KINGDOM FELLOWSHIP -
THE MARKS OF KINGDOM PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

My story:

I was an angry teenager, rebellious, quick-tempered and willing to attack anyone. In my mid-teens, a friend invited me to a Friday night youth meeting where I was introduced to Jesus as my Saviour, and I changed. Then something wonderful happened in the youth group, I discovered that God was more than my Saviour, He wanted to be my Father. (My dad had left before I was 13.)

The close friendships between everyone in the youth group created a loving family where I was accepted as I was. Their love for each other kept me coming back, and I learnt about serving each other from them. I also learnt about confrontation and hearing the truth spoken in love, often, when I misbehaved!

This community of people, strangers when I first arrived, showed me the reality of a Christian family as they grew to become my brothers and sisters in Christ. We cared enough to look after and serve each other whenever needed. In this group, I felt accepted just as I was, and loved for who Jesus was in me.

This is called **Kingdom Fellowship**, the mark or identifying characteristic of Kingdom People.

This small group of people formed a community where I experienced Jesus' words lived out in real life.

> **John 13:34 (NLT2)**
> 34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

I have never forgotten how their **acceptance and care for me impacted** the rest of my life. What had already been deposited in them became a daily action in their lives. (If you missed Tony's teaching last week, find it on YouTube!)

Meeting on Sundays in the larger church meetings was very different! I did not experience any sense of family there. There was a specific and rigid pattern (Liturgy) for services, and this was always followed. The big church meetings would not stop to comfort and pray for those feeling lost, broken and disillusioned.

In contrast, here at CVCF, as a caring community, we are aware of those who arrive on Sundays hurting and bearing a heavy burden and we can and do pray for them. If we become aware of a need during the service, everyone is encouraged and has the freedom to pray, bringing God's comfort and strength to the hurting, without waiting until afterwards! But we also realise that:

The Kingdom of God is not the church! The church, the people of God, are God's chosen people, are His Holy nation, His People, we are royal priests, set apart for Him, **a community, a family over whom He reigns!** It's a family gathering of various people who have chosen to obey God and live out Jesus' commands!

> **1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)**
> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The problem with seeing the church as the Kingdom of God is that everyone who attends on Sundays is **a mix of mature and immature Christians**. We are all on the same journey, on the road towards Christlikeness. Therefore, because we are all at different parts of our journey, everyone is still capable of disappointing others.

So, what is **KINGDOM FELLOWSHIP**

> **Acts 2:42-47 (NLT2)**
> 42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.
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> 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Here we see the early church's commitment to community and fellowship. They gathered regularly to learn, to pray, and to share meals with each other. They shared generously with those in need. They attended the larger church services, and they spent time together in smaller groups in each other's homes. It was here that miracles, signs and wonders were seen because the kingdom was within them. They did not wait to go to the church (Temple) for the Kingdom of God to break through; they knew the Kingdom of God was in them!

> **Luke 17:20b-21 (NIV)**
> … Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because **the kingdom of God is within you**."

These new believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and, as they worshipped and prayed, miracles, signs and wonders happened. ***Why not with us today?***

*Just after I moved to Pretoria, I started experiencing severe lower back pain. In our small group of young people, they prayed, and we all watched as my left leg grew! And then **no more pain!** I could stand, bend over and twist – no pain! What's different between then and now? We are still filled with the Holy Spirit!*

God hasn't changed His mind about His people gathering in small groups and growing into a community that accepts and cares for each other and being empowered by the Holy Spirit, praying and serving others, seeing miracles, signs and wonders, as they live out the message and ministry of Jesus.

Kingdom fellowship isn't just about socialising; it includes deepening our relationship with God and growing in Christlikeness together as we love and **accept** each other. This is shared life in a community of like-minded Christ followers! There are no age limits on living in community together.

We confirm who we are in Christ as we meet in groups like this. Together, in this community of Christian brothers and sisters, our identity in Jesus is strengthened as we open up to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, encouraging each other along the way.

In our "I will be independent and self-sufficient" life today, this **inter-dependence on each other creates a bond, a community that makes God's love visible to**

others. Being so different to our modern approach to life, the visible joy and contentment in our lives attract others to find the same. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Your love for each other proves to the world that you are My followers."

