Jesus' Church group study

Lesson 4
The Fellowship

this book belongs to date

Make the Most of this Study

The following recommendations will help your Jesus' Church Study Group experience the intended outcomes:

- 1. Each lesson builds upon the previous lesson, so work together and find a way to cover all seven lessons in as close to seven weeks as possible.
- 2. Invite everyone to bring their Bibles and pens.
- 3. If possible, sit at a table to be able to read, write, snack, and be closer to one another.
- * Supplemental teaching videos and downloadable booklets are all available through the BFAM App. Visit: https://bit.ly/BFAMapp or scan the QR code.



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Though the ESV and certain English versions do not capitalize divine pronouns, they have been capitalized in this resource.

Copyright © 2022, BFAM Resources A Solid Lives Ministry "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,

and the fellowship,

to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:42

04 | The Fellowship

Welcome to Lesson Four of the Jesus' Church group study! Let's open in prayer and ask God to teach us today about Jesus' Church. [Open in prayer.]

Before we begin this week's lesson, let's each take no more than 30 to 60 seconds to share about something we received from this past week's scriptures.

[Invite everyone to share.]

Thanks to each of you for sharing. At the end of this lesson, you'll find this week's 7-Day Plan. Once again, we'll take 10 to 15 minutes a day to read a short Scripture passage, write the answer to a question or two, and pray that God will use us that day to minister to people.

One more reminder: in our next lesson we will be studying, "The Bread," and sharing The Lord's Supper (communion). To do this let's make sure someone brings bread or crackers and some juice, such as grape juice. [Ask: Would anyone be willing to bring these two elements to our next gathering?]

The Priorities of Jesus' Church

Okay, let's begin Lesson Four. So far, we've learned that the foundation of Jesus' Church is the divine revelation of the person of Jesus Christ and our faith-filled response and obedience to Him. We've also learned that being filled with the Holy Spirit provides every member of Jesus' Church with the power to be personally built up, to build up other believers, and to impact the world. In our last lesson we learned that God uses the apostles' teaching—especially the New Testament—to teach us how to be the Church Jesus wants us to be, and we learned about the four priorities the apostles taught the early church. Today's lesson is about the second of these four priorities, "The Fellowship."

Let's begin by reading about the four priorities again in Acts 2:42:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Remember that the definite article "the" before each of the four priorities shows us that the members of the Acts 2 church were devoted to very specific priorities taught by the 12 apostles. Therefore, they were devoted to a very specific kind of "fellowship."

What is The Fellowship?

The Greek word translated "fellowship" in this verse is *koinonia* (koynohn-ee´-ah). *Koinonia* is a term that conveys a sense of commonality, solidarity, and shared responsibility. In the New Testament, *koinonia* carries two primary ideas: first, "to have a share in" (Romans 15:27), and second, "to give a share to" (Romans 12:13). Thus *koinonia*, or "the fellowship," is both a benefit and a responsibility.

Koinonia is used about 20 times in the New Testament, and much insight can be gained by simply studying how it is translated and used in each of those passages. Here are some of the things we learn about *koinonia*.

- Koinonia is partnership. In Philippians 1:5 the apostle Paul used koinonia to describe the "partnership" in the spreading of the gospel that he and the believers in Philippi shared. So "partnership" is part of the koinonia.
- Koinonia is contribution. In Romans 15:26 koinonia is used to describe a financial "contribution" or donation for poor believers in Jerusalem. So the giving of resources is part of the koinonia.
- Koinonia is sacrificial sharing. In Hebrews 13:16 koinonia is translated "share." This verse says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." So sacrificial sharing is part of the koinonia.
- Koinonia is participation. In Philippians 3:10 koinonia is translated "participation." The verse says, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" (NIV). Paul's deep appreciation of Jesus' sacrifice made him want to participate in Jesus' sufferings so that more people could hear about Jesus and be saved. So participation is part of the koinonia.

Koinonia is a term that conveys a sense of commonality, solidarity, and shared responsibility.

