

Lesson 6: Fellowship

As a follower of Jesus, you've been called into relationship. A relationship with God and a relationship with his people.

Read: Romans 12:4-5 "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

You're expected to live out your faith in community. It's healthy for you, and the quality of your relationships with other Jesus-followers is a testimony to the transforming power of God's love.

Key insight: Fellowship is communion, relationship, and sharing in common with other believers.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MENTOR/DISCIPLER: Share how fellowship has impacted your life. What changes have you seen? How do you experience it daily?

Discussion: Let's talk about that. We can then pray about what's distracting you.

A Conversation About Fellowship

During the next hour, both of you will go over the following outline. If there's something you don't understand—or you can't quite accept—mention it.

You and the Church

Any discussion about fellowship includes understanding what the Bible means when it uses the word, church. The word is a translation of the Greek word, ekklesia, and has two meanings:

- An assembly—a group of people.
- Called together or called out—a select group of people who are somehow apart from everyone else.

The church is an assembly of God's people, called out and called together for relationship with God and one another. And they're called together for the purpose of accomplishing God's mission on earth.

Read: Mark 12:29-31 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Read: Matthew 28:18-20 "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

At the heart of any Jesus-follower's purpose is relationship—with God and others. With those who are already followers of Jesus and with those who don't yet know him.

Discussion: How does seeing the church as relationships change your view?

Describing the Church

Here's a quick summary of what the Bible says about the church:

- It was established by Jesus, not by people, and nothing can destroy the church (Matthew 16:18).
- The church is empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- Whether or not you're part of a local congregation, you're part of the church—it's the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
- All members of the church have a unique blend of spiritual gifts that can be used to serve God and others (Romans 12:6).
- All believers are unified in Jesus. They may align with different denominations and may not agree with one another on all doctrinal issues, but they're still brothers and sisters (Galatians 3:28).
- Sharing the story of Jesus is central to the mission of the church, as is living in a way that demonstrates the power of God to transform us (Philippians 1:27).
- There is great benefit that comes from being a part of a local congregation, as well as the chance to serve others (Hebrews 10:25).

Connecting with and committing to a local church is an expectation of someone following Jesus.

What is Fellowship?

The Greek word translated "fellowship" is *koinonia*, and it means communion, relationship, and sharing in common.

Jesus-followers who are in fellowship together serve one another and others as well. They become part of a loving community.

Read: John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Discussion: If you've had a hurtful experience in the context of a local church, pause now to tell your discipler about that obstacle. Share what happened and how you're feeling about it.

The Blessings and Challenges of Being in a Local Church

First, the upside:

- You'll have support when you encounter difficulties (Galatians 6:1-2).
- You can benefit from the spiritual gifts others have, and serve using the gifts God has given you (1 Peter 4:10).
- Praying in unity can impact the power of your prayers (Matthew 18:19).
- The quality of your loving relationships becomes a testimony to nonbelievers, helping you fulfill part of the mission of the church (John 17:20-21).

And then there are the challenges:

- Church members are sometimes slow to forgive others in spite of having been forgiven by God (Matthew 6:14-15).
- Church members may have unhealthy, unvoiced, or false expectations about what will or won't happen in a local church. Any of those can sabotage relationships within the church community.
- Church members with unmet expectations can become bitter, destroying their own peace of mind and ruining relationships.

If bitterness has taken root in any of your relationships, don't ignore it. Confess it for what it is: sin.

Discussion: If you're feeling a nudge to acknowledge bitterness toward someone—a person who's disappointed or hurt you—tell your discipler about it.

Peacemaking in a Local Church

Relationships won't be perfect in any local church, so it's best to accept you'll need to be a peacemaker.

Read: Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Peacemakers choose to keep the local church healthy by doing the following:

- Praying for their enemies (Matthew 5:44).
- Speaking blessings about those who offend them (Romans 12:14).
- Having direct communication, actively seeking to hear and understand the other side of any conflict that causes them discomfort (Matthew 5:23-24).
- Forgiving others as they've been forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15).
- Staying humble, aware they may not know the whole story (Galatians 6:1).

Peacemakers allow God to work in and through them. They are quick to listen and slow to anger. And they stay connected, not allowing misunderstandings or anger to cause them to withdraw from fellowship.

Discussion: Is there someone that you need to forgive? Pray for that person who's harmed you. Pray daily that God will both bless that person...and show you a way to forgive.

Fellowship Opportunities in a Local Church

Most churches offer both large-group and small-group gatherings. Fellowship can happen in any of them, though meaningful relationships often form best in smaller groups.

- Large-group settings provide corporate worship, sharing the Lord's Supper, and the chance to bond around a shared vision.
- Small groups offer the chance to dive deeper into relationships, whether the small groups are Bible studies or shared-interest groups.
- One-on-one relationships like Conversations allow a discipler and disciple to grow deeper in Christ together through sharing and accountability.

And Speaking of Discipling...

Are you (the disciple) open to discipling someone else the same way you're being disciplined, using these conversations?

If so, you're both fulfilling part of the mission Jesus gave the church, and you're blessing someone else the same way you're being blessed.

Discussion: If you (the disciple) are equally willing, and the discipler is willing to disciple someone else, pause now to pray for one another that both of you will have an opportunity to disciple someone when you wrap up this program.

Memory verse to consider

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35, NASB).

"But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15).

This Week's Action

During the next week:

1. Attend a large-group or small-group gathering at a local church.
2. If needed, forgive someone by praying daily for them.
3. Consider who you might disciple and pray about it.

How can I pray for you?

Pray for each other: Specific areas to grow in fellowship—building relationships, peacemaking, overcoming bitterness; opportunities to disciple others; deeper community in a local church.