

# Exploring fellowship



Way In

There is an African proverb that says, 'it takes a village to raise a child'. It points to the importance of supportive relationships to healthy personal development. That is also true of growing as a follower of Jesus: we could say that it takes a church to raise a disciple! In this session we will explore what it means to be part of God's family, helping one another to grow up to be like Jesus.



## Connect: Share with the group

1. If you could have a meal out with any person (living or from history) who would it be and why?
2. What have you done in terms of your 'action point' from the last meeting?
3. Who has been the biggest influence on your spiritual life?



## Contemplate

1. Before people arrive put a 'reserved' sign on one of the seats in the room. Keep the seat free during the 'Connect' time.
2. Tell people that this seat has been reserved for Jesus. Ask them to shut their eyes and in the silence, imagine that he is entering the room and sitting down to be with you.
3. While people's eyes are still closed, read John 20:19-20.
4. The first disciples were overjoyed to see Jesus. Ask people to think about how *they* would feel if they opened their eyes and saw Jesus in the room. Invite them to say silent prayers to him to express their feelings.
5. Pray together: *Jesus, we welcome you here by your Spirit. Speak to us through the meeting of our lives. Amen.*



## Consider 1: Read Scripture

As in one body we have many limbs and organs ... so we, many as we are, are one body in Jesus, and individually we belong to one another. Well then, we have gifts that differ in accordance with the grace that has been given to us, and we must use them appropriately. If it is prophecy, we must prophesy according to the pattern of the faith. If it is serving, we must work at our serving; if teaching, at our teaching; if exhortation, at our exhortation; if giving, with generosity; if leading, with energy; if

doing acts of kindness, with cheerfulness.. Love must be real... be truly affectionate in showing love for one another; compete with each other in giving mutual respect... Give constant energy to prayer; contribute to the needs of God's people; make sure you are hospitable to strangers.

(from Romans 12:4-13) NTW

## Wesley's wisdom

Solitary religion is not to be found [in the gospel of Christ]. 'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness...

This then is the way: walk in it, whosoever you are, that have believed in his name ... You are taught of God, 'not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is', but to instruct, admonish, exhort, reprove, comfort, confirm, and in every way 'build up one another'.

(John Wesley: Preface to hymns & sacred songs)



## Consider 2: More about

- Jesus said that the crucial test of authentic discipleship is the love that we have for one another (John 13:34-35). The quality of our relationships, determines the effectiveness of our discipleship.
- The New Testament images of the Church point to the importance of our *life together* (living stones built together; different parts of one body; members of God's family...) These images go beyond just gathering for a 'Sunday meeting'.
- The New Testament emphasis on the importance of our life together includes an expectation that we teach *one another*, serve *one another*, encourage

*one another*, rebuke *one another*, confess our sins to *one another*, pray for *one another*, comfort *one another*... One-anothering is crucial to growing as a Christian disciple, and requires everyone to play their part.

- John Wesley released 'one-anothering' in early Methodism by organising fellowship in different size groups:
  - **Society** meetings – a large group for worship and ministry, a bit like our congregations
  - **Class** meetings – small groups, where people looked out for one another's personal and spiritual health
  - **Band** meetings – even smaller groups where deep friendships could be formed for accountability and mutual spiritual help in growing as a disciple.
- The New Testament teaches that *every* Christian has a contribution to make to the growth of another. There are no 'spare parts' in the body of Christ.  
(for more on Fellowship, see the article on the Methodist Church website [www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship))



### Consider 3: Your response

Spend a moment in quiet, considering your own response to the readings. You might like to jot down your thoughts in the following boxes.



What new thing have I seen about Christian fellowship?



What puzzles me about the New Testament emphasis on 'one-anothering'?



Who has encouraged me to grow as a disciple? How did they do it?



How could I help or encourage others in their walk with Jesus?



### Consider 4: Sharing wisdom

Now share your thoughts, questions and insights together in the group.

- Take it in turns to share something from your personal reflection.
- Listen to one another carefully.
- Discuss the issues raised, sharing your knowledge, experience and wisdom together.
- Aim to help one another find out what you are each learning about the importance of the spiritual practices in following Jesus.



### Commit 1: Reflect

Take a few moments to sit in silence together, reflecting on this session. How is God asking you to respond as an individual? These questions might help you think through your response:

- How do I contribute to the spiritual growth of the others in my church?
- Who do I know well enough to be honest with about my spiritual life?
- What value would I find in being in closer spiritual friendships – and what might stop me seeking them?
- What potential is there in joining – or forming – a small group for continuing fellowship after this course?



### Commit 2: Focus

Write one thing in the box below that you would like to take away from this session, either to do, or to think and pray about further.



**MY ACTION POINT:** In response to this session on fellowship, before the next meeting I would like to...



### Commit 3: Pray

Lord Jesus, our desire is to know you, to serve you, and to love you more deeply. Help us as we seek to deepen our discipleship this week. Amen.