WHAT A FELLOWSHIP

LESSON 1: FELLOWSHIP BEGINS WITH THE WORD

1 John 1:1-4 (KJV)

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

- The word fellowship comes from the Greek word *koinonia*
- It carries the idea of:
  - Sharing • Partnership • Participation • Communion • Having something in common
- Biblical fellowship is more than:
  - Being in the same place • Eating together • Belonging to the same church • Knowing the same people • Enjoying the same activities
- Christian fellowship grows out of what believers share in Christ
  - A common Savior • A common faith • A common Word • A common spiritual life • A common purpose
- The early church connected doctrine and fellowship together - Acts 2:42

FELLOWSHIP BEGINS WITH THE WORD

- John begins with what the apostles personally experienced concerning Jesus - 1 Jn. 1:1
  - They heard Him • They saw Him • They watched Him • They touched Him
- Their message was based on truth, not rumor or opinion
- They received the truth about Christ and then declared it to others - 1 Jn. 1:3
- Faith comes through hearing the Word of God - Rom. 10:17
- The Word gives believers a common foundation even with differences
  - Personalities may differ
  - Preferences may differ
  - Opinions may differ
  - The Word remains the standard

FELLOWSHIP GROWS THROUGH WHAT WE SHARE

- John said, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you” - 1 Jn. 1:3
- What they received from Christ, they shared with others
  - Fellowship includes sharing: The Word • Our testimony • Encouragement • Prayer • Wisdom • Spiritual support
- The Word should dwell richly among believers - Col. 3:16
- We should be able to help one another with what God has shown us through His Word
- Sometimes another believer needs:
  - A word of encouragement • A biblical reminder • Someone to pray with them • Someone to help them see what Scripture says

FELLOWSHIP CONNECTS US TO EACH OTHER

- John wanted his readers to "have fellowship with us" - 1 Jn. 1:3
- Christianity was never intended to be lived completely alone
- God often uses other believers to help us
  - Grow • Heal • Learn • Endure • Serve • Stay encouraged
- Believers are called to consider and encourage one another - Heb. 10:24-25
- Fellowship causes us to think about somebody besides ourselves
- You can attend church and still avoid fellowship
  - Come to worship • Sit through service • Hear the Word • Give your offering • Leave without really connecting to anyone

FELLOWSHIP CONNECTS US TO GOD

- John said, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" - 1 Jn. 1:3
- Our fellowship with each other grows out of our fellowship with God

VERTICAL FELLOWSHIP

- Fellowship with: God the Father • Jesus Christ

HORIZONTAL FELLOWSHIP

- Fellowship with: Brothers and sisters in Christ • The church • The body of Christ
- Our vertical relationship affects our horizontal relationships
- Walking in the light helps us have fellowship with one another - 1 Jn. 1:7

THE WORD TEACHES US HOW TO FELLOWSHIP

- The Word tells us how to respond when relationships become difficult
- WHEN SOMEONE HURTS US - Go to the person instead of talking around the person - Matt. 18:15
- WHEN SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING - Help bear their burden - Gal. 6:2
- WHEN SOMEONE NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT - Build one another up - 1 Thess. 5:11
- WHEN FORGIVENESS IS NEEDED - Be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving - Eph. 4:32
- WHEN PERSONALITIES CLASH - Forbear and forgive one another - Col. 3:13
- Without the Word, we may respond according to:
  - Anger • Pride • Feelings • Assumptions • Personal preference

FELLOWSHIP SHOULD PRODUCE JOY

- John wrote "that your joy may be full" - 1 Jn. 1:4
- There is joy in:
  - Worshipping together • Learning together • Praying together • Serving together • Laughing together • Helping one another • Watching each other grow
- Scripture describes unity among believers as both good and pleasant - Ps. 133:1
- ❖ God did not design the church to be a collection of isolated believers
- ❖ He designed us to walk together

WHAT WE MUST REMEMBER

- You cannot have true Christian fellowship without Christ
- You cannot maintain healthy Christian fellowship while ignoring the Word
- The Word:
  - Gives us our common foundation • Teaches us how to treat one another • Corrects our attitudes • Guides us through conflict • Keeps Christ at the center
- Fellowship is strongest when believers are growing in the Word together

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between attending church and having fellowship?
2. Can people be friends without having biblical fellowship? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think John connected fellowship with what he had "seen and heard"?
4. How does knowing the Word help us deal with problems between believers?
5. What can we do as a church to create stronger biblical fellowship?