You can see that when Acts 2:42 says the early church members were devoted to "the fellowship," it means much more than getting together and socializing. They were devoted to a *partnership* with each other, to making financial *contributions* to one another when there was a need, to sacrificially *sharing* their lives with one another, and to *participating* in Christ's sufferings in order to reach the world.

This is what is meant by "the fellowship." It is what Jesus intended for His Church. So when we use the word "fellowship" in these lessons, it means this kind of New Testament *koinonia*.

They were devoted to a partnership, to making financial contributions, to sacrificially sharing, and to participating in Christ's sufferings in order to reach the world.

The Fellowship of the Early Church

Now some may wonder if the early church of Acts 2 really understood this kind of fellowship since none of these New Testament passages had been written yet. Let's read Acts 2:41–47 and find out:

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Once you understand the New Testament's usage of *koinonia*, it's easy to see that these early believers did indeed understand it, and they were devoted to it. For example:

Verse 44 says, "All who believed were together and had all things in common." That's the sacrificial sharing commanded in Hebrews 13:5.

Verse 45 says, "They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." That's the kind of financial contribution Paul wrote about in Romans 15:26.

And Verse 47 says, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The simple fact that people continued to be saved, day after day after day, is evidence that the early church was committed to both a Philippians 1:5 kind of partnership in the gospel and a Philippians 3:10 kind of participation in the sufferings of Christ.

How in the world did these early Christians understand what was expected of them as part of the fellowship of Jesus' Church? The apostles of Jesus taught them. And where did the apostles learn it? They learned it from Jesus. Remember, the apostles did not only learn about the fellowship through Jesus' teaching, but they also experienced it as they watched Him live this kind of sacrificial life. And then at the end, when He was under extreme pressure to save Himself, they watched Him deny Himself yet again and give His very life.

Jesus died because He Himself was devoted to the fellowship of His Church. Long before asking anyone in His Church to commit to this fellowship, He committed Himself to it. His sacrifice was both an invitation into, and an explanation of, the fellowship. It was an invitation into this fellowship because it communicated, "This is how much I'm willing to sacrifice for the opportunity to be in fellowship with you for eternity." His sacrifice was also an explanation because He was demonstrating how all would be expected to live if they chose to be part of the fellowship.

His sacrifice was both an invitation into, and an explanation of, the fellowship.

Friends, we are being invited into the very fellowship that Jesus started. And here's the best part: Jesus is still participating in this fellowship. Observe how the apostle John invites us into this fellowship in 1 John 1:3:

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is amazing! At the time John wrote this letter it had been over 50 years since he and the other apostles had walked with Jesus, yet they were still enjoying that same fellowship with Him. And their fellowship was not only with Jesus; they were now also enjoying fellowship with Father God. But wait, is Father God part of the fellowship of Jesus' Church? Oh yes, He is. And He proved it by making a great and personal sacrifice for it. Remember John 3:16? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." If the Father had not made this personal sacrifice, there would be no fellowship, there would be no salvation, and there would be no Church. So yes, indeed, the Father is very much a part of the fellowship of Jesus' Church! And it would be a shame not to stop and acknowledge an obvious truth: If Father God and His Son Jesus made such great sacrifice so that we might have the privilege of being in this fellowship with them, shouldn't we be full of gratitude and count it an honor to sacrifice for it? We can answer this with a resounding "Yes!"

Now that we understand that John was in fellowship with Father God and Jesus, let's read his invitation to us once again from 1 John 1:3:

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Notice that over 50 years after John and the other apostles had joined the fellowship, he was still actively and passionately inviting others into it. And since this is a part of the New Testament, we know that this invitation is being extended to us as well.

Jeguz is now teaching us what fellowship means and inviting us into it.

Considering what we've studied so far, do most believers today really understand what it means to be in the fellowship of Jesus' Church? To some, the answer to that question may be debatable, but what should be very clear is that Jesus' apostles and the Acts 2 church understood a lot about it. And it should also be clear that Jesus is now teaching us what fellowship means and inviting us into it.

We'll study more about the practical elements of the fellowship in next week's lesson, but let's now turn our attention to some of the spiritual elements.

