



Riverwood-Punchbowl Anglican Church

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LIVING IN GOD'S FAMILY

**9 Studies looking at relating to
God and to God's people**

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Study 1

We are God's adopted children

Passages: Eph 2:4-22, 4:11-16; Jn 14:15-24

Eph 2:19-22 tells us that every Christian has been adopted into God's household, the church, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, a holy dwelling for God. This has been made possible through Jesus, who enables us to receive redemption and forgiveness and is entirely due to God's gracious mercy and not due to anything we have done (Eph 2:8-9). Eph 1:9-10 also tells us that God's plan is for everything to be under Jesus' rule, and for his wisdom and purpose to be revealed to all.

1. Read Eph 2:1-22 and 4:1-16. What do these passages tell us about:

(a) the nature of the church ?

(b) the purpose of the gifts God gives to us ?

(c) the differences between people in the church and people not in the church ?

2. How should being an adopted member of God's household affect us ?

See the verses in brackets for some of the consequences.

(a) All Christians have been adopted into God's household (Gal 6:10; 1 Jn 3:11-12, 4:20-5:2).

(b) God's Household is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (Rom 15:8-9; Heb 12:1-2; 2 Cor 4:2; 1 Cor 3:9-11).

(c) God's Household is meant to be a holy dwelling for God (2 Cor 4:7, 5:1, 6:14-7:1; 1 Pet 2:5,9,11; 1 Jn 3:1-3).

(d) Our adoption is based on God's grace alone (Gal 3:25-28; Acts 10:34-35; Gal 4:6-7; Jas 2:1; Rom 3:28-30).

3. (a) What is God's purpose for us as individuals (1 Jn 2:6, Rom 8:29, 1 Jn 3:2)

(b) Christian activities (e.g. prayer, caring for others, reading the Bible, sharing the gospel) are not ends in themselves but should be done with God's ultimate purpose in mind. What is this purpose (Eph 4:13, 15-16) ?

Study 2:

God Expects Us to Care For Each Other.

Passages: Jn 15:12-17; Phil 1:27-2:13

1. The Bible makes it very clear that God is very concerned about the way we treat other people (1 Jn 4:7-12; Is 1:15-17; Mt 25:31-45). At the same time, we know that our salvation is based on God's grace and not our efforts. How do these two principles fit together (Jas 2:17) ?

2. Jesus told his disciples that they were to love one another (Jn 13:35) and the 2nd Great Commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself (Mk 12:51). Some Christians worry that they can't like everyone - but Christian love is **NOT** about liking others.

(a) Exactly what does it mean for a Christian to love someone else (Eph 4:1-6, 25-5:2; 1 Jn 3:14-18; Gal 6:10; Jn 13:34-35; Rom 12:9-17, 15:7; 1 Cor 10:24, 31) ?

(b) Why are Christians to love others ?

(c) Who are Christians to love (Lk 10:30-37) ?

3. Look at the following passages: Lev 19:33-34, Lk 15:1-7, Lk 14:12-14, Heb 13:2, Ps 23, Mk 9:36-37, Mt 11:28-29, 1 Pet 4:8-10, Mt 25:31-46, Rom 12:1-13:9, Acts 28:30-31.

(a) What do these passages tell us about God's character and how we ought to act? Is there a specific instruction regarding caring for others?

(b) Suggest specific ways to apply this teaching in church (i.e. your local congregation), your HCG and our community.

Study 3:

What Caring Means for Christians

Passages: Mt 25:31-45; Rom 12:3-19, 13:8-10

1. The Bible tells us to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2). Read Rom 14:13-15:2, 1 Cor 12:25-26 and Phil 2:1-13. What does this tell us about:

(a) the benefits of being in close and regular contact with other Christians?

(b) the responsibilities we have towards other Christians ?

(c) Try to come up with one way that you can bear the burden carried by someone else in your HCG or congregation and one way that others in your HCG or congregation can bear your burden. Try to put these ideas in practice during the week.

2. Read 1 Peter 1:22, Rom 12:10 and 1 Thes 2:8-10. There is a cost to loving others. For Jesus, that cost was death and separation from the Father. For the Father, the cost was watching his Son die a terrible and lonely death.

