

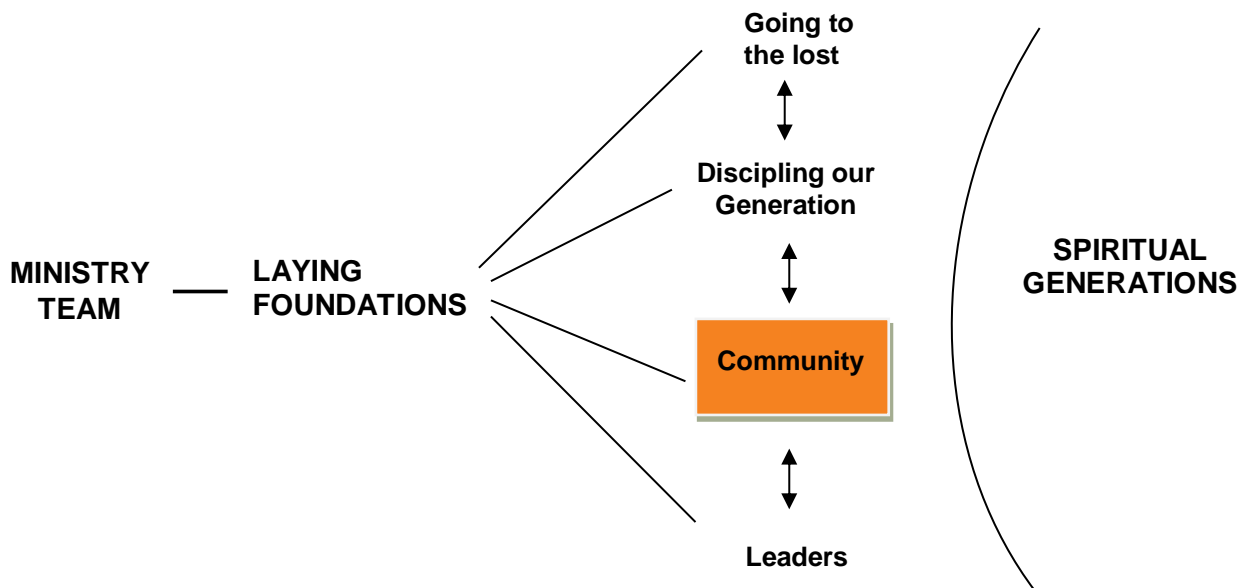
COMMUNITY BIBLE STUDY 1

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHATEVER **HE** ASKS. WHEREVER **HE** LEADS.



CRITICAL FACTOR IV - COMMUNITY



Community is one of the six critical factors of a generational ministry. Yet it is interesting that the word “community” does not appear in the Scriptures. Rather we have to look for the concept of community which we will find the Scriptures are bathed in.

As we examine the Scriptures it is very clear that without true community we will not see our Navigator calling our advancing the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom through spiritual generations of labourers living and discipling among the lost becoming a reality. Individual attention is vital, but limited. Congregating together in large groups can also play an important role. However, without the interdependence that characterizes Biblical Community, believers will not mature and we will limit our ability to carry out our calling.

It is important for us to recognise that “church”, *ekklesia*, means **gathering**. In the New Testament, it primarily (over 80% of the 114 times the word is used) means a local **gathering** of believers who assemble around our Lord, listen to Him speak to us through His word, which can come in many forms, like a sermon, a bible discussion, through prayer or singing. They respond to God, worshipping Him corporately through singing, focusing on His word, prayer and sometimes through communion. Sometimes, “church” refers to the heavenly gathering (about 12%), and even less frequently to the regional/worldwide church.¹ It is also important to recognise that the forms and expressions of church can look very different to each other around the world, but also in Australia.

¹ See our separate series of studies on the “church”.



There is considerable overlap between church and community. The two are inextricably linked. Our networks of relationships formed through the very act of earthly gathering continue outside of the assembly. And this is what community is. It describes how the church is towards each other. It is how we relate to each other in biblical community, how we relate as the people of God, how we relate as the body of Christ, how we relate as brothers and sisters in Christ who are adopted as the Father's children.

We will complete four studies whose purpose is to help us gain a deeper understanding of community and to see why it is one of the six critical factors of a generational ministry as well as helping us to determine ways of implementing it so that we would fulfil our calling.

STUDY 1 – COMMUNITY AND FELLOWSHIP; THE COMMON LIFE

Community is a way of relating together as believers. Fundamental to this is Greek word “*koinonia*” which is most often translated “fellowship”. *Koinonia* has a rich meaning, and in this study we focus on its importance and the “common life” aspect.

STUDY 2 – COMMUNITY AND FELLOWSHIP; PARTNERSHIP

In this study we consider the partnership aspect of “*koinonia*” focusing on our spiritual gifts, leadership, prayer and giving in a community.