He says "whenever you come together," each person should have something to share to build up the body.

The Fellowship of Spiritual Things

The New Testament teaches us that the fellowship of believers should not only include the sharing of natural things, but it should also include sharing spiritual things. Read what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26:

"Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up" (CSB).

In this passage, Paul teaches us something significant. We'll talk about some of the details mentioned in a moment, but let's not miss the large and obvious directive he is giving us. He says "whenever you come together," each person should have something to share to build up the body. This tells us that the New Testament church was not a gathering where a few gifted people sang and spoke while everyone else watched and enjoyed. It was, rather, a gathering where everyone would have something to contribute. Now that the Holy Spirit had been poured out, everyone could be filled with the Holy Spirit. And once they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they could contribute something spiritual.

The New Testament church was intended to be like a spiritual potluck, where each member contributes different kinds of spiritual nourishment. This idea is repeated again and again throughout the New Testament. Let's read a few examples, beginning with a prophecy from Jesus:

- In John 7:38–39, Jesus said, "'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given" (NKJV). So Jesus predicted that when the Holy Spirit was poured out, believers would have spiritual rivers of living water flowing out from their hearts, and the first spiritual rivers mentioned in Acts 2 were speaking in tongues and prophesying.
- In Acts 2:16–18, Peter said, "But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." So Peter tells us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was what Joel had prophesied about, and that this outpouring now meant that people young and old, male and female, rich and poor, would all prophesy.
- 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, "You can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged." So Paul tells us again that all believers can prophesy by the power of the Holy Spirit. He also tells us that when everyone prophesies, everyone also learns and is encouraged.
- 1 Corinthians 14:39 says, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (NASB). Here Paul tells us—because of the great benefit to other believers—that we should all earnestly desire to prophesy. And though Paul had said earlier that tongues without interpretation does not benefit others, he clarifies here that we should still not forbid speaking in tongues when we gather.

"You can all prophecy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged."

Just as there is more food at a potluck because everyone brings a dish, the New Testament teaches that because of the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus' Church should have an unending abundance of spiritual nourishment.

Let's now acknowledge an obvious challenge with this New Testament practice. If we're in a large crowd, how would everyone have a chance to share something with the rest who are gathered? Practically speaking, there wouldn't be enough time. But remember, church gatherings in the New Testament primarily took place in homes with smaller groups of people. This practice was not due to an insufficient number of people to fill a building—the church grew to over 3,000 on the first day! It was simply what the apostles of Jesus taught them to do. They did not spend time or money on buildings; they used what was already available and focused on ministering to people.

Jezuz' Church should have an unending abundance of spiritual nourishment.

Now before anyone rashly abandons their large, campus-style church, let's remember that God has effectively used a variety of church styles and sizes over the centuries, and He will no doubt continue to do so going forward. In fact, the New Testament speaks of a model that includes both large and small gatherings. For example, Acts 2:46 says that in Jerusalem the early church was "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes." This is not describing two different churches or denominations, but rather it speaks of two distinct ways that the same members of the early church would gather.

Similarly, about 25 years later, Paul said to the elders of the churches of Ephesus, "[I] have taught you publicly and from house to house." So we can see that there are benefits to both large and small gatherings.

Then what are we saying? In order for everyone to participate in the fellowship described in the New Testament, there must be regular, small church gatherings. However, a New Testament church is not developed simply by gathering in small groups. People must be taught about the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Spirit.

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In order for everyone to participate in the fellowship described in the New Testament, there must be regular, small church gatherings.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, the apostle Paul says:

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed."

Paul knew that if the people of Jesus' Church were not taught about the gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit, believers in the body of Christ would not know how to share and receive spiritual things. There are, no doubt, many reasons these spiritual things are not taught to believers today, but one reason is that they are simply impractical in a large gathering. And again, this is why Jesus has called us to gather in smaller groups. He's re-teaching us, through the New Testament, how to be the Church He wants us to be.

As Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 12, he lists nine gifts or ways that the Holy Spirit manifests Himself to help believers strengthen and build up one another. These gifts are not given to individuals to build or benefit themselves. Instead, the gifts are given to build up and benefit others. In other words, they are to be part of the fellowship of Jesus' Church.

Now let's read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11:

"A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: 8 to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, 9 to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. 11 One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as He wills" (CSB).

Notice that Paul says in verse 7, "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good," and then in verse 11, "One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing [gifts] to each person." This is one of the primary reasons the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was such a world-changing event. Now every believer can be filled with the Spirit, and every believer can be used by God to minister to others by the power of the Holy Spirit. We've included a brief description of each of the nine gifts of the Spirit at the end of this lesson to read at your convenience.

Now every believer can be filled with the Spirit, and every believer can be used by God to minister to others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

An Invitation into The Fellowship

Friends, we have received an invitation to join the fellowship of Jesus' Church as He intended it. This invitation is not only to be believers—many of us have been saved for years. Rather, this invitation is to be active, Holy Spirit-empowered participants in the fellowship. As a part of this fellowship, you will love and be loved. You will support and be supported. You will encourage and be encouraged. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will strengthen and build up and be strengthened and built up.

How should we accept this invitation? We can accept it as a group when we close in prayer; however, if praying is the only thing we do, it will reveal that we either misunderstood what we learned in this lesson or that we didn't accept the invitation. So, what if we take about 10 minutes in our next meeting to have a spiritual potluck? As we do our 7-Day Plan this week, let's each pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give us something to bring to our next meeting that will encourage or build someone up. It may be an encouraging prophetic word for someone or the whole group. It may be one of the other gifts of the Spirit. It could even be a one-minute teaching that you feel the Holy Spirit has given you for our group, or it could be a song to sing. Whatever it is, it should be inspired by the Holy Spirit and shared only to strengthen and build each other up. In the 7-Day Plan, there's an extra space allocated to jot down what you sense the Holy Spirit is giving you to share next week.

Now, before we pray to receive this invitation and allow the Holy Spirit to use us to minister to one another, let's take a few minutes to discuss what we are learning.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Considering what we studied in this lesson about *koinonia* fellowship, what advantages are there to meeting regularly in a small church gathering, such as a house church?
- 2. Read Acts 2:42–46 again before discussing this question: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts."

What aspects of the fellowship in the Acts 2 church should also be part of the fellowship of Jesus' Church today?

(continued on next page)

Discussion Questions (continued)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26 again before discussing this question:

"Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up" (CSB).

Based on this verse, what should be the purpose or motive for every spiritual gift or ministry shared? What wrong motives could have adverse effects on the fellowship Jesus intended?

4. What must we do or change to have true New Testament fellowship?

Close in Prayer

As we close, let's first pray together to accept Jesus' invitation into the fellowship of His Church. Then, let's break into groups of two or three to pray for each other. And if you sense the Holy Spirit may be giving you something to share, be bold and share it, but also be gentle and considerate of one another. And here's a suggestion: Instead of saying something like, "The Lord is saying . . ," let's say something like, "This is what I sense . . ." or "This is what I heard/felt/saw/thought. . ."

[Pray together to accept the invitation into the fellowship, and then break into groups.]

"A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good"
1 Corinthian 12:7

7-Day Plan | Week Four

Day 1 | My daily scripture and prayer Read: Acts 2:42-46 Write: What effect did these four priorities have on the church at large? What does the effect seem to be on each individual? Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people. This week, the Lord is going to give you a word, a phrase, a sense, or a direction about what to share with your Jesus' Church gathering. As you pray, use the space below to draft notes to bring with you. Day 2 | My daily scripture and prayer Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Write: How many are gifted with spiritual gifts? Should you expect to operate in these gifts? [Note: Wondering about these spiritual gifts? See the appendix following this lesson to learn more.

