

NOVEMBER 2011

FELLOWSHIP

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

INTERNALLY STRONG EXTERNALLY FOCUSED

WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST
CALLED BY GOD AND GIFTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
TO LIVES OF AUTHENTIC *WORSHIP*,
EXPRESSED THROUGH
FELLOWSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP AND APOSTLESHIP.

NOVEMBER 2011

**LIFE TOGETHER
SMALL GROUP GUIDE**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SPOKANE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Week One: Not Good to Be Alone	4
Week Two: The Fellowship of Family	6
Week Three: The Committed Community of the Church, Part 1	8
Week Four: The Committed Community of the Church, Part 2	10
Appendix: Life Together @ Fellowship	
Connection Point Questions	12
“Beyond the Meeting” Activities	13

OTHER ADULT FORMATION OPPORTUNITIES THIS FALL AT FPC

ALL-TOGETHERS: 10AM SUNDAYS

November 20 Global Fellowship
December 18 CoffeeHouse
December 25 Christmas Pancake Breakfast

COMMON HOUR: 10AM SUNDAYS

OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 17

Life Together: Biblical Insights for True Community—Jerry Sittser
2040—Thinking Orange: Building Faith in the Next Generation (conversation with parents and Children/Student Ministries)
The Bible in Context—Bruce Gore

THURSDAY NIGHT LIVE

November 3–17 Life Together Discipleship—Brenda Norton

SMALL GROUP LEADER WORKSHOPS

10am Sunday, October 30–November 6 in Room 213

MISSION OPPS

November 11 & 12 Jubilee Sale
Advent Missions Visit the Christmas Tree across from the Library

INTRODUCTION

November Sermon Series: God's Purpose in Fellowship

We need each other. That is God's plan and our fellowship is his design. Just as Eve was created to be a helpmate for Adam, we are helpmates for one another. Our fellowship enables us to supplement each other's gifts with the gifts that God has given to us. Our fellowship allows us to care for one another and to honor one another.

- John Sowers

You can download copies of this guide at www.spokaneipc.org/Community Life/Small Groups or pick up printed copies from the Small Group Leader mailbox in the main office at the church.

Give priority this month to strengthening the relationships between group members. The elements in this guide (Connecting Point Questions, Scripture Readings, Discussion Questions, Quotes, Activity Suggestions, Prayer, etc.) are there to serve this purpose. You are invited to honor God's design for us by valuing this priority.

Please continue to hold onto the 3 attitudes described below as you use this guide. Remember, if your group doesn't meet every week you are free to combine elements from different weeks or just choose one of the lessons.

#1—The Study Guide Serves the Group; the Group Does Not Serve the Study Guide

We don't expect your group to work through every question in this guide. The goal is to grow in your relationships with God and each other and to become more mature in your faith. Use your wisdom to focus on the questions and activities that resonate most with your group.

However, we do expect you to take risks. Be careful not to just skip over an activity because you've never done anything like it before or a question because you are afraid of it. Pursuing growth needs to include a willingness to try new things. Be challenged to experience God in new ways and to be thoughtful in your discussion. Sometimes the questions in this guide will lead your group to ask even more questions. Be a group that values the discussion rather than looking for quick answers.

#2—Encourage Times of Reflection

It is good to encourage reflection which includes periods of silence. Space when no one is talking gives people time to discover deeper thoughts and feelings. Reflection activities are included in this guide but times of silence may also be occur in the midst of discussion or prayer. Let them be. Watch for how God is present in the silence as much as in the words.

#3—Keep a Proper Perspective of Your Purpose

"The best and most healthy groups understand that being a small group is not about being a small group; it's about pursuing relationship with Jesus Christ and relationship with one another. Call this experience whatever you like; Bible Study, Dinner and Conversation Group, Community Group, Discipleship Team, Starlight Vocal Band, etc. The point is not to gather according to some particular formula, the point is to create for yourselves an Intentional Christian Community where you can study together God's Word and support one another as you live that out day by day."

- Jeff Lincicome, Sr. Pastor at Sammamish Presbyterian Church

***Quite simply,
we will not become
the people
God wants us to be
or the church that
God wants us to be
unless we are living in true
Christian community.***

- John Sowers

GOD'S PURPOSE IN FELLOWSHIP: NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE GENESIS 2:18-23

CONNECTING POINT

There's a list of "Connecting Point Questions" in the Appendix. In this month of Fellowship be intentional in using these questions to build your connection with one another. Choose one question each week to get things started as you gather or share a meal or refreshment with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

God, we want to receive and appreciate the gift of fellowship you have for us during our time together today. Help us to be more trusting of each other. Increase our love for one another.
Amen.

