



BASIC TRAINING



Getting back to the basics
of the Christian life

COMMUNITY GROUP
LEADERS GUIDE

Prepared by
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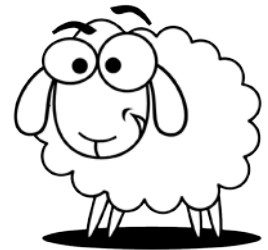


The Role of a Community Group Leader

Thank you so much for your willingness to serve God and Rosebank Union Church as a Community Group leader. RUC is not a mega church by any means, but it is large enough for people to get 'lost' and suffer the consequences if they are not connected. We, therefore, see Community Groups as a vital part of our mission to call, equip and send disciples for God's glory.

In recent months since taking over the responsibility of leading the Community Group ministry I have been particularly struck by the fact that your role as a Community Group leader is that of a shepherd. As a shepherd you have a fourfold responsibility in relation to the 'sheep' God has entrusted to you. Biblically a shepherd is called to

- **Know the sheep**
- **Feed the sheep**
- **Lead the sheep**
- **Protect the sheep**



God has called you to know the sheep in your Community Group. Who are they? Where are they on their spiritual journey? Are they growing? How are things going in their marriage, their family, their work? What are their joys? What are their burdens?

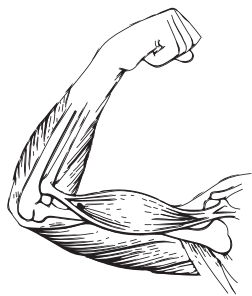
God has called you to feed the sheep with the milk and meat of his Word. Following the guidelines set out below will help you do this faithfully and effectively from week to week.

God has called you to lead the sheep. Where are you going to take our sheep this year? What are you going to do to seek to help them move to the right in the five areas of discipleship depicted in the discipleship circle diagram below? Lead them! Don't just muddle on from week to week.

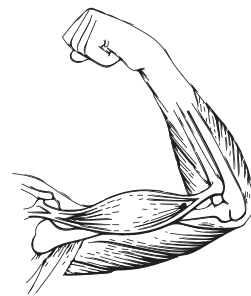
God has called you to protect the sheep from error and from evil. Be aware of the challenges they are facing, the sins they are struggling with, the errors in their thinking that need gentle correction. Watch over them and be willing to caution, challenge and confront with truth and tenderness.

I am so delighted to be a shepherd of God's flock together with you.





For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.



1 Timothy 4:8

Preparation

Leading a Community Group is a significant responsibility, one that is important and highly valued in the life of our church. In the book of James, there is a sobering word of caution to those who would aspire to be teachers, I have found that it serves as a good motivation to make every effort to be well prepared!

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James 3:1

So how can you prepare for your community group meeting?

1. Make every effort to attend one of the Sunday morning services for the duration of the series (25th January - 8th March 2015). Take notes during the sermon so that you can grasp the theological truth of the sermon. If you are unable to attend the service, you can download the sermon from the website each Monday morning (www.ruc.org.za)
2. Encourage your group members to also attend the services and to listen to the sermon so that they can be prepared and prayerful before your weekly meetings.
3. Before your meeting, read through the relevant weekly materials which will be provided each Friday. We will try to provide helpful questions to guide your group discussions. Feel free to select and use the questions you feel will be most beneficial to your group. Perhaps also prepare your own questions which will spark discussion (since you undoubtedly know how to target your group members better than we do!).
4. Go through the study yourself. Try to personally and prayerfully answer the questions. Let God use the message to challenge and change you first. If your heart is engaged with the message, you will be more passionate and equipped to share it with your group.
5. Pray.
 - Pray for insight into the meaning of the relevant passages and how best to apply these truths to our lives.
 - Pray for God to guide your group discussions - particularly that conversations can move further than simple "head" conversations. We want the message of the gospel to lead to life transformation - so pray that God will lead your conversations to address the heart.
 - Pray for your group members, particularly for the seeds of the message to take root in their lives.



Series Outline

The mission of Rosebank Union Church is to Call, Equip and Send Disciples. For the purposes of our ministry we have identified five key characteristics which help to define the life of a growing disciple of Christ. All of these traits are centred on the Gospel. The Basic Training series essentially seeks to draw out a more focussed view of each of these five characteristics, with the parenthesis of week focussing on Grace in the beginning, and a week focussing on the power available to us through the Holy Spirit at the end.

WEEK 1: Grace

WEEK 2: Love

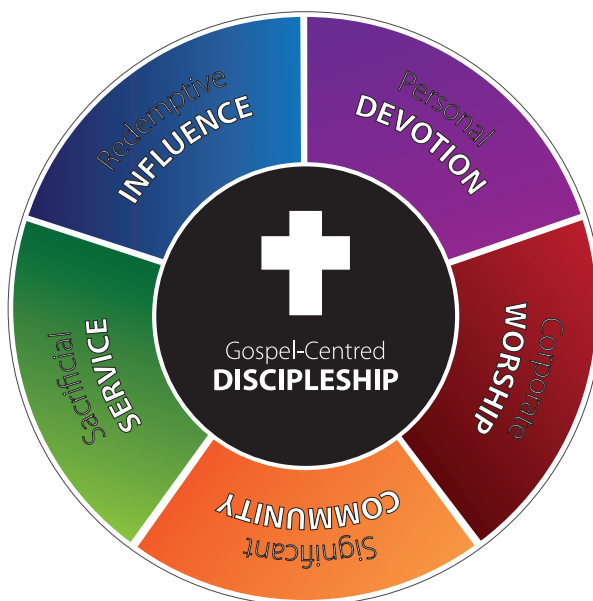
WEEK 3: Worship

WEEK 4: Community

WEEK 5: Work

WEEK 6: Witness

WEEK 7: Power

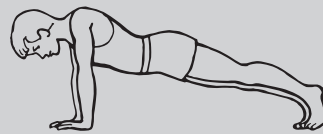


Structure of the Weekly Studies

The goal of this series is not to simply rehash the Sunday sermon. Rather our intention is that each group can pick up on the truth of the Sunday sermon and grapple with it. We want you to take it further and use it to help your group members discover ways of applying it to their own lives and contexts. Use the truth being taught to target the heart of each of your group members. The goal is transformation. We want to see people "Moving to the Right"!