STUDY 3 - COMMUNITY AND FELLOWSHIP; PARTICIPATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Transformation takes place in different ways, but one of the key ways is through community. This is the communion or participation aspect of fellowship. As part of our consideration of communing with one another in a transformational way, we look at the practical aspects of a transformational community – authentic sharing, gospel encouragement to holy living and relational harmony.

STUDY 4 – COMMUNITY AND MISSION ... AND REST

There appears to be a tension between building community and mission. What can we learn from the advance of the Gospel in the 1st century about how to deal with this tension? We think about our busyness, what the bible means by rest and how that fits in with being in community, and then reflect on what we have learnt for the series of studies.



STUDY 1 - COMMUNITY AND FELLOWSHIP; THE COMMON LIFE

GOD AND THE GOSPEL – THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

Like everything else, it is best to start with God. God is a triune God and even though the word trinity is not found in the Bible, the concept is writ large in texts such as Matthew 28:19; John 14:26; Titus 3:4-6 and 1 John 4:13-15. The God of the Bible is a complex unity of three divine persons – where person means the centre of conscious life and activity². God is a unity of three persons, in perfect relationship. He is a dynamic union of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit without any coalescing or co-mingling, yet without separation from one another. The three persons of the Godhead are who they are in relation with one another and so the single being of God is a God who is one, indivisible, unchangeable relational God. The one true God is a community of three divine persons subsisting in one infinite spirit being. Let's explore the implications of the reality of God as Trinity.

1. What do Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:18-25 imply about the importance and place of relationships to humanity? Note particularly Genesis 2:18 in comparison to Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, and 31.

2. What implications are there that God is a relational being and we are relational beings have for community?

² "Person" is, however, an imperfect expression of the truth inasmuch as the term denotes to us a separate rational and moral individual, but in the being of God there are not three individuals rather personal self-distinctions within the one divine essence. Personality in man implies independence of will, actions and feelings that lead to behaviour peculiar to that person. This is not so in the Trinity. Each person is self-conscious and self-directing, yet never acting independently or in opposition. God is a threefold centre of life, but His life is not split into three. God is not a committee of three persons!



Community is a way of relating together as believers. Fundamental to this is the Greek word “*koinonia*” which is most often translated “fellowship”. It’s a much deeper concept than what we often think of as fellowship. It’s sometimes said that having a cup of coffee with an unbeliever is friendship, but having a cup of coffee with a believer is fellowship! But this isn’t what the New Testament means by *koinonia*. *Koinonia* has a rich meaning.

3. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a tremendous passage on the gospel. It uses many images in an effort to describe the spiritual blessings we have. What is the basis for these blessings, or how do we obtain them?

4. Read 1 John 1:1-7. In this passage John is giving his firsthand experience of Jesus. He is essentially telling his readers the gospel. Fellowship is significant in what he says.

- a. Who is our fellowship with v3?
- b. What is the reason John is telling his readers the gospel according to v3?

Our union with Christ is the basis of our fellowship with God and, therefore, our fellowship with each other. As Jerry Bridges says: “*We must be united to Christ by saving faith before we can have fellowship with Him on a daily basis ... Our experiential relationships with one another grow out of our objective relationship [ie our union with Christ making us part of the one body and so having an objective relationship with other believers]... True fellowship embraces both the objective and the experiential aspects of our relationship with God.*”³

³ Jerry Bridges “True Community” p20



Jonathan Dodson in his book *Gospel Centred Discipleship* says that many Christians have a truncated gospel that “*focuses on Jesus death and resurrection as a doctrine to be believed, not on Jesus as a Person to be trusted and obeyed. The gospel has been reduced to a personal ticket to heaven. But the biblical gospel is much more than personal conversion to gain a reservation in heaven ... The gospel calls us into community and mission ... We are not converted to a disembodied Head; we are converted to an embodied Christ, which includes Head and body.*”⁴

5. Read Ephesians 2:8-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Colossians 1:18-20. Do you think Bridges and Dodson are right? What implications does this have for how you think about and live out community?

FELLOWSHIP – COMMON LIFE

6. Fellowship is primarily a relationship rather than an activity. It is a relationship that is founded on our relationship with Jesus. This relationship works itself out in many practical ways, in many activities. Because we are in relationship with one another, we share a common life in Christ. The early disciples’ application of having this common life in Christ was to share everything Acts 2:44,45. Consider these other ways that the New Testament talks of sharing a common life, of relating with one another.

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| Romans 15:1, 7 | |
| 1 Corinthians 1:10 | |

⁴ J. Dodson, *Gospel Centred Discipleship*, Crossway, Wheaton 2012 p 108-110.



