

# Discipleship

## Study 2: A Calling Into God's Family & Community

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### The Message

Jesus said "...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."<sup>1</sup>

We derive our English word 'church' from the Greek word 'Kyriakon' meaning 'the Lord's house', and this refers to a 'building'. The Scottish 'kirk', the German word 'kirche' and the Dutch 'kerk' all come from the same root as the English word 'church'; and each carry the idea of a building. **However, neither the biblical idea, nor the Greek word 'ekklesia' [translated 'church' in the English versions of the New Testament] have anything whatever to do with the concept of a building.**

The Biblical idea of 'church' is 'a gathering of people assembled for a purpose' or 'a gathering of those who are called out'. This is reinforced by the fact that we know there were no buildings specifically set aside for Christian worship until well into the second century A.D. So the frequently obscured truth is that 'the church can *never* be a building, it is always people'.

The New Testament uses 96 different images and metaphors to speak about the people of God in their many aspects. In this study we want to focus on one aspect of 'the church'; namely that of fellowship and community, and how these are a fundamental aspect of true discipleship.

So what images does Scripture reveal to us about the character of fellowship and community?

We can outline these as follows:

- **Family**  
We are the family of God (Ephesians 3:10-15), God's sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18), therefore brothers and sisters to one another (1 John 4:21).
- **Marriage**  
Betrothal (2 Corinthians 11:2), bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9b).
- **Community**  
Tabernacle and temple symbolise God dwelling in the middle of His people (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).
- **Politics**  
Christianity is filled with paradoxes, one of which is summed up by the outworking of a 'mustard seed revolution'. When we gather together something special should happen - Jesus Himself tell us "*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*"<sup>2</sup> Through Christ nothing is impossible, and when we join together in worship and in prayer, amazing things should happen. Our prayers of faith will not go unanswered. Try meditating on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) and consider what our calling is, and what impact this has in politics.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 18:20

- **Agriculture**

There are a number of images of agriculture that may be found in scripture which includes bread and wine (1 Corinthians 10:16-18), vine & vineyards (John 15:5), fig & olive trees (Romans 11:17-24), God's field and planting (1 Corinthians 3:9), sowing and reaping of the Lord (Matthew 13:1-30).

- **Structure**

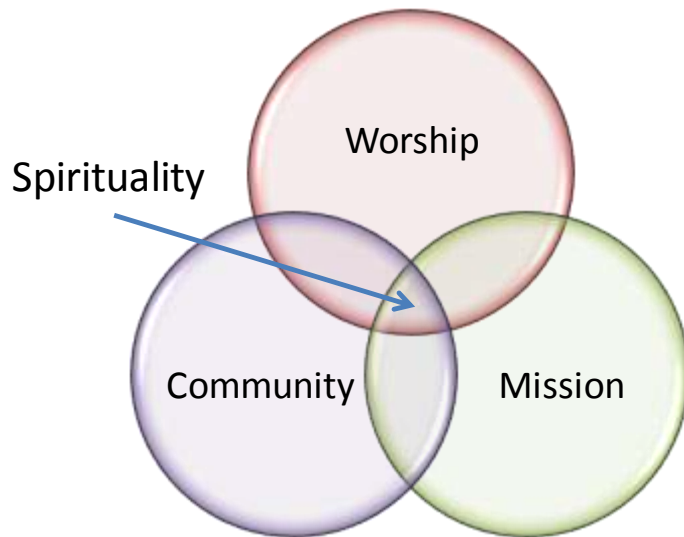
The house (Ephesians 2:20-22) built on rock (Matthew 16:18), the pillar and ground of truth (1 Timothy 3:15), God's building of living stones (1 Peter 2:3-5).

- **Physique**

Members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12), serving one another (1 Corinthians 12:24b).

Looking in more detail at fellowship & community, the Greek word is 'koinonia' which we can literally translate to mean 'fellowship and participation'. The use of this word in the New Testament always refers to some aspect of sharing, making common that which had been individual. This sharing is rooted in our life in God and Christ (1 John 1:3); it is also sharing in the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13-14). From this sharing, we have 'koinonia' with one another (1 John 1:7).

If we are called into God's family and community, what is the purpose of the church through which this might be realised? In Robert Warren's book "Being Human, Being Church..."<sup>3</sup> he illustrates this through a simple diagram:



Worship, community and mission are inter-related – and at the heart of all of them lays spirituality. When we think of what the church is for, it should encompass ALL of these facets – and at the core of community is discipleship through evangelism and nurture. It's clear that we all have much to learn about what fellowship and community entails – we need to be a humble and teachable people in this learning experience as we grow closer to God and to one another.

We sometimes need to take a step back and reflect on our theology of being church because this can impact how we are in worship, mission and community. These must all be held together in unity. With this in mind we want to take a brief look at various models of the church as presented in scripture:

<sup>3</sup> Warren, R. (1995), *Being Human, Being Church: Spirituality and Mission in the Local Church*, London, Marshall Pickering

## Questions

1. How is the Christian concept of church different from the secular perception of church?
2. Is there room for denominations in a biblical interpretation of church?
3. If a church is 'alive', what does it need in order to grow?
4. What do you find most encouraging about fellowship and community, and why?
5. Which of the images of the character of fellowship and community most appeals to you and why?