With this in mind, the notes we send out each week will follow a simple structure:

Weekly Workout Programme



Stretches:

Opening Prayer time

Warm-up:

Brief revision of the Sermon, read relevant passages of scripture

Strength Training:

Questions & discussion grappling with the truth of the passage

Cardio:

Questions and discussion to apply the truth for heart transformation

Warm-down:

Recap and closing prayer and sharing time.

Recovery:

Encourage group members to massage the message into their lives

As a group leader - try to limit your input to the initial teaching and then to guiding discussions and keeping things flowing. Try to keep discussions on track. Be aware of when your group members start following a rabbit trail and quickly lead the focus back to the truth being discussed. Try to resist the urge to speak more than necessary. After each question there may be a need to succinctly summarise and lead the focus to the next question.

Encourage *all* of your group members to contribute. We want everyone to be engaging with the truth. Be aware of the differences in your group members and try to make space for everyone to participate. Some members will naturally want to speak, others may need you to invite them or give them room to speak.



Please Note:

These weekly studies are designed to give impetus and direction to guide your group discussions. This guide is for you as the leader, it is not meant to be a worksheet for your group members. Any questions posed will be posed as though you (the group leader) were asking your group members.

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Introduce the topic for the week. Check which of your group members were able to listen to the Sunday sermon and encourage them to do so for the weeks ahead. Ask one of the people who had attended to open your time together in prayer.

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Titus 3:3-8

This passage (which Pastor Leigh preached on this Sunday), demonstrates a simple Gospel formula - the common experience of every Christian life.

- **AT ONE TIME...** We lived in disobedience, enslaved to our desires (v 1-3) and efforts to attain righteousness (v5a)
- **BUT WHEN...** God intervened, He saved us, he washed us, we were justified by his grace (v 4-6)
- **SO THAT...** As a consequence of God's grace, we become heirs, we find hope and our lives are changed (v7-8)

Q Where would you plot yourself on this progression? Why?

Strength Training: (20 minutes)

For the purpose of this study, instead of reworking Pastor Leigh's sermon, let's focus on one specific aspect of what God's grace does in us and for us:

*"... so that, **having been justified by his grace**, we might..." (v7)*

Grace is God's attitude towards us by which, through his love and kindness and sacrifice, he gives us what we do not deserve. It is God's unmerited favour towards us, bought through the sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Through his grace, God intervenes and gives us something which we do not deserve - he gives us JUSTIFICATION. The focus of this study is going to be on grappling with what it means to be justified.

Justification is one of those Christian words which, despite its richness, is so familiar that we read over it with very little thought.

- Q What do you understand by the word “Justification”?
- Q Sometimes I’ve heard it said that Justification is God’s work in making us “*Just as if we had never sinned*”. That is one piece of the puzzle, but what else does justification entail?

The phrase “justified by his grace” also appears in Romans 3:24 (with the addition of the word “freely”!). Let’s read this passage.

*²⁰ Therefore no one will be **declared righteous** in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

*²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Romans 3:21-24

The words “declared righteous” (v21) is from the same word which is translated as “justified” in other bible translations. So to be justified means to be declared righteous. But this is another word that is often not fully understood or appreciated.

- Q What is righteousness?

Tim Keller defines righteousness as “*a validating performance record which opens doors*”.

It’s like your resume. It is something which shows your past achievements and performance record, which you use to try and show your worthiness to gain acceptance for a position.

This is the way the world works and all other religions work. In the world’s eyes and in all man-made religions, your righteousness is your deservedness. It’s your performance record which gives you status and position and power and authority (or lack thereof) whether before people or before your god. It’s the things you peg your hope on for your validation and approval before people and before God.

Everyone in the world is striving to justify their existence. We justify ourselves through our wealth, our appearance, our status, our family and connections, our education etc etc...

- Q In what other ways do people strive to *justify* their existence?
- Q Is it ever enough? (Even on a purely human level)
- Q Practically in your life, what do you pour yourself into in order to justify your existence?
- Q Could you have done these things any better?

“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” Romans 14:12

But now... God intervenes.

God presents a new gift of righteousness - one that is apart from the laws of acceptance (whether before man or God). It is completely counter to every other religion and philosophy. Instead of man presenting his good deeds and credentials and work in order to gain approval, God makes a perfect record of performance at his own cost, and gives it to us. So that now, before God and through faith, we have the performance record of Jesus. This is justification.

Cardio: (20 minutes)

There are a lot of questions here. Feel free to choose the questions which you feel will best target the hearts of your group members (as time allows). The goal is for each of us to see our own efforts at justifying ourselves and to appreciate our need for the justification that is offered to us in Jesus. Dwell on the discussions which help to draw that out.

