

ὁ δὲ κύριος

And the Lord

προσετίθει τοὺς σωζομένους

added to those being saved

καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

day by day.

Community challenge

6 studies on Christian Community

small groups

Welcome to small groups for 3rd term! This term our groups will be having a close look at what the Bible says about Christian community.

The studies themselves are a little different. They address smaller sections of scripture to ensure we make the time to discuss the application of the Bible to our lives. It's not that we don't usually do this – but we are trying to make sure **these studies have a very clear application focus**. Bible study won't always look like this but from time to time we will do something together as a church with more of an application focus.

The studies are based on the community of believers in Acts. Specifically, the community set out in Acts 2:42-47. The studies are aimed at helping us to set the agenda in our church/small groups/families/lives to witness as a Christian community. We are ordinary people, but we want others to see the extraordinary God we are following!

The next two pages ('from shared space to shared lives') give a bit of an introduction to these studies: why we're doing them now; how they work.

It'd be great if you could read them before the first meeting of your group.

The main thing to notice straight away is that there are two weeks (week 4 and week 8) where you will not do a study. In week 4 your group should get together socially, trying to include/encourage your links. In week 8 it would be terrific to keep the night free to have a meal or some kind of catch up with some friends who aren't part of our community. You can do this together as a group, with a few of your group, or just as a household. Part of the challenge is to practice the community we've been learning about. I hope you enjoy these studies!!!



From shared space to shared lives

growing pains...

Ahhh, what a lovely problem for a church to have! One of the problems in a church that has grown so fast over the last few years is that many people are newcomers! We share a space each Sunday (or sometimes at different events) but are we really sharing our lives?

... is that just the way it is?

Maybe that's just what happens when churches grow. Maybe church is just destined to become less of a community gathering and more of an event to attend. Actually, this often happens, but it doesn't have to be so. Acts 2:41 tells us that after Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost about three thousand were added to the number of believers in one day. Based on our theory of 'sudden growth equals impersonal', this must have been an impersonal and ineffective Christian group. But it wasn't. Acts 2:42-47 proceeds to tell us that this group of believers was the ultimate Christian community. They learnt, they prayed, they ate, they hung out and they witnessed in a way that the church probably hasn't experienced since. AND...

Acts 2:47: And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Can you imagine what it would've been like to be part of this community? Thankfully we don't need to just imagine. While a lot of things like the miracles, signs and wonders may have been fairly unique to the ministry of the apostles (see Ephesians 2:20), the character of the community is something we can emulate. This is because we too have been given God's Spirit. Through the Spirit we can read the apostles teachings and understand. We can pray and be listened to. We can fellowship and encourage one another, and people can see the Lord at work in us.

a church of small groups

You may or may not have realised but the leadership of our church would love to see everybody at church involved in a small group. This is because we want to achieve and sustain Christian community. We want our small groups to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. We want their witness to add to the number of those being saved. Linking people to small groups gives everyone the opportunity to be part of real relationships and God's mission, our Christian community.

It can be easy for people who aren't connected (or linked) to a small group to feel like they're not really a part of our church. They may not read the bible with anyone from church, they may not pray with anyone from church and they may not associate with people from church outside a couple of hours on a Sunday. Is this what the relationships in Acts 2 look like?

linking

This is why we want to encourage all comers to be part of a group. We want people to be part of 'real' Christian community. It's important for us to draw people into our groups, into our community. We need to be aware of this and to welcome, help, pray for and encourage people to be part of our small groups. We want to help these people become part of our intimate Christian community.

these studies

These studies are about setting the agenda for our small groups. We want the Lord to add to our number daily those who are being saved. We want to meet together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all people.

Each of these studies looks at one of the aspects of the community in Acts chapter 2.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Christian community | 5. Breaking of bread |
| 2. The apostles' teaching | 6. Prayer |
| 3. Fellowship | 7. Those who were being saved |
| 4. Community challenge | 8. Community challenge |

prayer

The prayer points section includes space allocated for people we'd like to be part of our groups and unbelieving friends. If we genuinely desire to draw people on the fringe into our community we need to pray for them specifically and regularly. If we genuinely want people to be saved we need to be praying for them. Maybe it would be a good idea to pray as a group for one or two non Christian friends each week, with a view to them being added to the number of those being saved. Before you begin to share your personal prayer points why don't you have an initial separate prayer time for these things.