(a) Can you think of a time when you needed help or support from someone but they wouldn't give you that help or support ?

(b) Can you think of people whom you are/have been reluctant to help because of the cost involved ? Note that cost can involve things other than money (e.g. time, emotional or physical hurt, fear of what the other person might ask).

(c) Jesus' explanation of how much we should love others is given in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37). The Samaritan risked his life to help the Jew - just imagine what could have happened if other Jews had found him alone with an injured Jewish man ! Are you able to love others that much ?

(d) Christians can help each other to love others more by sharing the cost involved. Consider whether there is a way in which you could either help someone in your group or where someone else could help you in caring for others. Examples:

You would like to help someone who needs occasional child-minding assistance but find it difficult to manage the children on your own. Perhaps someone else in your group would be able to help you with the child-minding.

You know someone who has just left school and can't find any work because of lack of experience. You would like to pay them to do gardening for some elderly people, but can only afford a small amount. Perhaps others in your group would like to contribute to this cause.

Someone you know is lonely and needs people to talk to. You are worried that they might need you for more time than you can give, or that they may raise difficult emotional issues which you can't handle. Perhaps others in your group can share the time load involved, or can go along with you.

3. One really important - but, for many of us, difficult - part of caring is having good relationship skills. Try using the self-assessment below to determine which skills you are best at and which skills you need to work on. You may then like to share the result with your HCG, so that they can pray for improvement in your weaker skills and so that you can use your strengths to help others (Eccl 4:9-10, Rom 15:1).

Skill	Already OK	Needs Some Work
Listening to others		
Being genuinely interested in others' lives		
Looking out for people's immediate needs		
Remembering information		
Not being negative		
Not putting people down		
Empathy (sharing someone else's joy or grief)		
Allowing others know and help you		

Study 4:

Caring for Others Through Prayer

Passages: Jas 5:13-16; Mt 5:43-48, 6:5-15

1. (a) Sometimes the situation is so complex that we can't see any way to show our love for others - we can't even see what we ought to pray for.

What is the solution to this problem (Rom 8:26-27) ?

(b) Can you think of a time where others demonstrated their love for you through prayer ? Share your experience with your HCG.

2. In Eph 1:15-19, 3:14-19 and 6:18-20, Paul tells the Ephesians what he prays for them and what he would like them to pray about.

(a) Using these and other appropriate scriptural passages (e.g. Jas 5:13-16), make a list of how we should be praying for other Christians.

(b) Go through the list, and come up with specific matters/situations relevant to your HCG members. For example: Eph 6:18-20 calls Christians to pray for steadfastness and strength to withstand the devil; this is very relevant to your link missionary, or to anyone experiencing temptation. Pray for these matters in your group and through the week.

4. Come up with a way in which you and one or more of the members of your HCG (or congregation) can care for others by praying together. Some examples:

Prayer Partners (2 or 3 people who meet regularly to pray together for each other and encourage each other in Christian living)

Prayer Triplets (2-4 people who meet regularly to pray for specific issues, e.g. conversion of friends)

Prayer Walking (walking around your local neighbourhood, praying as the Spirit leads you for the areas you pass through)

Regular or One-off Prayer Meetings for (i) the Work of Specific Organisations Linked with Your Congregation/HCG (e.g. Missionaries, Kairos, Refugee Support Groups, Christian aid organisations), or (ii) Community Concerns, or (iii) Specific Events e.g. SMBC mission

Study 5:

Caring For Others through Hospitality

Passages: Lk 7:36-50, 1 Pet 4:7-11

Which would you choose as a Christian role model - a great preacher, or a person noted for their hospitality? In fact, the list of essential characteristics for a bishop in Titus 1:5-9 doesn't mention preaching ability but includes hospitality. Paul tells us to welcome one another as Christ welcomed us (Rom 15:7). In Jn 13:14 Jesus tells his disciples that they should wash each other's feet, just as he has done; note that in Lk 7:36-50 we are told that one of the ways Simon failed to welcome Jesus properly was by not offering him water to wash his feet. Welcoming and hospitality are an integral part of loving and serving each other, and need to be extended to both existing and new church members.

