

Gospel Community Foundations

Leader's Notes

#1 Gospel

Consider...

Communities can and do centre themselves around all sorts of things. A neighbourhood, a hobby, a political cause, a sport, a demographic.

At Summerleas, we aim to centre our communities firmly on the gospel (or *good news*) of Jesus Christ. We believe that when people centre their lives on the gospel both they and the communities they are a part of are transformed in amazing and radical ways!

Read...

Read the following passages. What do they tell us about how the gospel transforms people?

a) Romans 1:16; Romans 10:13-14; John 1:12-13

- *The gospel brings salvation from sin and judgement to those who believe it (Romans 1:16; 10:13-14).*
- *When you trust in the gospel of Jesus, you become part of God's family and you enter into a relationship with him as one of his beloved children (John 1:12-13).*

b) Philippians 2:1-11; Titus 2:11-12

- *The gospel motivates us to live a godly life (Philippians 2:1-2)*
- *The gospel gives us a pattern of living to imitate (Philippians 2:5-7)*
- *The gospel (grace of God in Titus 2) teaches us to say no to ungodliness and live godly lives.*

c) Ephesians 3:6; John 13:34-35

- *The gospel draws different people (even diverse people groups - Jews and Gentiles) into community together (Ephesians 3:6).*
- *It is in the gospel that we see the depths of Jesus love for us, and this is the kind of love we should have for one another in Christian community (John 13:34-35)*

d) Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:11-20

- *The gospel comes to its climax in Matthew 28 with Jesus calling his disciples to go out and make more disciples themselves. The gospel entrusts us with the gospel mission.*
- *In 2 Corinthians 5:14 it is Christ's love seen in the gospel (vv.14-15) that compels his people to be Christ's ambassadors and call on people to be reconciled to God (v.20)*

Think...

How would a gospel centred person respond to the following thoughts / temptations.

'I want a community that is primarily focussed on social activities'

- *Gospel Communities will be social places where people will find fun and friendship.*

- However, this can never be the core emphasis. If the priority is social activities, the community will lose sight of the gospel.

- This means the community won't reach out to those who don't know Jesus, won't grow in godliness, won't love it's members properly, and will be at risk losing sight of it's relationship with God through grace

'I want a community that is more like a therapy group'

- Gospel Communities will be places where we carry one another burdens.

- However, this can never be the core emphasis. If the priority is group therapy, the community will lose sight of the gospel.

'I don't want to keep doing things with my Gospel Community, because the people are hard work and there's no one like me in it'

- That the community is diverse is actually a really good thing.

- One of the most amazing things about christian community is that God has drawn all kinds of people together to love one another the way Jesus loved us.

- Rather than retreat, roll up your sleeves and get stuck in. You can always socialise with other people like you outside of Gospel Community if you want to.

'I don't bother engaging when community tries to do mission stuff. I don't enjoy it and it's too much hard work, and I don't feel like I get anything out of it.'

- Mission is a priority for Jesus' people. He himself calls us to it and when I think of his love for me it spurs me on to love others in the best way I can, by sharing the gospel with them!

- This means that even though it's hard sometimes and I might not get much out of it for me, I'll get stuck in anyway so that others might hear about Jesus.

'I hope no one else joins my community because if it got bigger it would change the dynamic and one day we might even have to split into two groups! I'd hate that.'

- If I care about Jesus' mission, then I want lots of people to become Christians and join us!

- Of course this means that we'll eventually become too big and need to multiply, but that's ok. Sure it will hurt a bit when we multiply our Gospel Community, but it's so worth it if it means more people are coming to know Jesus!

#2 Community

Consider...

Loneliness has become a major problem in the modern west. Many people find themselves socially isolated and longing for relationships.

Despite this, it seems there is much about our culture that makes community difficult. Many people don't even know their neighbours, our busy lives make it hard to fit relationships into what little free time we have, and because we have the means to live independently, we don't need to rely on others.

Perhaps because of this, many see the Christian faith as something that can be lived out in isolation. In fact lots of Christians see absolutely no need for Church whatsoever! At Summerleas we totally disagree with this. We believe that living in community is a vital part of the Christian life and is right at the heart of God's purposes for us!

Read...

1. Read Genesis 1:26 and John 1:1-2. What do these passages tell us about what God is like?

-God is community. In Genesis 1:26 he is an 'us'. This is made clear when we see that people are made in his image and they are made as persons in relationships.

