

Paving the Way

This study includes:

- ◆ How to establish a quiet time
- ◆ Building a devotional life
- ◆ Reading the vital signs of spiritual health
- ◆ Steps in effective prayer
- ◆ How the memory works
- ◆ Steps in meditation
- ◆ Receiving guidance from God
- ◆ The biological nature of the church
- ◆ Steps to fitting in with a local Body
- ◆ Corporate and individual responsibility in the fellowship

..... and more.

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A publication of the Barrie Christian Fellowship
Update: 2016

Prayer



Study 1

THEORY vs. PRACTICE

We need to examine the tendency in all of us to assume that because we have discussed a subject, or have studied that subject, that we have those things in place and in daily practice in our lives.

Nothing could be more misleading.

When Jesus said, “Why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command”.

He was directing our attention to the possibility of having things in ‘word only’ in our lives and not ‘in deed’.

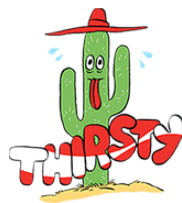
John 8:31 reads



“If ye continue in my word= in living out the things which I say - ye shall be disciples indeed.”

Being disciples indeed is our objective in all our studies together. Let’s look then at the Foundation Stone of prayer.

Do we remember the illustration of the cactus that was used in a biological experiment? Scientists wanted to see how long this particular variety could go without water. Somewhere during the seventh year it was pronounced clinically dead.



The object is not to see how long we can go without shriveling in our personal prayer life, rather we should be taking an example from Psalm 1:1-3.



Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

What do we see here?

Health through nourishment and personal communion.

Disabled Through Imbalance

On a tour of India a well known bible teacher spoke at a retreat attended almost entirely by missionaries. Most of those present were suffering from fatigue and burn-out. 75% confessed to having no regular devotional life.

Discussion Time



What might have been the cause of their crisis?

Suggest causes and list them below.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

A neglected prayer life leads to a sense of emptiness, distance from God, vulnerability to attack, flagging and fatigue in spirit, ultimate fade out in ministry.

John Wesley said, “that he traced the decline of Methodism to the abandonment of the early morning prayer meeting.”

At that time he was still ministering in a movement that had vigor, spiritual momentum and was increasing in numbers yet, Wesley was observing with a practiced eye symptoms that caused him concern. History was shortly to prove him right!

Point to Ponder



Doctors read vital signs that point to a patients condition. Blood pressure, heart rate, temperature, pulse, urine, etc.



Vital signs give a quick and fairly accurate assessment of a persons health.

Discussion Time



What do we consider the vital signs that point to a healthy Spiritual life?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

There is a need for an honest evaluation of our lives on a regular basis. We need to learn how to *take our own temperatures!* This job which is CRUCIAL to our own Spiritual Growth and Development needs to be done by ourselves FIRSTLY not by our pastor, wife or husband. Learn how to interpret the signals given by our own spirits.

On most cars, warning lights indicate when the battery is low, when oil pressure is down or the gas tank is empty.

How are your warning lights?

Assignment



This week take time to get alone with God. Take pen and paper and write down areas in your spiritual life that you would like to see improved. Why not share them with your husband, wife or trusted friend and ask them to pray with you as you rebuild.

STUDY 2

In our previous study we were considering the priority of prayer. The cultivation of a daily prayer life is of vital importance.

Remember; “Daily” is a discipleship word.

Our objective is to become disciples in deed.

Have we neglected our prayer life? Then we need to take positive steps towards rebuilding.



Here are five steps towards rebuilding our prayer life:



- 1) Make an honest confession to Jesus that you have failed Him in the place of prayer - Read 1 John 1:9 in this regard
- 2) Resolve to schedule a specific time on your daily calender. Morning is usually the best time. E. Stanley Jones writes; It is best to have a quiet time "in the pure, strong hours of the morning, when the soul of the day is at its best:. Wash your thinking in the thought of Christ before you face the day.

"Every morning lean thine arm awhile
Upon the window sill of Heaven
And gaze upon they God.
Then, with the vision in thy heart,
Turn strong to meet the day"



- 3) List in a prayer diary your prayer requests or names of those for whom you are interceding.
- 4) Attend a small group or a body prayer meeting - here we learn the power of agreement - Matthew 18:19-20

Again I say unto you, that if two or you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Discussion Time



Go over the steps together, discuss the practicalities involved.