1. (a) Think of an occasion when you went somewhere (e.g. party, new church, club) where you didn't know anyone. How comfortable did you feel? What did others do to make you feel this way?

(b) Share an experience of being positively welcomed into a Christian group (e.g. a church, bible study group). Identify what was said or done which was helpful.

2. Read Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35; 9:17-19, 27, 30 and 10:44-48.

(a) How did people in the early church treat each other?

(b) How did people in the early church treat new Christians/new members?

3. It is essential that we constantly strive for a welcoming environment in our congregations, not just for newcomers and visitors, but also for those who have been coming for some time. Many of us find this difficult. Some possible reasons are listed in the table below.

- (a) Share any other reasons you may have encountered. Do you identify with any of these?
- (b) Work through the list of reasons generated by the group to come up with a practical solution for each one.

Reason	Practical Solution
"I am shy with strangers."	Get a friend to go with you.
"I can't think of things to say."	Have 2 universally appropriate things to say/ask (e.g. "How did you find the service?"). Introduce the person to others.
"I have other commitments (e.g. tea, money counting, creche)."	
"I need to catch up with my friends."	
"By the time I look around, they all seem to have left."	
"Someone of their own age/gender should befriend them."	
"It is difficult for me to ask people to my home."	
"I don't have interests in common with that person."	
"I don't like that person."	

1. What is essential to creating a welcoming and caring congregation or HCG? Issues which you could consider:

what happens with newcomers

how regular members can receive support and care from other members of the congregation.

what happens if a regular member doesn't turn up for services/HCG meetings

Come up with one way you personally can help to create a welcoming and caring congregation/HCG. Share this idea with the rest of your HCG so that they can pray for you and otherwise support you in that ministry.

Study 6:

Caring For Others through Social Action

Passages: Jas 2:8-17, 4:13-5:6; Mt 12:15-21

It is frequently suggested that Christians should consider social action an optional extra, or at least a lower priority than, say, evangelism. Yet this is far from the picture given in the Bible, where commands to God's people to act to bring about justice in their society are found in virtually every book of the bible. Ron Sider's classic book "Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger" lists literally hundreds of these references, both in the Old Testament and the New. Perhaps the efforts of an individual may seem futile in the face of the massive corruption and injustice found in our world, and it is undeniable that there will not be perfect justice until Jesus returns. Nevertheless, we are told very clearly that "what the Lord [requires] of you is to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8, see also Dt 10:12-19 and Is 1:16-17).

1. The message of justice for the oppressed is integral to Jesus' ministry. He publicly stated (Lk 4:18-21, Lk 7:22) that he was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of a Messiah who would bring freedom from oppression for God's people (Is 61:1-8). This was **not** simply some spiritual jargon for salvation from sin, but a direct reference to the economic and social liberation set out in God's plan for Israel (Dt 10:12-25:16, in particular 15:1-18, 16:18-20, and 25:15-16).
 - (a) The prophecy by Isaiah refers to the Year of the Lord's Favour (i.e. the Year of Jubilee). What was the Year of Jubilee intended to achieve (Dt 15:1-18) ?
 - (b) What does Is 61:1-3, 8-9 tell us about the mission of the Messiah ? Note the RSV rendering of verse 1 is "to *bring* good news to the poor" (cf. "to *preach* good news" in NIV).

(c) What does this tell us about the importance of social justice in Jesus' ministry and messiahship ?

4. Read Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35 and 6:1,5. What measures did the early church take to achieve justice amongst their membership ?

5. Read Is 58:1-9a. God sees the apparently sincere devotion of the Israelites (v2) yet is displeased with them.

(a) What does God want of the Israelites (v3b-7, 9b-10a, 13) ?

(b) What does God say will happen if they do the right thing (v8, 9a, 10b, 11, 14) ?

(c) How does this apply to us today ?

4. We live in a world full of injustice. Most of us know that roughly 1/3rd of the world's population consumes 2/3rds of the world's resources (and conversely, the remaining 2/3rds of the population has to make do with 1/3rd of the world's resources). Guess which group most Australians are in ? Sider's book contains many other examples of such global injustices together with suggestions on how Christian individuals can make a difference. Make a list of the injustices you can see around you. Some of these might be local rather than global, e.g. a boss who bullies some of his staff. Then try to come up with a way in which you can combat at least one of these injustices. Examples:

Elderly people who are lonely - spend some time with someone who needs a friend by joining the Community Visitors Scheme or the Red Cross Telecross.