- In John 1:1-2, we see that the Son (the Word) has been in relationship with the Father since the beginning.

2. Read Genesis 1:27. What do these passages tell us about the nature of humanity?

- We are made in the image of God. This means we are made for relationships. We will never be truly complete without them.

3. Read Revelation 21:1-3. This passage describes God's ultimate plan for his people. To what extent is community present in this passage?

- It is very present. A city (big community) is on view (v.2), so God's people will be living in relationships with one another, but also with God. He will dwell with them (v.3)

4. Read the following passages. Why do each of them see community as being so important for Christians?

Hebrews 3:13 and 10:24-25.

*- We need daily encouragement from fellow Christians so that we won't be hardened by sin (3:13)
- We need others to think about how to spur us on, meet with us and encourage us.
-This means that community is very important to us as we seek to live godly, faithful lives as Christians.*

John 13:34-35 and 17:20-23.

*- When we love one another as Christ loves us, people will know that we are truly Jesus' disciples (13:34-35).
- We are called to share the kind of relationship that God the Father has with God the Son (John 17:21). When we love one another in this way, it proves to the world that Jesus has truly come from God and therefore is who he claims to be (17:23)*

- *This means that our lives shared in community have a powerful impact on our efforts in reaching out to people with the gospel.*

Ephesians 3:6 and 3:10

- *The fact that very different people are brought together as one in Christian community brings great glory to God in the heavenly realms.*

- *This means that just us being christian community together brings great glory to God!*

Think...

How do the above passages shape a person's response to the following thoughts / temptations.

'I prefer time on my own, I find being around others draining and so I don't like Church or Gospel Community very much.'

- *It is ok to enjoy your own company, and people can be draining some times. This means breaks from people can be good.*

- *In addition, people's personalities will have an impact on how much time they spend with others on a week to week basis and this is ok.*

- *However, the Bible is clear that all people are made for community and reliant upon it for their spiritual well being and church's mission. In addition it is one of the key ways we bring glory to God.*

- *If we find community difficult, rather than disengaging, we must work hard at organising the rest of our lives so that we have the energy to be committed members of our Christian community.*

'I'm happy to rock up to church once a week, but that's enough for me, I don't want to share my life with anyone'

- *If you don't share your life at least some extent with others you will put yourself at spiritual risk according to Hebrews 3:13. We need others to speak into our lives to help us steer clear of sin.*

- *You will also be depriving others of the care they would otherwise get from you.*

- *Finally, Christian's deep love for one another (modelled on the love the God the Father has for God the son) plays a key role in reaching the lost for Christ. But we will never have these kinds of relationships with one another unless we share ourselves with one another.*

'I don't have time to build relationships with people from Church'

- *Of course some people do have very pressing time restrictions in their lives. Maybe a job or a family situation means that they have less free time than others.*

- *However, given what we've seen above, relationships with Christians are a priority and we all need them at least to some extent.*

- *Maybe some key life changes need to be made to free up some time. Maybe some creative thought and effort needs to be put into how relationships could be possible.*

- *This should also be a key consideration when we make lifestyle choices. Before accepting a job, buying a house, or whatever, we need to ask ourselves 'will this prohibit relationships with other Christians.'*

'I just rock up to church when I feel like it, or when there's nothing else on. It's pretty much bottom of my priority list.'

- *This is a disastrous attitude.*

- *In effect you are saying that God's glory, God's mission, and your godliness are at the bottom of your priority list.*

#3 Small and Organic

Consider...

Last time we looked at the importance of community and saw that it is God's big vision for humanity! However we also noticed that meaningful community is becoming harder and harder to maintain in our western context.

Despite all this, we believe there is a way that we can work at a deep, meaningful community life, despite our cultural limitations. We just need to keep things small and organic! When you join a Gospel Community you are committing to share your normal, everyday life with a smaller group of Christians from Summerleas.¹ This can sometimes get messy, and it's not always easy, but in this session we'll see that it's totally worth it!

Read...

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 describe the relationship Paul had with the Thessalonians Christians.

