

Alone

Fellowship is Not an Option

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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In the 1930s and 1940s, a man by the name of Reen Spitz spent his life researching child development and child psychology. He was the first to use film, to use video cameras to observe the difference between infants who had what we would call normal interactions with their mothers, talking to them and touching them and holding them and showing them love.

And he compared those with children who were separated from their mothers for various reasons and only had their physical needs met. They were given food, they changed their diapers, and these children were in orphanages of sorts. He discovered that those infants who did not experience normal human interaction actually developed much slower and were far less healthy and cried much more than those who experienced that normal interaction with the love of a mother and father.

After Spitz's research, pediatric practices in hospitals around the world and orphanages would radically change in the early 1930s and 1940s as they would recognize the need for nurturing relationships in the development and growth of children that that was necessary and obvious.

Since the 1930s and 1940s, many other studies have been done like this to show the need for human interaction, especially in those who are younger, recognizing that it is actually essential for life. Scientists have now come to the conclusion. Psychologists have come to the conclusion that we need each other for survival. Now, when I read about studies like this, I often chuckle as they come to these conclusions because if they just read the Bible, they would find all of these answers.

They don't even have to read very far. It's in the first book of the Bible, the second chapter. They only have to make it to chapter 2 where we read, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone.'" Case closed for me. I don't need to do any more study or research to find that you and I were created to have fellowship with one another. I don't need the studies or the images on the screens to come to that conclusion, but it's another example for us of how often science proves what the Bible says to be true.

You and I were created to have fellowship with one another. Last week, we started a series that we're calling alone, and we're looking at this idea that it truly is not good for us to be alone. That even in Genesis 2, before sin entered into creation, as God created the entire universe and then He created Adam, he still came to the conclusion in a world that was without sin, it was not good for the man to be alone.

Last week, we looked at the analogy of the wildebeest as it travels across the Serengeti in its great migration, that there are strength in numbers, but if a lion can get a wildebeest to separate from the pack, they become easy pickings. And the same is true for us that when we isolate ourselves from others, we miss what God wants for us. When we are alone, we are more susceptible to fall into temptation and sin, for there is strength in numbers when we stick together.

And so over and over again in Scripture, it shouldn't surprise us that we find these commands about unity, about fellowship, about family, about connectedness. Because that is part of who we are. We are better

together. And because of that, the enemy will do whatever he can to separate us, to divide us, to try to convince us that we are better if we go it alone.

He does this, as I shared last week, sometimes through the death of a loved one or a hurt in the church that somebody experiences and they say, "You know what? It's not worth it. I can love God. I can have a relationship with Him, but getting involved in a church is just too messy." Sometimes the enemy will use any painful experience to try and create a wedge between us and God, as well as between us and other believers.

And so today, I want to look at even more scriptures that will hammer home this point, that will remind us that unity is important, that relationships are important, and that as we grow with other believers, God does something inside of us that draws us closer to Him. At the same time, I want you to know, as I stated last week, you do not need to come to church in fellowship with other believers to become a follower of Jesus.

But instead, you come to church in fellowship with other believers because you are a follower of Jesus. You don't come and gather with others to somehow earn your salvation before God. Scripture is very clear that you have been saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast. We don't gather together to earn favor before God or to make our moms happy. We come to church because it's a blessing for us, and it is a blessing for others as well.

So let me pray, and then we're going to jump into some Scripture. I am going to be jumping around this morning. I know sometimes I stick with one passage, but because I want to show you that this is from Genesis to Revelation, I'm going to jump around a little bit, but the Scriptures will be on the screen behind me. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together today, I know that even in a room that might be full of people, it's possible for us to still feel alone.

The enemy often tries to cause division in our lives, in our relationships, those that are closest to us with our spouse, with our siblings, with our children, with our parents. And so I do pray for protection over us, that the enemy would not get a foothold in those relationships, but instead, we would be a blessing to each other and that you would receive the praise. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus, amen.

This idea that a follower of Jesus could be a lone ranger is not new in our culture. It's not new in our society. We're not the first ones that have gone through life and maybe come to the conclusion. It's just easier to do it myself. It's just easier to go through life on my own. In fact, since the beginning of the church age, all the way in the book of Acts, as the church is just starting, certain people were convinced or deceived to believe they don't need anyone else.

