

# FELLOWSHIP

“ They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ”

# HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

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## Remember the context

This Holy Habit is set in the context of ten Holy Habits, and the ongoing life of your church and community.

**They devoted themselves to** the apostles' teaching and **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:42-47

## A prayer for the faithful practice of Holy Habits

This prayer starts with a passage from Romans 5:4-5.

Endurance produces character, and character produces hope,  
and hope does not disappoint us...

Gracious and ever-loving God, we offer our lives to you.  
Help us always to be open to your Spirit in our thoughts  
and feelings and actions.

Support us as we seek to learn more about those habits of the Christian life  
which, as we practise them, will form in us the character of Jesus  
by establishing us in the way of faith, hope and love.

Amen

# INTRODUCTION

The Greek word translated as **Fellowship** in Acts 2 is *koinonia*. It is a word rich in depth, meaning and challenge. It points to a quality of relationship and activity which is so much deeper than the chit-chat over a tepid cup of tea and a soggy digestive that sadly sometimes passes for **Fellowship**.

*Koinonia* is profoundly practical and deeply relational. John Stott argues that *koinonia* 'is a Trinitarian experience, it is our common share in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (*The Message of Acts*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1990, p. 83). In Acts 2, *koinonia* is seen in followers of Jesus eating, praying and sharing goods together. In short, sharing their lives with each other and the world around them, in a prophetic symbol of the kingdom of God: a powerful sign of a Spirit-filled way of life that stands against sinful selfishness; a wonder of hope, reconciliation and generosity; a true community of belonging and service. Through the practical expression of Christ-like love, *koinonia* draws people to Jesus, nurturing and sustaining disciples. It is evangelistic (good news), pastoral, practical and formative.

There is a risk that in deepening **Fellowship**, Christians can become insular. So, as you explore this habit, let us keep asking how can we, personally and collectively, practise this habit beyond the **Fellowship** of the gathered church, in our places of work, in the community and especially with those who suffer or are disconnected?



Resources particularly suitable for children and families



Resources particularly suitable for young people

- CH4 Church Hymnary 4 (also known as Hymns of Glory Songs of Praise)
- RS Rejoice and Sing
- SoF Songs of Fellowship 6
- StF Singing the Faith

## Reflections

**Fellowship** invokes images of close, supportive, personal relationships, including: small groups of mutual care and sharing and times of prayer, study and conversation with fellow Christians, as well as being nurtured in our spiritual lives through the encouragement and companionship of our friends in the Christian community. These are powerful expressions of **Fellowship** to be celebrated, nurtured and encouraged, reminding us of our need to draw alongside one another prayerfully and supportively on our faith journey.

Our Christian faith is not simply a private, personal affair; it unites us to one another through Christ and is at its most enriching and life-giving when experienced in **Fellowship** and community with each other and with God. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20, KJV). But we must be careful not to confuse **Fellowship** with closed groups which have formed such strong relationships and bonds that it is very difficult for others to be welcomed and embraced within them. **Fellowship/koinonia** by its very definition is a celebration both of loving gracious relationships and of open-heartedness towards others.

A church in the Birmingham Methodist Circuit, which first developed these resources, was blessed by the joy and challenge of welcoming a young couple seeking asylum. They enriched the **Fellowship** which the members of the church shared, and connected them with diverse experiences of another culture which has a particular emphasis on hospitality, caring and generosity of spirit, despite the hostility they have faced.

As you ponder **Fellowship**, reflect upon the ways in which you practise *koinonia* in your church and small groups. Give thanks for and celebrate those expressions of relationship with God and each other. Consider prayerfully and honestly how we sometimes fall short of the glory of God by neglecting our need for Christian **Fellowship**. How far does our **Fellowship** echo the self-giving gracious nature of our Trinitarian God's relationship with us and all?



## Introduction to the theme

### Luke 19:1-10

Retell the story of Zacchaeus being restored to **Fellowship**, using your preferred translation of the Bible (consider a children's Bible), or show a video clip such as the 'Brick Bible' version ([youtu.be/DdOSWhqQwhw](https://youtu.be/DdOSWhqQwhw), or search YouTube for 'Brick Bible Zacchaeus').

- At the start of the story, we see Zacchaeus is alone and has no friends. How do you think he feels about having no friends?
- Does the story have a happy ending?
- Why does the story end on a positive note?

Because Zacchaeus returns the money he has wrongly taken, we assume he is welcomed back by his neighbours. He can be friends with people again because Jesus has shown what it means to be a true friend.

Today, we are thinking about the Holy Habit of **Fellowship**.

Let's look up the dictionary definition of the word '**Fellowship**'. (Find a suitable volunteer to look up the word in a paper or electronic dictionary. The definition should read something like this: **Fellowship** is friendship or companionship based on shared interests or a shared aim.)

