

“Empowerment Through Fellowship”

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If the first disciples could time-travel to the present day, would they see anything that looked familiar? There is something that would be exactly the same. Today, we have mega churches, and televangelists, and internet Bible studies; do you think that they would say, “Oh, yeah, we used to do that.”? What would they think of our Christianity today? Oh, we know that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). We know the story; we know the promise; we know the message, but that was two thousand years ago; what does that have to do with us today? A lot of things have changed since then, but there is one thing that remains exactly the same as when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. It something that you can do everywhere you go: at work, at home, in the barracks, on the ship, in the still of the night, or in the busy-ness of the day... Many people are missing this today. Oh, they know the outward trappings of religion, and they are familiar with people getting emotional—and don’t get me wrong, if you truly know the Gospel, then it should make you emotional—but it isn’t the emotions that are important. What is it that could be so timeless? The answer is fellowship. God wants you to do something every day. He didn’t call anyone to be a lone ranger (but even the Lone Ranger had Tonto).

My first point is that fellowship is an incubator. It’s a protected environment for growth. One of the most important things that so many people miss: How do you get that to take root and grow?

Proverbs 27:17

...a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

In order to sharpen, the two things must be of like substance. For example, iron sharpeneth iron. You wouldn’t try to sharpen a knife by running it through butter, or by using it to cut bread. In order for fellowship to be successful, the two people must be like-minded. If you need to make a decision, maybe it would be smart to get His advice, since He knows the end from the beginning; He knows what the housing market is going to be like, and what the stock market is going to be like, or whatever else it is that would affect your decision. If God establishes it, it is unmovable. His seed will bring forth fruit, and that fruit will remain (John 15:16). We obtain that fruit through fellowship.

If God had intended for us to grow just by reading the text, then He wouldn’t have chosen twelve disciples, He would have just sent out a bunch of Gideons. Instead, He told His disciples to Go, teach, and baptize (Matthew 28:19). What does it look like when I apply that to my life? You may have noticed that when Jesus taught, a lot of the time He taught it twice; the first time was evangelism, the second time was fellowship. Matthew thirteen has several good examples of that. First He taught the multitude a story relating the Kingdom of Heaven to something they could understand, then the disciples came to Him and asked Him to explain the parable to them.

Real fellowship is available to us today, but you have to seek it out. You have to be enveloped in fellowship. You know that people who have been burned are put into a

special chamber to encourage healing, but they don't just get in and get out and go on their way; they have to stay in it. We are always growing, but we never outgrow fellowship. I promise you, you will encounter something different this week. I don't care how good you are at taking notes, you still need to revisit the sermons from each Sunday morning. Let it sink in. Talk to other people in the church about it; let the fellowship sharpen you.

My second point is that fellowship is a Green Card. It is a legitimate path to citizenship. I know that we have some people here who are on the path to getting their US citizenship, and some who have already done that. It isn't easy. How do you know if you are doing it right? None of us are smart enough to know on our own (God knew that if He made us that smart, then we wouldn't depend on anyone for help, not even Him). God's calling is established through fellowship. Fellowship is available to you any time you want it. They don't have to be people that you particularly like.

Some of you may be scratching your heads. "Yeah, I've had the punch on the church lawn after service, but I've never experienced anything like what you're talking about." True fellowship involves getting with people who really study the Bible.

Psalms 133 ...how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...

We are a spiritual family, and you should welcome that challenges. After a great victory, or after a great loss, fellowship is there for you. None of us can do it by ourselves, but we get all we need by fellowship. Fellowship can help you to understand and to know what it was you were born for.

Some of you may have had a religious experience; maybe at age thirteen you went down to the altar and prayed a prayer, but that experience really doesn't mean anything to you today; you not bearing any fruit. Maybe you're spending time praying and studying, but you're still not getting anywhere. Fellowship can help you to find God's purpose for your life, but you have to seek it out. Remember, Jesus said, knock and it will be opened unto you, seek and ye shall find, Ask, and it shall be given you (Matthew 7:7).

My third point is that fellowship is a showcase. True fellowship puts Christ on display. All that we are supposed to know about Christ gets put on display when there is true fellowship. We are not driven by the values of society. We are an odd bunch, a peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9). If you're not sure that you are getting true fellowship, here is a litmus test that God gave to His people. Look at these two Scriptures:

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another...

He said this was a new commandment. Do you really think that the Golden Rule was a new idea? Parents have always tried to teach some version of this to their children. Jesus said that this was a new kind of love, "as I have loved you." We will meditate on this for the rest of our natural lives and never fully understand. We need to ask God to help us understand. Jesus said that this is how people would know that we are His disciples.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My Name...

There is something amazing, and miraculous that happens when we come together in His name. Just coming together doesn't make it happen, but, if you truly gather together *in His Name*... It could be on a park bench, or a city bus, or a coffee shop; it can happen anywhere. Just talking about the goodness of God, in such a way that the waiter or waitress is hesitant to step in, but they want to hear or to be part of what you're saying. You need to grow, so you need fellowship. You need direction, so you need fellowship. You and I are supposed to be His ambassadors, to display the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Sometimes I just want to be grumpy; I don't want to have joy; I don't want to get fellowship. God's not happy with me then. Sometimes it's a real struggle for me to get myself to seek out fellowship. In times like those, I need to really have Christ, and to focus on that. Fellowship confirms to me that great things happen. Being in the same mind and same judgment. Ask God how you can get that (or, if you already have that, ask how you can get more of that).

The world around us is hungry for something real, right now. "Help me deal with my wife, my job, my relationships, the crushing pressure of financial distress, being sent overseas to hostile lands..." It's not just words on a page; it's in your heart. Remember, Jesus said that people would know His disciples by their love. When you glorify God for His blessings all around us, marvelous things happen. If that sounds odd to you, then you haven't experienced much fellowship.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works...

The light matures because you seek out fellowship. You are not so smart or so clever that you are going to figure out all of God's secrets. Fellowship will help you to grow and be faithful to God.

2 Corinthians 6:14 ...what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?...

I want to talk just a little bit about the other side of fellowship. If you're not getting the right fellowship, then you are suffering. You are causing yourself unnecessary anguish by missing fellowship. Just as God used the Red Sea to separate Israel from Egypt, so should we be separate from the world. I know that we are in the world, but we are not of this world (John 15:19). Fellowship with the brothers and sisters that are around you; that's true fellowship.