OPENING DISCUSSION

Read John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Therefore, our fellowship ought to look different than the culture around us.

Read the quote in the box below.

In what ways are you aware of a need to learn how to do relationships? In your own life? In your small group? In the culture around us?

M. Scott Boren describes a four-hour conversation he had with a friend who was serving as a missionary pastor in Ecuador. "We talked about family, personal interests, ministry, God, and the projects we were working on together. As we drank coffee, he said, "In Ecuador, the people do what we have been doing the last three hours nearly every day. They spend extended time relating to one another. We just use small groups to connect them together with God." In America, people don't relate to one another this way. Therefore, the American church has to learn not only how to do small groups but also how to do relationships."

- M. Scott Boren, [The Relational Way](#)

READ

Genesis 2:18-23

Our fellowship with one another is a gift from God, and a discipline to be nurtured and cultivated.
- John Sowers

DISCUSS

- What do you learn about God from these verses? What do you learn about God's relationship with us?
- What are the different circles of fellowship you have in your life?
- Share a recent experience in which fellowship has been a gift to you.
- What patterns or practices does your group have that help you build intimacy and trust with one another?

REFLECT & RESPOND

Read the box below. This is part of the covenant you agreed to at your first meeting this fall.

Talk about whether or not you are doing these things.

Share how you are, or are not, experiencing good fellowship because of these practices.

How could you improve in your relationship as a group?

LifeTogether@Fellowship

We agree to relate as friends and to care for one another.

- We will celebrate the special events of life with one another. (ie. birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, new jobs, promotions, etc.)
- We will come together at times for fellowship and recreation (picnics, movies, athletic events, etc.)
- We will listen to one another with love.
- We will pray for one another.
- We will provide comfort and help meet practical needs in times of illness or crisis.
- We will contact members when they miss a gathering to check in and to inform them of any plans made by the group.

GROUP PRAYER

Share praises & concerns with one another.

Pray as a group.

NEXT

Plan to do something together this month beyond your normal meetings. Try something different so you have an opportunity to get to know one another better as you interact outside your normal patterns. Find something that is not meeting-like; something that gives you more of a sense of just sharing life together. A change of pace is both healthy and refreshing for groups. See the "Beyond the Meeting" Activities in the Appendix for suggestions.

Remind everyone when and where you will meet next.

Do you have any assignments or plans for in between meetings. If so, make sure everyone is clear about what these are.

Are there some care needs your group should coordinate?

GOD'S PURPOSE IN FELLOWSHIP: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAMILY EPHESIANS 5:21-33 & 6:1-4

CONNECTING POINT

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Read the text in the box below.

How do you respond to Miller's questions?

Boren equates our drive for personal success as a negative aspect of our culture that keeps us from valuing and experiencing fellowship because we don't value relationships. What do you think?

Refrigerator Rights

Miller asks his readers, "How many people in your life right now have refrigerator rights in your home? How many of the people you encounter every day see you unshaven or without makeup? How many people hear you express yourself in that blunt, unguarded way you do with your family? How many can you talk to at a genuine, deep, intimate level? And how many people grant you refrigerator rights? How many people confide in you—tell you about the things that really matter to them?"

- Will Miller, [Refrigerator Rights](#)

"This drive to find "my" personal field of success compels me to focus on my needs, my dreams, and me. Relationships, then, serve my goals. There is little intrinsic value in just relating. In other words, refrigerator rights are not deemed necessary."

- M. Scott Boren, [The Relational Way](#)

READ

Ephesians 5:21-33 & 6:1-4

DISCUSS

- What do these verses tell us to value?
- Discuss what it means to submit to one another.
- Where have you seen or experienced real life demonstrations of these verses? Consider the contexts of family relationships and church relationships.
- How can these verses apply to the family relationship you have with your small group? What does it really look like to submit to one another?

REFLECT & RESPOND

If you haven't already done so, please do the "Reflect & Respond" from the previous lesson.

If you have done this already, please read and discuss the quote in the box below.

"The Biblical story teaches us that God's love cannot be reduced to 'inclusiveness': authentic love calls us to repentance, discipline, sacrifice, and transformation. We can recover the power of love only by insisting that love's meaning is to be discovered in the New Testament's story of Jesus – therefore, in the cross."

- Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

GROUP PRAYER

Share praises & concerns with one another.

Pray as a group.

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GOD'S PURPOSE IN FELLOWSHIP: THE COMMITTED COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH, PART 1 MATTHEW 12:46-50, EPHESIANS 4:25-32 & 5:1-2

CONNECTING POINT

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Therefore, our fellowship ought to look different than the culture around us.

Read the text in the box below.

How do you respond to this?

What conditions do we tend to attach to this command?

Where do you see us doing this well as a church? Where could we improve?

"We think we have the right and duty to decide whom to love and how to love them. But the Bible does not give that right to us. It simply commands us to "love one another." It does not attach conditions to this command."

– Jerry Sittser, *Love One Another*

READ

Read Matthew 12:46-50

Read Ephesians 4:25-32 & 5:1-2

DISCUSS

Consider the verses in Matthew:

- Do the verses challenge your definition of what it means to belong to the church? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to you to be considered a mother or brother or sister of Jesus?
- How does being defined as a family member in relation to one another affect your attitude toward the members of your small group?
- For a more challenging discussion of these verses consider the following: What about people who don't do the will of the Father? Are we told to exclude them from the family? In other words, who is included in the command to love one another? Does inclusion necessarily mean exclusion? Reread the quote by Jerry Sittser in the lesson and the one by Richard Hays in the previous lesson. What other scriptures need to be considered here for a more complete picture of God's intention for us?

REFLECT & RESPOND

Leader: Reread the verses in Ephesians one or two times. Ask everyone to listen for one thing God is asking them to work on. After you read, give everyone some time to reflect. Invite them to write their thoughts if they wish.

Leader: Invite group members to share what they will work on. Don't go around the circle forcing everyone to share. Simply open up a time to give the opportunity. It is helpful if you start the sharing to model what is expected. Keep it brief—you don't need to put in too much detail. Model what would be a comfortable depth of confession for your group. And, model a good length of time for what is shared.

GROUP PRAYER

Pray as a group.

Open or close your prayer time by reading Jesus' prayer for us in John 17.

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Remind everyone when and where you will meet next and any assignments or plans you have made. Coordinate meeting care needs, if necessary.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN FELLOWSHIP: THE COMMITTED COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH, PART 2 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-26

CONNECTING POINT

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Therefore, our fellowship ought to look different than the culture around us.

Read the text in the box below.

How do you respond to this?

In what ways are you aware of the difficult task of thinking and responding corporately more than individually? How does your group help with this? What cultural factors continually pull you into an individualistic mindset?

"The primary sphere of moral concern (in scripture) is not the character of the individual but the corporate obedience of the church... we seek God's will not by asking first 'What should I do,' but 'What should we do?'"

-Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*

READ

1 Corinthians 12:14-26

RESPOND & PRAY

Group Activity

Put each person in the “center/heart of the circle.”

Take turns telling this person what you appreciate about them. Name the gifts that this person brings to your group.

Group Prayer

Prayer for each individual after you affirm them.

DISCUSS & RESPOND

- Who sees evidence of the good fellowship you enjoy as a group? How is your fellowship with one another a witness to God and his intention for relationships?
- If you have done a service project recently or fellowship activity beyond your regular meetings consider how your fellowship was shared with others. What did you do well? Are there ways you could have been more intentional in extending fellowship to demonstrate Christ’s love to others?
- How do you see your group fitting into the broader FPC community? Does your group serve as a particular aspect of the FPC body? In what ways is your group a small representation of the body?
- Talk about how the command to submit to one another and the design of our different roles in the body work together.
- Is there are group of people or are there individuals at FPC who you are especially appreciative of? Maybe it is someone who fulfills a role or provides a service that is different from what your group is gifted to do. Maybe it is someone who doesn’t get shown appreciation very often. Or, maybe it is someone who could just use someone else acknowledging that they are part of the body of Christ—increasing their sense of belonging. Take some time as a group to send a gift of affirmation to this person or group. Have everyone in your group write a sentence or two about what you appreciate about them and put this in the mail.

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Remind everyone when and where you will meet next and any assignments or plans you have made. Coordinate meeting care needs, if necessary.

CONNCETING POINT QUESTIONS

Questions About Relational Life Right Now

What was the best conversation you had this week?

Have each person share their best and worst interactions with people from the previous week.

What is a good thing happening in a relationship in your life right now? What makes it good?

