

40 Weeks of Purpose

Week 18

Experiencing Life Together

POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT FROM LAST WEEK:

I must belong, not just believe.

Being a believer is more than just believing... We are called to BELONG to the family of God.

VERSE TO MEMORIZE FROM LAST WEEK:

“In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” – Romans 12:5

You are not your own. You BELONG to others. That dramatically changes a Self-centered life.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER FROM LAST WEEK:

Does my level of involvement in the Ecclesia demonstrate that I am committed to God’s family?

The first sign of spiritual decline is poor attendance at Ecclesial functions. Attending Ecclesial functions will NOT save you, but not attending them is clearly not healthy.

- Life is meant to be shared
- God intends for us to experience life together
 - This shared experience is called “Fellowship”
- Too often, the word “Fellowship” is misunderstood
- Sometimes people think that it means socializing and having food together
 - “*Stay after the class for dessert and Fellowship*”
- Sometimes people think that it denotes the doctrine that you believe

- *“Which Fellowship is he in?”*
- Real Fellowship is much more than just showing up a meeting
 - Real Fellowship is experiencing life together
 - Real Fellowship is loving someone unselfishly
 - Real Fellowship is sharing with someone honestly
 - Real Fellowship is serving someone practically
 - Real Fellowship is giving someone sacrificially
 - Real Fellowship is comforting someone sympathetically
- Real Fellowship is fulfilling all of those “one another” commands I mentioned before
- Too often we have never experienced Real Fellowship and don’t know the difference between Real Fellowship and Fake Fellowship

1) In Real Fellowship people experience Authenticity

- Real Fellowship is not superficial, surface-level chit-chat
- Real Fellowship is genuine, heart-to-heart, gut-level sharing
- Real Fellowship only happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives
 - In Real Fellowship people:
 - Share their hurts
 - Reveal their feelings
 - Confess their failures
 - Disclose their doubts
 - Admit their fears
 - Acknowledge their weaknesses
 - Ask for help and prayers
- Unfortunately, Authenticity is the opposite of what you often find

- Instead of an atmosphere of honesty and humility, there is pretending, role-playing, politicking, superficial politeness and shallow conversation
- People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act as if everything is rosy
- Real Fellowship can't live in an environment like that
- It is only when we are truthful and honest about our lives that we can begin to experience Real Fellowship
- 1st John 1:7-8 (NIV)

- 7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- 8) If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

- Darkness is used to hide our hurts, faults, fears, failures and flaws
 - In the light we bring them all out into the open and admit who we really are
- Being Authentic requires courage and humility
 - But it is the only way to grow spiritually and be emotionally healthy
 - Nothing good and healthy is hidden
- James 5:16 (MESSAGE)

- 16) Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.

- We only grow by stretching ourselves, and the biggest stretch is being honest with ourselves and with others

2) In Real Fellowship people experience Mutuality

- What is Mutuality?
 - It is the gift of giving AND receiving
 - It is depending on each other
- Many of us are much more comfortable with giving than receiving
 - But, we are supposed to be dependent on each other, not just supportive

- 1st Corinthians 12:25 (MESSAGE)

25) The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't,

- Mutuality is the heart of Fellowship

- Building reciprocal relationships, sharing responsibilities, helping each other

- Everyone is more consistent when others walk with you and encourage you

- Mutuality is the 50 "One Another" commandments that we see in the Bible

- Mutual encouragement

- Mutual edification

- Mutual honoring

- You are not responsible FOR everyone in your Ecclesia

- But you are responsible TO them

- God expects you to do whatever you can to help your Brothers and Sisters

3) In Real Fellowship people experience Sympathy

- Sympathy is not giving advice or quick, cosmetic help

- Sympathy is entering in and sharing in the pain of others

- *"I know what you are going through, and what you are feeling is not crazy."*

- Sympathy meets two fundamental human needs:

- The need to be understood

- The need to have your feelings validated

- Every time you take the time to understand and affirm someone's feelings you build Fellowship with them

- Too often we are in so much of a hurry to fix things, that we don't take the time to sympathize with people

- There are four levels of Fellowship:

- Too often we never progress beyond the first two

- a) The Fellowship of Studying
- b) The Fellowship of Sharing
- c) The Fellowship of Serving
- d) The Fellowship of Suffering

- This deepest level is the sympathy we are talking about...

- Galatians 6:2 (NLT)

- 2) Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

4) In Real Fellowship people experience Mercy

- Fellowship is a place of Grace, where mistakes are rubbed out not rubbed in

- Fellowship happens when Mercy wins over Justice

- We all need Mercy

- We need to offer Mercy to each other, and accept it from others

- 2nd Corinthians 2:7 (CEV)

- 7) When people sin, you should forgive and comfort them, so they won't give up in despair.

- You can't have Fellowship without Forgiveness

- We are all imperfect, so we will hurt each other from time to time

- Sometimes unintentionally and sometimes intentionally

- Either way it takes massive amounts of Mercy to maintain Fellowship

- Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

- 13) You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

- God extends Mercy to us, so we are motivated to do the same to others

- Many people are reluctant to extend Mercy because they don't understand the difference between forgiveness and trust

- Forgiveness is letting go of the past
 - Trust has to do with future behavior
- Forgiveness must be immediate
 - Trust must be rebuilt over time
- If someone hurts you repeatedly, you are commanded to forgive them immediately
 - But, you are not expected to trust them immediately
 - They must prove themselves over time

POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT THIS WEEK:

I need others in my life.

VERSE TO MEMORIZE THIS WEEK:

“Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:2 NLT

QUESTION TO CONSIDER THIS WEEK:

What can I do today to connect with another believer on a more genuine level?