- Q What are you relying on to earn God's approval? How will you "give an account of yourself to God"?
- Q What evidence is there in your life that this is your basis of finding approval?
- Q Looking at your life, what might other people say you are relying on to justify your existence?
- Q What is your standing with God like right now? Do you feel worthy of him?
- Q What do you need to do in order to get right with God? Do you feel like you need to neaten yourself up first?
- Q Isn't even the thought of neatenening yourself up an effort at earning God's approval?

"and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" Isaiah 64:6

- Q What do the passages tell us we need to do in order to be justified? (Titus 3:8 & Romans 3:22)
- Q How does it make you feel to think that your approval before God, from start to finish, is solely his doing?
- Q How does accepting this justification affect that way we come to God?
- Q How does/should understanding this truth about our justification influence that way we treat people who we might ordinarily feel superior to?
- Q What doors does this righteousness open for us? (Refer to Titus 3:3-8)

"so that, having been justified by his grace, we might..." (Titus 3:7-8)

- Q What is the consequence of "having been justified"?
(Heirs, hope of eternal life, removal of fear, assurance etc)
- Q How does having been justified lead to being careful to devote ourselves to doing what is good? (Titus 3:8)
(Our lives need to reflect our new status - joyful and humble obedience)

In the weeks ahead, we will explore some of the good works we are called to devote ourselves to, namely Love, Worship, Community, Work and Witness.

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

Spend some time praying as a group around the things you have discussed. There may be need for a time of repentance and of reaffirming our faith in God's righteousness on our behalf. Give thanks to Jesus for the freedom and hope and inheritance that is ours because of this new performance record that he won for us through his death on the cross.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

During the week ahead, try to encourage your group members to take note of the things they do and rely on in order to win approval, whether before people or God. Encourage them to meditate on the verse below and keep reminding ourselves of the new performance record we have through Christ.

*"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24)*





★ WEEK 2

Love: *The beauty of personal devotion*

Stretches: (5 minutes)

- Briefly follow up on the Recovery section from Week 1. See if anyone in your group had any insight into the things they do to win approval (whether the approval of others or the approval of God).
- Introduce the topic for the week. Check which of your group members were able to listen to the Sunday sermon and encourage them to do so for the weeks ahead.

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Titus 3:3-8

The closing verse in the Titus passage from Week 1 ends with a stern reminder that in light of the grace and salvation we have in Christ, we should **be careful** to **devote** ourselves to doing what is good. In context, it seems like a small thing to ask! Our devotion to Christ is a natural response to receiving and understanding the riches of God's love for us.

For today's study, as with Pastor Justin's sermon on Sunday (1 February 2015), our topic is personal devotion.

- Q What feelings does it evoke in you when you hear words like: Devotions, Quiet Time, Devotional Life etc?
- Q Why do you feel that way?

Strength Training: (15 minutes)

Read: **[Deuteronomy 6:3-5; Matthew 22:36-40]**

- Q What does it mean to say “Love the LORD your God with ALL your HEART and with ALL your SOUL and with ALL your STRENGTH”?
- Q If this is the greatest commandment, how are you doing?

Read **[John 4:13-14; John 7:37-38; Jeremiah 2:11-13]**

- Q If Jesus is living water, water which satisfies our deepest longings and wells up in us to eternal life, then in what ways might you be deserving of God’s reproof in Jeremiah?
- Q In what ways do you, or have you changed your glory for that which does not profit?

Practically in our day to day lives, we can “drink” from Jesus through a lifestyle of personal devotion. In his sermon on Sunday Pastor Justin dealt with this very practically. So to compliment his approach, let’s use the rest of this study to try and uncover some of the killers of personal devotion.

Cardio: (25 minutes)

10 Killers of a Healthy Devotional Life

1. Busyness

[Luke 10:38-42]

- Q Are you a Mary or a Martha?
- Q What are the things that keep you too busy to spend time with Jesus?

2. Distraction

[Matthew 13:18-23]

- Q What are the thorns in life? What distracts you from personal devotion?
- Q What are the worries and anxieties in your life that smother your devotion?

3. Laziness

[Proverbs 13:4; Proverbs 19:15]

This can include a simple lack of discipline or wrong priorities in our lives.

- Q What causes you to get lazy in your devotion to God?

4. Unresolved issues with God

[Hosea 14:1]

This includes things like habitual sin, guilt, feeling afraid to face God, anger towards God, bitterness, disappointment, unanswered prayer... etc

- Q What things obstruct your affection for God?
- Q How are these things causing your downfall? (Hosea 14:1)

5. Hardness of heart

[Hebrews 3:12; Ephesians 4:18]

Hardness of heart is an intentional attitude of our will against God. It may be the consequence of any of the unresolved issues mentioned above.

- Q How soft and tender is your heart towards God?
- Q What might be excluding you from the life of God?

6. Pride

[Isaiah 66:2; Daniel 5:20]

Pride is an attitude of putting ourselves over Scripture, being unwilling or lacking the humility to face the truth.

- Q Do you tremble at God's word?
- Q In what ways might you be arrogant and have a heart, "hardened with pride"?

7. Apathy

[Revelation 2:4]

I've heard it said that the opposite of love is apathy. It's a slow insidious disease that causes us to be indifferent and unmoved.

- Q Do you really love Jesus?
- Q In your experience, what causes you to become apathetic towards God? What robs you of your first love?

8. Lack of understanding

[Acts 8:30-31; Hebrews 4:16-5:2]

A persons devotional life might flounder for simple lack of understanding. You might not know what to do or where to start. Or on a negative note, a person might be approaching God's word really badly (perhaps treating it with a note of superstition, like reading a horoscope!).

