

COMMUNITY: What the Gospel Alone Makes Possible
Session 3 — Fellowship: The Daily Life of Community
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I. Introduction

A. Our Recommended Text

The Compelling Community by Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop

B. Our Study of Prayer

Week One: A Biblical Vision of Community

Week Two: How to Foster Community

Week Three: The Daily Life of Community

Week Four:

“Fellowship is one of the great words of the New Testament: it denotes something that is vital to a Christian’s spiritual health, and central to the church’s true life. It is of the first importance, therefore, that we should be clear in our minds as to what Christian fellowship really is.” J. I. Packer, *God’s Words*, 191.

II. WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

“Have thoughtful conversations.” Ed Welch, *Side By Side*

“Christians designing their friendships to help each other follow Jesus.” Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*

“Like fellowship with the Father and the Son, it is a two-way traffic which involves both giving and taking on both sides. It is, first, a sharing with our fellow-believer the things that God has made known to us about himself, in hope that we may thus help them to know him better and so enrich their fellowship with him... Fellowship is, secondly, a seeking to share in what God has made known of himself to others, as a means to finding strength, refreshment, and instruction for one’s own soul. In fellowship, one seeks to gain, as well as to give.” J.I. Packer, *God’s Words*, 195.

Simply put, fellowship means to *disclose* and to *discover*.

III. A DESCRIPTION OF FELLOWSHIP

“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” (Romans 1:11–12, ESV)

“For I long to see you...”

“Once the greetings are over, the pleasure of knowing someone begins. This means having thoughtful conversations—ones that go below the surface niceties. We don’t aim to draw out problems so that we can be helpers. We are simply interesting in knowing another person, which is a basic feature of everyday love.” Ed Welch, *Side By Side*, 79.

“...that I may impart to you some spiritual gift...”

“...to strengthen you...”

“The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without buying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

“...that we may be mutually encouraged...”

“Thus, Christian fellowship is an expression of both love and humility. It springs from a desire to bring benefit to others, coupled with a sense of personal weakness and need. It has a double motive—the wish to help, and to be helped; to edify, and to be edified. It has a double aim—to do, and to receive, good. It is a corporate seeking by Christian people to know God better through sharing with each other what, individually, they have learned of him already.” J.I. Packer, *God’s Words*, 196.

“...by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

“What inspires and fortifies other believers is when they perceive faith in other Christians. Seeing other believers trust God in the course of

everyday life reminds us that God is indeed faithful and encourages us to trust him as well.” Tom Schreiner, *Romans*, 52.

“It is inconceivable that the things that are of utmost importance to each individual should not be spoken by one to another. It is unchristian consciously to deprive one another of the one decisive service we can render to him. ... No matter how old or highly placed or distinguished he may be, [he] is still a man like us, a sinner in crying need of God’s grace. He has the same great necessities that we have, and needs help, encouragement, and forgiveness as we do.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 105.

IV. THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP

DISCUSS

ENCOURAGE

CONFESS

CORRECT

“The problem...is that God’s Word is not always massaged through the life of the congregation, like yeast through dough. People show up on Sunday for the sermon, and often do little more. The ministry of the Word stops at noon.

“The ‘ministry of the Word’ indeed *begins* in the pulpit, but then it must *continue* through the life of the church as members echo God’s Word back and forth to one another. The word reverberates, as in an echo chamber. In a real echo chamber, sound reverberates off the walls. In the church, it’s the hearts of people that both absorb and project the sounds of His effectual Word.” Jonathan Leeman, quoted in Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 96.

Diagnostic Questions:

- Do I understand fellowship?
- Do I prize fellowship?
- How can I pursue fellowship?
- What hinders me from fellowship?

APPENDIX: Questions to Promote Fellowship¹

1. WHAT ARE YOUR BURDENS?

- What has happened recently that weighs on you?
- What concerns do you have for the future that trouble you?
- What are your biggest sources of anxiety?
- How has God helped you with your burdens?

2. WHAT ARE YOUR JOYS?

- What was the best thing that happened to you today?
- What are you most grateful for?
- What was your highlight today?
- What are you looking forward to in the future?
- How has God answered a prayer for you recently?

3. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

- What's on your mind?
- What are you working on right now?
- What are your goals?
- What do you hope to accomplish this week? This year?
- What do you think God wants you to do with your life?

¹ These questions are adapted from Tony Reinke's 2009 interview with David Powlison: <http://tonyreinke.com/2009/05/28/3-questions-to-ask-your-spouse/>