So, let's think again about the story of Zacchaeus.

Consider the things that are good examples of **Fellowship** within the story and the things that are not good examples of **Fellowship**.

I am going to read out some statements about the story of Zacchaeus. If you think that the statement shows a good example of **Fellowship**, give a thumbs-up sign and I will put that statement in the red box/bucket/bag. If you think that the statement does NOT show a good example of **Fellowship**, put your thumbs down and I will put that statement in the yellow box/bucket/bag. (In a church with digital projection facilities, an electronic version of this activity could be devised.)

### Good examples of fellowship

- Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house for a meal
- Zacchaeus is honest about the wrong way he has treated people
- Zacchaeus returns the money
- Zacchaeus is seen as a 'Son of Abraham', not as an outsider.

### Not good examples of fellowship

- Zacchaeus is alone in the crowd
- Zacchaeus tries to get above everyone else so that he can listen to Jesus
- Zacchaeus is greedy and dishonest by taking other people's money.

### Message

The Bible includes stories where Jesus meets characters like Zacchaeus, whom no one wanted to be friends with, where Jesus brings the person into **Fellowship** with God and with people around them. It is easy for us to have **Fellowship** and be friends with people we like but Jesus encourages us also to have **Fellowship** with people we don't like as much. We need to ask for God's help to start such friendships and to keep them going when life is difficult as well as when life is happy.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for being our friend. Help us to be good friends to others and to live in fellowship. Teach us to respect others, to listen to them and work together in the ways of justice and peace.

Amen

# GROUP MATERIAL AND ACTIVITIES

Some of these small group materials are traditional Bible studies, some are more diverse session plans and others are short activities, reflections and discussions. Please choose materials appropriate to whatever group you are working with.

## *Koinonia* 😊

### Acts 2:42 and other verses

Discuss what the group think the word ‘**Fellowship**’ means, and possibly mind map on a large sheet of paper. Perhaps use questions such as: What is **Fellowship**? What does **Fellowship** look like/feel like? Are you in **Fellowship** with anyone?

Explain that the Greek word in the original text is *koinonia*, which appears 20 times in the New Testament, the first in Acts 2:42.

Share the meaning of *koinonia*: **Fellowship**, sharing in common, communion. Christian **Fellowship** is a key aspect of Christian life. Believers in Christ are to come together in love, faith, and encouragement. It involves a willingness to share life in depth. That is the essence of *koinonia*. In a world where people are often self-centred, it is deeply countercultural – a prophetic symbol of the kingdom of God.

Look at *koinonia* through what it means to be with ‘one another’. Discuss and/or mind map how you should behave around one another and treat one another.

### Further study

Look at some of the following texts about being with one another and discuss what is happening in the text, how it relates to our lives, how we feel about what it is telling us to do. If possible, look at the same text in different versions of the Bible to see what the impact on meaning is (for example *THE MESSAGE*, *The Word on the Street*, *NRSV*).

A powerful example of what *koinonia* should look like can be found in a study of the phrase ‘one another’ in the Bible. Scripture commands us to:

- be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)
- honour one another (Romans 12:10)
- live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8)
- accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13)
- be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
- encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13)
- spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
- offer hospitality (1 Peter 4:9)
- love one another (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12)

That is what true biblical *koinonia* should look like.

Resources based on this exploration of ‘one another’ can be found later on in this booklet.

### Final prayers

Sit in a circle. With one person starting, each person prays for the person on their left. Move around the circle until everyone has been prayed for. Give the option of praying aloud or in silence – if praying in silence, people will need to say ‘Amen’ at the end of their prayer.

## Entertaining angels

### Genesis 18:1–16

Read the passage and explore these questions:

- What are your first thoughts on reading this passage?
- What questions do you have?

It would be an insult to the community if hospitality was not offered. Certain acts like washing of feet were a sign of acceptance of people at face value. Rest and relaxation would be part of the hospitality along with a meal. On leave taking, there should be peace between host and visitor.

- 1 Who are these three visitors?
- 2 How does Abraham show hospitality?
- 3 How can we as a church or as individuals do the same?

- 4 How does Abraham serve the visitors with love?
- 5 How can we serve others within and outside the church?
- 6 How does Abraham show acceptance?
- 7 How easy is it for us to show acceptance and why might it be important to do so?
- 8 Is it significant that in verse 13 the voice becomes that of 'the Lord' and what does this say to us?
- 9 Hebrews 13:2 says, 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' How could this verse help us to think about **Fellowship** in a different way?

The idea of **Fellowship** with God is also an important one. In Philippians 3:10, Paul says: 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.'

In 2 Corinthians 13:13, Paul also prays that we have **Fellowship** with the Holy Spirit – something we regularly say in the words of the 'Grace'. How then do we see our **Fellowship** with God? What does it entail and why is it important?

