



Group Member Booklet

Better Together: An Introduction

This November we commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the end of World War I. A century ago the young men and women of our fledgling nation travelled half-way across the world to take their place in a war that had little directly to do with them as individuals. These days we're more about self-esteem and self-actualisation than about self-sacrifice. Independence and individualism is the air we breathe in modern culture. We carry around in our pockets i-Phones, not "we-phones". We sense that our communities are less connected and more fractured than they have been in the past. Many of us do not even know our neighbours, the people who live only metres from us.

In our 2018 Commitment Series we are revisiting and revisioning our understanding of our common life together at church. Without flattening down our individual personalities and contributions, the Bible carries a very strong conviction that we are better together. We worship God better, we experience God better, we love one another better, we reach out to others better and we grow as Christians better, when we do these things together.

Over the term, on Sundays and in small groups, we are going to trace this theme through the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians. We won't be going line by line, from start to finish, in this significant book of the New Testament. But you will be struck by the many ways in which the Ephesians were encouraged to be better together, as they shared in common life as believers in the ancient town of Ephesus.

We trust that you'll likewise be swayed by this book that the Christian life is lived better when it's lived with other believers. Hope you make the most of your time in God's word this term.

Study timetable

We've prepared these small group studies to follow the Sunday message, but you're free to use them as you wish. Here's a suggested timetable for their use.

Sunday Sermon Date	Topic	Mid-week (small group)	What?
		Wed 17 October	Term 4 Leader Session
Sun 21 October	Church	22-25 October	Study #1: Experiencing God Together
Sat 27 October: Serve Manly (at Manly Village Public School)			
Sun 28 October	Mission	29 October-1 November	Study #2: Reaching Together
Sun 4 November	Ministry	5-8 November	Study #3: Growing Together
Sunday 11 November: Sign-up and Serve			
Sun 11 November	Transformation	12-15 November	Study #4: Growing Together (2)
Wednesday 14 November: Celebration Dinner			
Sun 18 November	Care	19-22 November	Study #5: Loving Together
Sundays 18/25 November: New Member Photos			
Sun 25 November	Worship	26-29 November	Study #6: Praying Together
Sunday 25 November: Commitment Sunday			
Sun 2 December	Advent series starts		Small groups social / on break

4. How do v.11-18 further develop the idea of experiencing God together as the church?

5. What metaphor does v.19-22 use to describe the church, and how does that inform our understanding of our common life together?

6. What are some of the delights of church life together that you've experienced? What are some of the costs of committing to common life as the church? Practically, what is lost if you don't take your place within the gathered community here at St Matthews?

Prayer

Praise God for his great salvation by grace, when we were dead in our transgressions.

Repent of the times when you have selfishly held back from taking your place within the community of God's people.

Ask that God might grant us all an understanding of and commitment to the church, the household of God's people and a place in which God lives by his Spirit.

Trio #1

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Why are these verses among the most loved verses in the New Testament? Does it change the way you read them when you realise the Apostle Paul is addressing them as a group, not as individuals (i.e. the pronouns (you, we) are all plural, rather than singular)?

2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How do these verses develop the idea of experiencing God together as the church?

3. What are some of the delights of church life together that you've experienced? What are some of the costs of committing to common life as the church? Practically, what is lost if you don't take your place within the gathered community at St Matthews?

Prayer

Praise God for his great salvation by grace, when we were dead in our transgressions.

Repent of the times when you have selfishly held back from taking your place within the community of God's people.

Ask that God might grant us all an understanding of and commitment to the church, the household of God's people and a place in which God lives by his Spirit.

Trio #2

1. Read Ephesians 3:1-13, where Paul writes about being given the gift of God's grace for the revelation of the "mystery" of Christ, the message of the gospel. What has this gospel accomplished for the Gentiles, for the church as a whole, and for us individually?

2. Paul gave his life to proclaiming the gospel of Christ, and it wasn't without suffering. We learn in 3:1 that he was in prison while writing this letter, and in 3:13 asks his readers not to be discouraged because of his suffering. Why is he so content to suffer for his faith? How can his attitude shape ours?

3. The impact of a message is proportional to the conviction of the messenger. How does this statement describe Paul's ministry? How does it describe your own Christian witness, and that of our church?

Prayer

Praise God for revealing the mystery of the gospel of Christ, so that people of all backgrounds can approach Him with freedom and confidence!

Repent for times when you may have valued your comfort or reputation more than you valued the message of the gospel.

Ask that God would help us to adopt the same conviction and boldness of the Apostle Paul about sharing the message of Christ.

Study 3: Growing Together

Start

Have you ever successfully grown anything (a garden, a business, a beard, a friendship, etc)? What was the process involved; was it quick or slow? If you couldn't get something to grow, what do you think was the problem?