WHAT A FELLOWSHIP
LESSON 2: WHEN FELLOWSHIP GETS HURT

Ps. 55:12-14

FELLOWSHIP BRINGS BOTH PROXIMITY AND INTENSITY

- Fellowship brings people close enough to share:
  - The closer the relationship, the greater the potential for help or harm
  - Our proximity comes with responsibility to each other – 1 Cor. 12:25-26

HURT FROM SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU LANDS DIFFERENT

- Because of our connective nature, it can be more detrimental to be harmed by each other
  - Goes against Bible and out expectations – Psa. 55:12
    - Is indicative of ungodliness present in the fellowship – hatred, self-magnification
  - Harm came from a known, close person – Psa. 55:13
  - Received the same Word and worship and still held broke fellowship – Psa. 55:14
    - They had taken "sweet counsel together"
- David saw this person as his equal – Psa. 55:13
  - Note that David didn't see himself as higher or better than, but equal
- Betrayal can leave us asking:
  - Why did they do this?
  - Was the relationship ever real?
  - Can I trust anyone again?
  - Did I miss the warning signs?

JESUS HAD TO DEAL WITH THIS

- Jesus also experienced betrayal from someone close to Him - Matt. 26:47-50
  - Judas was not a stranger but had walked with Jesus, heard His teaching, and shared in ministry

DON'T GET STUCK ON WHAT IT USE TO BE – DEAL WITH WHAT IT IS

- The hurt gets amplified when you remember what was – Psa. 55:14
- Sometimes what makes betrayal painful is remembering what the relationship used to be
  - Grieve the person
  - Question can you trust again
  - Miss the relationship so either avoid closeness at all cost or corrupt closeness since you feel you will get hurt anyway
  - Live as if you are behind a locked door that you have given the only key to the person who hurt you
  - Can cause you to question everything and everybody

HOW THIS HURTS FELLOWSHIP

- We treat church or anyone trying to be present for us with
  - Suspicion – 1 Cor. 13:5
  - Withdrawal – Heb. 10:24-25
  - Fear – 2 Tim. 1:7
  - Anger – Eph. 4:26-27
  - Bitterness – Heb. 12:15

- Instead of healthy boundaries, we put up walls

Healthy Boundaries	Hindering Walls
Guard your heart with wisdom – Prov. 4:23	Close your heart because of fear – 2 Tim. 1:7
Recognize danger and respond wisely – Prov. 22:3	Become suspicious of everybody – 1 Cor. 13:5
Address the person and the problem directly - Matt. 18:15	Withdraw from people instead of dealing with the hurt - Heb. 10:24-25
Pursue peace when possible – Rom. 12:18	Allow bitterness to remain and spread – Heb. 12:15
Forgive while using wisdom about trust – Eph. 4:31-32	Refuse to forgive because you do not want to be hurt again - Col. 3:13
Allow healthy people appropriate access – Prov. 13:20	Keep everybody out because one person hurt you - Prov. 18:1

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND WHEN FELLOWSHIP IS HURT?

1. TAKE THE HURT TO GOD

- David was honest about what he was feeling – Psa. 55:1-2
- God is not intimidated by our pain
- Prayer gives us a safe place to process hurt before reacting to people

2. REFUSE TO FEED BITTERNESS

- Put away bitterness, wrath, anger and evil speaking - Eph. 4:31
- Replaying the offense repeatedly can keep the wound open

3. HANDLE THE MATTER BIBLICALLY

- Go directly to the person when appropriate - Matt. 18:15-20
- Avoid spreading the offense to people who are not part of the solution

4. FORGIVE

- Forgiveness – Eph. 4:31-32
  - Forgiveness releases our right to live in bitterness and revenge – Rom. 12:19
  - Forgiveness does not mean pretending nothing happened, calling wrong right, ignoring repeated harmful behavior, or restoring the same level of trust immediately – Luke 17:3
  - Trust can be broken quickly but may take time to rebuild – Pro. 25:19
  - Reconciliation requires more than one person – Mat. 5:23-24
  - Peace should be pursued when possible - Rom. 12:18

5. HOW EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE

- Our actions don't just affect us – 1 Cor. 12:25-26
- Ignoring the issue isn't accountability – Eph 4:15
- Things should be handled in accordance with Scripture – Mat. 18:15-17
- Real repentance should produce evidence of change – Mat. 3:8

