

## **What is Fellowship?**

### **Series: Roadmap For Christian Living**

## **What is fellowship?**

## **What Does The Bible Say?**

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. (Acts 2:42, 44 NLT)

**In the Bible, fellowship is translated several ways:**

**Fellowship (Philippians 2:1)**

**Partners (Philippians 1:5)**

**Offering (Romans 15:26)**

**At the very heart of the word fellowship as translated in the Bible is the concept of sharing.**

**Christian fellowship is mutual sharing at the most intimate level, in all areas of life, as a result of the transforming work of God in the life of an individual.**

**Who is our best example of fellowship?**

The Father and I are one. (John 10:30 NLT)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2 NLT)

**God, as three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

26 Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. (Genesis 1:26 NLT)

**We were created for fellowship since we are created in God’s image.**

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” (Genesis 2:18 NLT)

**Together, as man and wife in fellowship and communion with one another (as “one flesh”), they would fully reflect the plural nature of God’s being.**

15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Ephesians 4:15–16 NLT)

**By design, God grows His church (we believers) to maturity as we mutually live in community together, ministering to one another as a body.**

**Without other believers, you will be stunted in your spiritual growth.**

**How Can You Obey?**

**How did the first Christians fellowship together?**

- Studying the Bible together
- Praying with and for other believers
- Talking about spiritual things with each other
- Confessing sins to other Christians
- Celebrating the Lord's Supper with other saints
- Observing baptisms together
- Worshipping God with the people of God
- Singing praises to God with other Christians
- Weeping with others and sharing life's trials
- Rejoicing with others

- Interacting with other Christian families
- Helping each other as needs would arise
- Sharing meals together

**But I am an introvert, I don't like other people. What do I do?**

9 After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9 NLT)

**One of the main reasons God has us here in this life is to prepare us for eternity in heaven.**

**We all need fellowship!**

**Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

**Explore:**

Today's Deep Dive Into the Bible comes from Heiser, M. S. (2014). I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible. (J. D. Barry & R. Van Noord, Eds.) (p. 35). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine.

**Explore:**

It is unified (2:44, 46). This is a God-given spiritual unity, not a man-made organizational uniformity. The church is an organism that is held together by life, and that life comes through the Holy Spirit. Of course, the church must be organized; for if an

organism is not organized, it will die. However, when the organization starts to hinder spiritual life and ministry, then the church becomes just another religious institution that exists to keep itself going. When the Holy Spirit is at work, God's people will be united in their doctrinal beliefs, as well as in fellowship, giving, and worship (Acts 4:32).

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 420). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## **Explore:**

### **Fellowship (3 John 8)**

Some words get bandied about very freely. In considering John's letters we have already found it necessary to stop and ask, 'What is truth?' and 'What is love?' We now have to stop once again and ask, 'What is fellowship?' For some the word 'fellowship' conjures up ideas of a few Christians enjoying a chummy get-

together with something to eat and a few choruses to sing. What a superficial, cheap picture of Christian fellowship! But what does fellowship really mean?

John talks about Christians becoming ‘fellow workers’. In the original Greek this is only one word; a word meaning ‘with’ is used as a prefix joined to the noun meaning ‘worker’. A Christian is to be a ‘with-worker’. This word occurs twelve times in the New Testament. But the word ‘with’ is also joined to several other nouns as a prefix and looking at these will give us some insights into what fellowship and being a fellow worker really involves. What are ‘fellow workers’?

### **Fellow saints**

Being fellow saints is fundamental to becoming ‘fellow workers for the truth’. Only those who have first become Christians by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ qualify as fellow workers. Many try to achieve salvation by works, but they cannot



be fellow workers, because salvation is ‘not of works’ but ‘for good works’ (Eph. 2:9–10). Works are the result, not the cause, of salvation.

### **Fellow sons**

Fellow workers are ‘members of the household of God’ (Eph. 2:19). Far from being a saint out on his own, a Christian is a member of God’s family. Christians are not just neighbours in God’s kingdom, but brothers and sisters in Christ. In 2 John 1, when John was writing to ‘the elect lady and her children’, we saw that he seemed to be addressing a local church and its members. He was writing to the church family, to fellow sons and daughters in Christ.

Those who are children of God are ‘heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ’ (Rom. 8:17). Paul described Gentiles as ‘fellow heirs, of the same body’ (Eph. 3:6). Fellow workers are fellow sons.