- Q How do you go about your devotions? Is it working?
- Q What are some practical ways you can grow in understanding so that you can have a vibrant devotional life?

9. Familiarity

[Revelation 3:16]

Philip Yancey in his book "What's so Amazing about Grace" says that familiarity breeds unfamiliarity which breeds contempt. Sometimes when people are culturally Christian, or have been Christian for a long time, there's a danger of feeling like perhaps we've grown beyond some of the simple things like Quiet Times. We may find we can manage without them for a time, and gradually we end up forgoing them altogether.

- Q Honestly, when you hear the phrase "Quiet time", how does your heart respond?
- Q How do you wish you would respond?

10. Suffering

[Job 1:9-11]

The generalised biblical view of Christian suffering is that God uses it to purify us, so unlike most of the other points above, suffering is not something we can avoid. But the reality is that sometimes in the thick of it, during times of bereavement, illness, depression, trials and difficulties, our devotional lives may suffer. The warning is in the midst of this, not to allow yourself to slip into bitterness towards God. Sometimes when we look back, if by God's grace we're able to persevere and hold fast to God in the midst of pain and suffering, these times can be some of the richest experiences of God's grace in our lives [read Job 42:2-6]

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

*“Before we can be filled with the Spirit, the desire to be filled must be all-consuming. It must be for the time the biggest thing in the life, so acute, so intrusive as to crowd out everything else. The degree of fullness in any life accords perfectly with the intensity of true desire. **We have as much of God as we actually want.**”*

A. W. Tozer

Q How much of God do you want? How intense is your desire for relationship with him?

Spend time in open prayer particularly asking God to rekindle our love for him. There may be need for a time of quiet repentance. Rejoice in the fact that God is always calling us to return to him and longs for us to “abide in him”.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

Commit to setting aside designated time each day this week for time alone with God. Be ready next week to share your experience!





★ WEEK 3

Worship: *The richness of corporate worship*

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Check-in with your group members to see how their personal devotional times have been going. Have they been able to identify some of the enemies of personal devotion in their own lives? Spend a few minutes encouraging and praying for each other. Remind them that God loves those and is good those who delight in him and seek after him.

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

Choose one or two questions to introduce the topic:

- Q What is corporate worship?
- Q Who is the audience?
- Q Can you love Jesus and hate the church?
- Q When you read the bible, do you read it like it was written to you personally, or to you in community?
- Q Can you have a healthy spiritual life without regular corporate worship?
- Q If you said yes, then is this normative and life-long?

In his sermon this Sunday (8 February 2015), Pastor Leigh dealt with the EXCITEMENT, ELEMENTS & ENEMIES of corporate worship. For the purpose of this study, we're going to focus on some of the rich benefits of worshipping God TOGETHER.

While God is undeniably the focus of our corporate worship (and worshipping God is an end in itself), the truth is that Corporate Worship is perhaps the greatest means of God's grace in the life of the believer. There are rich benefits to the life of believers which are only accessible through participation in corporate worship.

Strength Training & Cardio (combined): (40 minutes)

*“There’s an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. **There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the ‘meeting together’ with other believers**”*

Don Whitney (Spiritual Disciples)

7 Benefits of Corporate Worship

Ultimately the benefit of corporate worship is that we together become reconciled to God and to one another - that we grow towards maturity in Christ. But there are a number benefits that contribute towards this end. They may not always seem attractive - but they are benefits nonetheless!

1. Awe in God's presence

When we gather to worship, God is present. That's God with a capital "G"... the creator, the conquering, risen LORD. Our corporate worship should be characterised by awe and anticipation. This is an attitude we should approach God with, but it is also a transforming experience when we deeply know God's presence.

- Zephaniah 3:17
- Matthew 18:20
- Acts 2:42-43
- Leviticus 10:1-3

Q When last did you experience God's presence in corporate worship?

Q Have you ever felt a sense of fear in coming into church?

Q How does experiencing God's presence impact you?

2. Revival

Throughout history, times of revival - when God pours out his Spirit in powerful transforming doses - have invariably been in the context of genuine corporate worship. From Ezra reading the books of the law, to the disciples gathered together in prayer waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, God undoubtedly delights in his people gathered in unity to worship him.

- Nehemiah 8:8 -10;
- 2 Chronicles 7:14-16
- Acts 1:14; 2:1-4

Q In these passages - what is the precursor to revival?

Q What level of intention and effort are you giving to these precursors?

Q Do you long for God to break through in revival?

3. Encouragement & growth

In the context of the gathered community we can be mutually encouraged both by intentional love and care, and by seeing evidence of God working in the lives of others (perhaps through testimonies and baptism).

- Hebrews 10:24-25
- Ephesians 4:11-16

At home in my own house there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way though.

Martin Luther

- Q How does simply being in a worshipping community serve to encourage us in our faith?
- Q How have you experienced being encouraged and stirred towards love and good deeds?
- Q What role do you play in this mutual encouragement? How does this change your attitude in coming to church?

4. Correction

God speaks to us through the reading and preaching of his word - shedding light on errors in our faith and practice. Many of the letters in the New Testament were sent to churches specifically to address various errors - this demonstrates how important correction is in the context of corporate worship. On our own it is too easy to be lead astray. It helps prevent backsliding and apostasy.

- Colossians 3:16
- 2 Timothy 4:1-4

"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above."
Robert Robinson

- Q How is admonishing one another different to judging one another?
- Q With your answer to the question above in mind, why is the corporate worship more effective for correction than our independent devotional life?
- Q How does God gift some people in the body specifically for the purpose of correction?

