

Koinonia

Culture today often promotes a me-first mentality, from “do what makes you happy” to the pervasive selfie photo. Some people live in gated communities and rarely interact with our neighbors. We tend to embrace individual freedom and decision-making that reflects our own interests over those of an organized group, church, or government.

Yet Christianity, while valuing the individual, consistently urges us to value God first and others second. Forget “me first,” for as Jesus taught in the Gospel of Matthew, many of the first will be last and last will be first (19:30) and that the two greatest commandments are, first, to love the Lord with every ounce of our being and, second, to love our neighbor as ourselves (22:37-39). Christianity isn’t intended to be lived out in solitude and shut off from the world. The church was established with Christ at the head and people as its body, with disciples commissioned by Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

Tied up in all of that is the concept of *koinonia*.

What Is the Meaning of Koinonia?

While there is no exact translation in English, *koinonia* is a Greek word most closely associated with concepts of a holy, covenantal fellowship. Joseph Henry Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines it as “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation.” Its origin is in the Greek word *koinonos*, which means partner, sharer, and companion. In short, it is a shared community that involves deep, close-knit participation among its people.

While some are tempted to substitute the word “fellowship” for *koinonia*, it’s far deeper. Fellowship is a more surface-level, friendly relationship, while *koinonia* is full, intimate unity. And it’s an important element in the New Testament particularly, as the apostles became filled with the Holy Spirit and then helped establish the first communities of new believers, who shared not only in the Spirit, but also in all aspects of life together, from meals and homes to money. The concept of communion is exemplified in *koinonia*. Communion, which means sharing, also represents the communion Christ offered the disciples in sharing his body and blood during the Last Supper, which is something we do here at MBC from time to time.

What Does Koinonia Mean in the Bible?

In the Bible, *koinonia* is more than friendship. It is a divinely intimate, holy unity among believers—and between believers and the Lord—involving everything from spiritual oneness in the Holy Spirit, community life, sharing contributions from money to food gifts, and the communion partaken in the body and blood of Christ Jesus. The Book of Acts is the first place we see the word *koinonia* in the Bible. Here, it is translated to mean a deep community fellowship among believers.

In [Acts 2](#), Peter and the other believers had just been filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, but the Jews watching were bewildered at the disciples’ ability to speak in many different languages; some even thought they were drunk. But Peter brought the gospel to these onlookers, and 3,000 became new believers and were baptized that day. After, these newly baptized believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and to prayer” ([Acts 2:42](#)).

The passage goes on to elaborate about what this koinonia looked like: communal-style living, where they “had everything in common,” sold property to give to anyone in need, gathered regularly in the temple courts, and ate together joyfully in their homes (43-47). Later, when Gentiles began to hear the Good News and also became Christian, we see the concept of koinonia used to include them, too. Back then, Jews and Gentiles did not intermingle and thought poorly of each other. But Christ at work in them through the power of the Holy Spirit allowed these separate groups to dissolve their former boundaries and become as one—true koinonia. As the apostle Paul wrote to the early church in Ephesus, God had a secret plan, a “mystery,” of unity beyond these cultural constraints. “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” ([Ephesians 3:6](#)).

Koinonia also includes the many-become-one concept reflected in the sacrament of Holy Communion. In the Last Supper, Jesus offered bread as his own body, “given for you,” and then his blood in the wine, calling it “the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” ([Luke 22:19-20](#)). Later, the apostle Paul reminds early Christians that this act, too, is a part of koinonia, as those who partake are one body all sharing one loaf ([1 Corinthians 10:17](#)). And it’s not just the sharing of food. Koinonia applies also to the sharing of financial gifts. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, generosity applies both to the spiritual and the material. Their financial generosity not only helps the community with physical needs but also serves as evidence that helps draw others into that united body of Christ.

Why Is Koinonia Important to the Christian Lifestyle?

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus is the path to eternal life, and that if we repent and believe, we should follow Him and obey His commands. And as Jesus told us in [Matthew 22:37-39](#), those commands are first to love God and second to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we love others as ourselves, it’s a joining, a uniting, a partnership. It says in effect that we are all in this together, or as the apostle Paul used as an analogy, all part of one body.

Therefore, Christ-followers serious about doing the will of the Lord try their best to heed these commands. When we love others as ourselves, we are generous. We share what we have, whatever that is—money, food, time, gifts, and more. All are connected, all interrelated. As Paul wrote, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ ... there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” ([1 Corinthians 12:21,25-27](#))

7 Ways Christians Can Implement Koinonia Today

Christians don’t need to live in a communal home in order to live out koinonia today, but it’s far more than chatting over coffee and doughnuts after worship. It’s modeling the love Jesus extended to us. As Jesus told the disciples in [John 34](#), “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” We can serve each other with our spiritual gifts as a form of love, and we can also offer more practical, concrete love.

1. Spiritual gifts: Serving each other with our spiritual gifts is one key way we can be the full body of Christ today. As Peter wrote, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). Paul expanded on this, noting, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give

encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully” ([Romans 12:6-8](#)).

2. Hospitality: We can be hospitable to each other, offering food, clothing shelter, and more.

3. Togetherness: We can gather together for worship, Bible study, small group time, meals, and service opportunities.

4. Acceptance: We can accept and include each other even when one among us is weak in faith or unusual.

5. Encouragement: We can encourage and support each other, as well as hold each other accountable when necessary.

6. Service: We can serve each other, whether washing each other’s feet, watching each other’s children, or providing a meal when someone is sick or otherwise unable.

7. Sharing our abundance: We can share our abundance with each other and the church through our tithes and offerings so that God’s good work may be done in the world.

By doing these things, we bring God and others into full unity with ourselves, pushing aside our own selfish concerns to embrace harmony, generosity, and accord. It might be tough to embrace the concepts of koinonia in such a self-oriented world, but we are called repeatedly to do so. And we are given an ideal model, both in Jesus and in the disciples.

Now how can you implement Koinonia? Are you living it out already or do you need to apply these to your lives