Regarding the 4th step why not as a group on a weekly basis spend time in prayerful agreement on needs that exist within the group or that face the fellowship?

FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE

Having a place to pray is an important part of a daily prayer life. To say we live in an attitude of prayer is a little to ethereal to be real.

We need to be brought down to a specific place and time where we spend time in prayer. To deny this is to get above Jesus himself who retired regularly for prayer - to the mountain, garden, etc.



"Those who say that they can live in a state of prayer without stated times for prayer will probably find themselves without both."



Recognizing Enemies

Since prayer is a very real form of Spiritual Warfare we need to be aware of, and able to recognize enemies that seek to prevent or hinder our prayer life.

Discussion Time



Spend time discussing as a group, forces that hinder effectual prayer. List them below.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

Assignment



Follow through on steps 1 - 4. Come prepared to share with the group the time and place you have decided upon for your prayer time.

Study 3 - Effective Praying



There is no doubt that every Christian is convinced about the power of prayer. Most Christians also wish to know more about the simplicity of prayer.

In a survey conducted on Sermons America Wants to hear by This Week Magazine, the number one choice was “ How Can I Make Prayer More Effective”. This should come as no surprise to us since the cry of the disciples themselves was “Lord, teach us to pray.”

What is Effective Prayer?

Jesus prayer life is a model of effective prayer. His prayers were answered in a mighty and dramatic way.

Unanswered prayers cause problems.

They raise the question “Does God really hear?”, or, “Is He really interested?”

Many Christians are afraid to specify in their praying because they are affected by the thought “What happens if God doesn’t answer? I’ll be proved wrong.” Consequently, general prayers are prayed with the vague hope that an answer will come or something will happen.

However consider the instructions of Jesus with regard to prayer. They hold the keys to an effective prayer life.

1) FAITH

Read together Mark 11:22 - 24



And Jesus answering saith unto them, "have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain 'be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea'; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, what things soever you desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Notice that being 'in faith' and remaining in faith is a key to receiving answers to prayer.

2) PERSISTENCE

Read Luke 11:9 - 10



And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you! Seek, and ye shall find! Knock, and it will be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.



The rendering here is "ask and keep on asking" and introduces the thought of persistence. Tenacity in prayer is a vital element. Quitting because we don't appear to have an immediate answer is one of the main reasons why our prayers go unanswered. It is often easier to pay others to pray for us.

Discuss the commercializing of Christianity and its destructive effect on the western church.

3) AUTHORITY



Coming to a correct understanding of who we are in Christ. That we come as sons to the Father.

Notice the authority in the Name of Jesus in John 14:13 - 14.



And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the sun.

If ye shall ask anything in my Name, I will do it.

4) AGREEMENT



We have already considered Matthew 18:19 - 20. if two be agreed on anything touching the kingdom.



We need to know the power of united faith and pray in agreement. Find someone with whom you can agree.

5) DISCERNMENT

1 John 5:14



And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.

George Mueller said that once he had become convinced of God's will in any matter, from that moment he never ceased to pray until he had the answer.

Discussion Time



Discuss together these conditions. Use the following space for any additional insights that the Lord may give. We need to be honest and ask ourselves, “has it been God’s fault that our prayers have gone unanswered or can it be that we have not always met the conditions?”

We can be sure that when we meet the conditions, God will always do His part.

Assignment



Study your notes and do any personal research from the Word on effective prayer.

Study 4 - The Cost of Prayer



Prayer is always costly. Have you ever observed how the Church Banquet of the Church BBQ are better attended than the Church Prayer Meeting. Why?

Prayer Meeting



While both are necessary types of meetings, one involves much spiritual exercise and engagement in spiritual warfare. Paul describes this action in 2 Corinthians 10:3 - 5.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.)

Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against a knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Discussion Time



Discuss these verses as a group and write down your conclusions as to what Paul was referring to when he wrote of:

- 1) Weapons of our warfare. _____
- 2) Strong holds. _____
- 3) Imaginations and every high thought. _____

When we are responsive to the call to pray, we pay a price. It comes out of our bank account.

