

A Church
for
growing
people

CCIW

CHRIST CHURCH INNER WEST
ANGLICAN COMMUNITY

Joyous Fellowship

INTEGRATED SERIES
SEPTEMBER 2010



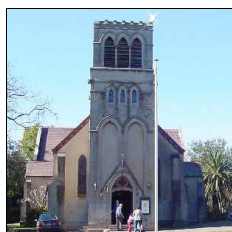
Welcome to the Joyous Fellowship Integrated Series!

An **integrated series** is integrated on two fronts:

- The whole church does this series together.
- The sermons on Sundays and the Bible studies in fellowship groups dovetail.

Our aim as a church is to grow more and more into fully devoted children of God. God has given us ways to grow, that is 'means of grace'.

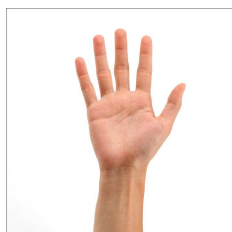
As a church we focus on five means of grace - five ways to grow more and more into fully devoted children of God:



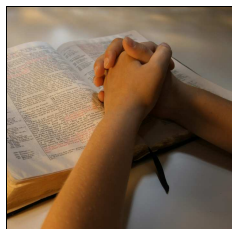
Gathering regularly in **Corporate Worship**



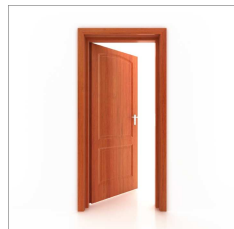
Sharing **joyous fellowship** in a small group



Using our gifts to **serve others in ministry**



Being rich and regular in **personal devotions**



Extending to unbelievers a **gracious witness**

This 4 week series focuses on **Joyous Fellowship**.

members about their congregations. A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men. When a person becomes alienated from a Christian community in which he has been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, he had better examine himself first to see whether the trouble is not due to his wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let him thank God for leading him into this predicament. But if not, let him nevertheless guard against ever becoming an accuser of the congregation before God. Let him rather accuse himself for his unbelief. Let him pray God for an understanding of his own failure and his particular sin, and pray that he may not wrong his brethren. Let him, in the consciousness of his own guilt, make intercession for his brethren. Let him do what he is committed to do, and thank God.

Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship, of our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may appear great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realise; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognise that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.

not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what he has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by his call, by his forgiveness, and his promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what he does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of his grace? Is the divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this, any day, even the most difficult and distressing day? Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together – the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship.

In the Christian community thankfulness is just what it is anywhere else in the Christian life. Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts he has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think we dare not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must constantly be looking forward eagerly for the highest good. Then we deplore the fact that we lack the deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experience that God has given to others, and we consider this lament to be pious. We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from him the little things? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if, on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.

This applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from pastors and zealous

The sermons on Sunday will lay the foundation and give some practical application of the topics listed below. Each week after the sermon, the fellowship groups will discuss in more detail the implications of sharing life together as a fellowship group.

This study booklet provides a guideline of how you can approach this discussion. It includes boxes where you can write your response or your group's response. Or if you prefer just to discuss, you can ignore the boxes altogether.

Series Aims:

1. to inspire people to engage in joyous fellowship.
 - a) Because God has called a people to himself – not just individuals.
 - b) Because joy is an amazing fruit of the Spirit that should pervade our relationships with each other.
2. to give some practical ideas about extending ourselves to be more joyful and purposeful in our fellowship.
3. to especially challenge fellowship groups to think of their opportunities as people meeting in a small group context to share in their life of faith together.

Topics for each week:

1. Being the people of God
2. Being the joyful people of God
3. Being the encouraging people of God
4. Being the love-in-action people of God

Study 1: Being the people of God

Introduction

Take a moment to write down your answers to the following questions, then share with the group.

1. Why did you decide to be part of a fellowship group this year?

2. If you've been part of a group for a number of years, have your reasons for being part of a group changed at all?

Questions to think about and discuss

Read these verses:

2 Corinthians 6:16

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”

Titus 2:14

“[Jesus] gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds”

1 Peter 2: 9-10

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy”

Appendix: “Life Together” Longer Extract

The small book “Life Together” emerged from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s experiences of directing a men’s seminary. This seminary was forced to run secretly in Germany during World War 2. Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis, close to the end of the war. Below is an extract from chapter 1.

Not an Ideal but a Divine Reality

Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and try to realise it. But God’s grace speedily shatters such dreams. Just as surely God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great general disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves.

By sheer grace God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God’s sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realised by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do

Wrapping up

As a group, discuss the group scores you've given yourselves in the table.

13. What areas are you really pleased with?

14. What areas would you like to improve in (if any)?

15. If there are areas in which you'd like to improve, what steps can the group take?

In the light of what you've talked about, pray for your life together as a group.

Revelation 21:3

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'”

3. What are the common ideas in these verses?

4. What forces (personal, social, spiritual) push against us living this out?

*In CS Lewis' famous book *The Screwtape Letters*, the senior demon Screwtape writes letters full of advice to his nephew, a junior tempter named Wormwood. In one particular letter Screwtape writes:*

‘One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That I confess is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate.

...When he gets inside he sees just that selection of neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like ‘the body of Christ’ and the actual faces in the next pew.

....Work hard then on the disappointment which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a Church man.’