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 3 My daily scripture and prayer
Read: 1 Corinthians 14:26–33 Write: Who should be prepared to share when the Church gathers?
Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.
Day 4 My daily scripture and prayer Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 Write: Which members of Jesus' Church are the most important? Do you recognize your value as a member of His body?
Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.
Day 5 My daily scripture and prayer Read: 1 John 1:1–9 Write: What can interrupt–or even destroy–our fellowship with God and each other?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 6 My daily scripture and prayer Read: 1 Corinthians 1:9 Write: Looking back at this lesson and some of the definitions of "fellowship," rewrite this verse according to what it means to be "called into the fellowship of His Son."
Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and
ask Him to use you to minister to people.
Reminder. Don't forget to ask the Lord for something to share when you come together this week. He is teaching us how to step out (even little by little) in the flow of His Spirit.
Day 7 My daily scripture and prayer Read: Acts 6:1–7 Write: Why would understanding "the fellowship" lead the church to have a daily distribution for widows?

ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Additional Notes

Appendix - The Fellowship

A Brief Explanation of

The Nine Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:7–11 (CSB): "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: 8 to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, 9 to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. 11 One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as He wills."

- A message (or word) of wisdom: This is not merely good advice from a wise person. That would be a manifestation of the person's own wisdom. This is the Holy Spirit giving a person a message of supernatural wisdom for someone else. It is like when Jesus told Peter to go and cast a hook into the Sea of Galilee and then told Peter that the first fish he would catch would have a coin in its mouth and be enough to pay the temple tax (Matthew 17:27). Such wisdom required the help of the Holy Spirit.
- A message (or word) of knowledge: Again, this is not merely a person conveying knowledge that he has learned, but it is something the Holy Spirit reveals. One example is when Jesus told the woman at the well that she had been married to five different husbands and that the man she was now with was not her husband (John 4:17–18). Again, having never met her, such knowledge required the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Faith: Though similar to normal faith in that it is believing something that cannot be seen, the gift of faith is unique in that it is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7) and occurs as the Holy Spirit wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). The gift of faith seemed to be in operation when Paul boldly told a sorcerer that he would be temporarily blind, and immediately a dark mist fell on the sorcerer and he went blind (Acts 13:9–12).
- Gifts of healing: In the original Greek text, both gifts and healing are plural. Unlike Jesus' promise of "recovery" for the sick on whom believers laid their hands in His name (Mark 16:17–18), gifts of healing are instant healings that manifest immediately, such as when Jesus healed the leper immediately in Matthew 8:1–3.

- The performing of miracles: These are supernatural occurrences that defy natural laws, such as when Jesus turned water into wine in a moment's time (John 2:1–10).
- Prophecy: This is a supernatural, real-time message from God. Though prophecy can sometimes be predictive, 1 Corinthians 14:3 says prophecy is to build people up, encourage them, and/or comfort them. When John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied encouraging and comforting words about how God was bringing His promises to pass for His people Israel (Luke 1:67–79).
- Distinguishing between spirits: This is either seeing or supernaturally discerning the activity or types of spirits affecting a certain person or scenario. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find the story of a father who brought his son to Jesus to be delivered from a demon. The father told Jesus that the boy had seizures and a mute spirit, but when Jesus cast the spirit out, He said, "You mute and deaf spirit." Jesus discerned that it was also a "deaf" spirit.
- Different kinds of tongues [or languages]: Unlike praying in tongues, which is speaking to God to build up oneself (1 Corinthians 14:2–4, 18; Jude 1:20), this gift is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit that happens as the Holy Spirit wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). The gift or manifestation of tongues is a prophetic message from God to people, and it is like prophecy except that it's in a language unknown to the one delivering it and usually to the one(s) receiving it. This gift must be accompanied by "the interpretation of tongues" to have the equal benefit of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:5).
- Interpretation of tongues: This gift is only needed when God speaks a message in an unknown language. There is actually a vivid example in the Old Testament of God giving a message in an unknown language and it being interpreted. Daniel was known to have the Spirit of God in him (Daniel 5:11, 14). One day, God used His finger to write a message on a wall to King Belshazzar, but He chose to write it in an unknown language. When the king learned that Daniel had the Spirit of God in him, he summoned Daniel and asked him to interpret the message, which Daniel did (Daniel 5:25–28).

