



Fellowship & Hospitality *January 2, 2022*

A few years ago, I recall a time when the elders were reviewing biblical requirements for elders, and one of the elders commented on the one that says that a pastor should be given to hospitality. He essentially was pointing out how interesting it is that one of God's requirements for a pastor is that the pastor is hospitable. Isn't that interesting? When you hear the apostle Paul call the church the ground and pillar of truth, and that spiritual leaders are to be examples of the believers, I wonder how many of you would put in "hospitable" in the job description for pastor. And, if hospitality is an example of the believer, I wonder how many of you see the benefit and need for practicing hospitality in your own life.

This year, as we ender 2022, I want to emphasize the theme of hospitality. A theme of welcoming people into our lives, our homes, and our church. Even as we move into next week, we'll be in an 8-week series on a theology of Food and Feasting. Why is food and feasting actually valuable? How can getting together with people regularly actually encourage us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? This is what I want to get into this morning.

I hope we can all see why real, deep, communal fellowship is of such vital importance. As I think of the early church in Acts 2, I recall the scenario where the Spirit works through Peter's preaching to draw many in Jerusalem to trust Jesus. Three thousand people trust in the Lord in one day! Then, starting in verse 41, we read the following: **So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42-43).** They, the Jerusalem church (not only individuals), continued steadfastly in four things. A miracle of many people coming to faith has taken place. Then, verse 42 tells us what the results of this miracle was. What happened as a result of many people coming to faith? There are four realities that take place. I tend to believe these four practices are essential ingredients in the lives of all churches that have been revived by the Lord.

The one thing that might seem a little odd in the list is fellowship. We may understand "apostle's doctrine." We need to know what we believe and why we believe it! The breaking of bread probably has ideas to communion; so, we understand that. Prayer... well, of course, we need to pray. But, some people may stop their devotion to the Lord at this point. If you do this, then the church community is simply a place you go to and leave. If you take "fellowship" out of this mix, you can literally treat Christ's church like many people in America treat it. You show up for a service, sit in the chairs, leave, arrive home, shut your garage, come back next week.

If this is you, you're missing out. And, Christ's church is missing out because the Scriptures tell us that we need all believers. Just as believers are to devote themselves to right beliefs, they are to devote themselves to fellowship! So, this morning, we're going to look at the Scriptures to discover why fellowship is essential and how we can live it out with believers.

1. Fellowship and hospitality include communion (relationship with) other believers.

A man by the name of Jerry Bridges once wrote this: **“To be objectively in fellowship with other believers while we experientially deny that very fellowship is to contradict the clear teaching of the Bible and to live in disobedience to the revealed will of God.”**¹

How can he say this? Well, do you know the words of Jesus when he says that the world will know his disciples by our love? Many times we hear people quote that, but I think they misapply it. They make application to how we ought to love the world. And, while we ought to love people who refuse to believe, Jesus says that they’ll know we are Christians by our love for one another (i.e. – fellow believers).

How does this apply to fellowship and hospitality? Fellowship, according to the Bible is communion and relationship with fellow Christians. It’s the coming together around what unifies us. And what unifies us? God’s glory in Jesus by the Spirit. So, fellowship happens when we confess and make clear that Jesus is our central hope. Hospitality is kind of like a subset to fellowship. And, hospitality actually has a broad and narrow definition. Hospitality literally means “love of strangers.” That’s a broad definition. It doesn’t have to only refer to having people over for a meal. Although, in the ancient world, the practical application involved the home. In the ancient world for the early church and the Old Testament time period, it was an opening of your home to people you did not know in order to help care for them. For Christians, it was a call to allow other believers to live with you because they needed a place to stay. In doing so, you gave evidence that you were all family in Christ. As one Bible dictionary defines hospitality, it states, “In general, hospitality involved the process of ‘receiving’ outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests.”² One commentator writes about the Greek in Romans 12:13 and says, “The implication is not simply that believers should be ready to extend hospitality if called upon but that they should be looking for those they can befriend in this way.”³

This is why Jerry Bridges can be so strong in his wording. If God has loved, and continues to love us, in these ways, converting us from strangers to friends; then why would we not want to do the same? Think of the practical ramifications for fellowship and hospitality. This means we should look for opportunities on our calendars to get together with Christians we know and also with Christians we don’t know. Maybe if a missionary is traveling you can open up your space. Maybe you can set aside a room for people in need.

I know what some people think, “My house is messy” or “My house is small” or “I don’t have the money to invite these large families over to our house.” But in giving and sacrificing we reveal the love of Christ! When we give to those who are in need, we reveal Jesus who is the True Good Samaritan who helps us in our sickness and need for food.