- *Very deep and loving relationships are on view here, the picture of a nursing mother is used (v.7).*
- *In v.8, Paul writes that he didn't just share the word but also his life as well!*
- *He describes the Thessalonians as being 'dear' to them (v.8)*

2. Read the following passages. How do they shape our vision for what Christian relationships should look like.

Romans 12:10

- *Devoted, brotherly (family) type love.*

Galatians 5:13

- *Serving one another*

Galatians 6:2

- *Carrying each others burdens*

Colossians 3:16

- *Teaching and admonishing each other*

James 5:16

- *Confess our sins to each other and pray for each other*

1 Peter 4:9

- *Offer hospitality to each other*

3. Read Titus 2:7-8, and 1 Timothy 4:12. What must Titus and Timothy do to help others grow in the faith?

¹ **Note:** This doesn't mean you can't spend time and build relationships with people outside of your Gospel Community. Indeed such relationships can serve to encourage and inspire us to love and serve our Gospel Community members all the more!

- They are to set people an example. People need to see the way they live their lives.

Think...

How would you summarise the kinds of relationships the Bible calls us to have with other Christians?

- *Rooted in real life, loving, committed, deep, honest, transformational... any others??*

How many people do you think you could meaningfully sustain these kinds of relationships with?

- *In our culture most people would not be able to sustain these kinds of relationships with many others.*

- *The way we live our lives is quite individualistic (most of us don't need or depend on our neighbours) and by the time you add in work, family etc. there's not that much space left over*

- *For most people the idea of trying to sustain these kinds of relationships with everyone else in church would be impossible.*

To what extent could you build these kinds of relationships if *all* you ever have are formal meetings?

- *Formal meetings are great for many things but you will be unable to build these kinds of relationships if that's all you have.*

- *To truly serve, show hospitality, carry burdens etc. will require time outside of meetings. In addition it is hard to set an example for others in everything in a formal meeting because there are only so many things you can model. You can't model being a parent when you're in a meeting without your kids for example.*

- *Finally, you rarely see people 'warts and all' in formal situations. They are normally on their best behaviour so what you're often confronted with is a front. This makes it hard to teach, rebuke and encourage people in a way that meets them where they're really at.*

Try and think of some ways that you could share your life with others (1 Thessalonians 2:8) and set other believers an example in everything (Titus 2:7-8)

- *There are all kinds of ways you could do this and it's important for people to think how this might work for them personally but below are some suggestions.*

- *Think of ways to include people in your family life (dinner with the kids, outings etc.)*

- *Ask people to help with stuff you have to do.*

- *See if you could organise to do stuff that youth have to do (e.g. the shopping) together and chat on the way there and back etc.*

- *Ask someone to meet with you regularly to study the Bible.*

#4 Diversity

Consider...

Unity in diversity is greatly celebrated in the Bible. Our God is diverse (one, yet Father Son and Holy Spirit), and his nature is reflected in his beautiful creation! Even a simplistic look at the various eco systems that surround us can't help but leave us amazed at the way God has ordered this world around this principle of unity in diversity.

Despite all this, humanity seems to struggle with diversity. Racism, sexism, and xenophobia plague our societies. We often fear those who are different, and, rather than harnessing the different strengths and ideas that diversity offers, we retreat into social ghettos with those who are like us. The big question for us as Christians is: should we settle for this, or does God offer us the hope and means to reclaim the diverse relationships we were made to enjoy? As a Gospel Community member you will be encouraged to love, serve and care for men and women of different ages and backgrounds, as well as babies, kids, and teenagers. This might sound crazy, but as we'll see it's God's great plan for his people.

Read...

1. Read Revelation 7:9. What is God's ultimate goal for humanity?

- It is a great very diverse multitude! People of all different races and languages together worshipping God.

2. Read Colossians 3:8-14. Is this vision of diversity only for when Jesus returns, or should we strive for it now in our churches?

*- Colossians is insistent that Christians strive to create loving diverse communities in the here and now.
- It is not so obvious to modern readers but the categories Paul mentions in v.11 (Jews, Gentiles, barbarians, scything etc.) were deeply polarising. These people did not associate with one another at all and in some cases were quite hostile to one another. And yet, Paul expects them to love and care for one another.*

3. According to the same passage in Colossians, how does diversity grow us in godliness?

*- Diversity forces us to be patient, kind, gentle, humble, and compassionate.
- When we only spend time with people like ourselves, we often don't need to work at some of these qualities as they are never tested, but diversity forces us to grapple with and grow in these key areas of godliness.*

3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How does diversity benefit the church community?

*- Church is pictured as a body that needs different parts if it's to work properly
- If Church is to be the best it can be it requires all kinds of people with all kinds of gifts and abilities*

4. Read Ephesians 3:6-11. What effect does the church's diversity have in the heavenly realms?

- In Ephesians the fact that God has united Jews and Gentiles together in one body (3:6) brings great glory to God in the heavenly realms (3:10)

Think...