This is why we have the author of Hebrews telling us in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25, and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching. You notice that the day is capitalized there. It's referring to the day of the Lord.

The author of Hebrews is saying that as the day of the Lord's returning is getting closer, as we look forward to that, don't give up the habit of meeting together. Instead, we should encourage each other. We should lift each other up all the more. For when we meet with other believers, we should leave the meeting encouraged. When you leave church on a Sunday morning, you should leave encouraged. But the problem is, we don't always do a good job of that, do we?

The psalmist says in Psalm 133, verse 1, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. When we can live together in unity." It's not just a blessing for us, but it's a blessing for those outside the church as well. When people look inside the church, they should recognize that we are different, that we don't act like the rest of the world, that we do think of others first, that we want to encourage other people and not tear other people down.

So Jesus says this in John chapter 13, "A new command I give you. Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. And by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Our meeting together in unity is not just about us, but it's beneficial for others as well.

If we are acting how God has called us to act, if we are loving others well, if we are encouraging others, those that are outside the church will long to be here. I truly believe that we would run out of seats, we would run out of room because those outside of the church are used to getting beat up. They're used to getting tore down. They're used to living in a world where everybody is concerned about themselves. They're only encouraged about number one and what they can do.

One of the reasons that many people struggle to find true fellowship is that we often do the opposite of what God tells us to do. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, the apostle Paul says, "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing." When we gather, we should be lifting each other up, encouraging each other, loving each other. But all too often, when people gather in a church setting like this, instead of being encouraged, they leave feeling beat up.

They leave saying, "I'm not sure I want to experience that again." Because maybe somebody said something to them. Maybe somebody gave them a weird look. Maybe they just came and no one even talked to them, and they thought, "This isn't fellowship." And so they leave and they wonder why they even came. Now, I'm not talking about this idea of feeling judged. I do believe in our church today, just as I mentioned last week, people, believers, are way too quick to say, "Don't judge me," when, in fact, as fellow believers in Jesus, one of our jobs is to hold each other accountable.

But it should be done in love. That's the part we often miss. If we are going to look at somebody and point something out in their life and say, "Hey, it looks like something's a little amiss there." It's to be done in love, not to be done in a judging manner, but that's not even the hurt that I'm talking about in the church. What I am talking about is the gossip, the betrayal, the feelings of jealousy, the hurtful words that are often given that tear others down. When we gather, we are supposed to follow the commands that are given to us.

In Philippians chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. Again, the Apostle Paul writing to the church in Philippi, but also to us says this, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others." This is a hard way to live. Truly putting others before yourself. It's the opposite of how the world lives.

To truly go through life recognizing that I am always at least second, that I should be looking to others first, that I should be pouring myself out into other people. To the Ephesians, Paul says, "Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." It is this type of fellowship that is life-giving.

It is a life-giving to other people. And again, if the church was like this, we would run out of seats. When people experience true fellowship with other believers, they want to be a part of it. There's something that is drawing them in. In our world today, people are sick of getting beat up. If they could find a place where people truly loved them, it would bring healing. And we all need that healing. Now, I'm not blind to the fact that this is often a battle against the enemy.

The enemy is the one that is wanting to cause this division and this loneliness. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say, and that there would be no divisions among you, but that you would be perfectly united in mind and thought." The enemy will use whatever disagreement he can to bring about division.

He will get people to stop attending church and stop fellowship with other believers in any way that he can. And often, they are silly and unimportant ways. Let me just tell you some of the reasons that people have left churches. Some of these are actually firsthand experience and some are not, but I'm not going to tell you which

is which. Some people have left churches because of the smell in the building. They just didn't like it. Some people have left churches because of the color of the carpet.

Many people have left churches because of the music. Some people have left church because the pastor is using a version of the Bible that they don't like, and they should use a different one. Some people have left churches because they spend too much money on donuts, and they don't think money should be spent on donuts. Okay, I'll tell you, that one, we have had people leave. We didn't have donuts today, but people have left because of donuts. Some people have left churches because the pastor references a book, not the Bible, from upfront, and that person doesn't like the author of that book, and so they decide they're not going to come anymore.