Read

Ephesians 4:1-16...and share your first thoughts.

Think and talk

- 1. Verses 1 to 6 are a great call to Christian unity. How do we pursue unity together, and what is the foundation of our unity?**

- 2. Do you find it easy to bear with one another in love? What makes Christian unity difficult to achieve, and what can you do to pursue unity?**

- 3. Re-read v.7-13, where Paul pivots and talks about things that are "different" about us. In what ways are we different and why is it important that we are different?**

4. Why does the Apostle make special mention of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors & teachers (v.11-12)?

5. What is the consequence of God's people shirking the works of service that God has in store for them?

6. Are there ministry opportunities that are available that you should take upon yourself? Do you need to recalibrate your attitude to the ministry and service you are currently involved in?

Prayer

Praise God for his word, and for giving us opportunities to serve him and one another so that our fellowship can mature.

Repent of the times when you've resented service, or resisted service.

Pray that God might fill you with a willing heart, ready hands, and a humble attitude, to play your part within the body, helping us together to mature.

Trio #3

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-6. What is the foundation of Christian unity? When it's difficult to "bear with one another in love", what can you do to pursue unity?

2. Read Ephesians 4:7-16. Why does the Apostle Paul make special mention of word ministry (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers in v.11-12)? What's the connection between word ministry and our collective maturity?

3. Are there ministry opportunities that you should take upon yourself? Do you need to recalibrate your attitude to the service you're currently involved in?

Prayer

Praise God for his word, and for giving us opportunities to serve him and one another so that our fellowship can mature.

Repent of the times when you've resented service, or resisted service.

Pray that God might fill you with a willing heart, ready hands, and a humble attitude, to play your part within the body, helping us together to mature.

Study 4: Growing Together, Part 2

Start

Are there any areas of sin or struggle in your life that God has helped you overcome since becoming a Christian?

Read

Ephesians 4:17-5:7 and share your first impressions...

Think and talk

1. This passage provides further commentary on 4:1, where Paul exhorts his readers to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Lists the contrasts in the descriptions of the former sinful life versus the new self of their present life in Christ (from 4:17-24)

Former “Gentile” life	Present life

2. Compare this passage with Romans 1:21-32. What similarities do you see? How do these passages view sin?

3. Verse 19 talks about being “full of greed.” The word used literally means “the desire to have more”. Are there areas of your life where you can be prone to greed? Have you personally experienced downsides to your greed?

4. Ephesians 5:5 has a strong verdict for those who practice greed. What is the opposite of greed, and what would it practically look like to be generous in those areas of life? Have you experienced benefits from being generous?

5. What does Paul mean in 4:28, comparing stealing with working and sharing with those in need? How does this idea translate to a church community context?

6. Re-read 4:32-5:7, which provides a striking contrast between Christ's self-giving nature that we are to imitate, and the sins of self-indulgence including immorality, impurity, greed and even idolatry (5:5, the turning from God to the idol of self).
 - a. Thinking through "God's example" in verses 4:32-5:2, and the opposite behaviour in 5:3-5, which characteristics do you see more of in yourself? You may wish to think this through on your own!

 - b. In light of our new self, created to be like God, what is one area of your life that you want to pray for renewed righteousness and holiness? Share with someone if you feel comfortable, and pray together.

Prayer

Praise God that we are a new creation, given a new life and a new self.

Repent for those areas in your life that do not correspond to the new self or imitate God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ask that God might help us to live as those who have been made new, especially to be generous with all that God has blessed us.

Trio #4

1. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. Compare the “old self” of the Gentiles and the “new self” of the believers’ present life.
2. Verse 19 talks about being “full of greed”, which literally means “the desire to have more.” In what areas of your life are prone to greed? What would it look like to be generous in those particular areas of life?
3. Read 4:32-5:5. Do you see more of yourself in the example of God to be imitated (4:32-5:2) or in the more self-indulgent descriptors (5:3-4)? In light of our new self, created to be like God, what is one area of your life that you want to pray for renewed righteousness and holiness?

Prayer

Praise God that we are a new creation, given a new life and a new self.

Repent for those areas in your life that do not correspond to the new self or imitate God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ask that God might help us to live as those who have been made new, especially to be generous with all that God has blessed us.

Study 5: Loving Together

Start

Complete these sentences, and share the answers with your group:

I love my (person or pet)
My favourite kind of food is
I really enjoy music
The best work I've ever done is
On my day off I most like to

How would you define “a labour of love”? Have you ever completed a project that was a labour of love? What kept you going?

Read

Ephesians 3:14-19; 4:25-5:2 and throw any initial observations into the mix.

