

We are a Fellowship Community

Church, A Community on Purpose—part 3

August 22, 2021

DAY 1: Broadly thinking about fellowship...

1. Baptist churches are renowned for their “food and fellowship.” The Catholics have mass, the Episcopalians have holy water, and we have casserole dishes!
2. As a church community we “do life” together. We share our joys and sorrows, our victories and setbacks, our blessings and our “opportunities for personal growth.” :-)
3. There are layers of fellowship.
 - Our day-to-day, week-to-week lives.
 - Fellowship that deals with our heart issues: dealing with temptation, trying to do what is right, attempting to add light into a dark world, relating to a difficult person, realizing sometimes I am the difficult person.
 - The hunger and thirst for deeper connection. Someone that really knows me and can speak into my life even when it may be painful.

4. One of the ways God makes Himself known to us is through people.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

5. God is not an impersonal force. God is not a philosophical idea. God is personal.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

6. We are made in God’s image. That includes being personal beings and relational beings.

We are made to know and be known,
to love and be loved.

1 Thess. 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

7. Spiritual growth is not just a product of bible study and teaching and learning. It is also a product of relating to people in community.

8. When I was a pre-med student, I spent at least as much time in the lab as I did the classroom. Both experiences were important to learning. The lab was about practicing with what I had learned in the classroom.

9. Spiritual growth is very similar. We learn from the bible in our personal reading, at church and in small groups. But we also practice what we learn in the laboratory of relationships.

10. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Romans 12:9-11

*Romans 12:9 **Love** must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in **love**. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

1. What does Paul mean by “Love must be sincere”? Is he talking about our feelings? Our motivations? Something else?

2. What is the connection between hating what is evil and clinging to what is good?

3. In verse 9, the word “love” is the Greek word *agape*, which means a sacrificial love. In verse 10, the word “love” is the Greek word *Philia*, which means brotherly love.

4. This kind of love is the kind that accepts others’ weakness, overlooks slights, affirms others, and whose loyalty to someone is greater than the others’ failings.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another.

While only God can meet our deepest needs,
He often touches those needs through others.

Romans 12:10 ...Honor one another above yourselves.

5. “Honor” means to highly value, to highly esteem someone or something. Honoring someone in your heart helps your attitude toward someone. But communicating that you honor them builds stronger relationships.

6. On what basis do we honor people? People have intrinsic value because they are made in the image of God, and if they are Christians they are our brothers and sisters.

7. Why do you think we are to honor one another “*above yourselves*”?

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

8. Paul’s assumption is that we can expect our zeal (enthusiasm) and spiritual fervor (passion) to wane. This is due to our sinful nature, and living in a fallen world that often disappoints.

9. The image is of a lonely mountain man huddled around a fire at night. He can see the wolves lurking in the brush. The only thing that keeps the wolves at bay is the fire. The mountain man must continue to add wood to the fire through the night! The fire will not sustain itself.

10. For the Christian the ravenous wolves are apathy, discouragement, negativity, complacency, and depression. The baby wolves are after comfort, convenience, and the “better life.”

DAY 3: Romans 12: 12-15

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

1. Paul gives us three important ways to think about our future.
2. To be “joyful in hope” is to joyfully relax in the assurance that God’s ultimate plan for us is good. We *will be* rejoicing in heaven (and sometimes, sooner!) when we look back on all we went through in this life. In that sense, hope is a *present tense* joy.
3. The image is like having a huge retirement account for when you finally retire. But on occasion you make needed withdrawals on your retirement account before you retire. That present money is enjoyed in the present even though the money was set up for your future!
4. To be patient in affliction tells me that affliction is part of life. I should not be surprised or “blind-sided” when affliction comes my way. The way forward is patience—through joyful hope and faithful prayer.

Romans 12:13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

5. Our Christian growth in maturity does not just happen by focusing on ourselves. A vital part of spiritual maturity involves serving, sharing, and giving to others. (See Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 11:27-30)
6. “Hospitality” is not the same as “entertaining.” “Entertaining” tends to be *host-focused*. Is the home spotless? Is everything in place? Is the food top-notch? Is the ambience impressive? But “hospitality” is *guest-focused*. The house does not need to be spotless, everything doesn’t have to be in place, the ambience does not need to be impressive, and the food can be what we normally have.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

7. Paul reminds the believers in Rome that sometimes persecution comes from the government while at other times it comes from people around you. Either way, how does he tell them to act?

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

8. This principle is the fastest way to better relationships. Why? Because feel understood by you.
9. Ironically, both of these things are sometimes hard to do. Why might it be hard to rejoice with someone who is rejoicing?
10. Why might it be hard to mourn with someone who is mourning?
11. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: Romans 12:16-17

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

1. One of the goals of relationships is to live harmoniously with others in the church. What keeps that from happening? Paul identifies the serial killer of relationships—pride! It is our natural desire to feel superior to others that people sense in us that turns them off to relationship with us.
2. You may feel superior about your marriage, about how you parenting your kids, about a successful career, or how you serve, what you do, where you vacationed, etc.
3. Do you sense some superiority in your heart about anything in particular?

4. The rest of Romans 12 gives us great wisdom on how to deal with very difficult and nasty relationships.

Dealing with difficult relationships... 4 principles

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

1. First, do not make the situation worse. Law number one in the medical field is “Do no harm.” Make sure you don’t make the crisis worse. We are not to repay someone for their evil to us. What strikes you about this principle?

2. Second, however you do respond let it pass the muster of those around you. Do not rely only on how your response may seem to you! Invite a friend or two to help you “talk it out” with how you should respond. The standard is, “What response will be honorable?” What strikes you about this principle?

3. Third, is there something you can do to attempt to better the situation. Oftentimes, the short-term goal is not to “fix” the situation. It is only to better the situation. This usually involves some small step of creating good will or extending an olive branch. What strikes you about this principle?

4. Fourth, you may be in a situation that will never be fixed. You can only do what you can do. What strikes you about this principle?

What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Romans 12:19-21

1. Some situations will be so awful that you will be tempted to take revenge.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

2. This reminds us of the first principle of response: Do no harm.

3. But the deeper point is that human revenge never accomplishes what we want it to accomplish. People who have done us wrong are not changed, do not repent even when they are getting a taste of their own medicine. Instead, they just become even more bitter at us!

Only God has a big enough "Mr. Spanky Spoon"
to get someone's attention.

4. It is God's role to apply whatever necessary pressure and force to stop someone in their tracks. Then, what is our role?

Romans 12:20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

5. This is the shocking role we are to play: undeserved kindness! Why do you think undeserved kindness is important?

Romans 12:20...In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

6. The amazing answer is two-fold. First, undeserved kindness has the opportunity to erase someone else's blame of you. It is an opportunity to show you are not the villain they may think you are. The less blame they can throw at you, the more guilt they may feel for their part.

7. Second, undeserved kindness gives someone a taste of what the grace of God is like. "Burning coals on their head" is redemptive. It indicates genuine conviction of sin.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

8. Paul returns to the great over-arching principle of responding to very difficult people. There is a battle to win in our hearts, and in our responses.

9. What strikes you from Romans 12:9-21

We are a fellowship community that puts in flesh form what it means to reflect God to others.