I would encourage you to sit down this week and plan for how you’re going to have people in your home – whether visitors, strangers, missionaries or even people within our own church. Now, even as I say these things, I want to make sure we don’t miss the heart behind this all. We need to be in communion with other believers, especially those whom we have committed ourselves to. I say especially those whom we’ve committed to because Acts gives us the example of the early Christians being baptized and then added to the numbers and then continuing together in these certain characteristics. This doesn’t

¹ Bridges, Jerry. *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (elec. ed.). NavPress: Bay, New York. Kindle, Loc. 651.

² Malina, B. J., & Powell, M. A. (2011). hospitality. In M. A. Powell (Ed.), *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (M. A. Powell, Ed.) (Third Edition) (395). New York: HarperCollins.

³ Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Vol. 27: Romans*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

negate our responsibility to all believers, but I believe that there is a biblical precedent for local gatherings and the need for those gatherings to especially care for each other. There is something different about being friends with someone around the world and actually getting together face-to-face with Christians I've committed with to help grow in godliness. When we are hospitable – whether that means we invite people into our house or we invite them into our life's schedule – we are doing life and learning how to apply the gospel to our hearts.

So, we must have communion with believers. That's what we see in Acts 2. There's fellowship and breaking of bread. There's togetherness and care. Again, hospitality isn't simply a thing to do. It's a privilege we can participate in as we seek to magnify the glory of God to one another.

2. Fellowship and hospitality are based in the nature of God.

When we think about fellowship our minds should first and foremost go to God Himself. In Genesis 1:26, we read, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...."⁴ Then we are told that God does make man in His own image: "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."⁵ This is very interesting phraseology, isn't it? We ought to be thinking, "Why does God say, 'Let us make man?'" Isn't God One. Yes, but we also know he is the Three-in-One. And, I think this is why God creates mankind as two different people. Did you hear the result of being in God's image? Male and female He created them. This is not only talking gender. I believe this is also teaching us about the greater community experience that is greater than any other created being.

We can experience community and fellowship to greater degrees because God Himself is communal. We know that God is a Trinity. He has never lacked for fellowship for all eternity. He has always enjoyed infinite fellowship within Himself. As a result of this great joy within Himself, He decided to create beings who would also be able to know joy in community. Therefore, He created human beings – *plural*. He did not only create one. He created two. Then He did not only want two. He called them to be fruitful and multiply. He wanted the earth teeming with human beings who would be able to represent and know the character of our Triune and communal God. Yet, seemingly not long into Adam and Eve's existence, they decided that they wanted to be like God. As a result of their sin, you find a breaking of true love and community. You find Adam and Eve blame-shifting. Eventually we read of murders, and all sorts of others sins that break apart relationships in marriages, families and communities. Even in the Israelite community that God set apart for himself, they rebel and turn from each other, creating a divided kingdom.

But that's not God's intention. As we read in Revelation 5, "**And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,"**⁶ And, in Revelation 21 the following is recorded: "**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."**"⁷

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ge 1:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ge 1:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *English Standard Version* (Re 5:9)..Crossway

⁷ *English Standard Version* (Re 21:3–4). Crossway

God's plan has always been for people to come together in true fellowship and community. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in Acts 2:42, we find that the Jerusalem church continued steadfastly not only in the Apostle's Doctrine but also in Fellowship. Fellowship is the result of being reconciled to God. In other words, if we know God's love, and love God; then we will love others because we are imitating our Triune God. The image of God is being renewed in us when we fellowship. In addition, as we fellowship, Ephesians 4 states that we help fellow Christians grow in becoming more like Jesus. Also, as we've already discovered, when we fellowship with believers, we learn more of the joy that God has within Himself as the Triune God.

You see, fellowship isn't simply a task we do. We don't fellowship to check off a list and say, "Well, I did my duty. I was supposed to get together with people." Instead, we fellowship because we have been granted great love in Christ. We also desire to know God and enjoy Him forever. And, we want others to grow in knowing God's love, too. Therefore, if we really are zealous for eternal joy in God, we *together* will continue steadfastly and zealously in fellowshiping with other believers. To go to Ephesians 4:13, we see Paul's logic when he says that we will become mature someday and that maturity includes a unity that will exist among believers – a unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Therefore, as a result of that future unity, Paul calls us to pursue fellowship and unity today.

So, with all of this backdrop, let's continue to learn more implications of real fellowship.

3. Fellowship and hospitality reveal the glory of God.

The Greek word for fellowship is "koinonia." This word means ". . . a close mutual relationship; participation, sharing in; partnership; contribution, gift."⁸ But I think even the definition needs to be clarified. The reason I think that is because we need to realize why there would be a mutual relationship or participation or partnership. In 1 John 1:7, John tells us the following: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."⁹ He is saying that if we are enjoying fellowship with Jesus, then we enjoy real communion, relationship, participation with others around us. Add to this, Jesus prayed for Christians to have real fellowship in John 17:20-23. Hear these words: ". . .that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.¹⁰ Jesus prayed that all who believe will be perfectly one. And, we know that the perfection in unity comes because we now have fellowship with Jesus.