5. Reconciliation

One of the challenges and blessings of worshipping together is that we are forced to be reconciled with our fellow believers. Our common faith in Jesus and common experience of his grace always trumps our differences and grudges - whether they be racial, socio-economic, gender based or whether there is need for forgiving each other for wrongdoing.

Worshipping God together in community demands that we first be reconciled with each other. While this is always difficult and demands repentance, forgiveness and humility, being reconciled with one another is liberating and joy-giving and frees us to worship God.

- 1 Corinthians 11:17-22; 27-30
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13
- Galatians 3:28
- Ephesians 4:1-6
- Matthew 5:23

- Q What is the basis of our equality in Christ?
- Q How does the fact that we are all "justified freely by his grace" challenge or change your view of others?
- Q When you come to church, do you harbour bitterness towards others? Is there pride in your heart? Do you look down on others?
- Q Why is God displeased with our offerings or our worship when we are not intentionally reconciled to the people around us?
- Q How might God be prompting you to be reconciled to others? Who?

6. Joy

Genuine worship produces joy when we become pre-occupied with Jesus. When we forget about ourselves (our stomach, our sore back, the irritating person behind us, the loudness of the drums or our plans for the week) and instead get caught up the beauty and majesty of God (whether through a song, a testimony, a prayer or the reading and preaching of God's word).

- Psalm 16:11
- Zephaniah 3:14–17
- Revelation 7:9-10

- Q How do all the benefits above (Awe, Correction, Reconciliation etc.) contribute to our experience of joy?
- Q Why is being “self-forgetful” such an important element in worship?
- Q How does being “self-forgetful” influence the way we come to worship? (The way we dress, our worship preferences, our sense of entitlement, the way we view the people around us etc.)

“The angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly”

G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

7. Witness

Being devoted to corporate worship is finally a good witness to the world. Firstly, a unified church worshipping one God together despite differences demonstrates God's love and proves that we know him. Secondly the Gospel can be spread through the wise use of our collective effort and giving. And thirdly, the priority we each personally give to our church attendance is a witness to our family, friends and colleagues.

- John 13:34-35
- Acts 2:46-47
- 1 Corinthians 14:24

- Q From these two passages, what does the witness of the gathered community require of each of us?
- Q What priority do you give to your participation in corporate worship (i.e. church attendance)? How does church rank against your hobbies, your recreation time, your work etc?

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

There are a lot of questions in this study that require some self-examination. But - the benefits and blessings of corporate worship are worth the effort! If you want more of Christ, and if you want to grow in his likeness, corporate worship is indispensable!

Depending on where your group discussions tended to focus, spend some time encouraging and stirring one another on to address the issue which may have come to the fore. Maybe split into pairs and pray for each other. There may be a need to confess your sins to each other in the area of our apathy towards corporate worship or things that might hinder our worship.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

Spend time this week preparing yourself for church. Ask God to reveal the things that hinder your ability to worship. Come to church with a sense of anticipation! With a desire for God to kindle a fire in your heart that breaks its way through!

“It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”

Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk



★ WEEK 4

Connection: *The value of significant community*

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Last week we looked at corporate worship and the value and benefits it can bring to the life of a believer.

- Q Were you able to prepare yourself more intentionally for church this last weekend?
- Q Has God shed light on any areas in your life that may be hindering your worship of him? (bitterness, unforgiveness, unrepented sin etc)

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

Over the last two weeks we have looked at basic elements of the Christian life concerning how we are to relate to God if we wish to grow in our faith (namely personal devotion and corporate worship). Our attention now shifts to consider how we are to relate to others (namely community, work and witness). All of these basic elements of the Christian life are birthed out of the gospel and empowered by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

- Q Do you think that belonging to a Christian Community is critical to our growth in faith? Why? / Why not?

Why Community is important

COMMUNITY IS BIRTHED OUT OF THE GOSPEL [READ 1 John 4:10-11; 19]

COMMUNITY IS PROOF OF OUR SALVATION [READ [John 13:35; 1 John 3:14]

COMMUNITY IS INDISPENSABLE TO OUR GROWTH IN CHRIST [READ Ephesians 4:15-16]

COMMUNITY IS A VITAL IN OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD [READ John 13:34-25]

Strength Training: (20 minutes)

It is clear that community is very important to the Christian life. Participating in community is one of the “basics” - it is essential for our growth in Christ-likeness. In this study we’re going to dig a little deeper into ways we can either nurture or destroy community.

Listed below are a selection of verses - all of them are “one another” verses that help define what true Christian community looks like.

Assign verses to each of your group members. Have them read them out, then have them try to explain what their verse might practically look like in our community (whether in your Community Group or in our church).

FOR EXAMPLE:

If my verse is 1 Peter 5:14 - “Greet one another with a holy kiss”, I might suggest that our door stewards start giving people a peck on the cheek as they come into the church (or not!). Rather I might suggest that to build community we should greet one another with affection, interest and love (rather than an indifferent nod or cold handshake).

How to nurture community

UNITY

One third of all the “one another” verses in the New Testament refer to actions which foster the unity of our community.

- Be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50)
- Be of the same mind with one another (Romans 12:16, 15:5)
- Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- Gently, patiently tolerate one another (Ephesians 4:2)

FORGIVENESS

- Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Bear with and forgive one another (Col 3:13)

LOVE

Another third of all the one-another verses talk about our need to love one another.