planning ahead

You'll notice that there are two dinners planned for your small group this term. **THERE IS NO BIBLE STUDY IN THESE WEEKS (so studies 4 and 8 in this booklet are just some helpful tools you may like to look at in your own time)**. The idea is to use one of these events to get people you'd like to be part of your group along and the other one as a low key relationship building outreach meal/activity. Think of the first one as a chance to build your Christian community. Think of the second one as a chance to invite some outsiders into your community. They are both for relationship building so please do not feel guilty if you cannot think of any one to invite or the people you invite do not come. Just relax and try to share a meal with some people. There is value in simply breaking bread together.

ministry tools

There are two studies for individual use that are aimed at helping us to get better at telling our own story and telling others about what we believe. Use them for your group's first dinner if you like. There's also a great tool referred to each week designed to help us grow in the knowledge of God.

1 Christian community



Many people see Christian community as too inward focused. The Bible disagrees. Christian community is a powerful witness that draws people to Christ.



What's the difference between a cult and a community?

warm-up



Read Genesis 1:26-27

1. In what sense are we made in God's image (given the use of 'we' and 'us')?

study

Read John 17:20-26

2. What do we learn here about the God in whose image we are made?

Read Acts 2:42-47

3. How is this passage a picture of the image of God?

4. What are the believers devoting themselves to (Ephesians 2:19-20 may be helpful for this one)?

5. What did they do to meet each others needs?

6. In what way are they a fulfilment of Jesus prayer in John 17?



interact

7. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. What do they have in common with the Acts 2 community?



your small group



your church



your household

8. Still considering these communities, what are some things you could do to be more like the Acts 2 community? (Night church are looking at the first 8 chapters of Acts at the moment if you want to find out more...)



your small group



your church



your household



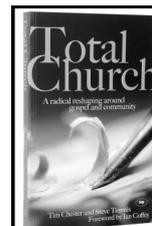
prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?



Total Church is a thought provoking book on what church is all about. It pleads for two key principles for church and mission. First, being word-centred (for the gospel is truth) and being mission-centred (for the gospel is truth to be proclaimed). Second, the community as context: sharing our lives as Christians and offering a place of belonging to unbelievers.



ministry tools

2

The Apostle's teaching



the point

The Bible is God speaking to us. And what does he have to say? We can be saved through faith in Christ Jesus! That's a message worth our complete devotion.



warm-up

Imagine you were one of the apostles who had just witnessed the risen Jesus and his ascension. What would this make you want to tell others about?



study

In Chapter 1 of Acts we see that the apostles witness the risen Christ. Not only that, but they witness his ascension. They know that he is real and they know that he came to bring salvation to God's people. This is the focus of their teaching throughout Acts... and the entire New Testament.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3 and 4:12-13

1. Using what we learned last term in Hebrews and these passages, discuss how God has spoken to us in these last days and how we can listen to him.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17

2. According to verses 1-9, what are we most likely to devote ourselves to in these last days?
3. What kind of devotion has Timothy seen in Paul's life?
4. What do verses 14 and 15 tell us about Timothy's upbringing and early family life? What is the use of the scriptures according to these verses?
5. How might we be able to put the Bible to work in our own lives according to verses 16 and 17?



interact

6. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. Why might it be important to read the Bible together (be specific)?



your small group



your church



your household

7. Still considering these communities, how might you be able to make the Bible a bigger part of them?



your small group



your church



your household



prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?

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|--|--|
| | <p>Guidance and the Voice of God How do I know what God wants me to do? How can I make decisions that are in-line with God's will? Will I recognise his voice? These are important questions and many Christians ask them. This book charts a way through these often confusing issues, and shows how for those who have ears to hear, God is still working through his Son.</p> |
| | <p>Reading the Bible This Matthias 'minizine' will help get you thinking about the who, what, where, when and how of reading the Bible. It provides lots of practical tips.</p> |



ministry tools

3

The fellowship

 the point

Working together as Christians is a good way of reminding each other of the hope we have in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



‘You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian’. Discuss

warm-up



study

Acts tells us that the early Christian community met together every day with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. What a great picture of spurring one another on as we await the return of our Lord Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1 and 1 John 1:3

1. What kind of fellowship are these verses talking about? How do they help us to understand why fellowship is so important?