In me stating this to you, I hope that you hear me pointing you back to the Apostle's doctrine. It is because of Jesus that we are forgiven. It is because of Jesus that we live. Jesus took the wrath of God for sinners on the cross. We were unjust. We were blamershifters. We have hid and sought to cover-up. Yet, Jesus took people's punishment for us. In rising again, He has called people to look to Him for forgiveness and life. And, in looking to Him, Jesus becomes the center of our lives and our fellowship with other people who believe on Him for salvation. You see, real fellowship does not exist without Him. He loved us and gave Himself for us. Now we want to be with other people who have been saved

⁸ Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament*. (101). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Jn 1:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Jn 17:21–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

by Him. He broke down the walls of hostility between ethnicities. He has brought both rich and poor together and then called them to love and befriend one another because He has befriended us.

I want you to get this point. As stated before, real fellowship does not exist without Him. Sometimes I think Christians turn “fellowship” into a generic term. We have coffee fellowships and we have a fellowship meal after the service. I’m not against saying that they could include fellowship, but we have to make sure in our own minds that we don’t merely think that something is fellowship simply because it is happening within the church walls or simply because we are getting together with another Christian. I believe that I could get together with another Christian and never acknowledge the privileges of fellowship. I’m not fellowshiping simply because something is entitled a “fellowship.” You and I must purpose to fellowship. I could only ever shoot the breeze with someone and never get into real life and real hope in Jesus with them. That isn’t to say that talking about a hobby or talking about your children or getting to know someone is sinful. This isn’t to say that every word, sentence or time period must always mention God somewhere. But, the hope is that the relationship will go deeper. You want there to be a relationship where you can go deeper in encouraging one another in Christ.

From personal experience, I can’t tell you just how awesome relationships like that are. I have a couple of relationships where we can talk through the gamut of issues, but our ultimate theme is the greatness of God in Jesus. It’s so amazing how we can be outside playing Bocce ball or sitting out the couch talking about work and our conversation jumps to how Christ encourages us. There is nothing like that type of level of fellowship. And, honestly, I pray that we all experience that with closer friendships and also through the relationships within this church family.

As we live this way, we reveal the glory of God to one another and even to the world. The Triune God is in communion with himself. Now, because of Jesus, we are in communion with God and one another. As we live that out, we reveal God’s glory! Isn’t that amazingly glorious? But as I say this, I want to be careful. To keep us from merely being pharisaical and rules-based, I want to emphasize one final point. Remember how Jesus said that all the Law is summed up in loving God and loving others? That includes the commands for fellowship and hospitality. Without love, you’re just having people over to fill their stomachs. Without love, you’re just sitting at a table with another human being.

We must evaluate our hearts in this, and pray that God increases our love for him and for others. But I want to press this a little more. Over the last couple of months as I’ve been counseling people, I’ve picked up on something interesting. People want to know that you care about them. You can say “I love you” until you’re blue in the face, but do you actually care about them? Do you show you care? Do you listen? Do you encourage and build them up when you see God’s work in them? Do you show you value them?

I don’t believe we can separate care from love, but I think practically, we can do that. We can treat people like projects and not like humans for whom Christ died – and thus we fail to see them as family in the Lord! If we see them as family, and as loved by God, then we will want to know them more because we’ll know them for all eternity! This mindset generates a desire for hospitality.

So, I think we ought to ask ourselves questions like, “Do I love the people here at Ventura or do I want them to just love me?” Or, “Am I getting together with them because I care for them or simply because I want someone to care for me?” Listen to 1 Corinthians 12:25. Paul prays **“that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”**¹¹ We don’t want

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (1 Co 12:25). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

division in the body. Instead, we are going to seek to care for all around us. Keep in mind, this is each of our responsibility to work towards. It doesn't help to have one person saying, "See how they don't care for me!" That attitude will bring divisiveness in the body. Have a genuine concern for people.

How can we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice if we're not involved in their lives? Jesus himself is the greatest example of this. God, in glory, did not have to come to this earth, but he left heaven's glory. There was a cost. He came to this earth. He now sympathizes with humanity's weaknesses and hears our prayers. Now, we're called to follow in his steps. We are to let his mind be in us! Or, as Paul says in Romans 12:13, we are to "contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

Ventura, I genuinely hope that as 2022 pans out that you will proactively look for ways to minister to people, to feed people, to welcome them into your lives. Following Jesus is never something to regret. I genuinely hope you'll look at your calendars and schedules and carve out dates to get together with one another and be involved in each other's lives. **So, let's count one another more highly than ourselves with the mind we have in Christ Jesus. Let's minister effectively. Let's live like family. Let's confess that there will be growth pains required in this. But, let us also confess that we trust the Lord to work his will in and through us to grow us to maturity as we fellowship with and invite each other into our lives.**

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