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| 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 | |
| Galatians 6:10 | |
| Ephesians 4:15 | |
| Philippians 2:2-4 | |
| Colossians 3:12-17 | |
| 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 | |



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| 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 15 | |
| Hebrews 13:1-3; 16-17 | |
| James 2:1-4; 15-16 | |
| 1 Peter 4:8-11 | |
| 1 John 3:16-17 | |

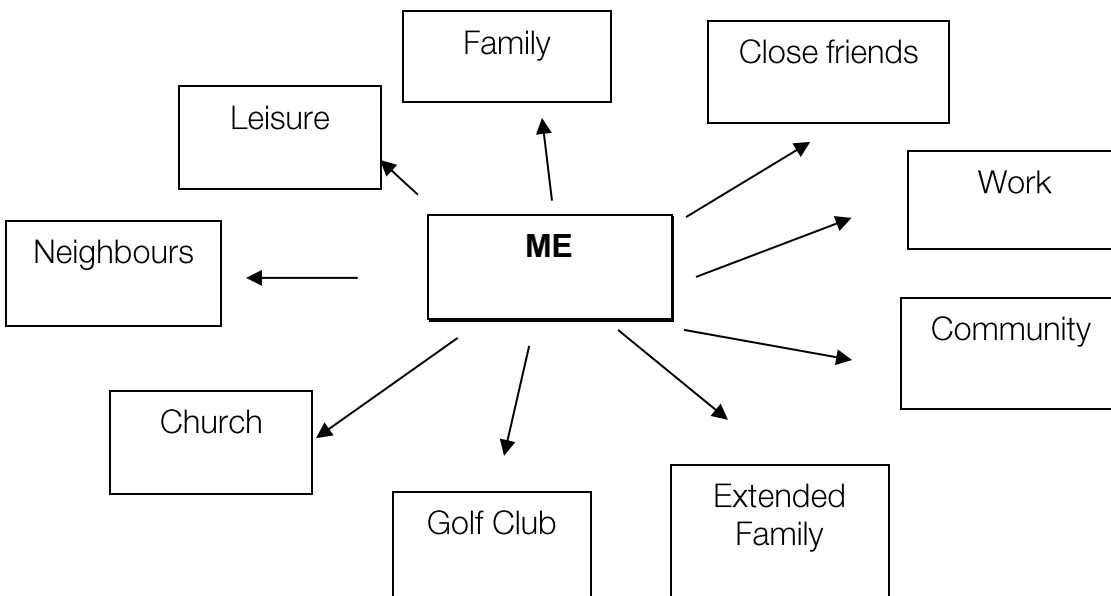
7. Given that community is about relationships that follow out into activities, how can you develop the relationships that underlie activities so that the activities become things you want to do, things that you prioritise over other activities?



8. As you reflect on the above Scriptures and the Biblical Community/s you are involved with, what is it/they are doing well and what is the key area it/they could improve? How could this be done?

THINKING IT THROUGH

The prevailing view of life today is an individual standing on his or her own, juggling various responsibilities – family, friendships, career, leisure, decisions, money, and social responsibilities like school associations, political activity, residents groups ... Most often there is little overlap and our relationships are segmented into independent, insular compartments. We have a family life. We're expected to keep that to ourselves. Our business environments require another behaviour. Social relationships often have no connection to either family or business. From time to time the pressures overwhelm us and we drop one or more of the balls. It can be illustrated like this.



9. Use your imagination to draw a picture that illustrates how your life and relationships are currently arranged. Who would you include in your social network, extended family, circle of friends, etc? Add names to your diagram.

10. What does this tell you about the way you are currently living? Is your life fragmented or fairly integrated? Is it insular or fairly open? Are you spread too thin or trying to do too much? How are your relationships impacted by your lifestyle?



11. All too often biblical community, fellowship, becomes just one of the balls that are dropped. A more biblical model is to view ourselves as a person-in-community who shares a common life. Biblical Community then would be at the centre of life. It would not be me as an individual, but us as members of a Christian community in the centre. Community would not be another ball for me to juggle, but that which defines who I am and gives shape to my life. Consider Romans 12:5 in light of this. How would this thinking change your diagram and how you live if that were the case? How would it impact on what you do and how you make decisions? What is stopping you from living that way?



Individualistic View



Community View



12. The first occurrence of *koinonia*, “fellowship”, in the New Testament occurs in Luke’s account of the day of Pentecost in verse 42. Read Acts 2:41-47 and consider. Why do you think that the new converts *devoted* themselves to fellowship, alongside the apostles teaching and prayer, which we may think are more central? As you reflect back over the study, how important do you think the bible says fellowship is? How important is fellowship to you?

13. As you review this study what do you sense God is asking you to do as a result?