Read Hebrews 10:23-25

2. What basic aspect of fellowship is this passage insisting on?
3. What should we always be looking back to, and what should we always be looking forward to as we fellowship?
4. According to this passage, what should underpin our habit of meeting together?

Read Philippians 1:1-8

5. The word ‘partnership’ in verse 5 is the Greek word for ‘fellowship’. What does this passage add to our understanding of fellowship?

Read Hebrews 13:15-16

6. The Greek word for ‘fellowship’ is also translated into English as ‘share’. What does this add to our understanding of fellowship?



interact

7. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. How much does what you are doing in them measure up with fellowship as we see it in the Bible?



your small group



your church



your household

8. Still considering these communities, how could your fellowship be more biblical?



your small group



your church



your household



prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?

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| | <p>Life together gives practical advice on how life together in Christ can be sustained in families and groups. The role of personal prayer, worship together, everyday work, and Christian service is discussed in simple words. It's bread for all who are hungry for real life Christian fellowship.</p> |
| | <p>Encouragement deals with understanding encouragement and explores the process of encouragement, including such practical how-tos as: developing a careful selection of encouraging words, cultivating active listening skills, using biblical fellowship to break through the 'surface community' of self-satisfied smiles and shallow greeting, and recognizing subtle opportunities for encouragement.</p> |



ministry tools

4

Testimony



What is a testimony?

At a 'testimonial dinner', honour is given to the life and work of a significant person. A testimony is about giving honour to God - pointing to the life and work of his Son - as we tell the story of how we became a Christian.

"...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have"

(1 Peter 3:15)

How should we use testimonies?

Testimonies can be used in evangelism, but their best use is for encouraging other Christians in doing gospel work. It's always good to hear how God has worked in the lives of others. Testimonies remind us that God delights in using ordinary people like you and me to save others. When I hear someone tell their story I'm surprised how God can use the same message in so many different ways. I'm always surprised that people become Christians, and it reminds me that conversion is essentially the work of God, not people.

Testimonies are great for encouraging each other to keep on with the gospel. Your testimony will encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ no matter how spectacular or 'unspectacular' it is...

Helpful tips on giving your testimony...

A basic model for a testimony is like the 'Before and After' ads on TV. Paul talks this way in Ephesians 2:1-10: "*You were... but God... and now*". Paul tells their 'before' and 'after' story - describing their lives before and after knowing Christ. And he keeps the focus on the thing that has made the difference: the gospel. It's a great 3-point pattern for a testimony:

1. Describe what life was like **before** you became a Christian.
2. Describe what life is like **now** you are a Christian.
3. Describe how the change came about: tell the **gospel**.



don't

- ...be too long - aim to get your testimony down to 3 minutes
- ...use jargon - talking about prevenient grace is not gracious!
- ...make yourself the main focus - it's a testimony about God

do

- ...begin with a bang...and end with a bang
- ...keep it personal - remember it's a story not a sermon

| testimony jargon chart | | | |
|---|--|-----------|--|
| try to think of another way of describing each of the following concepts: | | | |
| Sin | | Christian | |
| Faith | | Grace | |
| Justification | | Saved | |

now try writing an outline for your testimony...

1. Describe what life was like **before** you became a Christian.

2. Describe what life is like **now** you are a Christian.

3. Describe how the change came about: tell the **gospel**.

5

The breaking of bread



the point

God showed us true hospitality when He welcomed us into His life through the blood of His son. We can show generosity in response by being hospitable like God.



Discuss a positive experience where you've gotten to know someone by sharing a meal?

warm-up



study

There was a genuine godliness in hospitality for the first Christian community. We see this in Acts 2. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Read 1 Peter 3:18 and Romans 5:6-8

1. The Greek word for 'hospitality' is *philoxenos*. It means 'lover of strangers'. It can involve food, but it's more than that. How has God demonstrated hospitality to us in the past?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

2. Above all, what should we do to each other and how does this cover over sin?
3. Why would anyone grumble as they offer hospitality?
4. What are we to do with each of the gifts God has given us? How are we to do it?
5. What do things like 'hospitality' and 'serve others' have to do with God's grace to us?