Everything in the world has its price. If we wish to see souls saved, people delivered, the church grow, somebody has to PAY THE PRICE.

Above all other spiritual exercises, prayer has a price tag and it is not cheap.



Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint", that involves praying when we are tired or discouraged. When we do so, we draw on the account of our emotions and physical weariness and pay the price.

Discussion Time



What other 'personal accounts' might we draw on in order to be faithful in the place of prayer? Discuss together and list your suggestions.

- 1) Comfort when we _____
- 2) Pleasure when we _____
- 3) Sleep when we _____
- 4) Time when we _____
- 5) Food when we _____

Which of these do you find the most difficult to respond to?

Remember - when we pay the price we simply transfer our "funds" into a heavenly account.



Study Acts 10:1 - 4 together.

What do we think the angel meant when he said Cornelius' prayers had ascended to form a memorial before God?

In conclusion, let us think on the words of a well known missionary.

The art of prayer must be learned, for reservoirs of power are at our disposal if we can learn the art. "If we can learn it" - that is the question. We would deem a person foolish who stepped up to a musical instrument and expected to produce sweet music without training and practice. The little son of a missionary bought a mouth organ, and come home in tears.

"That man cheated me. There is not 'God Save The King' in this mouth organ." We foolishly believe we can get ready made results without practice and without paying the price of prayer.

Just as God has left open certain things contingent upon the human will, and they will never be accomplished unless that will decides, so He has left open certain things contingent upon prayer - things which will never be accomplished unless we pray.

Brethren, let us pray!



Word



Study 1

Do we clearly understand that we cannot grow in spirit as we ought without an adequate intake of the Word of God.



<<<<<<<<< What food is to the
body

The Word is to the spiritual
man >>>>>>>



Consider these scriptures that convey the thought of receiving nourishment from the Word of God/

1 Peter 2:2

As new born babes desire the sincere mild of
the word, that ye may grow thereby.



Also discuss the connection of the following verse 1 Peter 2:3 with this thought.

Yet again Jesus in His temptation in the wilderness answered the devil in Luke 4:4;

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God.

Deeper truths from the word are referred to as meat. Check 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12 - 14. The implication is clear that the word of God is spiritual food.



As well as receiving strength through prayer, we gain nourishment from the word.

DAILY INTAKE is an indispensable part of our experience - whether we are NEW BORN BABES requiring 'sincere milk' or we are MATURE SAINTS that require 'meat' - the scriptures are the source for both. We never will grow to a point where we do not need to be fed from the word of God.

Point to Ponder



We live in the age of the information explosion. With the mass of information that has come to mankind, there has also come the means to store, communicate and reproduce that knowledge.

It is so in the church. Today we could well 'get by' without ever reading scriptures. There is an array of teaching tapes, books, magazines, videos, christian comics, radio and TV broadcasts and cds which can be enticing substitutes for the personal study of the word.



Discussion Time



Discuss the place of books and other aid material in our experience. Where should the line be drawn?

- 1) Study and reading of the word.
- 2) Memorization of the word.
- 3) Meditation of the word.

In Group Assignment



Spend a few minutes marking the following passage. 2 Timothy 1 - 16

1. Thou therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
2. And the things that though has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.
3. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
4. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier
5. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully
6. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.
7. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.
8. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:
9. Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds' but the word of God is no bound.
10. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
11. It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.
12. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he will also deny us:
13. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny us:
14. Of these things put them in remembrance charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.
15. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
16. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Share with the group one of the thoughts which impressed you as you read this passage of scripture.

Assignment



Set a daily goal for reading at least one chapter from the scriptures. Come prepared to share with the group something you received in your study during the week.



Study 2 -

Part A - The Memory

We often hear people remarking that they have poor memories, and that they forget things easily. Actually the average person has filed millions of impressions and “bytes” of information in his memory. Someone estimated that if the amount of information and knowledge stored in our memories were to be put on file it would fill a building the size of the Empire State Building. Truly the memory bank is a most amazing piece of machinery.



God expects us to use it and not allow it to go defunct.



- < Understanding the process whereby memory works will help us
- < to better employ it. Rather than the concept of a cloakroom
- < where facts are stored on hooks and hangers, the memory works
- < like a chain where our powers of recall are set in motion by association.