In the icon by Andrei Rublev, known as *The Hospitality of Abraham* and also as *The Trinity* (find it online), we have an idea of what **Fellowship** with God might be. The picture shows the three angels who visited Abraham, but is also full of symbolism, often interpreted as the Trinity. Around the head of each figure is a circle of light or halo, to show holiness. As you draw your gaze further out from the picture, you see that, in relation to each other, the figures also form a circle. However, the circle is not complete, for there is a space at the table which draws the onlooker in. There is also a place at the table for those outside this group. What is also clear is that, while the figures have a relationship together, they are sitting in such a way that they also look outward, so they have communion with each other and with those beyond them.

- 1 How might this picture help us to understand **Fellowship** with God both for Abraham and ourselves?
- 2 What other things would you say were useful to help explain **Fellowship** with God?
- 3 What personal examples or anecdotes might you be willing to share to illustrate your **Fellowship** with God?
- 4 The figures in the icon look outward. What can we do to try to extend our hospitality, service and acceptance both within and beyond our church?
- 5 Spend some time in silent reflection thinking about what it means to be in **Fellowship** with one another and with God. Is God calling you to change?

# ARTS AND MEDIA

There are many films and books containing scenes about **Fellowship** which could be used as an illustration in worship. However, it is suggested that the following films and books are watched or read in their entirety and followed by a discussion to go deeper into the topic of **Fellowship**.

## Films

**Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** (PG, 2011, 2h32m)

The Harry Potter novels and films chronicle the life of a young wizard, Harry Potter, and his friends.

**Fellowship** is at the heart of Harry's journey through the whole series of films as he faces all sorts of unforeseen dangers and situations. The first film, based on the book of the same name, introduces the main players and the events which first build their **Fellowship**.

- Harry enters a new world, a world about which he knew nothing until he heard from Hogwarts. How does Harry's experience of joining the magical community as a relatively uninformed outsider challenge our understanding of being 'in' or 'out' of the **Fellowship** of the church?
- Who are the 'muggles' in our communities? How do we practise **Fellowship** with them?

**The Help** (12A, 2011, 2h26m)

Set in the American south in the 1960s, a southern society girl is determined to be a writer. She chooses to write about the local black women who are the hired help for the white families, a potentially dangerous book to write during the turbulent era of segregation. Based on the book of the same name, this is a story of courage and friendship, of divisions and strengths within communities.

- Where do you see the most powerful displays of friendship and **Fellowship** in this film?
- What are the values that underpin the different communities in the film, and the **Fellowship** that exists as a result?
- What might be a similarly risky subject to write about in your context today? What does this say about who might be excluded from **Fellowship**?



## **The Lion King** (U, 1994, 1h29m)

A film that captures divisions in family and community that lead to a time away from home. Ultimately, there is reconciliation and restoration into community.

- Where and how does Simba find **Fellowship** when he flees his community?
- What responsibility do we have to remain in **Fellowship** with those among whom God has ‘cast our lot’?

## **The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring**

(PG, 2001, 2h58m)

When a long-lost ring of dark power resurfaces, an extraordinary group of individuals must come together to embark on a mission that will forge bonds of **Fellowship** that will overcome the harshest of challenges and save Middle Earth. Based on the book of the same name, this first film of three culminates in the gathering of the **Fellowship**, each member pledging what they bring with them to the common cause.

- What could the way that the **Fellowship** forms around a quest tell us about how **Fellowship** might form around mission?
- The different members of the **Fellowship** of the ring all come together for different reasons, with

different motivations and with different gifts – but with a single purpose. Explore how these themes might help you grow deeper **Fellowship** in your church or small group.



## **Over the Hedge** (U, 2006, 1h23m)

A group of animals work together to store food for the winter. See what happens when another animal joins the team.

- How does the animal community in the film embody **Fellowship**?
- What can the film teach us about how to respond when someone new arrives and shakes up our expression of **Fellowship**?



## **Paddington** (PG, 2014, 1h35m)

A young bear from Peru travels to London and is in need of a home. He is taken in by the kindly Brown family, who found him at Paddington station. He soon becomes very much part of their family, despite the many incidents that he gets involved in. Based on a series of books.

- Strong **Fellowship** develops within the Brown family over the course of the film. What causes this and what changes occur?
- What challenge can a story like this bring to your family, or to the church?

**HOLY HABITS** is an initiative to nurture Christian discipleship. It explores Luke’s model of church found in Acts 2:42–47, identifies ten habits and encourages the development of a way of life formed by them. These resources, which include an introductory guide, have been developed to help churches explore the habits in a range of contexts and live them out in whole-life, missional discipleship.

Biblical Teaching  
 Fellowship  
 Breaking Bread  
 Prayer  
 Sharing Resources

Serving  
 Eating Together  
 Gladness and Generosity  
 Worship  
 Making More Disciples



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