Read Revelation 19:7-9

6. How would you describe God's hospitality toward us?



interact

7. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. What are they like at welcoming and hospitality?



your small group



your church



your household

8. Still considering these communities, what are some things you could do to be more welcoming and hospitable?



your small group



your church



your household



prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?



Loving your church Do you love your church? We don't mean: do you love the music, or the quality of the preaching, or the architecture of the building? We mean: do you love the people God has given you to meet with each week? And how do you show that love? The three articles in this 'minzine' not only challenge us to think about our attitudes to church life, but give lots of practical ideas for becoming more loving, caring and welcoming to those around us.



ministry tools



the point

Paul clearly prayed with the priority of making the gospel known. Our prayers should reflect this same priority.



warm-up

Share some of the ways that God has answered prayer in your life.



study

In Chapter 1 of Acts the risen Jesus clearly tells his followers what they are to be concerned with; that is, being his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The followers began by praying (Acts 1:14) and they continued to pray (Acts 2:43). This mission we're part of requires prayer!

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

1. Try to remember what we learned from this passage last term. How are we able to talk to God and why should we?

Read Ephesians 6:17-20

2. What does verse 17 say the sword of the Spirit is?
3. What does it mean in verse 18 when it says to 'pray in the Spirit'? When are we to pray like this? What does this mean?
4. What does Paul instruct the Ephesians to pray for?

Read Philippians 1:9-11

5. What is Paul's prayer for the Philippians? What does this mean?

Read Philippians 4:6-7

6. What does this passage tell us about *when* and *how* we should present our requests before God?



interact

7. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. How could you make prayer a bigger part of them?



your small group



your church



your household

8. Still considering these communities, how could your priorities in prayer be more like Paul's?



your small group



your church



your household



prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?

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|--|---|
| | <p>A Call to Spiritual Reformation 'A Call to Spiritual Reformation' is a hard read by Don Carson that teaches us to find strength and direction in the prayers of Paul, spelling out the lessons of Paul's 'school of prayer'. It will really challenge you to think about what your priorities in prayer are and should be.</p> |
| | <p>Help for a sick prayer life Prayer is deceptively natural and easy—a child can do it. And yet persevering in prayer is agonizingly hard. This little booklet by Matthias Media won't solve your prayer problems forever but it may be a great help.</p> |



ministry tools

7

The Lord added...

 the point

The most powerful way of letting people know about Jesus is actually living like Him. Loving others and proclaiming God's salvation.



warm-up

Why would you want people to become part of our Christian community?



study

At the heart of the way the early church lived in Acts was a desire to see God's name glorified on earth. Their life and community were their powerful witness as they imitated Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

1. What does verse 31 say we should do for the glory of God? What does this look like?
2. What does it mean in verse 32 by 'causing people to stumble'? How might we do this?
3. Why, according to verse 33, is Paul trying to please everybody in every way?
4. Whose example does chapter 11 verse 1 say Paul is following?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

5. According to verse 5, what approach did Paul use to bring the gospel to the Thessalonians?
6. What were the results of the Thessalonians receiving the gospel?



interact

- 7. How have the studies you've looked at so far helped you with doing 'all for the glory of God'?
- 8. Consider the different Christian communities you are part of. What are some things about them that may be causing others to stumble? How can that be changed?



your small group



your church



your household

- 9. Still considering these communities, how can we make sure the salvation of others is at their heart?



your small group



your church



your household



prayer

Who are some people you'd like to be part of your group that you can pray for? What can you pray?

Consider one or two non-believing friends to pray for each week and to share the gospel with.

From the study, what can you pray about?

What can you pray about for each other?

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| | <p>Reason for God</p> <p>At a time when scientists and critics are questioning the validity of religion, this book uses literature, philosophy and reason to explain how faith in a Christian God is a soundly rational belief. Timothy Keller looks at some of the most widespread accusations levelled at Christianity and charts a brilliantly considered and impassioned path to Christianity.</p> |
| | <p>Evangelism and social action</p> <p>This Matthias Media 'minizine' looks at how these two strands of the Bible's teaching work together.</p> |



ministry tools



ministry
tools

1. connecting to CHRIST ... the GOSPEL centre

The one thing we want to communicate, the one thing we want to connect people to is Jesus Christ. It's important that in a gospel talk (and all talks from the Bible!) that the gospel is the focus of the message. A gospel talk has the aim of winning people to Christ, taking them from hopeless to hopeful through a knowledge of the only Lord and Saviour. This is the message at the heart of God's word to us and it has to be at the heart of our words to others. It's important to have this clear before we go any further.

