

**“Experiencing Life Together”**  
**by Brother Kenneth Ray**  
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Life is meant to be shared. God intends for us to experience life together. The Bible calls this shared experience, “fellowship.” Today the word has lost most of its biblical meaning. Fellowship now usually refers to casual conversation, socializing, food, and fun. “Where do you fellowship?” means where do you attend church. “Stay after for fellowship,” means, wait for refreshments. I have seen both sides: I have fun and casual conversation after church, and I have had food while sharing about the goodness of God.

Real fellowship is more than just showing up for service. Fellowship, or experiencing life together, includes: unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting, and all the other “one another” commandments found in the New Testament.

Does size matter? In fellowship it does. You can worship with a crowd, but it is hard to talk with a crowd. You can fellowship with just one other person.

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

God made us an incredible promise. If you think of the church like a ship, then fellowship is the lifeboats attached.

Unfortunately, being in a group having fellowship does not guarantee a sense of community. Sometimes we get stuck in superficiality (not keeping it real). Some people have no clue what it is to experience genuine fellowship.

What is the difference between real and fake fellowship? In real fellowship, people experience authenticity, not superficial, surface level chit-chat. Real fellowship is genuine, heart-to-heart, God-level sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives. This is where you share hurts, reveal feelings, confess failures, admit fears and doubts, and acknowledge weakness. This is where you ask for help, and ask for prayer. Women are better at this than men are.

Real fellowship is the exact opposite of what you find in too many churches. What you should find is an atmosphere of honesty and humility, but what you really find (all too often) is pretending, role-playing, politicking, and superficial politeness, but shallow conversation. If you really want to know if a church has real fellowship, don't ask the members; ask the visitors. Did people speak to you, learn your name, find out where you're from, etc.

People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act like everything is rosy in their lives. These attitudes are the death of real fellowship. If everything is so great, why is my soul so bothered for you? When we open our lives, we experience real fellowship.

*1 John 1:7-8    ...we have fellowship one with another...*

There's another one of those “one another: commandments. The world thinks that intimacy happens in darkness; God says it happens in the light. The darkness is used

to hide hurts, faults, fears, failures, and flaws. In the light we bring all those things out into the open and admit who we really are. Remember that it's not what other people say about you that defines you, it's what is true.

Being authentic requires courage and humility. It means taking a risk of being exposed, of being rejected, and being hurt all over again. The question is, "Why would anyone take such a risk?" The answer is to grow spiritually and to be emotionally healthy. It's hard to be spiritual if you are emotionally messed up.

*James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another...*

NOTE: This does NOT mean to confess your sins one to another. You should confess your sins to God. We grow in taking risks; possibly the most difficult risk of all is to be honest with ourselves and others.

In real fellowship, people experience mutuality. This is the art of giving and receiving. We depend on each other.

*1 Corinthians 12:25 ...that the members should have the same care one for another.*

*Romans 1:12 ...the mutual faith both of you and me.*

We are more consistent in our faith when others walk with us and encourage us. The Bible commands mutual accountability, encouragement, serving, and honoring one another. There over fifty times in the New Testament that it commands us to perform tasks one with another, or with each other.

*Romans 14:19 ...things wherewith one may edify another.*

You are not responsible for everyone in the body of Christ, but you are responsible to them. God expects us to do whatever we can to help each other.

In real fellowship, people experience sympathy and mercy. Sympathy is not giving advice, or offering quick cosmetic help. Sympathy is entering in and sharing in the pain of others. "I understand what you are going through," or "What you fell is neither strange nor crazy."

*Colossians 3:12 ... mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

Sympathy meets two basic fundamental human needs: The need to be understood, and the need to have your feeling validated. When we hurry to fix it, or get pre-occupied with our own hurt, self-pity dries up sympathy for others.

There are three levels of fellowship:

Fellowship of sharing and studying God's word together

Fellowship of serving (when we minister together)--deeper

Fellowship of suffering (bear one another's burdens)--deepest

In real fellowship, we experience mercy. Mistakes aren't rubbed in, they're rubbed out. In fellowship, mercy wins over justice. We all need mercy; we all stumble, and need help to get back on track. We can't have fellowship without forgiveness.

Many don't understand the difference between trust and forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past. Trust has to do with future behavior. Forgiveness must be immediate, whether or not the person asks for it. Trust must build over time; it requires a track record

There are many benefits that you will experience in being part of real fellowship. It is an essential part of Christian life that cannot be overlooked.

Got Fellowship?