The widening gulf between rich and poor in Australia - lobby your local MP or political party to bring in more measures to help the poor, or save a little money each week (e.g. by having one less cup of coffee) which you can then donate to an appropriate charity.

People living in countries where they are persecuted or where there is civil war - join the Refugee Support Ministry or Amnesty International

People in Third World Countries struggling to live - ask your friends and family to give you Christmas/birthday presents from the TEAR Really Useful Gifts Catalogue instead of buying you something you don't really need.

- (b) How can you, as an individual, be involved with God in helping this person come to Christ?

 - (c) How can others in your HCG (or other Christian friends) support you in this work? Some options to consider: meeting regularly to pray for the person's conversion, helping you answer the person's questions, getting to know the person so that they can provide input more directly.
5. As we all know, learning about God doesn't stop at our conversion. There is plenty of work to be done in helping other Christians continue to learn about God.
- (a) What does God expect us to do to help other Christians grow in their knowledge of him (1 Thess 2:9-12; Heb 10:24-25; Col 3:16; Eph 4:25-29, 5:19-20; Rom 14:13, 15:14) ?

 - (b) How are you doing this in your HCG ? Are there new things you can try ?

 - (c) Are other Christians in your congregation helping you grow in your knowledge of God? If not, what could they do to help you in this way?

 - (d) Are you helping other Christians in your congregation grow in their knowledge of God ? If not, what could you do to help them?

Study 8:

Practical Ministry and Service

Passages: 1 Jn 3:16-18; Lk 10:30-42

1. Jesus' actions are often described as a response to the compassion he felt for people (Mt 9:35-36, 14:14-20, 15:30-32, 20:34; Mk 1:41, 6:34, 5:18-19; Lk 7:13-15). What needs was he responding to and how did he respond?

2. Loving others is about ministering to all their needs to the best of our ability whilst relying on God's grace and strength (1 Jn 3:16-18). Sometimes we may feel that "practical" ministry is not as important as "spiritual" ministry. Jesus' response to Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42) is often understood in this way.
 - (a) The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) has been placed just before the story of Mary and Martha. Look at what needs the Samaritan ministered to. What do you think determined the order in which he did them?

 - (b) Does this help in understanding Jesus' reply to Martha (Lk10:41-42) ?

(c) What else does the Bible tell us about practical ministry (Rom 12:6-8; Is 58:2, 7-9; Mt 25:31-45) ?

5. (a) What are some of the practical ways people help each other in your HCG or congregation ?

(e) Are any of these things you could do ? Try to think of 1 practical way you could minister to someone else and 1 way someone else can minister to you.

(f) How can we become more aware of the needs around us and more responsive to those needs ?

Study 9:

Integrity and Ethical Living

Passages: Eph 4:22-5:2; Lk 11:33-52

Having integrity and strong ethics is fundamental to being a Christian, but it doesn't mean that we have to be perfect, or that we have to pretend to be perfect, or make a big fuss about our strong points. God knows exactly what and who we are, and He has accepted us anyway, even though He wants us to keep striving to live according to His laws.

1. How do your non-Christian friends and relatives see the church and Christians? List up to 3 positive things and up to 3 negative things. Now think about how your own life fits with these perceptions. Do your actions and attitudes reinforce any of these ideas?
2. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth." (1 Jn 1:6). What difference should walking in the light make to our actions (Eph 4:1-5:2, Rom 12:1-13:10)?
3. Share with your HCG one way in which you could change your actions to walk more in the light, then pray together for God's strength and the work of the Holy Spirit in your lives.

4. This series of studies has discussed a number of ways in which we can minister to those around us, whilst always remembering that the ultimate goal is for all Christians to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Assess your own relationship with your HCG and congregation.

(a) Are you ministering to others ? How does your ministry contribute to our ultimate goal?

(b) Can you see any ways to build or improve on what you are already doing ?

(c) Are there ways that others can support you in your ministry ?

