:37 says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Jesus demands costly discipleship. He does not want us to place our family above Him. We should search our hearts for any places where we have idolized family and confess those. How do we find a right balance in our relationship with our parents, especially during our transition after college? Here are some thoughts to consider.

Communication

Technology allows us to communicate with friends and family members easily. Though we have potentially unlimited access to our family, we need to decide what type of communication is the most productive and healthy. There is no "right" answer as far as frequency or form of communication with your parents. It is important to pay attention to your motivations and outcomes as you communicate. One question you might ask is, "Are these patterns accomplishing something positive and healthy or not?" It can be important to have a conversation with your parents to work together and figure out what patterns work best for everyone. This could be things like keeping your parents in the loop of major decisions, and less so with minor ones (what is major/minor might be worth defining). It could also be setting expectations for connection patterns. Perhaps you will FaceTime with them on Saturday mornings or always have lunch at their house.

Moving Toward Healthy Interdependence With Your Parents

As you launch into this new season, your goal should be to move from dependence on our parents to greater interdependence and personal responsibility. One question to ask might be, "Do I need their help, or can I do this by myself?" The answer should increasingly become, "Yes, I can do this." This doesn't mean we interact with our parents less or that we don't seek their wisdom and counsel, but it may change *how* we interact with them. Here are some practical steps to move toward healthy interdependence:

- Avoid Codependence. If you rely solely on your parents (or vice versa) to meet social, emotional, spiritual, or financial needs, it will be important to break away and establish healthy boundaries.
- Ask for your parents' input about major decisions. When appropriate, this communicates respect and helps mature the connection between adults.
- Pay off family-related loans efficiently. The financial tie can sometimes keep other aspects of the new relational context from maturing.
- Report successes that you have when they occur. Parents love to hear when their kids are successful!

- Communicate about Holidays. Holidays may look different after college, especially if you get married. It is important to communicate well with your parents about expectations.
- Live, act, and function as an adult. If you want to be treated as an adult you must live, act, and function as an adult. This may mean avoiding financial dependence, offering to help or serve your parents, or taking responsibility for your actions.

Family stuff can be weird, tiring, frustrating, and confusing, but it's too important to ignore. Family Matters, and the potential for what God can do in and through you and your family is huge – in this next phase of life and for generations to come. Our invitation is to pray and trust the Lord to move all of you towards a God-honoring, appropriate relationship between mutually respected, accepted and loved adults.

Section 2: Why Church?

Biblical Perspective Why Church (15 Minutes)

Post-it Note Exercise: Why do you go to church?

Let's take a few minutes examining our own motivation for why you do/don't go to church. On the post-it notes in front of you, I'd like to list the top reasons you go to church. Use a pen to write them, and only write one answer per post-it. Please be honest, as we will all benefit from honesty. If you don't typically go to church, list the reason why you think people typically go to church. Once you're done, place the post-it notes on the wall, and try to cluster similar responses together.

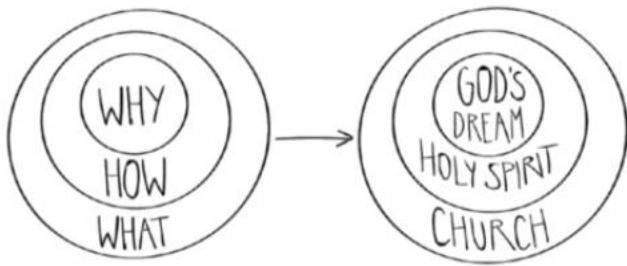
Allow time for activity.

Let's make observations some observations about why you go to church based on our collage. What do you notice? What surprises you? Anything missing?

Have an honest and brief conversation about why they do or don't go to church.

The Big Why: God's Dream

We cannot ask about the why of church without beginning with God's dream also known as the Kingdom of God. The church alone is not a big enough container for the desires God has placed within each of us. According to Tim Soerens, "God's dream gets at God's desire for how we should all live together and includes the nuanced reality that each of us needs salvation. This macrodream is huge in that it's for all people, all neighborhoods, all cities, all the land, all enemies, all of creation – everything. But it's also small in that it demonstrates God's passionate desire to be in relationship with individuals and to break down all barriers that stand between us and our beloved creator...God dreams about restoring every relationship in our families, in our marriages, in our neighborhoods, with our friends, and even with our enemies." After the why we must consider *how* God will accomplish the why. God has sent the Holy Spirit to bring about this dream, and as Christians we must learn to pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is working in our life and neighborhood. Then we can begin to see that the church is the "what". The what provides tangible proof of the why. God's design for the church is to be the tangible proof of his dream aka the Kingdom. Sometimes we settle for the church being the why in itself. It's just what you do as a Christian. If we do that church becomes a place of individual consumers together pursuing the American Dream wherever it suits them, reinforced by a local Sunday event or online. This is a cheapening of the historical purpose and experience of the church which is a community of people joining in God's dreams in a particular place with their everyday lives. Church is a community that God uses to do things in and through us. We need Church and Church needs us. (Reference Everywhere You Look, Tim Soerens, IVP 2020)