This gives rise to an interesting thought. If our memory is enriched with the word of God - chains of truth are established that quite literally hold us to the anchor of our soul, the Lord Jesus.

Discussion Time



Discuss this idea in the light of David’s statement where he writes
“Thy word have I hid in my heart (commit to memory) that I
might not sin against thee’

The opposite is also true. Memory can be responsible for imprisoning us to former things from which we need desperately to release.



“Remember Lot’s Wife” said Jesus. We can understand why. If old thought patterns keep us enslaved to old habits, and in bondage to the enemy - what would be a powerful factor in breaking out from old thought modes?

Navigators include the following step in the process of learning scripture.

The most important time to review a verse repeatedly is right after you can repeat the whole (topic, reference, verse, reference) without making a mistake. Review the verse a minimum of once daily after that, preferably several times a day for a few days. Some people say that they cannot memorize. In reality, most people tend to have a short memory. God has given us a “forgetter” and there are some things we should forget. God has also given us the capacity to remember, but we must apply the basic principles of memory to do this. The primary principle is REVIEW. A verse is learned, partially forgotten, relearned, partially forgotten and relearned again. The relearning process takes progressively less time until forgetting is replaced by knowing.

Assignment



Using this method of learning, memorize the following two verses of scripture.
ROMANS 12:1 - 2

Study 2 Part B **Meditation**

Meditation is one of the forgotten arts of spiritual life. What might be the reason for the neglect of meditation?



Discussion Time



Discuss the following causes . A noisy world, music, radios, television, video games, i pods, phones, computers, predigested opinions though news and media, the frantic pace of life, the quick and instant society.

Think about this poem:

*And wow he died, ans wow he lived
Going whop to the office, and blooie home to sleep
And biff go married, and bam had children and oof fired
Zowie did he live and zowie did he die!*

Daniel "In the last days knowledge shall be increased and many shall run too and fro."

What is meditation?

The nearest illustration is that of our own digestive system. What our digestive system is to food - meditation is to the word. When we meditate on the word we extract from it essential truth.

Look at these scriptures. They highlight the importance of meditation.

1) Joshua 1:8

2) Psalm 1:2

3) 1 Timothy 4:15

HERE ARE SOME PROVEN STEPS TO MEDITATION



- 1) Prayerfully read the word, the word is our material for meditation.
- 2) Focus on a specific truth or verse -- in reading the word there will always be something that the Lord seeks to impress on our heart.
- 3) Quiet the mind. That's not always easy. It requires a conscious effort to settle down in God. We need to learn how to put our whole weight down in Him.
- 4) Keep focused and ask God for His illumination.
- 5) Implement. Always be ready to put into practice what is spoken to your heart.

Assignment



Spend 5 minutes meditation on this verse; Galatians 6:1. Write down three things that impressed themselves on your mind.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Review Romans 12:1 -2

Study 3 - The Word



'Logos' or 'Rhema'

There has been much reference made in recent years to 'the Logos' of God and 'the Rhema' of God.

The 'Logos' is Greek for the written word. The 'Rhema' is Greek for the spoken word - immediate living word by His spirit. The question seems to be which word carried the final authority.

Points to Ponder



In prelude to our discussion:

In Hebrews Chapter 4 we read,

For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernment of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Which 'word' do we think is referred to here, the logos or rhema?

When Jesus said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone', He went on to say 'but he shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

Note that first He said, 'it is written', secondly He made reference to words that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

Why do we think the tense is so important in this verse?

It would appear that the securest position is a balance between the two - the rhema and the logos. The logos in one sense, becomes the foundation to the rhema.

One of Wesley's preachers said, "I get my texts and my sermons from God without studying." Wesley asked, "Does God ever give you a text you have not read?" "No," replied the preacher. Wesley added, "Then you had better read more."

Of the two great movements in the 17th and 18th century in England, the Quaker movement laid much stress on the 'Rhema' word and the Methodist movement on the 'Logos'.

Why do you think that the Methodist movement was the more enduring?

HOW DO WE RECEIVE GUIDANCE FROM THE WORD?

To make major life decisions on a simple 'prompting' is dangerous.

Let's look at the story of the Harbor Lights.

