

# **“Cultivating Community”**

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**Community**—Condition of living with others. b. Friendly association.

**Cultivate**—To improve by care, training or study, refine one’s mind, (to) promote the development or growth of.

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year. I want to thank Ken and Abby for opening up their home for New Year’s Eve. I know that this is the time of year that many of us make New Year’s resolutions (make promises and try to keep them; some do, and some do not). My goal/resolution for Christian Fellowship Great Lakes as a whole is to cultivate community, or build family and increase fellowship. Family is a very special state of being: Those who have close-knit family understand the value that it impacts on your daily life. Strong families support one another, weather storms, and overcome great odds. Lack of, or loss of, strong families has the opposite effect.

My own natural family was very tight-knit when I was a kid. It isn’t so much anymore, because of deaths and professions (for example, I have a brother who works nights and sleeps during the day, and it’s hard for me to get a hold of him now).

Today, I would like to put forth a challenge to you. Of course, this is America, and you have the freedom to accept the challenge, or ignore it, but, let your yeas be yeas and your nays be nays. The challenge is for you to put forth an honest, heartfelt effort to build family 1) with those whom you call brothers and sisters now, and 2) with those who are looking for or are just new to our family a) a visitor looking for a relationship with God, or b) newly baptized who needs to grow, who is just getting started in a relationship with God. Remember the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15)? We know that there is someone out there that would like to snatch the good news out of their hearts.

Only the Holy Ghost can create real fellowship between believers, because only the Holy Ghost lets you see past the faults and failures of others, and even their external package. Sometimes we don’t like the way other people look, but, when you get right down to it, the way someone looks shouldn’t matter. My wife is the most beautiful woman in the world to me. My daughter is the most beautiful child in the world to me. Other people may not see it that way, but that’s okay. And your spouse doesn’t always see eye to eye with you. That’s okay, too. But the Holy Ghost refines our relationships with the choices and the commitments that we make. Regardless of outcome, the chain has to be linked together, but the weakest link can pop the chain.

*Ephesians 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

How do we go about endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit (God’s Spirit being the glue of our relationship) in the bond of peace (where a relationship has resolve)? Without resolve there is just discontent.

An important contribution is honesty. You have to care enough to lovingly speak the truth, even when you would rather overlook a problem or ignore an issue. Ignoring

the problem just makes things worse. Being silent is not a loving thing to do—if I see you walking towards a cliff, I'm going to tackle you. Most people don't have someone who loves them enough to tell them the truth when it's painful. When everyone knows about the problem, frustration remains because no one will openly talk about it; this can lead to gossip. Real family/fellowship depends on frankness. It's been said that the tunnel of conflict is the path to intimacy in a relationship. When you care enough to confront and resolve underlying barriers, then you will grow closer by facing and resolving differences.

Frankness is **not** a license to say anything you want, whenever and wherever you want; that's just being rude. Thoughtless words leave lasting wounds. You aren't going to build family by being rude.

Humility is the oil that smoothes and soothes. Pride destroys relationships by building walls between people; humility builds bridges. If we have a lot of knowledge, then it's hard to be humble, but, if you can act humble, then people will come to you because they know that you won't look down on them.

*1 Peter 5:5 ...be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud...*

Pride blocks the grace of God that we need to grow, change, heal, and help others. It's like lead to a cell phone—it blocks the signal. Humility is admitting that we need God's grace, and that allows us and others to receive it.

Practical ways to develop humility: 1) admitting your weakness; you're not good at everything. 2) be patient with others. 3) be open to correction—be as open to correction as you are ready to correct others. 4) point the spotlight on others.

A little courtesy goes a long way. Respect others; respect their beliefs (now respecting doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with); be considerate of others feelings; be patient with those that irritate us.

*Titus 3:2 ...shewing all meekness to all men.*

One key to courtesy: to understand where people are coming from, when you know what they have been through, our understanding improves. Instead of thinking about how far they still have to go, think about how far they have come in spite of their hurts. Family building happens when people know that it is safe enough to share doubts and fears without being judged. Now, the Bible talks about judging righteous judgment (John 7:24), that's not what I'm talking about here; I'm talking about placing your brand on other people.

Frequency—Frequent, regular contact with people builds family ties and fellowship.

*Hebrews 10:25 ...not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together...*

Develop a habit of meeting together. A habit is something you do frequently, not occasionally. If your fellowship is shallow, then you aren't spending enough time together. You may think that you'll get more fellowship when you find time. No, you need to make time. We are all busy people; you will never just find time. It may not be convenient (we'll get together when we feel like it), but family building is not built on convenience, it's built on conviction. You will make time for it when you take the attitude that this is something that I need for my spiritual health. That means meeting together even when you don't feel like it, because you believe that it is important.

*Acts 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord...*

To meet this challenge, we will only be successful if we partner with God. We all have quirks, but family/fellowship has nothing to do with compatibility. Instead, it is our relationship with God which is the basis. It means giving up our independence in order to become interdependent (body fitly joined together—Ephesians 4:16). The benefits of sharing life together far outweigh the costs. It prepares us for Heaven by keeping unity in our bond of peace.