- Love one another (Romans 13:8-9)
- Through love, serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Tolerate one another in love (Ephesians 4:2)
- Love one another deeply, from the heart. (1 Peter 3:8)
- Be devoted to one another in love (Romans 12:10)

HUMILITY

About 15% of all the one another verses command us to be humble.

- Give preference to one another in honour (Romans 12:10)
- Regard one another as more important than yourselves (Philippians 2:3)
- Be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5)

WHOLESOME SPEECH

- Speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25)
- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. (Ephesians 5:19)

CARE

- Wash one another’s feet (John 13:14)
- Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)

ENCOURAGEMENT

- Encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)



GROWTH

- Admonish & teach one another (Colossians 3:16)
- Build each other up (I Thessalonians 5:11)
- Instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)

PRAYER

- Pray for each other (James 5:16)

How to destroy community

Effectively, we destroy community by doing the opposite to any of the above! But there are some verses that specifically speak of negative actions.

- Don't boastfully challenge or envy one another (Galatians 5:26).
- Don't lie to one another (Colossians 3:9)
- Don't be haughty: be of the same mind (Romans 12:16)
- Stop passing judgment on one another. (Romans 14:13)
- If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be destroyed by each other. (Galatians 5:15)
- Do not slander one another. (James 4:11)
- Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)

Cardio: (20 minutes)

- Q So, with this understanding of community, how well do you think we're doing? What are the positive signs of a healthy community in your Community group? In our church?
- Q What are some of the shortcomings? *(It can be challenging to answer this honestly without actually transgressing the requirements for building community! Don't let this be a moaning / grumbling session! Try not to use the word "they" rather say "we"!)*
- Q After considering some of these shortcomings, what is your personal culpability in causing them? *(Either by actions or neglect).*
- Q Why do we find genuine, loving community so hard? *(especially with ALL believers - not just the ones we like!)*
- Q Part of building community is confessing sins to each other. What might we need to confess with regard to our involvement in community?
- Q What first step might you be able to take in working towards nurturing a better community *(in your CG and in our Church)?*

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

Genuine, sincere and loving community is essential to our maturing in Christ. Spend some time in silent prayer encouraging each person to ask God to show them what next step he might want them to take in building community. Pray for our church as a whole to increasingly become a church where genuine Christian community is flourishing - both for our good and for our witness.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

Coming out of your prayer time, maybe let people briefly share what their next step is in forging community. Encourage people in their decisions and stay accountable.



★ WEEK 5

Work: *The revolution of sacrificial service*

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Last week we looked at the value of community in the maturing of every believer. We asked you to consider what first step God might be asking you to take in forging better gospel centred community.

- Q Were you able to take that first step?
- Q If you did, how was it?

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

This week we're considering the value of sacrificial service. Sacrificial service is really an extension of community. In the context of community, we are told to serve one another.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" Galatians 5:13-14

- Q What feelings does it evoke in you when you're told we must serve one another?
- Q Why don't we like the idea of serving others? [Hint: we're afraid we'll be taken advantage of, that our own needs won't be met]
- Q Discuss for a moment what a community would look like if everyone served one another?

Strength Training: (25 minutes)

As with every other element in our Basic Training series, sacrificial service is impossible without the transforming work of the Gospel of God's grace in our lives and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Living Sacrifices

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.
Romans 12:1

In view of God's mercy - as a response to his grace, we are to offer our bodies as a sacrifice. We often read this verse with a very individualistic view - as though it's just between us and God.

Q But how can we practically offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices?

[READ Romans 12:3-21]

Q In the context of these verses, how do we practically offer our bodies as living sacrifices? What does the life of the believer look like who has offered their body as a living sacrifice to God?

[Humility, service, love, zeal, rejoicing, patience, prayer, hospitality, etc]

Loving and serving others is really the only way we can demonstrate our love for God. So if we have been recipients of God's grace, and if we say that we love God, it will inevitably flow out in our lives through love for others.

Whatever you did for the least of these...

[READ Matthew 25:31-46]

Q The verse is talking about final judgement. Who is the *Son of Man* and the *King* referring to?

Q Considering the "Sheep" in the parable, what comes first: is it their service or is it God's blessing? Are they righteous because of their actions, or are their actions because of their righteousness? (see vv 34, & 37)

Q If God's blessing and their righteousness come first (as is the testimony of the rest of scripture), then what is the implication of this to their acts of service?

Q What does this imply with regards to people who would seek to earn God's favour through acts of service?

Q Did the righteous know they were serving Jesus through their acts of service?

Q How does their ignorance to the fact that they were serving Jesus reinforce their righteousness?

Q Who does "the least of these, my brothers" refer to?

Q How does the idea that our acts of service to others are acts of service to Jesus change your view of Sacrificial Service?

Cardio: (15 minutes)

“The test of whether someone belongs to those who are ‘blessed by my Father’ or to those who are accursed and of the devil is whether that person is living the life of the revolution, as Jesus did”

David Wenham

Think about the kinds of people Jesus identifies himself with in this passage:

- The Hungry & Thirsty
- The Strangers
- The Naked
- The Sick
- The Imprisoned.

- Q Why does Jesus identify with the poor and needy? What is your raw, heartfelt reaction to this list of people?
- Q Who are these people in our society? Who are these people in your life?
- Q What is your attitude towards them?
- Q Why do we struggle to love and serve them?
- Q How is eternity, and the fact that Jesus will come seated on his glorious throne to judge the earth, and the fact that there is an inheritance prepared for us, move you towards a life of sacrificial service?