## **Fellow soldiers**

Paul addressed one fellow worker as ‘Archippus our fellow soldier’ (Philem. 2). Soldiers fight battles and the Christian life is certainly a battle. Here again individual Christians can feel on their own in their fight against sin and Satan, but on a worldwide basis all our brothers and sisters in Christ experience the same struggle (1 Peter 5:9). Fellow workers are fellow soldiers in God’s army; though an army is made up of individuals, it is essentially a unit of individuals working and fighting together.

## **Fellow supporters**

Members of a family and members of an army support one another. The Revised Standard Version translates 3 John 8 as ‘we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth’. As suggested above, Gaius was probably supporting these fellow workers financially, an act which the New Testament often describes in terms of sharing and fellowship

(see 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Phil. 4:15; 1 Tim. 6:18). But support for one another can be shown in many other ways, such as caring, encouraging, greeting, teaching, comforting, praying and doing good, which, as seen in an earlier chapter, are all expressions of loving one another.

### **Fellow servants**

Fellow workers act as fellow servants in two aspects, both to be found in 3 John. Firstly Gaius was directly serving God's people (v. 5). Paul described Titus to the Corinthians as 'my partner and fellow worker concerning you' (2 Cor. 8:23). But behind all our service for one another is something even more noble. In serving other Christians Gaius was in fact serving God himself (v. 6).

Paul again described Timothy as 'our brother and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith' (1 Thes. 3:2). A fellow worker is a 'fellow servant' (Col. 1:7; 4:7).

## **Fellow sufferers**

In some form or other fellow workers can expect to become fellow sufferers. In 3 John 10 we read about Christians suffering and being thrown out of the church by Diotrephes; the direct cause of their suffering was the fellowship they were having with visiting believers! Suffering often goes hand in hand with fellowship.

In the companion volume *Opening up Philippians*, Roger Ellsworth has dealt at length with the experience of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–30). Paul referred to him as ‘Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need’ (v. 25). This man was a fellow worker, a fellow son, a fellow soldier, a fellow servant and, as a result, a fellow sufferer too; ‘for the work of Christ he came close to death’ (v. 30). His suffering took the form of sickness (vv. 26–27).

## **God's fellow workers**

Fellowship with other believers is a great privilege, but there is yet a higher privilege to be enjoyed. Christians can be fellow workers with God himself (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). John visualized Gaius as sending forth God's servants 'in a manner worthy of God' (3 John 6), on God's behalf. Gaius was a true fellow worker with God. John could well have said to him what he wrote at the start of his first epistle: 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3).

Crosby, T. P. (2006). *Opening up 2 and 3 John* (pp. 59–60).

Leominster: Day One Publications.

## **Explore:**

we have fellowship with one another—

Believers have fellowship with other children of God which is ultimately related to fellowship with God. They are free to enjoy the rich rewards and intimacy of those who are sons of the King.

They are free to live out eternal life and fellowship to its fullest.

If you're walking in the light, you will not forsake the

assembling together as is the habit of some. But you will

congregate and consider how to stimulate one another to love

and good deeds (Heb. 10:24–25). The fellowship of other

Christians will be sweet. “He who consistently has trouble

maintaining fellowship with others walking in the light should

examine his own claim of fellowship with God” (Hiebert, p. 62).

Do you love fellowship? When you get together with other

Christians, what does your conversation mostly revolve around?

—Christ, redemption, heaven and the hope of glory, love and

good deeds? Or the world and the things of the world?—TV, movies, music, sports, money and possessions? I’m not saying we should never talk of these things. I’m asking, “What is our real focus?” The answer will betray where our devotion lies.

Our walk in the light brings freedom to pursue holiness and truth. It brings the freedom of fellowship.

Kress, E. E. (2002). Notes for the Study and Exposition of 1st John (pp. 28–29). The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications.

**Explore:**

OUR COMMON INHERITANCE

In common usage fellowship describes something subjective, the experience of warmth and security in each other's presence, as in 'We had good fellowship together'. But in biblical usage koinonia is not a subjective feeling at all, but an objective fact, expressing what we share in together.