How do the above passages shape a person's response to the following thoughts / temptations

'I don't like my GC because there is no one else in it who is the same age; has the same personality; has the same interests; or at the same life stage.'

- According to 1 Corinthians 12, this is actually a wonderful strength and something that we should celebrate, not despise!

- There must be a wonderful variety of personalities, abilities and gifts at the communities disposal and we need to get better at marvelling at and appreciating these.

'I'd rather not try and talk to the International student. They're too hard to understand and I find it awkward.'

- God's ultimate and eternal plan for us is a multicultural community, where people of different nationalities love one another (Revelation 7:9).

- In our Colossians passage we saw that God wants us to start working on that now.

- All of this should drive us to make an effort with people from different countries and strive to overcome any awkwardness we might feel.

'Dealing with kids puts me out of my comfort zone, so I'd rather not engage with anything my GC does with them.'

- Relating to children (and to anyone else who is different for that matter) can be an incredible blessing to us.

- Our Colossians passage showed us that we can expect great spiritual growth when we relate to those who are not like us and who we find challenging.

- This means that we should make the most of any opportunity our GC affords us to relate to children.

'There aren't any other kids in this GC / Church that are the same age as mine, it will be better for them if we move GCs / Churches.'

- What we said under the previous point also works the other way.

- Kids need people of all sorts of different ages if they are to grow.

- This means that a peer orientated program might not be the best thing for your kids in terms of spiritual growth and even if it's available it should never be the whole picture for them in terms of church involvement.

#5 Mission

Consider...

Gospel Communities (GCs) do not exist solely for their members. They also have an outward dimension and exist very much for people who aren't members yet!

As part of a GC you will be encouraged to join in with activities that are focussed on reaching out to people who aren't yet Christian. In addition, you will find that outsiders are invited to join in with certain aspects your GC's life. At times this might feel challenging, or inconvenient. However, as you'll see below, being engaged in God's great mission is one of the most important things you could ever give your life to...

Read...

1. Read 2 Peter 3:7-13. How does Peter describe the coming day of the Lord?

- *It will come like a thief, in other words it will be unexpected (v.10)*
- *It will be a time of judgement and destruction of the ungodly (v.7)*
- *For those who are God's people it will be wonderful - a new heavens and earth (v.13). Something we look forward to (v.12)*

2. According to 2 Peter 3, why hasn't this day come yet? What is the big thing God is doing in the age we live in now?

- *It has not come yet because God does not want anyone to perish. rather he wants everyone to repent and be part of his new creation (v.9)*
- *Because of this he is holding off patiently waiting for as many people to be saved as possible.*

3. Read Romans 10:13-15. What needs to happen if people are to be saved?

- *People need to call on the name of the Lord (v.13).*
- *For this to happen they need someone to preach the gospel to them (v.14)*

4. Read Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15. What do these verses tell us about how Christians should engage in God's mission?

- *Colossians tells us that we need to make the most of every opportunity we get with outsiders. This means that all Christians should have a mission focus and be ready to be active in evangelism when God provides opportunities.*
- *1 Peter tells us that we should all be prepared to explain the gospel to people.*

5. Read John 13:34-35 and 17:20-23. According to these verses, how does our community life together contribute to God's mission?

- *As we saw in session 2 our community life plays a significant role in mission. As people see the way we love one another, they will know that we are truly disciples of Jesus (John 13:35)*
- *Our community life can also bear witness to the fact that Jesus is sent from the Father (ie. is who he claims to be).*
- *Our community life together is a powerful apologetic to the gospel we preach.*

Think...

How do the above passages shape a person's response to the following thoughts / temptations.

'I know mission is important, but it's just not my thing, I prefer to leave it to others.'

- Both the Colossians and 1 Peter passages show us that we are all called to be involved in mission to at least some extent.

'I don't have the time and energy for mission stuff, so when my GC does it, I'll take the night off.'

- Given what we've seen in 2 Peter surely mission should be a priority! The consequences are real and severe, people are facing the judgement of God!

- Romans 10 shows us that the way people come to repentance and faith is through hearing the gospel preached, and for that to happen people have to be involved.

- Surely all of this should drive us to see mission as a priority and not an excuse for a night off.

Look again at Colossians 4:5-6 and 1 Peter 3:15. How do you go at living these verses out? What would need to change for you to grow in these areas?