6. USE WISDOM

- Be wise in how relationships are restored – Pro. 4:7
- Forgiveness and trust are related, but they are not identical – Pro. 25:19

7. LOVE

- Lead with love following Jesus example
  - Don't let betrayal destroy your capacity to love
    - Judas betrayed Him - Matt. 26:48-49
    - Peter denied Him - Luke 22:54-62
    - The disciples scattered - Matt. 26:56

8. PATIENCE

- It may take time – Ecc. 3:1; Rom. 12:12; James 1:4

FELLOWSHIP CAN SURVIVE HURT

- Hurt does not have to have the final word
- Some relationships can be restored, some changed, and some ended
- Our relationship with Christ must remain steady even when relationships with people become difficult

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does betrayal from a close friend hurt differently from opposition from an enemy?
2. What are some ways hurt can affect future relationships?
3. What is the difference between forgiveness and restoring trust?
4. How can believers set healthy boundaries without becoming bitter or isolated?
5. What can the church do to help people heal when fellowship has been hurt?

WHAT A FELLOWSHIP
LESSON 3: A CARING AND SHARING FELLOWSHIP

Acts 2:44-47

YOU CAN NOT SEPARATE GENUINE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP FROM CHRIST-LIKE BEHAVIOR AND ACTIONS

- Note why Christ came –
  - To seek and save the lost - Luke 19:10
  - To serve and give His life for others - Mark 10:45; Gal. 1:4
  - To show us the love of the Father - John 14:9
- Note His actions while here in person –
  - He had compassion on people - Matt. 9:36
  - He fed people who were hungry - Matt. 14:14-21
  - He healed the sick - Matt. 8:16-17
  - He spent time with people others rejected - Luke 19:5-7
  - He served others humbly - John 13:4-5

REAL FELLOWSHIP CARES ABOUT PEOPLE

- The early church did more than worship together
  - They cared about what was happening in each other's lives - Acts 2:44
  - Fellowship means I cannot be concerned only about myself - Phil. 2:4
- Caring requires us to notice people – who is hurting, struggling, missing, needs encouragement, needs help
- Caring also requires identifying those that can help
  - Who has God positioned to help both physically and spiritually
- We cannot meet every need, but we should not become comfortable ignoring needs
  - "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men" - Gal. 6:10

FELLOWSHIP SHARES – Acts 2:44

- Sharing can include more than money
- Caring becomes visible when it produces action - 1 Jonn 3:17-18

FELLOWSHIP RESPONDS TO NEED – Acts 2:45

- Biblical fellowship pays attention to real needs
  - Not every want is a need – Phil. 4:19
  - Not every need requires the same response – James 2:15-16
  - Wisdom is still necessary – Pro. 4:7

FELLOWSHIP DOES LIFE TOGETHER – Acts 2:46

- Their fellowship was not limited to a weekly worship service
- Relationships usually become stronger when people spend meaningful time together - Prov. 27:17

FELLOWSHIP HAS EACH OTHER'S BACK

- Fellowship means we stand with each other in good and challenging times – Gal. 6:2
- Scripture calls us to:
  - Rejoice with those who rejoice - Rom. 12:15
  - Weep with those who weep - Rom. 12:15
  - Bear burdens - Gal. 6:2
  - Comfort one another - 1 Thess. 5:11
  - Pray for one another - James 5:16
  - Serve one another - Gal. 5:13
- People should not have to wonder whether the church will still be present when they are hurting

CARING REQUIRES SACRIFICE – Acts 2:45

- Love is demonstrated by what we are willing to give - 1 Jn. 3:16
- Sacrifice does not mean allowing people to misuse us

CARING AND SHARING SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE RIGHT HEART

- They ate together "with gladness and singleness of heart" - Acts 2:46
- Fellowship should not become:
  - Competition
  - Control
  - Showing off
  - Keeping score
  - Expecting repayment
- What we do for others should be done from a willing heart - 2 Cor. 9:7

HEALTHY FELLOWSHIP CREATES AN ATMOSPHERE PEOPLE WANT TO BE AROUND

- The early church had "favour with all the people" - Acts 2:47
- Their life together gave others a picture of what Christian community could look like
- People should be able to see the love, care, unity, generosity, joy and genuine concern
- The Lord added to the church daily - Acts 2:47