> **John 13:35 (NLT2)**
> Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

*(More of my story:) That small group of people I met as a teenager chose to love me, to accept me and they showed their **love through actual service**. One of them arranged to fetch me from home and then drive me back home again after the meeting. Another offered to teach me to play the guitar – and after a few tries, **suggested I not sing!** 😊 The list of how they served is longer, but they had chosen to be **loving.** God has empowered all of us to do this, and we show love by what we do!*

These small groups we're talking about are not limited to the Discovery Groups, who are finding out about God by reading the Bible. A small group can include any group of people meeting anywhere at any time, so if you do not want to drive at night, how about **starting a lunchtime group** at the office? Or a **Sunday lunchtime group**? (Ron will be the 1st to sign up for that one) Or a fortnightly bring and share Supper group? What about a painting (as in artists) small group? Or baking (the office offers free taste testing!), or gardening, or knitting, crocheting, crafts, or any other subject a group of people want to engage in, and then invite your neighbours to join in. If you need help in doing this, come and speak to any of the team, and we'll assist where we can. So**, is anything stopping us from being a part of a small group** where we can share our lives with others in community?

Small groups committed to kingdom fellowship pray always for each other, they share responsibilities, they put their spiritual gifts to use, they share what they learn with other people, they recognise and help meet needs in their group, and they become very close and long-lasting friends. In these close relationships, God transforms us and, as Tony said last week, '*Transformed people transform people'*, who transform communities who transform cities, and so on... And these transformed people sharing life in a small group are known as **KINGDOM PEOPLE.**

Who are **Kingdom people**? They are God's masterpiece, created in Christ to do good amongst the people of the world!

> **Ephesians 2:10 (NLT2)**
> **For we are God's masterpiece**. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

There is a story where a young man, admiring one of Michelangelo's statues, asked him how he found what to sculpt. The answer was:

"The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material."
— **Michelangelo**

Although attributed to him, this quote is not by Michelangelo, but it illustratess the transformation we need to go through to be Kingdom people. All the 'stuff' we carry that does not reflect Christ is chipped away by the Holy Spirit in us to reveal the masterpiece within. God uses other people to do the chipping, challenging us when our speech and behaviour are wrong.

Kingdom people show others the masterpiece already in them: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23] *gentleness, and self-control,* through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

> **Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT2)**
> [22] But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Therefore nothing stops our prayers for others, encouraging them through our words and actions, and by demonstrating spiritual gifts working in us. God's grace was poured out on you, so what's stopping you from sharing it with others? The Almighty God is on your side, and so nothing can come against Him who is in you!

Let's talk about **praying for others briefly**; everyone here this morning is empowered by the Holy Spirit in them and you are free to pray for other people. In the Vineyard, we call this "Everyone gets to play!" If you see, or think you see, someone who you feel needs encouragement, go to them and begin praying quietly for them. God is not impressed by lengthy prayers, but prayers from the heart count! For example, praying that God meets their needs, that God's peace, love and comfort fill them...or anything else you feel is necessary.

Similarly, you can ask anyone to pray for you, anywhere, anytime. If you want someone to **pray for you in confidence**, that's when you ask the Prayer Ministers up front to pray for you. And so we can also pray in our small groups!

Let me repeat: If Jesus is our Saviour and we've asked the Holy Spirit to fill us, we're allowed to and empowered to pray for others! So, what's stopping us from arriving at our small group meeting, or every Sunday morning, ready and willing to say: '*Lord, here I am, use me!*' Then look around, greet people, look them in the eyes and ask: "Can I pray for you?" You will bless them out of their shoes and socks!

Another characteristic of **Kingdom People** is that they have asked God to keep His promise and change their heart of stone to tender hearts of flesh. (See Ezekiel 36:26) Tender hearts help us to be more aware of God's presence around us.

Last week, Tshego testified how her encounter with God at the Youth Camp **broke down the walls around her heart**. Meeting with God, asking Him to take away our hard-heartedness, helps us to be more **compassionate** for others. We look at people with the thought: '*Lord, how can You use me to help them?*' and then we take action!

We go to our small group, or we arrive at the Church services, with the attitude of '**what can I give, not what can I get!**' The characteristic of serving others.

Once we experience the grace of God at work in us, we should be concerned more for the condition of others than we are for ourselves. Setting fellowship as a priority in our lives and demonstrating practical love with the evidence of miracles, signs, and wonders is what we, as Centurion Vineyard, must be all about. It's what Jesus was all about on earth. As we live this different lifestyle, we are **marked by Kingdom fellowship**. And God added those being saved to their numbers daily…(Acts 2:47)

It's what we are committed to as a local church:

LIVING OUT THE MESSAGE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS,
EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

For those of us who are exhausted by the daily struggle just to get through our daily life, start a small group, join a small group, or get involved in a ministry group where life is shared and we can encourage each other through our daily struggles.