- If people are not comfortable explaining the gospel, it would be worth encouraging people to think about doing our 'Gospel Fluency' course.

#6 Ministry

Consider...

Gospel Community (GC) churches are a bit different to other churches in that for us, most of church life takes place in small focussed communities, rather than larger events and programs. This does however raise the question, who will do the ministry? It is certainly not possible for the pastor to be in all of these communities to do the Bible teaching, pastoral care, mission work, follow up, discipleship and youth ministry. So if he cant be there to do it, who will?

The answer to that question is simple. YOU! Whist each GC does have a leadership team, they rely on *all* of their members to be involved in ministry to one one another and this session shows us why we want to empower every single Summerleas member to be active in ministering to the rest of their GC.

Read...

1. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What is the role of the pastor in this passage? How is this different to the stereotypical understanding of a pastor's role?

- *In Ephesians the role of the pastor is to prepare God's people for works of service (v.12).*
- *This is quite different to what most people think a pastors job ought to be. There is a tendency in churches to look to the pastor to do all of the ministry, but in Ephesians the role is to train and equip the whole church to do the ministry.*

2. a) According to Ephesians 4, who does most of the ministry in the church?

- The church itself does the ministry (v.16)

b) What is the result when the *whole* Church gets involved in ministry?

- The church will be built up, unified in the faith, mature and attain fullness in Christ, safe from false teaching. (vv.13-14)

2. Look back over the 'One Another' passages we looked at in session #3. What kind of ministries are we *all* called to be involved in?

Romans 12:10; Galatians 5:13; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:16; James 5:16; 1 Peter 4:9

- *Devoted to one another in love*
- *Serving*
- *Carrying others burdens (looking after people practically)*
- *Teaching and admonishing (which means warning and correcting)*
- *Praying for each other and helping one another struggle with sin.*
- *Hospitality*

Think...

How do the above passages shape a person's response to the following thoughts / temptations?

'Discipling people, and caring for others is just not something I want to get involved with. I'd rather just rock up to meetings.

- *This is simply not the Christian life. God has called us all to be involved in these ministries.*
- *If you live like this you are depriving your church from one of the key resources God has given it - You!*
- *Your Church will never be the best it can be unless everyone gets involved in ministry.*

'This church is no good at caring for people, because the pastor and the elders don't visit me regularly, or even check in on me very much!'

- *The pastor and elders may not visit you, but do others? As we have seen caring for people is not just the pastors job. In fact if the pastor and elders are the only ones that do it, then that is a clear indicator that the church is not very good at caring for people.*

- *You are part of your church's care strategy, are you contributing to making your church a church that cares for people well.*

'I can see all sorts of problems and issues with the church, why won't someone do something about them!'

- *This is totally the wrong question to be asking.*

- *As we have seen everyone is called to ministry, which means everyone can get stuck in and solve problems! Most of the time 'someone is you'.*

- *The first question you should ask when you notice problems is can I be part of the solution. If you've noticed it chances are you can be!*

- *Rather than complain ask if you can help. remember God has given you to your church to help make it be the best it can be.*

'I'm just not equipped to do the kinds of things those 'One Another' passages call me to.'

- *Then get equipped! We proactively equip ourselves to do stuff all the time!*

- *These are basic commands for all christians, so we should not excuse ourselves from them.*

Once again your church needs you to be serving in these ways if it's to work properly.

- *If you don't know how to do something, ask for help and training.*

- *Discipleship relationships can be very helpful for this so make sure you're in one.*

'I've got a lot to offer but no one has asked me to do anything, so I won't.'

- *This is disastrous! Please put your hand up!*

- *Church needs to be a place where people volunteer and step forward. After all, people don't necessarily know what you have to offer, or know that you're keen.*

- *Remember we all need to take responsibility for ministry, so we need everything you have to offer.*

- *God has brought you with your specific gifts and personality to help our church reach fulness in Christ, please don't hold anything back!*

#7 Reliance upon God

Consider...

You're probably aware by now that we expect rather a lot from our Gospel Communities. The vision is that they'll be places where people are to openly share their lives with all kinds of people they might not normally associate with. In addition they're places where people are to remain Gospel focussed and engage in mission together. Having discovered all this, you could be forgiven for feeling a little overwhelmed. Perhaps you're starting to wonder, how is all of this humanly possible?

Well the reality is that it's not...but that's ok. The reason it's ok is because we have *God*, the creator of the universe, at work among us in all kinds of ways and he is more than capable of transforming our GCs into the type of communities he wants them to be!