5. How could you rewrite this to apply to a fellowship group?

6. How do you think a fellowship group could pose a great threat to the work of Satan?

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7. Look up these “one another” verses from the New Testament. Are there ways we can obey these more actively in a fellowship group than in the larger Sunday meetings?

Galatians 5:13 (about serving)	
Colossians 3:13 (about forgiving)	
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (about encouraging)	
1 Peter 5:5 (about humility)	

8. What excites you about the potential of a fellowship group?

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Wrapping up

In the light of what you've talked about, pray for your life together as a group.

*We need to keep 2 aspects of love in mind as we come to this table— **be fervent** and **be forgiving**.*

Romans 12:11 says of our fellowship together –

NRSV – “Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord”

NIV – “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”

As a group:

6. Think of some other examples for the 7 habits listed

7. Add to the table some other habits you think are important

8. Fill in the “group score” column – give your group a score out of ten for each habit

On your own:

9. Fill in the “personal score” column on the table – give yourself a score out of ten for each habit

10. Are you happy with your personal contribution?

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11. Which of the following is the *pattern* you are most likely to adopt?
(not as a one-off, but as a habit)

When I'm tired, work is pressured, or life is hard,

- I push myself a bit harder to come to fellowship group
- I stay back at work
- I withdraw from contact with other Christians

12. Are you OK with your answers to the “on your own” questions?
If not, what changes can you make?

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7 Habits of Highly Effective Group Members (some tips!)

#	Habit or tip	Examples	Group Score (/10)	Personal Score (/10)
1.	Showing respect	Assuming you'll be missed; listening well		
2.	Taking initiative	Contacting someone during the week		
3.	Being observant	Offering to wash up; moving chairs back to make enough room		
4.	Being positive	Smiling even if tired; being welcoming; asking questions; being open about your life		
5.	Keeping group a priority	Not booking something else on group night		
6.	Praying lots	Praying aloud often		
7.	Interacting with the Bible	Looking at Bible to discover ideas		
?				
?				
?				

Study 2: Being the joyful people of God

Introduction

Discuss together:

1. In the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), joy is listed second only to love. Have you any thoughts on why Paul places joy so close to the top of the list? Would you put it up there?

2. What are some of the words that come to mind to describe a person without joy? (apart from joyless!)

Joy in Philippians

*Joy is one of the central themes of the letter to the Philippians. Read **Philippians 4:4-9** and imagine this letter was written to your fellowship group and you've just reached this section together. Try to think about these verses as written not just to you as an individual, but to your group.*

3. What are the challenges Paul gives to your group?

4. What reasons does he give to encourage joy in your group?

The New Testament is very realistic about how we connect together as God's chosen people now – growing yet often failing.

*Read **Colossians 3:12-14** (noting especially v13) and **Ephesians 4:31 - 5:2** (noting especially v32)*

3. What are the consequences for our fellowship together if we don't pay heed to these challenges?

4. How can we combine forgiveness with compassion (NIV) or being tenderhearted (NRSV) in a fellowship group?

5. When you've been hurt by someone, how do you decide when to let things go and when to speak?

(Continued over the page...)

Study 4: Being the love-in-action people of God

Introduction: “Life Together”

During World War 2, a German pastor and theologian took a stand against Hitler. His name was **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**. He wrote a number of books. One of them ‘Life Together’, emerged from Bonhoeffer’s experience of directing a seminary (hidden from the Nazis). He was imprisoned for 2 years by the Gestapo and executed by them in 1945 not long before the end of the war.

1. Read the following extract from Life Together, using a pen to underline anything that you find interesting.

Community – not an ideal but a divine reality

Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream.

...Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

...The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realised by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly.

...When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure.

...God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ.

2. Are there any aspects of this extract that you think relate to us in fellowship groups?

5. Is there anything you could implement as a group in response to these verses?

Expressing Joy

Philippi was one of the “churches of Macedonia” mentioned in **2 Corinthians 8:1-5**. Read what this passage has to say about expressing joy to others.

6. Are there ways you can imagine your group’s “abundant joy” could overflow?

In **2 Chronicles 16:7-10** God’s people sing praises when the ark of the Lord was placed in the tent. Read what this passage has to say about expressing joy to God.

7. Are there ways you can imagine your group expressing your joy to God?

Wrapping up

In the light of what you’ve talked about in this study, pray for your life together as a group.

Study 3: Being the encouraging people of God

Introduction

1. The Bible doesn't distinguish between large and small Christian gatherings. As a member of a fellowship group, are there aspects of meeting in a small group that you find are different from the larger meetings on Sundays?

"One another"

Consider these four "one another" verses mentioned in Sunday's sermon:

1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing"

Hebrews 3:13

"...exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"

Hebrews 10:25,

"Do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching"

1 Peter 4:9

"Be hospitable to one another without complaining"

2. Are there ways these can be lived out more easily in a smaller group context?

3. Read out the following "one another" verses.

How does being part of a fellowship group help you obey these?

Romans 12:10	
Romans 12:16	
Colossians 3:13	
Colossians 3:16	

Looking at our group...

4. As a group, which "one another" challenges are you doing well in?

5. As a group, which "one another" challenges do you need to work harder at? How can you do this?

Wrapping up

In the light of what you've talked about, pray for your life together as a group.