Questions About Relationships

What quality do you appreciate most in a friend?

What is one characteristic you received from you parents that you want to keep, and one you wish you could change?

When and how did you first meet your spouse?

What three things do (or did) you most like about your father? About your mother?

What is the first thing you notice about someone when you first meet?

Who was your best friend growing up and why?

What is a rule your family had when you were growing up that you really appreciate now that you are an adult? What is a rule that really drove you crazy?

Questions on the Theme of Food or Meals

What is the weirdest thing you have eaten?

If you are at a friend's or relative's house for dinner and you find a dead insect in your salad, what would you do?

If you could have an endless supply of any food, what would you get?

If you sat down next to Jesus at a dinner party, what would you talk about?

Name something you've had in your refrigerator for a long time.

Questions Just for Fun

What book, movie or video have you seen/read recently you would recommend? Why?

If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be? Why?

If you could learn any skill, what would it be?

What is your favorite bumper sticker?

Name a hidden talent you have.

You've been exiled to a deserted island for a year. In addition to the essentials, you may take one piece of music, one book (not the Bible) and one luxury item you can carry with you (not a boat to leave the island). What would you take? Why?

If you were sent to live on a space station for three months and only allowed to bring three personal items with you, what would they be?

“BEYOND THE MEETING” ACTIVITIES

Do something together this month beyond your normal meetings. Try something different so you have an opportunity to get to know one another better as you interact outside your normal patterns. Find something that is not meeting-like; something that gives you more of a sense of just sharing life together. No agenda; just enjoy being together. A change of pace is both healthy and refreshing for groups.

Here are some Ideas . . .

Go Bowling Together. You might find some hidden talents in your group. Call a local bowling alley to find out when they have lanes open.

Jubilee Dinner: Eat dinner together at the Jubilee Sale at the church on Friday evening November 11th. There are more details in the November newsletter. Shop together for Fair Trade items before or after dinner.

Watch a movie together. Don't forget the popcorn and other snacks.

If you'd like to choose a movie to spur some conversation related to our focus on fellowship then consider the following movies that have community relationships as their primary theme: *Babette's Feast*, *Remember the Titans*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Pay It Forward*, *Barbershop*, *Lean on Me*, *Coach Carter*, *Akeelah and the Bee*, *March of the Penguins*. Ask for suggestions from the group.

Attend a Coffee Ceremony together. Ethiopia's coffee ceremony is an integral part of their social and cultural life. An invitation to attend a coffee ceremony is considered a mark of friendship or respect and is an excellent example of Ethiopian hospitality. Queen of Sheba is an Ethiopian Restaurant in the Flour Mill that serves coffee through ceremony on Saturdays until 3:30pm. To find out more go to their website at www.queenofshebaspokane.com. You need to call them ahead to make a reservation.

Do something for others together. There are suggestions in the Appendix of the October Small Group Guide. If your group would like some help determining a service project please contact Brenda Norton at brendan@spokanefpc.org or 747-1058 x220.

Cook a meal together. Don't just bring food to share a meal; actually cook together. It's a bonding experience around food that includes hospitality, creativity, team work, communication and more. You might want to divide into small teams with responsibility for each part of the meal.

Host a "Game Night." Get together for an evening to play games. Group game suggestions: Bunko, Pictionary, Charades, Nerts, Dominoes, Spoons,

Spend time intentionally affirming one another. Take turns having each group member sit in the center of the circle and have everyone shower him or her with heartfelt affirmation. Statements can begin with, "You're important to our group because ... " Everyone needs this kind of affirmation from time to time. This would be a good thing to do after sharing a meal or dessert with one another.

Shop together for our Christmas Toy Store. Plan a day to go shopping. Have everyone bring some cash to pool together. Plan to pass a bag around so group members can put cash in it without having to disclose how much they are contributing. Pass the bag around as gather to go shopping. After everyone has had a chance to contribute count the money to establish your budget. Go shopping for some toys that you will bring to the church by December 4th. We'll be inviting parents from some of our Mission Partners to our Toy Store on December 10th to shop for toys for their children for Christmas.

Meet up to go on a walk or hike. Centennial Trail and Manito Park are both very accessible. You might also consider the Fish Lake Trail off the Cheney Spokane Rd or Dishman Hills with access off of Sprague Ave at Sargent Rd.

Share a hobby. Does someone in your group have a hobby that everyone could try or learn about? Get together and have that group member lead the group in a demonstration or activity they can participate in.

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