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 1:27

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

Passages like this can weigh very heavily on us - especially as people in a wealthy church in the context of South Africa. The needs around us can seem overwhelming. Our hard-heartedness can at times be a heavy weight of guilt in our lives.

Spend some time praying and asking God to give you a heart of flesh, to again pour his spirit into your life (Ezekial 11:19).

Consider that we too were at one time hungry and thirsty and naked - *“separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship... foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” (Eph 2)* BUT GOD, because of his mercy and great love for us has made us alive in Christ!

Worship God because of his mercy to you. Worship him because of his love and concern for the poor and needy. Repent and recommit to offering your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

This week be mindful of your attitude to serving others. Pastor Ryan on Sunday spoke on Nehemiah 3, and how we need to each do the work in front of us. Ask God to show you the people you can serve - the people God has already placed in your life. Take some risks in serving others. Do it as an act of worship to Jesus!



★ WEEK 6

Witness: *The pervasiveness of redemptive influence*

NOTE TO COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

In his sermon on Sunday, Pastor Justin dealt with some of the theology and practical principles of being a witness by looking at the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. As Christians, we do need to be prepared to give a reason for our hope - so we need to equip and prepare ourselves to be witnesses. That however is not the goal of this study. In this study we are looking specifically at how and why our world-view needs to be correctly aligned to the eternal purposes of God. If you have set apart Christ as Lord, then our witness to the world is all encompassing. It demands our life, our soul, our all.

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Last week in the study and in the sermon we dealt with God's call on us to serve one another through love. If God has saved you and in view of his mercy, we should live lives of worship to God through loving and serving the people around us.

Q Did you have any experience this week that may have prodded you in this regard? Especially in light of the fact that God often identifies himself with the poor and needy?

Open in prayer. Praying particularly for God to grip our hearts again through this study. Pray that God through his Spirit will be present with you and that your discussions won't just be intellectual debates but that they'll take root in your hearts.

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

Over the course of this study we have firstly looked at God's initiating love for us - his grace in saving and justifying us. Then we spent two weeks looking at our response of worship to God through our personal devotional life and then in our participation in corporate worship. These are God-focussed activities that cultivate our relationship with Jesus. Think of it as our obedience to the first commandment to love God with all our heart and strength and mind. Then, over the last two weeks (and today), we have looked at the basic elements of the Christian life through which we demonstrate our love for God through loving other people. So we considered the importance of community and of serving one another. These are things which demonstrate our obedience to obey the second commandment, namely loving other people as ourselves. To end off this section, we are today going to dig into how we are called to love God and love others through being a witness.

Q What does it mean to be a witness?

*“‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.’ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.**’” Acts 4:16-20*

Being a witness is simply that - it is a compulsion to speak about what we have seen or heard. Why? Because we're listening to God and not to men.

- Q Peter and John said they “*cannot but*” speak of what they had seen and heard. How compelled do you feel to be a witness?

Strength Training: (25 minutes)

The pressure of our society (or any society) is to be assimilated into the prevailing culture through privatising our faith. In our syncretistic environment the question of our faith is often not so much an issue - but don't bring it into your public life. Don't speak of it lest it spread further among the people. Don't bring Jesus into your work, your relationships, your money, your recreation, your marriage, your family. The pressure of our culture is to say that your faith is between you and God.

But, the challenge of Jesus is that we are called to be salt and light, we're to be like a city on a hill, we're to shine like stars in the midst of a crooked and depraved world. Without this kind of redemptive influence, your faith is useless - like salt that's lost its saltiness - only good to be thrown into the fire.

- Q So, what is our motivation for “*speaking of what we have seen and heard*”?

[READ: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21]

- Q From this passage, what are some of the motivations for being a witness for Christ?

Motivations for being Christ's witness:

- Fear of God (v11)
- Christ's love compelling us (v14)
- Because of his sacrifice (v15 - he died for us, so that we should live for him)
- Because if we are in Christ we are a new creation (v17)
- Because God has an unstoppable plan of reconciling the world to himself in Christ (v18)
- Because God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (v18)
- Because God has committed to us the message of reconciliation (v19)
- Because we are God's ambassadors (v20)
- Because Christ makes his appeal through us (v20)

With all these motivations in place - we can like Paul have a heart that **implores** people on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God.

- Q Are there any of these motivations in this passage that might rile or surprise you?
- Q How about the fear of God? How is “*knowing what it means to fear God*” a healthy and positive motivation to want to persuade others?
- Q What does it mean to fear God? Is it a fear of punishment?
- Q How does this fear of God relate to the pressure we might be under from the prevailing culture we find ourselves in?
- Q How does the fear of God conflict with the fear of man?

Cardio: (15 minutes)



This is an image of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians before being beheaded by ISIS earlier this month. According to CNN, many of the men were crying out to Jesus in the video.

- Q What feelings does this image provoke in you?
- Q How does this relate to the idea of being a witness?
- Q How is the witness of these Christian brothers a demonstration of their healthy fear of God?
- Q While we are, god-willing, unlikely to ever face this kind of persecution, what can their fear of God teach us about our own commitment to bear witness to Christ?

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 10:28-33

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Daniel 3:17-18

“Fear of man is a self-interested cowardice, but fear of God is a healthy response of awe and obedience in the face of the Almighty, and one which is positively commended throughout the Bible”

R. T. France

- Q How does eternity feature in the call to fear God and acknowledge him before others?
- Q What motivation, if any, does eternity play in your being a witness of all Jesus has done?
- Q Does your life bear witness to a hope in Christ?