Think and talk

- 1. Paul's prayer in 3:14-19 is wordy, but what's the gist of his petition? Has Paul's prayer been answered in your life?**

- 2. How would your life change if you grasped the full extent of the love of Christ for us?**

- 3. In Ephesians 4:25-32 there are numerous instructions about anger, rage and brawling. Do you struggle with anger and resentment? What can you do about that?**

4. Furthermore in these verses there are multiple instructions about the way we speak. What are these instructions, and what is one main way you can upgrade your personal speech?

5. Ephesians 5:1, 2 concludes the passage with a general direction to us as God's dearly loved children. What does it mean to live a life of love?

6. How much better would life at St Matthews be if we consciously sought to love those around us? Who are you convicted to love in the way that God has loved you?

Prayer

Praise God for his weighty and extensive love for us in Christ Jesus.

Ask forgiveness for any anger, resentment, rage, bitterness, untruthfulness, slander and unwholesome talk.

Pray that God might assist you to love others, in thought, word and action.

Trio #5

1. Read Ephesians 3:14-19. What's the main point in Paul's wordy prayer? How would your life change if you grasped the full extent of Jesus' love for us?

2. Read Ephesians 4:25-32. There are numerous instructions here about anger and rage, as well as about the way we speak. What is one way you can upgrade your emotions, behaviours or speech, to the benefit of others?

3. How much better would life at St Matthews be if we consciously sought to love those around us? Who are you convicted to love in the way that God has loved you?

Prayer

Praise God for his weighty and extensive love for us in Christ Jesus.

Ask forgiveness for any anger, resentment, rage, bitterness, untruthfulness, slander and unwholesome talk.

Pray that God might assist you to love others, in thought, word and action.

Study 6: Praying Together

Introduction

On Sunday we thought about the idea of worshipping God together, as we join together, filled with the Holy Spirit, to sing God's praises.

Prayer is the natural complement to praise. In praise we sing to God and remind each other of all the benefits of being his people. In prayer we speak to God, bringing forth our requests and thanksgiving.

Consider some of these verses from Ephesians:

Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. (1.15-16)

I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (3.14-17)

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. (5.19, 20)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (6.18)

We are going to pray using the acronym P*R*A*Y (Praise, Repent, Ask (for others), Yourself).

Praise

Starting with P for Praise to our Heavenly Father, use these verses from Ephesians as opening exaltations.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (1.3)

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (3.20-21)

Repent

Continue with some quiet time reflecting on your weakness and rebellion—failing God and fighting him—and confessing sin.

Then use this prayer as a group:

*Heavenly Father,
we praise you for adopting us as your children
and making us heirs of eternal life.
In your mercy you have washed us from our sins and made us clean in your sight.
Yet we still fail to love you
and serve you as we should.
Forgive us our sins
and renew us by your grace,
that we may continue to grow as members of Christ,
in whom alone is our salvation. Amen.*

We can be sure that God pardons those who humbly repent and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ask (for St Matthews)

As we move into prayer requests, feel free to mix it up. You might like to break into pairs and cover different prayer requests, or start at the bottom and work your way up, or pick and choose what to focus on. It's up to you to make the most of this chance to pray through the many and various ministry needs of St Matthews Manly, asking God for all that we require.

Vision: Growing God's Church through the Gospel

- Pray that God might use St Matthews Manly, and our vision to grow his church through the gospel
- Pray for a great work of the Holy Spirit in us, and then through us, so that many people might become disciples and grow in their discipleship
- Pray that God might energise our own spirits to be a part of his great work in Manly and beyond

Worship

- Pray that we might be transformed by the Word of God as we encounter the risen Christ through the preaching of the gospel in our services
- Pray that we might respond prayerfully and joyfully, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the proclamation of the good news

- Pray that our public worship, preaching, prayers and welcoming, is joyful, warm, deep and relevant to those who know Christ and those who are yet to know him
- Pray for David Nduwimana as he leads and develops the worship ministry

Growth

- Pray for people to be maturing disciples of Jesus, transformed by the Word of God and prayer, living in community and serving in the church and the world
- Pray for all our small groups, including kids groups, youth bible studies, and adult groups, that they might be little cells of discipleship, growth and care
- Thank God for the service of small group leaders and ask that they might have time to prepare well and to pastor their groups effectively
- Pray for all those reading the Bible one-to-one with others, one disciple to another, that their time together would be a rich and maturing experience
- Pray for Scott Petty, in conjunction with others, as they seek to develop small group leaders and organise small groups for 2019

Care

- Pray that as a church we will be able to express Jesus' love, grace and truth to people in special times or seasons of need
- Pray that our small groups might be effective centres exercising pastoral care to group members
- Thank God for the Soup Kitchen which brings love, grace and truth to some needy members of the Northern Beaches community, and pray that God will strengthen this ministry and sustain the volunteers
- Thank God for the presence of the Grace Group, which provides financial and practical assistance to church members in serious need
- Pray for Max Boys' replacement, who will continue to develop the pastoral care ministry across St Matthews