Certainly, some people don't come just because of different personalities. There's somebody in the church that they just don't connect with. They really just rub each other the wrong way, and they say, "You know what? I can't go in fellowship at that church. I just can't get along. And so I'm going to go somewhere else or I'm not going to attend church anymore." We all struggle with certain personalities, don't we? But yet we never look in the mirror and wonder, maybe people struggle with my personality. We all have different personalities that can rub each other the wrong way.

And many of these reasons why we break fellowship with other believers are silly. And we would look at them and recognize them as silly from the outside. But we all have things within us that seem to be important to us and aren't important. Anybody who's ever parented young children and had siblings that fight over silly things, I just want to share with you one that happened just a couple of weeks ago. We were driving back from Fort Wayne. I won't mention names because I didn't get approval from my kids. So you can guess who it was. I only have three, so you can kind of guess.

But we were driving back from Fort Wayne and we had bought a watermelon. And one child got to hold the watermelon the whole way home. And so the other child said, "It's my turn to hold the watermelon." She's been holding it the whole time. And I thought, "You're arguing over holding a watermelon. We look at those things and we think they're silly and we laugh, but I often wonder if God looks at us and laughs at some of the reasons that we can't get along with each other. They might be silly from the outside. Some of the other ways that the enemy will use to get us to break fellowship with other believers can be laziness, but it also can be the opposite.

It can be busyness. People will leave the church because they're too busy or people will leave the church because they're too lazy. 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul says, "And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. The enemy will use both extremes. You can either be too lazy to get out of bed to attend church, or you can be such a go-getter that you don't have time for church.

And although I have run into people on both ends of the spectrum, I would say that the latter is our bigger struggle currently. We are too busy. I have so many more verses that we could share from the Old Testament and the New Testament about unity, about fellowship, about gathering together. But I want to put those on the back burner so I can address something else. I know that hindsight is always 20/20, but I want to share with you something that I have just observed over the last few years, really over the last two generations of how the enemy is winning this battle, of allowing us to become too busy to have true fellowship.

So the first generation I want to address if you're with us today, maybe you're watching online, is if you are in the over 70-ish crowd. You're over 70 and you grew up in a Christian home. I want to talk to you about what Sundays looked like as I talked to these individuals. When I talked to individuals in this generation, Sunday was the day of rest. And they took that seriously. If you grew up in one of these conservative Christian homes in this generation, you went to church at least once on Sunday.

Often twice or three times. You would go to Sunday school, you would go to Sunday morning service, and very often there was a Sunday evening service. And so when the doors were open, your family would go to church. Since it was a day of rest, there was no yard work. You weren't allowed to mow the yard. No housework, no

chores. You would have family meals. It was very important. You would get together around the table after church. You would have dinner together. Oftentimes, it was a time to invite other family and friends to come. In that generation, you even limited your leisure activities on a Sunday.

You couldn't do fun things that were active. I grew up going to a Christian camp in the summer for one week. It was called Brown City Camp. And the camp would go from Thursday evening until the following Saturday. And it was run by some of these conservative people from this generation. And there was no lake to play in or anything else. And so most of the teenagers and many of the adults for entertainment throughout the week when you weren't going to chapel services or whatever would play softball. And there would be a huge softball game at the end of the week between the pastors and the campers, and it was always fun.

But on Sundays, you weren't allowed to play softball because it was a day of rest. And I remember being an angry teenager on Sundays because then you just sat around and you did nothing. But that was important to them. Even your leisure activities were lessened. No eating out. You stayed home. You rested. And even as I talked to individuals in this generation, most stores would be closed on Sunday. So you couldn't even go to the store if you wanted to. Most of them were closed.

Now, I want to fast forward to my generation, somewhere between 40 and 70, maybe 35, and 65. And things began to change with my generation. As I was growing up in a Christian home, it wasn't a conservative Christian home. You maybe went to church. It was most Sundays, but you would miss every once in a while. But after church, you could do whatever you wanted. It was a time to get together with your friends. You didn't have to stay together as a family. Most people generally didn't work their job or do anything like that.

You could do yard work, but you didn't have to. Housework, chores. You could do homework if you needed to. Dinner was certainly optional. If I was out with my friends and we were just hanging out, I didn't have to come home for dinner with the family. Most leisure activities were acceptable going golfing. Eating out was common on a Sunday after church. And just so you know the kind of family I grew up in, if we didn't have roast beef after church on Sunday, we went to Ponderosa. That was our schedule. But eating out was common. Very little, if anything, was scheduled, though.