The captain of a certain ship always wondered why the pilot he took on board could steer with such confidence into the harbor at night time. The pilot pointed the captain to three lights, one shone from a buoy in the mid channel, the other belonged to a beacon on the harbor wall, the third shone from his own house on the hillside. "When I see all those three lights in line I know when to make my turn and head straight for port."



So it is with us in the matter of guidance, having been prompted in a certain direction (let's call that prompting our first light). We need to add to that the two other safeguards of a specific word from the scriptures and sound counsel from a trusted friend. Three in line will give us the clear inward witness of peace in our heart.

Discussion Time



Consider together these points which form the essential steering mechanism in our lives. Rhema word, Logos word, counsel and the umpire of peace in our hearts.

Assignment



Tell of some instances of where you received special direction from God.

Finally remember, The Rhema of God will never speak anything contrary to the written word

All doctrinal error stems from incomplete understanding of the scriptures. The major cults of Jesus' day are referred to in Mark chapter 12. Who were they?

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

Notice when Jesus pointed out their error He said "ye do greatly err (in modern language you're out to lunch) you don't know the scriptures and you don't know the power of God."

Think of 2 major cults today, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons - there are others as well.

Discussion Time



Discuss and write down three errors of each cult where they depart from the word of God.



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One of the most common problems that lead to error is building to narrow a base for our doctrines. Other people choose a single text and build a theory upon that text. A far broader base is needed.

All major doctrine should be built up like this.

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Point to Ponder



Remember the old adage:

A text

Taken out of context

Becomes a pretext.

When studying the word of God, judge the context in which the statement is given. We will then see 'truth in perspective'. Even in churches where the word of God is held to be inerrant and supreme - different emphases can lead to imbalance. Where this has occurred, different factions of the Body of Christ have resulted.

Discussion Time



Major denominations in the worldwide church have their roots in scripture.

How do we view other denominations?

Is perfect agreement on scripture among all Christians possible or even desirable?

At what point must we separate from other believers because of doctrinal belief?

What are our thoughts about Ephesians 4:14 - "Be not children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine".

Are those winds of doctrine necessarily heresies, or could they be the latest fashionable teaching blowing through the land?

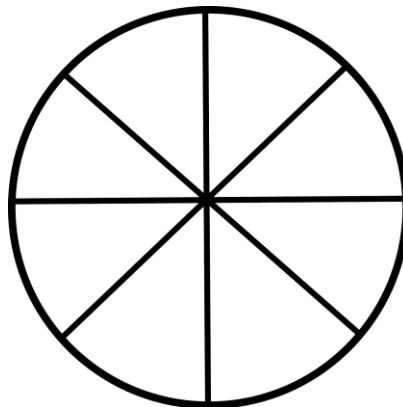
The goal is given in Ephesians 4:13 >>>>> A perfect man in full stature.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE

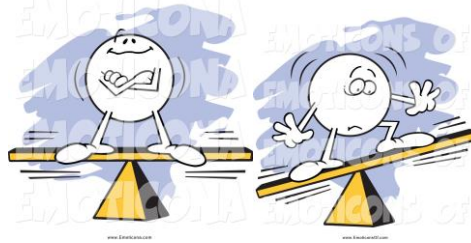
In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul writes, "Study to show thyself approved. A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

It is clear that knowing the word of truth (the scriptures) is insufficient. We must know how to correctly divide the word. This will keep us from overbalance, and from being blown about by the winds of doctrine.

As part of a group exercise apportion the circle into areas which you consider to be important truths for every christian to hear and understand.



What do we think of the illustrations of these two believers? We have called one BALANCE and the other OVERBALANCED.



Assignment



Read your scriptures daily and complete in the coming week the daily highlight sheet.



Fellowship



The Greek word *Koinonia* means - the communion - the fellowship and participation with Christ in His sufferings, in the Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit in this life, and in the glories of the Kingdom in the next.

The word 'Koinonia' directs our thoughts to the corporate nature of the church.

No man can achieve that goal given in Ephesians 4:13 without being in fellowship with other Christians for the prevailing truth is that we all come to this place together.

Reading



Ephesian is the epistle that speaks particularly of the corporate nature of the church.