Mission

- Pray that many lost people might come to know Christ in Manly, as we reach out to people who connect with the church through ministries like ESL, Open Door, Mini Matts, Kids Church, Youth Ministry, Soup Kitchen, and so on
- Pray that many of our members (perhaps including you) would be able to start reading the Bible with friends and contacts, using the Word 121 materials
- Pray for the running of the evangelism courses at church, and for those who do the course in preparation for baptism at St Matthews, that people would not only find out more but would be drawn into relationship with Christ and become members of St Matthews
- Pray for Ben Adamo as he oversees and develops our mission ministry

- Pray for our heroic Mission Partners and Church Planters who are seeking to win lost people to Christ:
 - Jack and Lily Harradine as they lead the Living Desert Indigenous Church in Broken Hill, and Neville and Kathy Naden in their role with Bush Church Aid developing the next generation of Indigenous leadership and ministry
 - HEAL Africa bringing spiritual, medical and social healing in DR Congo
 - Bridge of Hope in Manado, Indonesia providing micro-finance and micro-enterprise to help impoverished people lift themselves and their families out of poverty through running businesses and educating children
 - Dave and Leonie Painter whilst they're back studying in Australia in preparation for their return to Cambodia to do translation, theological training and student evangelism
 - Mark and Rachel Collins leading the church plant in Marsden Park in north-west Sydney
 - David and Crystal Fell who are missionary church planters and chaplains on Norfolk Island
 - Andrew and Michelle Blumer doing evangelism through their English school in Vienna, Austria
- Pray in particular that we will raise \$120,000 for our mission partners during this Commitment Series

Next Generation Ministry (NextGen)

- Pray that we might win and build the next generation of disciples of Jesus through investing in Sunday Kids Church, midweek Kids evangelism like Mini Matts, Holiday Club, etc), Youth Ministry on Friday nights and Sundays, School Scripture outreach at Manly Village Public School and nearby high schools
- Pray for Naomi Ireland and Nathan Campbell as they develop our ministry to young people
- Pray that the NextGen Intern Programme will continue to be an effective training program for young people interested in vocational Christian ministry.

Other “church stuff” to pray for

- Thank God for all the people who volunteer in so many ways to make the ministry of St Matthews happen week by week
- Pray that He might sustain all volunteers in their ministry so they can continue to serve him and others with joyful hearts
- Thank God for the Parish Council and pray that they would all work together well
- Pray for the staff team, especially for Bruce Clarke as he leads and oversees the whole ministry. Pray for the other members of ministry staff – Scott Petty, Max Boys, Dave Nduwimana, Nathan Campbell, Naomi Ireland, Ben Adamo, Kelsey Wilson, Sozon Smith, and Barry Hammond.

- Thank God for the excellent work of the admin staff: Christina Franze, Mari Steyn, Michelle Rademeyer, PJ Fisher & Viliam Mako
- Pray for our finances, giving thanks for people's generosity but also asking that our regular giving will rise to meet budget
- Pray for the Building Project, giving thanks for the hard work of Tim Evans and John Wood and others to prepare for the project. Pray also for safety and efficiency in the program of construction. And pray in advance for all the ministry and outreach that will be possible as a consequence of the newly-developed Darley-Smith building.

Other "people stuff" to ask for

- Pray that as a church that we will manifest God's love in all our dealings with each other and not let anger get a foothold
- Pray for single people to find contentment in their situation and deep friendships around them
- Pray for single parents, that they might have an extra measure of energy, wisdom and strength from God, and support and friendship to help parent their children well
- Pray for husbands, wives and children, for strong marriages and stable families, that husbands and wives would love each other, forgive each other and remain faithful to one another, and that children would grow in a real knowledge of Christ through loving discipleship at home
- Pray for relationships with friends and family, that we would all be loyal friends and loving family members
- Pray for our relationships with people in the community and at work, that our presence might shine a light unto the Lord Jesus and present opportunities to witness to him
- Pray for workers as they seek to honour God in their places of employment, to serve their employers well and to work with diligence and integrity
- Pray for people going through difficult relational issues with others, that they might be resolved quickly with genuine repentance and forgiveness
- Pray for God to work powerfully to heal people and help those in great need, particularly those with significant health issues and those who are seeking visas to remain in Australia
- Pray that we would help each other grow in godliness and to pursue purity in a sin-soaked society
- Pray that we would not love money but be generous in manifold ways
- Pray that we would delight in reading the Bible and prayerfully urge God to be at work in us and through us

Yourself

The “Y” in P*R*A*Y is for prayers for Yourself. Perhaps in pairs or triplets, share some personal things you would like to thank God for and ask God for, and then turn them into prayers.

Finish

Finish by saying the words of the grace to one another.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

And the love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, evermore.

Amen.

Notes:

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