There was no school sports. There was no travel sports on Sunday. Sunday was generally kept free. There were not things on the calendar. And most stores were open. Some were closed, but most were opened. Now I want to fast forward to the current generation. This would be those that are under 40. And you're being raised in a conservative Christian home. Here's what statistics say for those that are under 40. You average attending a church being part of a fellowship one out of three or one out of four Sundays a month that you do that.

There are lots of travel sports that are going on and so often you're missing because of that. You're missing because of vacations. For some people, it is a requirement that it's another day of work to earn extra money to pay for the things that you have bought. Sports practices have become very common. Over the last few years, it's gone from Sunday evenings to even Sunday mornings. Sunday mornings used to be more sacred, but now there's even sport practices on Sunday morning. There's golf leagues, and nearly every store is open except Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby.

Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A, but everything else is generally open. It's okay to do housework. It's okay to do chores. It's okay to do homework. Often for dinner, the family will grab fast food or get pizza so you can get on to your next thing. It's often a nonstop day, no rest, exercise, it's just another day. The number one reason that someone doesn't attend church today is often because they are too busy. And they might even be busy doing good things. I'm not judging anybody here.

But there's also no longer a sacred day. There's no longer that day of rest. What happened is I look back again, hindsight's 2020. As I look back, even over my own life, the other six days became so full that the only other option to put stuff was Sunday. And it started with Sunday evenings, but now Sunday mornings are an option too. And again, I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. It's just an observation. But I would like you, just as I have,

to look at my schedule, to look at my calendar, and truly ask the question, do I have time for fellowship and rest?

Because there's many weeks that I don't. There's many weeks that my calendar is so full that there is no time for rest. There is no time for fellowship. And most of my relationships simply just become passing relationships. Hey, how you doing? Doing good. Yep, good to see you. Okay. I got to go on to the next thing. And I'm really trying to work on that personally. It's something that God is teaching me that I need to be more intentional in my relationships. And so the question we need to answer today is this, is fellowship with the bride of Christ important and necessary for believers?

Well, I've already told you it's not to earn your salvation, so it's not necessary for salvation. But if you've been listening over the last two weeks, I do think our answer should be a resounding yes. It is important. It is necessary for us and for others. No, it doesn't buy your salvation, but it's part of God's plan for his children, for us. Remember, the church was his idea. Man didn't come up with it. It's something that he gave to us because we weren't meant to be alone.

We were meant to be in fellowship because when you are separated from the body of Christ, you can become an easy meal for the enemy. Now, some of you are thinking, "Pastor, this is great, but you're preaching to the choir. We're all here today," right? It's true. You guys are here. But maybe you can share this with somebody else. Maybe you have friends or you have others in your life that maybe they just gave up on church because they said, "I've been hurt too much. I just can't do it." Maybe you can begin to share with them the importance of fellowship. Maybe you can bring the church to them. Because the church is not the building. You guys know that.

We are the church. Maybe you can say, let's just start with us. Maybe we can get together on Sunday evenings or Sunday afternoon. Maybe you can come over for lunch and we can just fellowship together. Begin by doing that. Maybe you would encourage them to come back to the church. I'm not talking about Fairview. I'm talking about a church where they feel fellowship, where they feel belonging. Remember, this is not about earning your salvation, making God happy, making your mom happy.

This is for your benefit, as well as for the benefit of the body of believers and even beyond that to those on the outside, that they would see something that happens here, that they long for and desire for because they have been created in the image of God as well. They just may not know it yet. And so they desire that same fellowship. Don't give up the habit of meeting together. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, I thank you for the opportunity we have to gather together.

And I know that we all get busy doing our own things. We all have schedules. We all have calendars that we have to follow. We all have responsibilities. But Lord, I pray that in the midst of that busyness, that we would find moments of rest, moments of rest to be with you, moments of rest to be with those that we love and we care about and that we want to invest in. Moments of rest so that we could just simply be refueled to do what you have created us to do.

Help us to love each other well. Help the enemy not to get a foothold in our lives that you would receive the praise. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.