

Fellowship

Fellowship, gathering, get-together, assembly, and congregation are all terms for the same thing. We use these to describe when people come together in one accord. Today we want to talk about what fellowship is, what we do when we fellowship, and what happens as a result of fellowship.

To get started, let's read Acts 2:42-47

(42) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (43) Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. (44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This is a favorite passage of scripture of mine. I find it so encouraging. The Bible is talking about the fellowship of believers that have come together. There are some great nuggets of knowledge and inspiration we can dig out of this short passage and we are going to break it down.

When we, as Christians, come together, great things can happen. We have shared in the past about Ecclesiastes 4:12 where we read that a cord of three strands is not easily broken. This is an illustration of what it is like when we, as the church, come together. We can do amazing things and face insurmountable problems with grace, peace, and joy when we are together.

Let's look back on the early church and see what we can learn from them and put into practice today.

We read in verse 42 that they devoted themselves to what the apostles were teaching, to fellowship, to meals together, and to prayer. That sounds fantastic to me. If you attend a conventional church service weekly, you may even be thinking to yourself, "That's what I do." It may be or are you maybe just fulfilling a religious duty.

As we move forward after Jesus' earthly ministry, we see all the church stayed together. They came together often for all these reasons. When they were together they were in awe in all the signs and wonders that were performed by the apostles. Verse 43 says everyone was filled with awe. They didn't get bored seeing people get healed. They weren't tired of seeing people's needs met. They were in awe.

As we read about Jesus' life in the gospels, we see how he lead his disciples and followers. They lived in community. They ate together, learned together, worked together, and so on. I'm sure there were some followers that were only there every now and again. They had shops to run, crops to tend, animals to take care of, and more. That is no different today. The important thing is people were together and when they were together, they were like family.

Family takes care of family. This new family in Christ, the Church, kept all their possessions for everyone's use. It was all held in common. Verse 45 even says they would sell possessions and property as people had need. They didn't hold on to anything for selfish reasons. They shared with one another freely, just like family does.



The big observation of the early church we want to point out is found in verses 46 and 47. Every day they met together in the temple courts. They came together every day. That was important. This was one of the ways they stayed connected. This is how they knew what was going on. This is where they learned more about Jesus through the Apostles' teachings. This is where they would learn about the needs of their fellowship.

Then we read that they then broke bread together in their homes with glad and sincere hearts. They invited each other into their homes and ate meals together. They became part of each others' lives. They enjoyed their time together and loved each other. Most of all, they had a sincere heart attitude in all they were doing.

What was the result of all this? The Lord added to their number who were being saved daily! That means more people were coming together. More people were learning about Jesus through the Apostles' teaching. More people were joining the family. More people were breaking bread together and sharing their lives with everyone else.

Why don't we see that today? In some parts of the world, we do. Here in America, it is very rare. It does happen, but not often. However, we see in places like Kenya and Pakistan where the church truly lives in community. They work together and live their lives together. They share each other's burdens and good fortunes. They greet one another daily and often break bread together or share a meal with one another. It is truly inspiring, and the Lord is adding to their numbers daily.

I know the people we have met in some of these faraway lands are some of the most sincere in heart we have met. They are hungry for teachings about Jesus and to know him more and draw closer to him. This then causes them to share more with the people around them. And it grows.

This is what we are supposed to be doing. This is what Jesus called us all to do when he said to go and make disciples. He is commissioning us to bring more and more people into the family of God and then treat them like family. Help them learn about Jesus and then tell their story as they come together with others and bring them into the family.

As we bring more people into the family of God, the Church grows. The Lord adds to our number daily those who are being saved! That is what it is all about! That is our primary purpose or prime directive you might say.

Our motivation is key to this whole thing though. We cannot build a program around this. We cannot put this into a policy and procedure manual. The Church of Jesus Christ is organic. It must grow the way it grows, like a grapevine. We can prune it and train it to grow in a certain direction and we can fertilize it and weed around it to keep the ground fertile so it can grow, but it must do the growing on its own. The Church is exactly the same. We can teach about Jesus and share the gifts of the Holy Spirit with others. We can feed each other physically and share our possessions and property with others. We can even point out changes that need to take place in one another, as the Holy Spirit prompts us. The growth, however, must be allowed to happen as it happens. The Lord will grow the Church, and He will grow it in his timing, not ours.

We get impatient and jealous of other groups and how fast they grow. We try to copy what other church groups are doing so we can grow like them. This is not biblical. There is no defined program other than



love one another, and share what Jesus has done in you with others. Then the Lord adds to your numbers.

When we lived in a farming community many years ago we pastored a small country church there. The area is one of the largest growers of soft white wheat in the world. I don't recall the exact statistics, but the average yield was something like 100 bushels of wheat per acre. The next county over was only producing wheat at about 50 bushels per acre. That was still very good, but not as good as the county where we were. Our county had more fertile soil and was just better suited for the wheat.

Church, some places and groups are just better suited for growth. They can support a larger number of people than other groups. We need to stop comparing ourselves to the group across the street and start living like we are all part of one church, one family, and lift one another up. As we do that and focus on the people the Lord has put in our paths, we will see people come to know Jesus in an ever-deepening way, and we will see the Lord add to our numbers more often.

Let's look back at the early church and do what Jesus told us to do. Love one another, so that others will know we are Christians. Take care of one another, so no one has need. Let the Lord bring the discipline people need through the Holy Spirit, that is not what he has asked us to do. Continue to gather together, break bread, pray, worship, and fellowship, for this is what pleases the Lord.