WHAT CARING AND SHARING FELLOWSHIP LOOKS LIKE TODAY

- Check on people when they are absent
- Call someone who is going through a difficult season
- Celebrate someone else's blessing
- Help meet practical needs when possible
- Pray with people, not just tell them you will pray
- Share resources when God has given you the ability
- Make room for people who may feel overlooked
- Be present during both celebrations and crises

WHAT A FELLOWSHIP
LESSON 4: FELLOWSHIP IS WORTH GUARDING

Eph. 4:1-6

WHAT WE HAVE IS WORTH PROTECTING

- Paul tells the church to be "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit" - Eph. 4:3
- Consider what is present when healthy fellowship exists:
  - Love - "forbearing one another in love" - Eph. 4:2
  - Unity - "keep the unity of the Spirit" - Eph. 4:3; John 17:20-23
  - Peace - "in the bond of peace" - Eph. 4:3
  - Support - seen in "forbearing one another in love" - Eph. 4:2

DIFFERENCES DON'T HAVE TO BECOME DIVISION

- Our differences should never become greater than what we share in Christ – Eph. 4:4-6
- We can disagree without becoming divided - Rom. 14:1
- Love gives room for differences that do not violate Scripture - Rom. 14:13

WATCH WHAT YOU BRING INTO THE FELLOWSHIP – James 3:13-18

- Everybody brings something into the atmosphere of the fellowship
- We can bring:
  - Peace or confusion
  - Encouragement or discouragement
  - Healing or hurt
  - Unity or division
  - Love or bitterness
- Before blaming the atmosphere, consider what you are contributing to it
- Scripture tells us to pursue things that make for peace and edification - Rom. 14:19
- Ask yourself:
  - What am I bringing into the fellowship?
  - Am I building up or tearing down?
  - Am I promoting peace or feeding problems?
- We should never bring personal bitterness into a fellowship and expect it not to affect others - Heb. 12:15

GUARD YOUR WORDS

- Our words should build rather than tear down - Prov. 18:21 ; Eph. 4:29
- Avoid:
  - Gossip - Prov. 16:28
  - Backbiting - 2 Cor. 12:20
  - Slander - Eph. 4:31

- Unnecessary criticism - James 4:11
- Angry words - Prov. 15:1

❖ Before you repeat something, ask:
- Is it true?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it helpful?
- Does this person need to know?
- Am I part of the problem or part of the solution?

❖ Everything that is true does not have to be repeated

DON'T FEED DIVISION

❖ Division usually grows because somebody feeds it
❖ Scripture warns against causing division - Rom. 16:17
❖ Things that can feed division:
- Gossip
- Taking sides
- Repeating offenses
- Recruiting people into disagreements
- Assuming motives
- Refusing to forgive
- Keeping old issues alive

❖ A whisperer can separate close relationships - Prov. 16:28
❖ God identifies sowing discord among brethren as something He hates - Prov. 6:16-19
❖ Do not carry a problem farther than it needs to go
❖ If you are not part of the problem or the solution, be careful about becoming part of the conversation
❖ Peacemakers should calm conflict instead of adding fuel to it - Matt. 5:9

IT'S EVERYONE'S JOB

❖ Protecting fellowship is not only the pastor's responsibility
❖ Every member affects the health of the body - 1 Cor. 12:25-26
❖ Every believer has a responsibility to:
- Promote peace - Rom. 14:19
- Forgive - Col. 3:13
- Encourage - 1 Thess. 5:11
- Speak responsibly - Eph. 4:29
- Avoid division - Rom. 16:17
- Love one another - John 13:34-35

❖ You do not have to start division to help division spread
❖ Refusing to stop it can also allow damage to continue
❖ Guarding fellowship requires everyone to take responsibility for their own conduct

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE FOR FELLOWSHIP

- Healthy fellowship should not wait until something breaks before receiving attention
- Some things should be practiced regularly to protect the fellowship

Preventative Maintenance	**Scripture**
Pray for one another	James 5:16
Communicate directly	Matt. 18:15
Forgive quickly	Col. 3:13
Deal with anger promptly	Eph. 4:26
Watch your words	Eph. 4:29
Refuse gossip	Prov. 16:28
Pursue peace	Rom. 14:19
Assume responsibility for your conduct	Rom. 14:12
Encourage one another	1 Thess. 5:11
Make room for differences	Rom. 14:1
Keep love at the center	1 Pet. 4:8