“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”

1 Peter 3:15

- Q Would other people looking at your life, and listening to your words, be intrigued enough to ask you to give a reason for your hope?

*“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the **task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.**”*

Act 20:24

- Q How much more do you value your life, your worth, your wealth, your ambitions, your reputation than the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace?
- Q Who do you practically fear more, God or man?

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

In light of all the God has done for us, and in light of his awesome majesty, is it okay to have a private faith or should our lives radically and recklessly bare witness to the hope we have in Christ?

Shouldn't we be imploring people to be reconciled with God?

Pray

Spend some time in prayer. Pray especially for our brothers and sisters in the middle east who are under pressure to bare witness to their faith in God with their very lives. Pray for God to strengthen them and enable them to rejoice in him even in their dire circumstances. Pray that the blood of those who have been martyred truly would be the seed of the church.

Then pray for your own witness. Confess any apathy and lack of healthy fear of God. Confess your fear of man. Ask again to be filled with the Holy Spirit who gives us power to be his witnesses.

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

The scriptures encourage us to always be prepared to give and answer to those who ask us about the reason for our hope. If you need to, get your hands on some resources to equip yourself to share your faith.

Here are a few: <http://ruc.org.za/evangelism-resources>

Pray that God would give you opportunities this week to give a reason for your hope!



★ WEEK 7

Power: *The availability of divine strength*

Stretches: (5 minutes)

Last week both the study and in the sermon dealt with God's call on us to love God and others through being a witness. We ended last week with a challenge to pray for opportunities to be a witness to what God has done through Jesus.

- Q Have you had any opportunities to in some way share your faith over this last week?
- Q Have you had any progress in preparing yourself for sharing your faith?

Warm-up: (5 minutes)

In his sermon on Sunday (8 March 2015), Pastor Leigh gave an overview of how the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is indispensable in all the elements of our "Basic Training". From God's initiating love, through our worship of him and our love of others, the Holy Spirit is the breath of life that fills, renews and empowers us. Leigh also spoke about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and gave some great insight into the practical ways we can continue to be filled.

- Q If you were able to listen to the sermon, were there any points that God used to specifically speak into your life?

Prayer - Spend some time in prayer inviting God to be present in your discussions and to grow in each of us a thirst for life in the Spirit.

Strength Training: (20 minutes)

NOTE TO LEADERS:

Try not get too bogged down in any one of these passages. The goal is simply to show how we receive the Spirit (and remind and encourage people that if they have believed in Christ they do have the Holy Spirit), and secondly to then show how we are to live in light of the fact that we have the Spirit of God inside us.

How we get the Holy Spirit

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
Titus 3:4-7

- Q From this verse, what role does the Holy Spirit play in our salvation?
- Q On what basis does God pour out his Holy Spirit?
- Q Who is the mediator of the gift?
- Q In what measure is the gift given? What does this show us?

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13-14

- Q Who does the “him” refer to?
- Q What is the prerequisite for being given the Holy Spirit?

How we walk in step with the Holy Spirit

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:30-32

- Q What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?
- Q How do we stop grieving the Holy Spirit?
- Q What do all the actions have in common? [All about relationships]
- Q What is the key to this change in actions? [Focus on the fact that in Christ, God forgave us]

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5:16-26

- Q How does this passage call us to relate to the Holy Spirit?
 - Walk by the Spirit, Be led by the Spirit, Live by the Spirit, Keep in Step with the Spirit
- Q What is the consequence of not relating to the Holy Spirit in these ways?
 - All the works of the flesh (things that grieve the Holy Spirit)
- Q What is the ultimate warning against those who live by the 'works of the flesh'?
- Q In contrast, what are the consequences of walking by the Spirit?
 - Fruit of the Spirit, and inherit the kingdom of God.

Cardio: (15 minutes)

Having the Holy Spirit in you is God's a seal guaranteeing your full redemption. He is the very life of God dwelling in you. Think about it, the very same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you to give you life and power the certainty of your future resurrection!

BUT, the sad reality is that often we don't walk in tune with the Holy Spirit and so don't experience his life giving power. We too often let sin reign in our mortal bodies (Romans 6) and drown out the voice and influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- Q If you have accepted Jesus by faith, and have received the Holy Spirit. How might you be grieving the Holy Spirit? In what areas of your life are you not keeping in step with him?
- Q Spend some time reading through the lists of things that grieve the Holy Spirit & things that are the "works of the flesh". Are there any things in these lists that the Spirit in you immediately prods you with?
- Q A lot of the things that grieve the Holy Spirit are about relationships (both towards God and towards others). Are there areas in your relationship with God and with others that you need to repent of? Are you harbouring bitterness, anger or resentment towards God? Towards your spouse? Towards your parents?
- Q What's the root of many of these relational issues? [Ultimately pride - that we deserve better, that we're more important etc.]
- Q What's the key to being freed from the pride that leads to so many of these issues?
[Ephesians 4:32 - Remind yourself always that in Christ, God forgave you. We have no reason for boasting. We are recipients of his grace]

Warm-down: (10 minutes)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-39

Spend time praying around the things you have discussed - especially areas in your life where you may not be in step with the Spirit. Meditate on the promise of coming to Jesus to drink - of having your thirst quenched and satisfied and again being filled with the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit will be like living flowing from your heart!

Recovery: (homework for the week ahead)

Ask God this week to begin to show you areas of your life where you may be grieving the Holy Spirit. Are there areas which you are withholding from him and his control? Are there things in your life where you've drowned out the voice of the Holy Spirit?

Repent and ask God to fill you again with the Holy Spirit.

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:12



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