Section 3: How to Find a Local Church

Identifying Your Preferences (10 Minutes)

Note: If students are going to another campus to continue their studies, this can also be a good practice for finding a campus ministry to get connected with. Even simpler, you can help them connect with the local staff/student leaders as they transition.

Now that we have explored what church is for, let's spend some time identifying what we are looking for in a church. In your notebook, write down everything you are looking for in a church. Feel free to write down anything from "people my age" to "local community involvement" to "biblical teaching" to "multi-ethnic body". *Allow students time to write.*

Display PPT slide with three categories: 1. Non-negotiable, 2. High Value, 3. Preference. Now that you've made your list start ranking your preferences by putting a 1, 2, or 3 next to the distinctives they've listed corresponding to the categories on the screen. One limit, you may only have three distinctives in the non-negotiable category. Allow space for work.

What are you placing in each category? *Allow space for discussion. Our hope here is to see each other's values and help the consider additional perspectives.*

There is no perfect church. When you encounter things that aren't your preference (outside of non-negotiables), that isn't reason enough to change churches. It's also worth noting here that no two churches are alike, and that's the way it should be. Remember, God designed churches to be tangible proof of the kingdom in a particular place! It's good to have a few (not 50) non-negotiables but to be open from there. God may use us to bring healthy change to a church that's not our ideal fit or He may use a church that's farthest from our personal preference to transform us most.

Practical Tips for Getting Connected (10 Minutes)

Note: Again this also applies to campus ministry on a new campus.

For Finding Church

Here are some practical tips for finding a church:

- Use your relational networks for recommendations.
- Start your exploration online. Investigate vision, mission, value statements on the website.
- Listen to sermons online before visiting.
- Visit more than once before making a decision.
- When you visit, introduce yourself, don't wait to be found.
- Limit your search to approximately 3-4 months. Eventually you'll need to decide. Choose to commit and get involved.

For Getting Involved

Here are some practical tips for getting involved with a church:

- Join a small group or bible study. Even if it feels awkward for a while.
- Invest where you are planted by giving financially to the church.

- Get to know others by finding a way to serve.
- If there is a process for membership take the first step. This is usually an introduction course or class that teaches about the church's vision and values.
- Meet with the pastor or staff member. Bring questions you have about the church.
- Don't compare a church to previous church experiences. Instead give thanks for the good that you see.
- Invite a friend.

Section 4: Next Steps

Alumni Testimony (5 Minutes)

Invite a recent alumnus to come back to campus to share their church involvement or InterVarsity in a new context story. This could be live or a recorded zoom interview.

- What was it like the first time you visited churches after college?
- What factored into your decision?
- How has being involved in church helped you grow in your faith and/or find community?

Individual Reflection (7 Minutes)

We've covered a lot of ground today. I want to give you some time to reflect and journal about what you've heard. Here are some questions to guide your reflection:

- What values will guide you as anticipate "choosing community" throughout this transition?
- If you could hear God audibly on your last day of class, what do you think He would say to you about finding community in your next step?
- What are some actions you plan to take throughout your transition to choose community?

Closing Comments & Announcements (3 Minutes)

Hopefully our time together today was valuable to you. Finding community and getting connected to a church are big pieces of your upcoming transition. Before our next gathering, you have a couple of tasks:

- Announce whatever reading you'd like them to do to prep for the next session.
- Homework: If you know where you are going to be during your next step start exploring some churches online.

Additional References:

Here are some additional resources to recommend to students or use for further prep of this session:

- [Just Tell Me What I Need To Know: Church After College](#)
- [Just Tell Me What I Need To Know: Community After College](#)
- [Finding a Church—Practical Points](#) (PDF)
- [Everywhere You Look](#), Tim Soerens
- [Incarnate](#), Michael Frost