So Paul could write 'you share in God's grace with me' (Philippians 1:7); John could write '... that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and his, Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3); while Paul added 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 Corinthians 13:14). Thus authentic fellowship is Trinitarian fellowship. It bears witness to our common share in the grace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Is this not what makes us one? We come from different countries, cultures and churches. We have different temperaments, gifts and interests. And yet we have this in common: the same God as our Heavenly Father; the same Jesus



Christ as our Saviour and Lord; and the same Holy Spirit as our indwelling Comforter.

It is our common participation (our koinonia) in God (Father, Son and Spirit) which unites us. And this is most vividly expressed in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. For 'is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?' (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Stott, J. (2007). *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (pp. 96–97). Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.

**Explore:**

One of the most encouraging features of the world Christian scene today has been the recovery of small groups. Many historical movements have begun in the intimacy of small groups. I have already mentioned the beginnings of English Reformation in Cambridge, and the Methodist Revival in Oxford. In my own day, the East African Revival began in the 1930s and has continued with fellowship meetings. Today there is a worldwide proliferation of cell groups, home groups or house churches.

In London we call them fellowship groups because we are anxious that they will exhibit the riches of New Testament koinonia. Fellowship groups express what we share in together as we pray and feed on Christ in his word. They express what we share out together. They are encouraged to be outward-looking, to look for opportunities of service, such as inviting local people to evangelistic evenings, visiting the sick and elderly people in

their neighbourhood, volunteering to cater for church events and interceding for the world and the church.

Fellowship groups also share with each other. Every time they meet, an opportunity is given to members to share their joys or sorrows, doubts and fears and needs. Of this third type of fellowship John Wesley wrote in his Plain Account of the People called Methodists:

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ and naturally to ‘care for one another’ ... And ‘speaking the truth in love, they grew up into him in all things who is the Head, even Christ’.

Thus fellowship group leaders become mini-pastors, and the pastoral oversight of the congregation is decentralized and shared.

Fellowship groups are composed of human beings, and all human beings differ from one another. We have no desire, therefore, to stereotype a group's programme or development. Nevertheless we believe that true Christian koinonia involves the rich and comprehensive sharing which I have tried to unfold. And therefore we constantly keep before our eyes the threefold biblical ideal. We are anxious that the groups will not become unbalanced and degenerate into being merely Bible reading groups, prayer groups, study groups or action groups. We want the fellowship groups to be true to their name, expressing the fullness of koinonia. So we keep asking ourselves: are we growing in Christian maturity together? Are we serving the Lord, the church or the world together? Are we increasing in love and care for one another?

Then we may say with confidence and joy, ‘we had good fellowship together’.

Stott, J. (2007). *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (pp. 100–102). Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.

### **Explore:**

The New Testament is replete with commands for Christians to minister to “one another” in various ways. To do so is to fulfill Christian fellowship. Consider some of the main “one anothers” that the church is to obey.

### **Love one another**

Jesus said to His disciples, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know

that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35). If you are a Christian, it will be obvious by how you treat other Christians. That’s what Jesus said.

### **Serve one another**

Christian fellowship entails serving others. Galatians 5:13 commands believers to “serve one another in love.” Serving others means waiting on them and attending to their needs.

### **Encourage one another**

Words have power. Proverbs says, “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up” (12:25). An encouraging word spoken at just the right time can lift the spirit in a unique way. The Christian community is supposed to be a place where people are given to verbally encouraging each other on a regular basis.

### **Instruct one another**

Colossians 3:16 says Christians should “teach and admonish one another.” This means Christians should counsel one another.

That is what these two words mean—“teach” and “admonish.”

Teach is the positive aspect of counseling and admonish is the negative aspect of counseling. These two words refer to giving

verbal, didactic instruction to another—communicating

propositional truth directed at the mind, with the goal of

changing the heart and the behavior. It is akin to the verse that

commands believers to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians

4:15).

McManis, C. (2006). *Christian Living Beyond Belief: Biblical*

*Principles for the Life of Faith* (p. 47). The Woodlands, TX:

Kress Christian Publications.

### **Question 1 of 5**

How would you describe fellowship?

### **Question 2 of 5**

How do you explain the fellowship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Where in the Bible would you see all three Persons of the Trinity working together?

### **Question 3 of 5**

What were some of the main ways the early disciples had fellowship with one another?

### **Question 4 of 5**

When is it okay to seek counsel from those who are not Christians? When is it not okay? What are the boundaries for determining this?

### **Question 5 of 5**



Is regular, ongoing, consistent fellowship with believers in the local church a priority for you right now? Why or why not?