Locate the chapters that speak of;

The church as a body _____



The church as a building _____



The church as a family _____



In each case the thought is of the importance of each member to the other members. And of the rest of the body being indispensable to the individual member for his growth, his correct development, for his protection and for the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose in his life.

The chapter that unfolds the revelation of the biology of the Body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12

Reading



Read 1 Corinthians 12:12 - 23 and also Acts 9:1 - 6. What do you think is the connection between these two passages of scripture, one being narrative and the other doctrinal?



Discussion Time



Study 1 Corinthians _____ /here the following important characteristics are referred to.

Mutual Care

vs. _____

Function

vs. _____

Comfort in Pain

vs. _____

Protection of the Weak Members

vs. _____

Interdependence of Members

vs. _____

Unity

vs. _____

Notice there is never any place for a member being isolated from the Body of Christ.

As all the organs and members of our own body function and relate together so it must be with the 'Koinonia' of Christ. Every member is important. There are no atrophied or defunct members.



Point to Ponder



Several years ago the medical profession pronounced the appendix as a useless part of the anatomy. The tonsils and adenoids were not considered to be of much use either. The tendency was to remove them at the first signs of a problem. Now it is known that the appendix excretes an oily substance that lubricates the lower bowel and helps prevent constipation. The tonsils are the third line of defense against throat infections. God has created nothing in our bodies without purpose and every member of the Body of Christ is likewise important.

1 Corinthians 12 speaks of the Body of Christ *functionally*. It is the 'how' of the church. Ephesians 2 speaks of the Body of Christ *positionally*, for example, where we are in Christ. Because the emphasis is on position - preposition (words denoting position) are important.

Underline the prepositions in this passage and discuss the significance of these words to ourselves as members of the Body of Christ.

20. Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.

21. Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

23. Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

Assignment



In Ephesians Chapter 2 mark the five times the word *together* is used.

Clearly whatever is happening in the Koinonia of Christ is not just happening to one or two 'special' members. It is happening to us all - together.

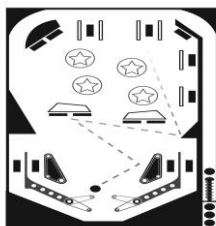
Assignment



This week read through the book of Ephesians and meditate on the three different revelations of the church. There is a fourth revelation that is spoken about in the fifth chapter. What is it?

Study 2 - Fellowship

We are concerned that new members who attend our fellowship, not only attend but also are 'added'. Understanding the process of integration is important for us all - *all of us are part of the answer to growth*, both spiritual and numerical. We are probably familiar with the *church-pinball* illustration where new members find it difficult to integrate with the existing structure. This is what can, and does happen.



Instead of assimilation there is a series of rebounds until eventually the person leaves by the back door. We need to understand that a person entering in a new body does not automatically feel at home or accepted. In fact it is possible that instead of a message of acceptance, signals of rejection may be given, unintentionally by the host body.

We are learning something of the nature of the process in modern medicine where transplant operations are performed.

Although the host body needs the new organ in order to survive and the new organ also needs a host body to be useful, there is not an immediate assimilation. The host body gives 'unfriendly' signals to the new organ - saying something like this ... "I don't recognize you as being part of me." "You are strange" "My system does not relate to you - it doesn't see you as 'self'."



Immuno synthetic drugs block that signal and prevent rejection until a period of time takes place when the organ is fitted in and functioning.

Discussion Time



Discuss this thought and how it might relate to fellowship.

Assignment



List five ways in which a local church body might see new members effectively integrated into live relationship with itself.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Discussion Time



Also list five steps that new members might take to more easily facilitate identification with a local body.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Assignment



If you are a new member work at your steps. If you are an established member, look for a new family and take steps to confirm them in the body.

Study 3 - The Church as a Family



Perhaps the most common understanding of the church is that it is a family - the family of God. Ephesians speaks of the 'Whole family in heaven and on earth'. And how true is this. The very next chapter speaks of there being one God and Father of all. We, as His children, become brothers and sisters in that family. We shall even be members of that family in the new age for it is a family that is in heaven as well as on earth.

In many ways life in our spiritual family can be compared to life in our earthly family.

Assignment



Break into two groups or divide into pairs and make a list of five or six benefits that belong to us when we are part of an earthly family.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1) _____ | 2) _____ | 3) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 5) _____ | 6) _____ |

Do we find the counterpart of these benefits in our spiritual family?