"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:1-2

2. connecting the talk itself ... the BIG IDEA

Listening is hard work. No matter how much riveting stuff you try to pack into a talk, the truth is most people will only walk away with one central idea. Because this is true we need to make sure that the idea they walk away with is the one we want them to. We need to construct our talk so it communicates one BIG IDEA. Flowing from the introduction through to the conclusion we need to be sowing the seed of one clear idea in the listener's mind. This impacts everything from the type of illustrations we use, through to the individual words we choose.

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

3. connecting to listeners ... APPLICATION mode

Whether consciously or not, many people have a question running through their minds as they listen to you speak. It's the question, 'so what?... what difference does what you're saying make to my life?' This step is crucial. A Bible talk needs to be (i) Christ-centred, (ii) have a clear big idea and (iii) be APPLIED to the listener. It needs to answer the 'so what?'. It's important that people come away from the talk aware of the fact that they're either accepting or rejecting Jesus message.

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 3:36

Some ideas for a model talk outline

introduction

People make up their minds in the first minute or two whether they are going to listen to you! So the introduction needs to be interesting. This might take the form of a story, whether personal or from current events. Being interesting is only half the job. It also needs to introduce the big idea and the key associated language. Getting people's attention is good; getting them thinking in the right ball park is even better.

the body of the talk

STATE the point – say in clear terms what this point is

SHOW where in the text this point has come from (verse reference, etc)

EXPLAIN the point – in plain language expand on the point
ILLUSTRATE the point – some sort of story, etc to help your explanation
APPLY the point – this may only be brief at this stage but should happen

conclusions & application

For a gospel talk it's important to conclude with a challenge to follow Jesus. Here's an example from John Chapman's "Setting Hearts on Fire":

To conclude: Christmas is about forgiveness and friendship. Forgiveness from God because Jesus has died for us, and friendship with God because forgiveness now makes this possible. No wonder Christmas is such a good time! A time to say "thank you" to God for such a great gift. It is possible, as you have been listening to me, that you have said to yourself, "I don't really know God as a friend and I certainly don't know what it is to be forgiven". Tonight would be a good night for you to turn back to God and rectify this situation. I will pray a prayer that would be appropriate for you. You might like to echo it to God, in your head, after me. Let me tell you what I will say in the prayer and it will give you time to think. I will say:

"Dear heavenly Father, I haven't been serving you as my God and I am sorry about that. From tonight onwards I want to serve you. Please help me. Lord Jesus thank you for dying for me. Please forgive me. Please come and take over the running of my life."

AMEN!

Hints & tips for giving a talk...

- * listening is HARD WORK – it's easy to drift off
 - * SO WHAT? is the question in people's heads – give them reasons to listen
 - * talks don't need to be complicated. Focus on a single key idea.
 - * read the passage. Re-read it. Write it out by hand. Re-read it.
 - * if you can't summarise your talk in a single sentence, who could?
 - * don't start writing until you have the big idea
 - * the idea needs to be broken down into a clear structure
 - * the more you say, the LESS people will remember
 - * give yourself plenty of time to think through application
 - * repetition is very important
 - * people like to hear about PEOPLE, not abstract ideas
 - * even the most brilliant people prefer SIMPLE communication
 - * simple communication uses simple words, short sentences and repetition
 - * repetition is very important
 - * learn to write how you speak not how you write
 - * never use a long word when a short word will do the job
 - * use down to earth language – without being offensive
 - * never use more words than you really need
 - * aim for an average sentence length of 15-20 words. Or less
 - * repeat the first sentence of a new point two or three times
 - * direct people's attention to the verse(s) you are dealing with
 - * illustrate and use stories ... to explain points and to give a break
 - * almost always abbreviate: can't, don't, aren't, etc, except for emphasis
 - * almost never use long sentences with lots of subordinate clauses. Break it up into shorter sentences with repetition of the primary clause
 - * start sentences with AND and BUT. Ignore your old English teacher!
 - * strong conclusions are crucial – don't fizzle out.
 - * repetition is very important
 - * treat the previous point seriously – it'll revolutionise your communication
- ... apologies if anything said here is repeated.