

Building Community and Fellowship

According to the dictionary, fellowship is *a feeling of friendship* that people have when they are talking or doing something together, and sharing their experiences. It is also used to describe *a group of people that join together for a common purpose or interest*. Such a group of people is also referred to as *a community*.¹

As we explore the scriptures we find that the first "small group" was formed in the Garden of Eden when...

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

When Isaac blessed Jacob, as he sent him out for a wife among the daughters of Laban, he said...

"May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples." Genesis 28:1-3

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the body of believers...

...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42

In other scriptures we find that the body of believers were drawn together as a community of peoples because of their relationship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. When they gathered together and devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, their spiritual bond and relationships with each other were strengthened as they shared their experiences, and encouraged one another to live by the truth, and walk as Jesus did.²

Today, we likewise join together in the same common bond as a community of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and our challenge as flock group leaders is to help make this spiritual truth a reality for the members of the flock that have been led by the Holy Spirit to gather together in our homes.

Based on the feedback we have received from flock group members, this reality is being accomplished as each member is encouraged to actively participate in all of the four pillars of flock groups:

Teaching...Encouraging one another to apply the pastors' teachings to their lives.

Fellowship...Building community with love and devotion to one another in Christ.

Prayer...Joining together in a meaningful personal time with our Lord and Savior.

Outreach...Sharing our faith in Jesus and serving others through word and deed.

¹ Collins Dictionary of the University of Birmingham England

² Acts 2:42-47, 1 John 1:1-10, Philippians 2:1-2

Community Building flows from all four of the pillars, but benefits from the special emphasis on getting to know one another. Together, the four pillars provide the foundation by which community building grows and flourishes.

Building Community Today

Is there a need today for building community and connecting with one another in fellowship? The answer is an astounding, Yes!

A. It is a strongly felt need of many people today.

1. "Our people's hearts cry out for it" says Dr. Garrett Higbee a well-known psychologist who now provides pastoral counseling services at College Park Church.
2. Elizabeth II on her 50th Christmas greeting to her nation in December 2001 said, "A sense of community and our faith will be beacons that will lead us into and through the coming year."

B. God designed the church to be a community of the Spirit.

1. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with His Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose," Philippians 2:1-2.
2. Pastor George Mueller (1805-1898), who relying solely upon God's word, the Holy Spirit, and prayer supported all of his works, sought to help his people realize, "the deeper truths of the word, which relate to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God in the church, and to the ministry of saints, one to another, as fellow members in the body of Christ use their spiritual gifts for service." For more information, see www.bsmi.org/mueller.htm.
3. A.T. Pearson, in writing the biography of George Mueller quoted him in saying, "As to the importance of the children of God opening their hearts to each other, especially when they are getting into a cold state, or under the power of a certain sin, or in especial difficulty; I know from my own experience how often the snare of the devil has been broken when under the power of sin, how often the heart has been comforted when nigh to be overwhelmed; how often advice [amid] great perplexity, has been obtained—by opening my heart to a brother in whom I had confidence. We are children of the same family, and ought therefore to be helpers one of another." A.T. Pearson, "George Mueller of Bristol and His Witness to a Prayer Hearing God," 223.
4. Pastor Kimber Kauffman, Senior Pastor of College Park Church since 1985, said, "If you want to be a part of the New Testament church, exercise your gift in the church." 11/23/01 AM Sermon.

Today, we gather together in a variety of settings with family, friends, colleagues, associates, etc. But what makes a gathering of people, a community of God, is the common

bond we have when we gather together in fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3.

As fellow believers, we are reconnected with the Living God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we share the spiritual realities of...

- A. Eternal life, "The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord," Romans 6:23.
- B. God's grace, "All of you share in God's grace with me," Philippians 1:27.
- C. Union with each other through Christ's death and resurrection, "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life," Romans 6:4.
- D. We are one body and all partake of one Holy Spirit, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. . .and we were all given the one Spirit to drink," 1 Corinthians 12:13.
- E. We all received pardon through Christ for our rebellion against God, "For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son..." Romans 5:17-20.
- F. We all have been elevated to a status of sons and daughters and thus form a community with God, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children," Romans 8:16.
- G. We all have a common inheritance and destiny, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ," Romans 8:17.
- H. As, "All the believers were together and had everything in common...selling their possessions and goods, they gave to everyone as he had need,"³ we share in good times and bad times: birth and death; personal triumphs, as well as personal tragedies; and at times share our goods.
- I. We, as the New Testament Church, have a love for each other that the world cannot match.
- J. We, as a body of believers, also share our talents and gifts in common service to Christ. For example:
 - 1. We can help empower each member to live in daily spiritual blessing and victory through the Fellowship, Teaching, and Prayer/Worship experienced in the Flock Gathering.
 - 2. Together we can learn how to share the Good News of Christ's Redemption with our siblings, relatives, and neighbors.

³ Acts 2:44-45; 4:32

3. God may call some Flock Members to teach his word in Sunday School or AWANA, and others may be called to proclaim it in Nursing Homes, Detention Centers or Rescue Missions.

As we continue exploring the scriptures, we also find that the early church grew and flourished because of common characteristics and biblical principles they followed.

Fellowship in the Early Church

As the Holy Spirit moved among the people after the day of Pentecost, there was great excitement in the air for the followers of Jesus, and much soul searching for the assembly of God fearing Jews, from every nation under heaven, who had heard about and witnessed the recent events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

As the early church began to form, Luke describes what happened after people accepted the messages they heard from Peter and the other apostles.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, describes how their fellowship with each other was made possible because of their relationship with God.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also *may have fellowship* with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. 1John 1:3-4

John continues in 1 John 1:5-11 to describe that we can enjoy this same fellowship with God and with one another, if we...

- live by the truth,
- walk in the light...as he is in the light,
- confess our sins,
- obey his commands, and
- walk as Jesus did.

The Apostle Paul encourages fellowship among the believers in Philippi.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4

Paul encourages Philemon to actively share his faith and continue refreshing the saints.

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. Philemon 1:4-7

In Hebrews 3:12-13, the writer encourages the fellowship of believers to...

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Principles for Building Fellowship

As we examine these scriptures more closely, we learn that the body of believers...

- devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship with one another,
- met together regularly in corporate gatherings and in each others' homes,
- broke bread together...asking the Lord's blessing and sharing in communion,
- prayed for one another,
- encouraged one another in their walk with the Lord,
- were filled with awe at what God was doing,
- reached out to others in need with tenderness and compassion,
- praised God with glad and sincere hearts, and enjoyed the people's favor,
- were encouraged to become one in spirit and purpose, and love one another,
- shared their faith and nurtured those that the Lord added to their numbers.

When applying these principles in building fellowship in our flock groups, most will occur naturally, while others may need a little attention on our part to nurture the process. Our prayer is that your fellowship will be strengthened as you...

1. Devote yourselves to the pastors' teachings and fellowship with one another,
2. Meet regularly throughout the whole year in each others' homes,
3. Share refreshments, meal-time and communion together as the Lord leads,
4. Pray for one another when together and between meetings as well,
5. Encourage one another in your walk with the Lord,
6. Share how God has been at work in your lives and give him the glory,
7. Reach out to each other with tenderness and compassion,
8. Praise God with glad and sincere hearts and let your lights shine,
9. Encourage your group to become united in purpose, spirit and love, and
10. Share your faith and nurture those entrusted to your care.