Discussion Time



Can we list four or five verses that help to underscore the protection, provision, care and love that we receive in the Koinonia of Christ?

TROUBLE IN THE FAMILY

As in all families there are times when things do not run as smoothly as we would like. We still are brothers and sisters and we still belong but things are messed up and relationships dislocated.



We need to be aware of the steps that God expects us to take to see harmony restored.

Reading



Matthew 18. The first part of this chapter deals with offenses in the world (vs. 7). The second part deals with offenses in the church (vs. 15). “moreover if they brother sin against thee”

Of the two offenses - in the world and in the church, which are the hardest to bear and why?

Share with the group some situation in which you felt wounded, hurt or wrongfully treated. How did you respond to this offense? Would you handle a similar situation in the same way today?

In Matthew 18 we see various situations described where elements of sin, forgiveness, acceptance, rejection, restoration and excommunication occur.

Do we have to go and see our brother every time he offends us to tell him his fault?

Are there some faults that we have to bear silently?

Then when do we speak and when do we refrain from speaking?

Discussion Time



In terms of offenses in the body which seriously breach fellowship, list four or five trespasses which the scriptures say are sufficient grounds for exclusion from the fellowship of God's people.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

In verse 21 Peter is told to forgive his brother and keep forgiving his brother. For whose sake might that command be given?

Where in the scriptures does it speak of a 'root' of bitterness springing up?

Who would be the "many" that are defiled by this bitterness?

IMPLEMENTATION

- 1) Determine as you continue meeting in this small group to have open relationships and to work towards a secure environment where all member can honestly share their deep feelings with one another.
- 2) Is there a brother or sister you need to see alone? If possible see that person before next week.

Discussion Time



What might be the type of toxins produced by close relationship among Christians?

Discuss and list together. _____

As we can see the experience of moving together in close committed relationships is not an ideological theoretical exercises - it is very much a down to planet earth, daily walk involving a range of situations that can be joyful and satisfying or heavy and traumatic.

Hanging in with the Body

The temptation when things become heavy in our relationship together is to check out or bail out and find somewhere less demanding. To do so is probably the worst possible reaction if we wish to press on to that stature in Christ already referred to in Ephesians 4:12.

If we check out of the 'Koinonia' of Christ we immediately come under the power of a different law. What scientists call the law of entropy which simply says:



Everything in the cosmic system tends to disintegration - it is losing energy and falling apart.

However consider the first statement made by Jesus concerning his church.

Matthew 16:18. I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Put another way this could read, "I will build my church and the law of destruction from hell shall not affect it".

Which law do we want to be under the power of? It's our choice.

Study 4 - Walking in the Light

Earlier we looked at the word 'together' in the Ephesian epistle, how we were raised together, made to sit together, how we were being built together. In John 1, the word speaks about walking together.

If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanseth us from all sin.



On the face of it, that sounds easy but nothing in our walk is easy, though God intends everything to be simple.

Discussion Time



Discuss the difference between simple and easy. What is the light that we are to walk in?

Clearly the reference is to an openness and honesty in relationship that from time to time will involve offense being given to another brother or sister and forgiveness being offered; of hurts being sustained and repentance being made; of relationships that are real enough and strong enough and secure enough to endure the test and pressures that come from daily living in a fallen world.

Charles Simpson gave an illustration of molecules and cells in a living organism, how they always produce toxins as a waste product of life. He wisely observed that since the body of Christ is organic in structure, the normal business of living produces toxins between members that need to be purged away, in order that healthy function can continue.

Walking in the light, allows the blood of Christ to flow - the arterial system of Christ's body, carry away from the members the waste products of relationship, so our fellowship with each other can remain clean and updated.



As the final days approach us Jesus there would be cataclysms in the earth - earthquakes, famine, etc. But there will also be convulsions in society which means in individual families and in personal lives.

Discussion Time



Discuss this thought and list four or five evidences of the law of entropy as it works in our society.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What opposite qualities should be displayed in a strong cohesive fellowship of God's people.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

In which of these areas is our own church lacking do you think?

Assignment



Work personally to make up for those weaknesses that you perceive in our own fellowship. Remember, when you do - you work with Christ who is building his church for all eternity.