Read...

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How does this passage describe the Bible? What is the Bible able to do for us?

- *It is described as 'God breathed'. It is not just a human book, God actually speaks to us through it!*

- *The Bible is able to thoroughly equip us to live out the Christian life!*

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and Galatians 5:22-26. Who is at work in us in each passage? What do they do?

- *In 1 Thessalonians we see that God is at work in us! He grows our love for others, strengthens our hearts and is at work in us to make us blameless!*

- *Although loving others who are different from us and being passionate about reaching the lost might seem unrealistic at times, 1 Thessalonians assures us that God will grow that kind of love in us!*

- *Galatians tells us that the Holy Spirit is at work in us bearing fruit! It is interesting to note that the fruit of the Spirit is very relational. All of these fruits will affect the way we relate to others and therefore our Gospel Communities!*

3. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What does God do among his people in these verses? What should we do if we want to benefit from this?

- *In verse 7 we see that God's peace will guard our hearts and minds.*

- *This happens when we rely on God for everything in prayer!*

4. Read Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:9-12.

a) What does Paul do in these verses to help Christians grow in their faith? Why do you think he does this?

- *Paul Prays for them! Given what we've seen above this is not at all surprising!*

- *Ultimately it is God who will transform people, so the best thing Paul (and we) can do is pray for people and rely on God to bring change in their lives!*

b) What does he pray for them in these verses?

- That their love might abound

- Knowledge and depth of insight

- The ability to discern what is best

- That they may be pure and blameless

- Filled with the fruit of righteousness

- Filled with the knowledge of God's will

- For spiritual wisdom and understanding

- That they might live a life worthy of the Lord that pleases him in every way

- Bearing fruit in good works
- Growing in the knowledge of God
- Being strengthened in by God's power to endure and be patient in the Christian life.
- That they might be thankful to God
- It is interesting that so often Christians don't pray for people like this at all!

Think...

How do the above passages shape a person's response to the following thoughts / temptations?

'Bible study can be a bit awkward and boring, can't we just chat about our lives when we meet up and support each other?'

- *There's nothing wrong with chatting about your life with people, however, that will not fully equip you to live as a Christian!*
- *We have to remember that the Bible is the way God has chosen to speak to us and change us, so this should always be a priority!*

'I don't really like prayer, it feels pointless. I especially don't like praying with other people!'

- *Praying is one of the most effective things we can do together!*
 - *We have just seen that ultimately we must rely on God to change his people. he is the one that brings great transformation.*
 - *He has chosen to work in response to our prayers so if we want to grow, see others grow and see the church grow, we must pray!*
- We should also do all we can to encourage others to pray given that it's so important, so it's worth working at praying with others even if you find it difficult.*

'With my schedule, there's no way I have time to read the bible and pray.'

- *Given what we've just seen about the word and prayer, we must prioritise it.*
- *These things are so important that it is worth changing our lives around to incorporate them!*
- *Can you think of ways that busy people could incorporate the bible and prayer into their daily lives?*

'This whole Gospel Community idea is just too idealistic. There's no way it will ever work.'

- *If we had to manufacture it on our own, then it is absolutely too idealistic.*
- *However we have just seen that our Gospel Communities are primarily a word of God. He most definitely has the power to change our lives to make us healthy, diverse, mission focussed Gospel Communities.*

'That man is just a lost cause. He'll never change so what's the point in trying to minister to him?'

- *As we just saw above, it is God who changes people and that means that people are never a lost cause!*

'I think we should just pray about things like sickness, work, family.'

- Unfortunately so many small group prayer sessions consist of nothing more than praying about these things.
- Of course there's nothing wrong with praying about sickness, work family etc. in fact we should. But our prayers need to be way bigger than that.
- We saw at the beginning of Colossians and Philipians that Paul prays big prayers for the churches.
- We need to make sure that we pray for people's growth and godliness as well.

'Being a Christian is way too frustrating. I'm not making any progress, I just can't get it together no matter how hard I try!'

- *It is good to try hard for God and we definitely should do that.*
- *However, we should never think that ultimately it is up to us and our hard work. The liberating truth of the Gospel is that God is at work in you.*
- *This means that even when you fail it is not 'game over' God can use even your failures to teach and mould you into the likeness of Christ.*
- *Although things might not happen according to your time frame, his plan for your life will succeed and you will be blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 3:13)*
- *This means we should always try hard, but never despair and give up!*